



PRESS RELEASE

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Office of Planning Must Fulfill

Its Promise to Protect Neighborhoods, Assess Digital Billboards

The *Committee of 100 on the Federal City* (C100) is urging the DC Council to budget for additional staff and funds for the Office of Planning (OP) to fulfill the agency's long-standing promises to preserve and protect neighborhood character and to perform a serious, rigorous assessment of the impacts of digital billboards on residents and office workers.

When OP recently radically rewrote the zoning code, staff worked with residents of Georgetown on a customized set of generally applicable zoning rules, supplemented by specific provisions that preserve and protect that neighborhood's character. OP staff promised to work with other neighborhoods to craft appropriate, community-specific zoning, but have failed to do so. "We call on the Council to fund additional OP staff to work with communities to develop specific zoning rules," said Stephen Hansen, Chair of C100. "Such customized local zones were promised when the zoning rules were rewritten last year and should follow the model of the "Georgetown Residential House Zone," already enacted.

"We note that there are few of these community-specific zones on the eastern side of the District--and none east of the Anacostia River," said Laura Richards who spoke for C100 at Council's Budget Oversight hearings on Monday, April 10. "OP was very anxious to grant major development increases downtown and across the city in the new regulations. It's time for OP and the Mayor to keep their commitment to protect our communities."

On another matter regarding the recent re-permitting of the huge digital billboards at Verizon Center, C100 requested additional funds to require OP to hire a contractor to produce a credible report. OP's legislative mandate was to assess the adverse impact of the digital signs on the surrounding neighborhood. Instead, in late 2016 OP produced a skimpy two-and-a-half page, totally inadequate memorandum instead of a properly conducted assessment of these digital signs. The OP document contained no photos, maps, or view shed analysis to show how these billboards affect the nearby work and living conditions; nor did it include any opinion surveys or analysis of changes in property values in the immediate area, or the negative effects on residents at Gallery Place, the MLK Library (southeast corner), the National Portrait Gallery or the Smithsonian American Art Museum.

"Why does our city government refuse to look at the impacts of these ad-spewing, light polluting machines before reauthorizing them? Mixed use has become mixed abuse at Gallery Place, feeding public cynicism about planning in our city," said C100 Vice Chair Meg Maguire.
