

The Committee of 100

on the Federal City



Committee of 100 Candidate Questionnaire November 2024 Independent At-Large Seat

Response from Christina Henderson

Planning and Zoning

1. Over the past 15 years the Office of Planning has supported maximum zoning allowances, smaller residential units, and luxury amenities as priorities in revitalizing neighborhoods. Significant displacement of Black residents and businesses has followed. What three changes to planning and zoning would you recommend that will address growth and change while maintaining the culture, history, and demographic of DC's neighborhoods?

Christina Henderson:

- Narrowly modify the Height Act to allow for greater density in certain areas. Take Friendship Heights for instance where a new housing development is going up – there is no real reason the height of the apartment buildings on the DC side of the line cannot match those across the street on the Maryland side of the line. It would not disrupt anything about the character of the neighborhood, but give us more units at a transit-oriented development.
- Improve the Planned Unit Development (PUD) process so that it can work again for both communities and developers. There have long been conversations about the need to put some guard rails on the community benefit possibilities to ensure that the community benefit is long-term and that the community writ large would broadly be impacted. Further, I would also want to explore potential policies that could limit the legal challenges of PUDs brought by individuals who do not have a direct nexus to a project or neighborhood. Too many projects have been bogged down by 11th hour challenges by someone who has not been engaged at all through the process either with the ANC or the Zoning Commission.
- Comprehensive review of our Inclusionary Zoning program. There have been 2,373 units developed since the program's inception in 2009. But we still have an incredible mismatch in terms of types of units available vs need.

2. Would you support the creation of an independent Planning Commission? Yes ___ No ___
Please explain your answer.

Christina Henderson:

At this time, I would not support the creation of an independent planning commission as I simply don't have enough details about what it would look like, how it would interface with our existing planning agencies, how members would be appointed and confirmed, and what problem we are seeking to solve. I'm certainly open to learning more, but this is the first I've heard of this idea.

I need more information about what is envisioned for an independent Planning Commission, such as how many members, how it would interface with our existing planning agencies, and what is the real problem we are seeking to solve with a new entity in our governance structure. I am open to learning more. As we saw with the independence of the Commission on the Arts and Humanities, however, if we go down the road of an independent Planning Commission, it requires all parts of the government to be on the same page to be successful and not have several years of brinksmanship over the status and future of the agency.

3. Do you support retaining the current Height Act? Yes ___ No ___
Please explain your answer.

Christina Henderson: No.

I believe there are opportunities to adjust the Height Act in certain neighborhoods, especially around the borders, to increase housing density and meet our housing goals. Additionally, there could be instances where in the downtown area we allow for the addition of another floor or two to the tops of our buildings that are set-back to also increase density, without obstructing the skyline or attractiveness which could spur investment in our commercial real estate market. Our commercial real estate market desperately needs investment and stabilization, and this could be one way to assist with that and shore up the District's finances.

Downtown

4. Aside from office to residential conversions, what do you believe are the best solutions to the hollowing out of downtown?

Christina Henderson:

Between 2019 and July 2023 commercial property tax revenue decreased by \$243 million, and it is not rebounding. There must be a multi-faceted approach to our downtown recovery and residential conversion is one of many options available, but we also need to increase the variety of businesses and ensure significant foot traffic downtown. One option I often cite is "Eds and Meds." We should harness our assets including attracting higher

education institutions whose students want to spend a semester in Washington, DC to learn about government and policy, and convert office spaces into housing and learning environments for these students. It already happens with several institutions, but we should be doubling down.

We should also attract industries that require in-person work, such as science and technology labs, where people can't work from home. We have a great opportunity here to transform the composition of our employment base, while utilizing the built-in pipeline from our existing District-based higher education institutions. We should also lean-in on our proximity to the National Institutes for Health, the FDA, and other national research entities.

Personally, I also think we should be investing in spaces for families and Children. We have the Children's Museum right next to the Wilson Building, where many families visit on the weekends. When they finish, there are limited options within a few blocks for further entertainment or hospitality on the weekends. We can reimagine many of our vacant spaces to have play spaces for children and families to enjoy.

Further, I support the efforts we passed in the FY25 budget, including increasing the retailer property tax credit from \$5,000 to \$10,000, indexed to inflation; expanding PopUp Permits Pilot Program; temporarily freezing property taxes for 15 years for conversions from office to residential; retail and business support grants; programs to maintain existing and attract new small businesses; and funds for cultural, entertainment, and arts activities.

Finally, support for WMATA is a critical support for the revitalization of downtown. Without a thriving public transportation system, our downtown will not recover. Ensuring we have a regional funding source for WMATA, and that WMATA lives within the budget allocated, will support economic opportunities downtown.

