



November 22, 2022

Testimony on the Green New Deal for Housing Amendment Act of 2022
DC Council Committee on Housing and Executive Administration
Testimony of Meg Maguire, Trustee, Committee of 100

I am Meg Maguire, a trustee of the Committee of 100 on the Federal City, a planning advocacy organization that will celebrate its centennial next year. We are testifying in broad support of creating social housing in the District.

There are many attractive aspects of this innovative model:

- Public land is used for the public good.
- Housing is considered part of our essential infrastructure, not a commodity.
- Residents represent a broad range of incomes.
- Rents are capped at 30% of income.
- The public owns the land and buildings that are guaranteed to be permanently affordable.
- Rents are reinvested in the property and expansion of the program rather than as profit on private investment.
- Tenants organize and manage their own buildings.
- Building design is exceptional, adding sustainable and beautiful buildings to neighborhoods.

How do we create this desirable end result with maximum efficiency, transparency and replicability in social housing projects throughout the city?

The bill establishes an Office of Social Housing Developments within the city government to foster the construction, maintenance and growth of District-owned social housing properties. Would this office be high enough in the city bureaucracy to cut through red tape, secure land in a timely manner, and produce and maintain a growing housing stock? Would there be a meaningful role for highly successful non-profit affordable-housing developers and the Douglass Community Land Trust in producing, managing and permanently ensuring affordability in these social housing properties?

We urge Council to consider other alternatives such as creating a quasi-governmental organization with bonding authority, land ownership and tough performance measures for tangible success.

Whatever model is chosen, it must explicitly address and reverse the structural and administrative problems in the District's public housing program, and build instead on what we have learned from successful affordable housing communities, including:

- Robust ongoing resident involvement and role in oversight of the property;
- Ongoing support/technical assistance for tenant organizations;
- Effective maintenance/management of the property;
- On-site services designed to build a sense of belonging and support, including early childhood education, after school programs, etc.;
- Quality building materials with no downgrade in the affordable units; and
- Availability of multi-bedroom and accessible units

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One provision of the bill needs clarification: Section 103, (2) under Duties of the Office of Social Housing Development states: “Upon the purchase of privately-owned housing accommodations pursuant to The Rental Housing Conversion and Sale Act of 1980...*convert these housing accommodations into social housing developments.*” Would this provision require all TOPA conversions to become social housing? Or would this simply permit conversion to social housing if the tenants preferred that model over the more typical conversion to a limited equity coop or continued renting?

Finally, we urge the Council and the administration to immediately initiate at least one social housing demonstration project on existing city-owned land, both to test the underlying assumptions and to show what is possible. The Chevy Chase library and recreation center is an excellent site for social housing, and we urge DMPED to specify this model in the soon-to-be-released RFP for the site’s redevelopment. While the broader administrative structure of social housing is being debated, designed and developed, **let’s build a model and document the results.**

Our city is nationally acclaimed for making substantial affordable housing investments. But it’s time to stop bragging and show that we are also *cutting-edge promoters of racial and economic equity through social housing.*

Thank you for the opportunity to testify.

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