

**COUNCIL OF THE DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA
COMMITTEE OF THE WHOLE
VINCENT GRAY, CHAIR**

PUBLIC HEARING ON

**COMPREHENSIVE PLAN AMENDMENT ACT OF 2010
BILL 18-0867**

TUESDAY, SEPTEMBER 28, 2010

TESTIMONY OF THE COMMITTEE OF 100 ON THE FEDERAL CITY
Alma Hardy Gates, Chair, Zoning Subcommittee

Good Afternoon Chairman Gray. I am pleased to represent the Committee of 100, a group that has advocated on behalf of intelligent and smart planning and land use in Washington, D.C. since our founding in 1923. I participated in the Comprehensive Plan Amendment meetings and serve as a member of the Zoning Review Task Force.

The Amendment Process

The Office of Planning showed great patience throughout the Comprehensive Plan Amendment meetings but somewhere late in the review process, OP fell silent leaving the public in the dark since last October, and without an opportunity to review proposed map changes.

The Comprehensive Plan

The Land Use Element (LU Element) of the Comprehensive Plan serves as the Holy Grail for other Plan elements and “lays out the policies through which the city will accommodate growth and change...It integrates the policies and objective of all the other District Elements and objectives and should be given greater weight than the other elements as competing policies in different elements are balanced.” It is for that reason the Committee of 100 will focus its testimony on the proposed Land Use Policy changes.

Proposed Policy LU-1.1.5, LU-1.1.8, Action LU-1.1.C

The Land Use Policy Amendments and Action item propose a new means for measuring height would be established for each unique site based on OP's desired outcome and the need to entice development dollars. The elimination of physical barriers such as rail lines and highways may be desirable, however, the proposed Comprehensive Plan amendments suggest accomplishing this goal by altering the city's established height limits rather than adhering to the height constraints applied to city development since 1910.

Many Parisian visitors, where the height of buildings is limited to 121 ft., are struck by the height of the distant "tower blocks" development and their inappropriate intrusion on the city's skyline. Washington also has its development in the distance. I draw your attention to Roslyn, Virginia where numerous architects have attempted to leave their unique mark on Northern Virginia's landscape. Take a long, hard look at Roslyn. Drive through its dark dense canyons. Would this collection of development styles form a complementary backdrop for the Nation's Capitol? And, how would the inappropriate intrusion of too tall buildings affect Capitol Hill and Union Station?

Reconnecting the city, its neighborhoods and street grids is desirable, but not through the introduction of vertical barriers that equally divide and scar the city's viewshed.

Conclusion

The proposed Land Use amendments represent the Office of Planning's attempt at an end run around the Height Act and the established measuring point for building height for buildings fronting a bridge or viaduct that has been relied upon since 2003.¹ Council should be cognizant that with one vote they have the ability to abandon 100 years of building within a height standard because the Office of Planning proposes a different vision for the skyline of the city. This is the watershed moment when Council has the opportunity to preserve and protect the legacy of Washington's horizontal landscape, the unique feature that makes it one of the most beautiful cities in the world.

¹ Zoning Commission for the District of Columbia, Order No. 02-35, November 7, 2003.