Neighborhoods

5. It is an established fact that Wards 7 and 8 lag behind the other Wards in terms of services and amenities, such as grocery stores, comprehensive health care and restaurants. What do you think can be done to bring real racial and economic equity to these Wards?

Christina Henderson:

Among my top priorities have been improving food access and ensuring equitable access to health care across the District. As chair of the Committee on Health, it is my top priority to ensure that the Cedar Hill Regional Medical Center opens on time and on budget in early 2025. My goal is to work with the health industry to foster the build-out of medical services around the new hospital, similar to how we see doctors' offices clustered around the GW University Hospital. Individuals and families east of the river should not have to travel across town to access health services, they should be able to access quality services in their communities.

I've also made investments in key food access programs as Chair of the Health Committee, and established a new program where eligible SNAP-Ed recipients can have their monthly membership and administrative fees for food delivery services such as Instacart paid for, in an effort to enhance food access. I've also introduced and passed Give SNAP a Raise which provides supplemental cash assistance for food purchases. My goal for this was two part:

one, to increase the purchasing power for individuals using these benefits; and two, increasing the purchasing power of entire communities in an effort to sustain a future grocery store. I've spoken with many developers who tell me that their biggest challenge with grocery stores in areas with high public assistance is that the first week or two of a month are strong, but the last two weeks they struggle to make ends meet, which often results in operating losses. Give SNAP a Raise is an investment in our local economy. Overall, bringing real racial and economic equity to these Wards requires intentionality on the part of our leaders and dogged oversight to make sure the government keeps its promises. For example, when I learned that a project to deliver the first dog park east of the Anacostia River was in jeopardy, I secured the funding to keep it going and provide needed oversight to get the project over the finish line. It took nearly 4 years, but the Texas Ave Dog Park opened with a paw-celebration earlier this year.

Transportation

6. What can be done to support MetroRail and MetroBus considering the reduced ridership from the pandemic and the potential reduction in federal subsidies? What should the Council do to ensure funding of DC's share of WMATA's costs?

Christina Henderson:

First and foremost, we need a regional agreement for a dedicated funding source for WMATA that would put the agency on the path to fiscal stability. I serve on the DMV Moves Taskforce and I'm very clear-eyed about what is needed at the end of this work. Another thing we can do is invest more to revitalize our downtown, which would attract more visitors and events that helps WMATA's bottom line. We saw it this year with the Capital Pride Parade setting record numbers for ridership on Metro for weekend travel and specific station entrances/exits this year. These types of events in the heart of the city will only increase WMATA ridership. We also need to lean into trying to recruit businesses and entities that require in-person work. I'm not naive enough to not think that for some industries working from home is now a way of life, which is why we need to diversify our employment base to include in-person jobs such as science labs and education institutions.

7. More than 60% of the vehicles on DC streets are commuters from outside the District. Both MARC and VRE are planning significant increases in commuter rail traffic coming into and through DC, which should reduce the number of commuters driving into the District. For example, Virginia is investing about \$2 billion to construct a second Potomac River rail bridge and expand the L'Enfant VRE Commuter Rail Station. Should DC more actively support the development of commuter rail? Yes ___ No ___ If your answer is yes, what steps should DC take?

Christina Henderson: Yes

As chair of the region's Transportation Planning Board, I believe that if one of our jurisdictions are making an investment in a capital project that is for non-vehicle transit, the District seek to support it. We all made a commitment on reducing greenhouse gas emissions and an expanded commuter rail option would inevitably help that along, as well as help the District with some of its congestion challenges. Our support does not need to be directly financial in nature, but as chair of TPB I have signed several letters of support for federal grant applications for funding for transit projects for many jurisdictions in the national capital region.

8. Should the existing 2.5-mile streetcar line on H Street NE continue in operation, or be dismantled and replaced with buses? Yes ___ No _____ Please explain your answer.

Christina Henderson: No

The way this question is worded is confusing as a Yes or No question. We've got to get the streetcar extension to Ward 7 across the finish line. We cannot have a streetcar that only runs a few blocks on H St NE, and nowhere else. We've invested so much in this infrastructure, let's expand it and connect communities on both sides of the Anacostia.

9. The installation of bike lanes around the city has resulted in strong opposition. Different stakeholders say their interests have been ignored and they are now less safe and less welcome in these areas. What are your views? Are you aware of any data that show that bike lanes have resulted in increased bicycle use and safety? Do you think an evaluation of newly installed bicycle lanes should be conducted (considering such factors as increases in bike ridership; rider, pedestrian, car safety; reduced traffic, etc.) before there is any expansion?

