

The Committee of 100
on the Federal City



**COUNCIL OF THE DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA
COMMITTEE ON LIBRARIES, PARKS, RECREATION AND PLANNING
BUDGET OVERSIGHT HEARING**

**OFFICE OF PLANNING
Friday, April 20, 2012**

Testimony of Alma Hardy Gates

Good Morning Chairman Wells and Members of the Committee. I am Alma Gates, chair of the Zoning Subcommittee of the Committee of 100 (C100); and, I represent the Committee on the Zoning Regulations Revision Task Force.

As you are aware, the Committee of 100 on the Federal City (C100) has advocated on behalf of intelligent and smart planning and land use in Washington, DC since its founding in 1923.

The Committee of 100 finds that The Historic Preservation Office continues to function at a high level and should be fully funded. However the same accolades cannot be assigned to the Zoning Regulation Rewrite (ZRR).

As consistent attendees at Task Force meetings and witnesses before the Zoning Commission on the ZRR, C100 notes that when the Office of Planning (OP) initiated the rewrite process that would transform all land use regulations and provide fewer protections for District residents, it determined hard-fought and settled issues in the Comprehensive Plan would be disregarded. To date the agency has downplayed or ignored critical comments at public hearings and

displayed little or no empathy for the effect complicated zoning changes would have on residents, individual neighborhoods or the pattern of living in the District.

OP has made little attempt at accountability, or even the appearance of accountability with regard to the ZRR. Instead the agency has avoided public scrutiny and adopted an absolutist approach to implementation of its proposed new zoning regulations. In her “Agency Performance Report” on February 9, 2012, Harriet Tregoning informed Council “To date there have been over 190 public meetings [on the zoning regulations rewrite].” While there have been numerous work group and Zoning Commission meetings on the ZRR, only recently has OP responded to requests from communities to discuss the proposed zoning changes; and, it is clear these communities are not happy with what is being proposed. As recent as last Tuesday night in Tenleytown, where a large group of residents gathered for a presentation by OP, there was wide spread opposition expressed by audience members who ferociously expressed opposition to the proposed zoning regulations. Where is agency accountability when:

- OP is working around and ahead of the public rather than with it?
- Task Force members, charged with reviewing proposed changes, no longer attend meetings, apparently because they are tired of not being listened to?
- Ward Planners have not communicated with ANCs or the public?
- The OP website, has been experiencing difficulties since March 3 and requires the task force and public to contact staff directly for information?

The Comprehensive Plan recognizes that the city has no fewer than 130 distinct neighborhoods. They are diverse, ranging from high-density communities (like the West End or Mount Vernon Square) to quiet low-density neighborhoods (like Crestwood and Spring Valley). This diversity of neighborhoods provides residents with a wide range of choices, and accommodates many different types of households and their preferences. The Committee of 100 suggests it is counterproductive to endorse agency actions that disdain public participation and send the message that the District needs to be more like other cities and less like the nation’s capital.