



**Testimony by the Historic Preservation Subcommittee to the  
DC Council Committee on Libraries, Parks, Recreation, and Planning  
Oversight Hearing - Historic Preservation Office, Office of Planning**

**By Loretta Neumann**

**February 9, 2012, 10 AM**

**Room 412, John A. Wilson Building**

**1350 Pennsylvania Avenue, NW, Washington, DC 20004**

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Mr. Chairman and members of the Committee, thank you for the opportunity to testify. I am Loretta Neumann, a trustee of the Committee of 100 and member of its Historic Preservation Subcommittee. I am here to present our views on the activities of the DC's Historic Preservation Office (HPO) and the Historic Preservation Review Board (HPRB).

We endorse the testimony of the Historic Districts Coalition and along with HDC, greatly appreciate the fine work of the HPO and the HPRB. We just want to emphasize a few points.

**HPRB Membership**

We have been extremely concerned about the long delays in filling positions on the HPRB. Several members of the HPRB have served nearly two years since their terms elapsed. This is an extremely important board. Established by the DC Historic Preservation Act, it is the official body of advisors appointed by the Mayor to guide the government and public on preservation matters in DC. It also serves as the State Review Board under the National Historic Preservation Act, to assist with implementation of federal preservation programs and the review of federal projects in DC. Board members must meet specific qualifications spelled out by the DC and federal laws.

We were pleased with the prompt consideration your committee gave to the recent nominations of Ms. Nancy Pryor Metzger and Maria Casserella-Cummingham. We are also pleased that the Mayor has put forward the remaining nominations, and we urge you to expedite their consideration as well.

**Demolition by Neglect**

We strongly support the HDC's comments and recommendations concerning the need for the Demolition by Neglect regulations to remedy an extremely serious problem facing historic properties all over DC. It has been nearly six years since the DC Historic Preservation Law was amended to include the Demolition by Neglect provisions.

Last year, members of the Committee of 100's Historic Preservation Subcommittee worked with the DC Preservation League to draft new regulations to offer HPO for consideration. These are still a work in progress. But we hope to have a draft ready soon. Among other things, we feel strongly that HPO should:

- provide adequate information to owners on the standards for maintaining historic properties;
- monitor historic properties routinely and create a list of deteriorated buildings;
- provide a way for concerned ANCs, organizations and individuals to initiate an HPO review of properties that appear to be threatened by demolition through neglect;
- coordinate with the DC Department of Consumer and Regulatory Affairs (DCRA);
- include special provisions for emergencies; and
- assure that that necessary repairs are made consistent with historic preservation standards.

We agree with HDC that the HPO's final draft regulations should be publicly reviewed later this spring and summer and should be ready for HPRB consideration in September 2012. Once promulgated, HPO will need to provide adequate information to owners of historic properties and to ANC's and concerned organizations.

### **Mayor's Agent**

For the past few years we have been greatly concerned about the dual, and sometimes conflicting, role that the Director of the Office of Planning has played in also serving as the Mayor's Agent for Historic Preservation. The position had previously been held very effectively by an administrative law judge. The situation appears to have been resolved through the appointment of J. Peter Byrne, Professor of Law at Georgetown University Law Center, to serve as the Mayor's Agent Hearing Officer. Mr. Byrne is one of the most knowledgeable lawyers in DC on historic preservation law. We applaud the appointment.

### **Historic Preservation Plan**

Beginning last August, HPO has been leading a public process to prepare a new "Historic Preservation Plan 2015" to replace the existing plan that has guided preservation efforts for several years. To develop the plan, HPO has conducted outreach, and several of our members have participated in meetings on this plan. We understand that HPO hopes to complete the plan by September, and we hope that it will truly serve as a useful guide for preservation programs and decisions in the coming years.

Thank you again for the opportunity to testify today.