Christina Henderson:

First, let me share that my family is multi-modal. We bike (my five-year old daughter loves to bike), we drive, we use metro bus and rail, and we take advantage of all options available. I know that bike lanes have value and are an important part of the District's attraction of new and existing residents and visitors, but I also believe that all roads can't be everything for everyone. We must make choices. I do believe that we can do a better job citing bike lanes. I feel like for several years DDOT was just placing bike lanes across the city to meet an arbitrary goal of X miles of bike lanes per year, instead of analyzing, deliberating, and truly engaging the community on the safest and most effective use of our bike lanes. Bike lanes should not be the default if a road needs a road diet. Through my work on the Committee on Transportation and Environment, I've worked closely with DDOT in understanding their approach and asking the difficult questions about bike lane placements during oversight hearings. My goal is to continue to increase our bike lane network, while ensuring that the needs of surrounding communities are taken into consideration and addressed prior to installation. I don't think we should stop installing bike lanes, but an analysis of the usage of our current bike lanes could help inform future buildout.

Historic Preservation

10. In your view, has historic preservation been an economic driver and an essential tool in shaping the physical character of Washington's downtown and neighborhoods.
Yes ___ No ___ Please explain your answer.

Christina Henderson: Yes

The historic nature of many of our neighborhoods, parks, monuments, and buildings are an attraction and economic driver for our economy.

11. Do you believe the Historic Landmark and Historic District Protection Act of 1978 should be revised? If so, how should it be changed, and what do you hope to accomplish with the change(s)? Please explain.

Christina Henderson:

I think it's reasonable for legislation to be periodically reviewed and updated to ensure that the intended effect from nearly 50 years ago is still applicable today. It is not my priority to take on this task at this time, however in principle, I would hope that a modernization of the law could be achieved with input from all involved in a way that continues to balance historic preservation with modern needs.

Affordable Housing

12. What tools and investments are needed to maintain housing affordability or increase affordable housing opportunities throughout the city?

Christina Henderson:

During my first term on Council, there have been several bills & budgets I've supported to advance deeply affordable housing and stop displacement. Here are 3 bills in particular that I was proud to introduce:

To provide renters with more time to consider their options when a landlord raises rent, I introduced and worked to pass the Fairness in Renting Clarification Amendment Act which increases the notice requirement for rent increases from 30 days to 60 days. It also prohibits landlords from charging any fees beyond a maximum application fee.

I introduced the Community Land Trusts' Access and Homeowner Support Amendment Act of 2023 to allow for community land trusts (CLTs) to be incorporated into the Tenant Opportunity to Purchase Act (TOPA) structure, granting registered community land trusts an automatic third right of refusal to purchase multifamily housing. It would also provide registered CLTs with the second right of refusal for properties on the tax sale list before

they are available to private buyers. Ultimately, this would help grow the portfolio of properties for CLTs to make available as affordable housing. The legislation had a hearing in 2023 and is awaiting approval by the Committee.

To accelerate development of much-needed, affordable mixed-use residential projects at unimproved District Metro stations, I introduced the Unlocking Housing at Metro Property Tax Exemption Amendment Act. This bill would provide a 20-year tax exemption for projects meeting specific criteria with the goal of encouraging additional transit-oriented development through joint development agreements. Montgomery County already moved on this in partnership with WMATA. This bill can help facilitate amazing changes at the Anacostia, Congress Heights, Brookland, & Deanwood stations.

13. Whom do you think DC's rent control regulation DC benefits? Would you support expanding the program to multi-family buildings built before 2005?

Christina Henderson:

I believe rent control regulations benefit working and middle-class DC residents. I support expanding rent control to multi-unit properties built before 2005 and that eligibility for rent control should be pegged to a dynamic date so that we can continue to grow the number of units in rent-controlled status over time.

14. Interest has been expressed by the Council in eliminating single-family zoning as one way to address the shortage of affordable housing. What is your thinking on this strategy, and on what data do you base your conclusion?

Christina Henderson:

I do not support a wholesale elimination of single-family zoning. Through the comprehensive plan revision process and cases before the Board of Zoning, adjustments can be appropriately made to allow for more density and affordable housing.

RFK Stadium Site

15. If the District acquires the RFK Stadium property, for what purposes would you want it used?

Christina Henderson:

The RFK site is more than 50 acres of opportunity. I'm interested in purposes and development plans that are compatible with good river quality and maintaining the wildlife habitat around the Anacostia River. I believe we can do that while also addressing the community needs of true workforce housing, indoor public recreational space (we desperately need an indoor track and field space), and other commercial development that promotes economic growth. It will be vital to ensure that input from the surrounding

community as well as environmental concerns are incorporated into the design process, including public access to the water and existing fields and playing grounds.

16. Do you support the District subsidizing a new football stadium in the District for the Washington Commanders? Yes ___ No _____

Christina Henderson: No

Please respond to Chair@Committeeof100.net .