

**COUNCIL OF THE DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA  
COMMITTEE OF THE WHOLE  
PUBLIC OVERSIGHT HEARING, OFFICE OF PLANNING  
February 16, 2011**

Testimony of Alma Hardy Gates on behalf of Neighbors United Trust

Good afternoon Chairman Brown and Members of Council. I am Alma Gates. I am a member of the Zoning Task Force and have been asked to represent ANC 3D as a member of its Zoning Committee.

Washington is a city of neighborhoods. Each of these distinct geographic areas has its own unique character that over time has been stabilized by established zoning regulations and overlays. Given the proposed zoning changes, it is questionable whether the Office of Planning's (OP) staff has any appreciation for, or even taken the time to visit, any of our city's neighborhoods.

Council may recall that initially, the Zoning Regulation Rewrite (ZRR) was meant to be a review of areas of the code that needed updating, revision or clarification; however, OP took things to a different level when it determined a new code was needed as well as expansion of its scope and has added new chapters on Green Area Ratio and Bicycle Parking.

There is little doubt that over the past two years the Office of Planning has been very focused on the zoning rewrite; but, in its haste, has left the public in the dark. My point in being here today is to let Council know there has been no communication between OP and ANCs, citizens associations or other community groups. When I contacted ANC 3D, the Palisades Citizens Association and the Foxhall Community Citizens Association about outreach from OP, I learned that in 2009 the Ward 3 Planner informed the ANC that the zoning code was being revised. That was the last communication between OP and ANC 3D and the citizens associations have never heard from OP.

It is troubling that sweeping zoning changes are being proposed for neighborhood residential zones, but the residents are unaware changes are underway. Will homeowners wake up one morning to discover their assumptions regarding matter of right development, uses, setbacks, yards, density and height in their particular zone district are no longer in place?

The Zoning Commission has been informed that attendance is low at Zoning Task Force meetings and has noted few members are presenting testimony before the Commission on sections of the new code. Why is there a lack of participation? Perhaps it's that OP doesn't listen to, or implement suggestions from Task Force members, even though OP has routinely assured the Zoning Commission that there is support for what is being proposed.

The meetings cited by OP, numbering well over one hundred, do not present an accurate picture of public participation in the zoning rewrite process. It is time for Council to put its finger on the accountability pulse and enlighten itself on public participation by requesting lists of:

- 1) Task Force members, their attendance at meetings and subsequent testimony before the Zoning Commission;
- 2) ANCs, dates of outreach and content outline of OP presentations on the zoning rewrite; and
- 3) Community groups, dates of outreach and content outline of OP presentation on the zoning rewrite.

The public information process proposed following the two roundtables in 2007 has not been implemented. If appointees to the Task Force, ANCs and community groups are not engaged or informed, the interests of your constituents are not being met. Council needs to exercise its budget authority over the Office of Planning and suspend further action on the zoning rewrite until a process is in place to inform the public of the proposed zoning changes, lest the stability and unique character that defines each of our city's neighborhoods is destroyed.