

GOVERNMENT OF THE DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA  
DC OFFICE OF PLANNING



**Fiscal Year 2017-2018  
Performance Oversight Hearing**

Testimony of  
Eric D. Shaw  
Director

Before the  
Committee of the Whole  
Council of the District of Columbia  
The Honorable Phil Mendelson, Chairperson

John A. Wilson Building  
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## **INTRODUCTION**

Good afternoon, Chairman Mendelson and members of the Committee of the Whole. My name is Eric Shaw, and I am the Director of the Office of Planning (OP). I am pleased to be here, on behalf of Mayor Muriel Bowser, to share with the Committee the activities and accomplishments of the Office of Planning during fiscal year 2017 and the first quarter of fiscal year 2018.

Mayor Bowser's Fiscal Year 2017 Budget reflected our deep commitment to DC values by making investments that will provide all residents of the District of Columbia with the opportunity to succeed. We remain focused each day on creating pathways to the middle class by investing in education, affordable housing, infrastructure, public safety, and people.

Washington, D.C. is thriving. We have many successes to be proud of, ranging from rising employment and better health to stronger public resources that underpin an inclusive city – including streets, parks, libraries, and schools. The Office of Planning plays a special role in the evolution of the District. We guide development at the citywide level through the Comprehensive Plan and at the neighborhood level through small area plans, site review, and other planning tools we tailor to the needs of specific communities.

But perhaps just as important as the tools we use is *how* we plan: the approach we take to the work that we do. When I joined the Bowser Administration as Planning Director more than three years ago, I arrived in D.C. with an emphasis on engagement, data, and design. Since that time, my staff and I have tried to bring these themes to life. We have worked at a hyper-local level with people across the city to understand community context and concerns. At the same



time, we have balanced this focus with the goal of understanding the complex systems—from housing markets to transportation networks—that affect our entire city. We endeavor to lead by defining trends, issues, and challenges; by sharing this knowledge with our partners; and by recommending innovation and action following careful research, analysis, and, sometimes, experimentation. We are proud to support dozens of agencies within the District government, providing them with critical products and planning expertise that directly advance their missions and allow them to better address growth and change.

### **DISTRICT GROWTH BY THE NUMBERS**

Washington, D.C. has just passed a watershed moment. By the estimates of our State Data Center, just this month, the population of the District of Columbia hit 700,000. Over the last decade, the population has risen by more than 100,000 people. Since 2010, the population of the District has grown by 15.3 percent, faster than any state.

The required forecasts that OP develops in concert with the Metropolitan Washington Council of Governments show that the District expects to reach almost 800,000 people by 2025 and almost 1 million people by 2045. In short, the city is expected to add a substantial number of residents, households, and jobs in the coming years, and we must prepare for these changes. It is the job of the Office of Planning to help direct this development to the appropriate places; align it in a manner that meets the multiplicity of goals, desired outcomes, and requirements detailed within the Comp Plan and other policies; and to maintain the overall integrity of the urban infrastructure. We continue to approach this work with an emphasis on equity. During my confirmation hearing, I defined equity as the ability of all residents to extract the full value of



living within the city. This means that all residents should be able to fully enjoy the benefits of our continued growth and development.

As we transition into our role as a fast-growing city, my team is looking to the history of the District to understand how we accommodated a population of this size in the past. We are also looking at peer cities as bellwethers for innovation and caution; to understand the changing dynamics of urban economics, mobility, density, resilience, and equity. This year, OP has also increased its presence as a regional partner working with the Council of Governments, Urban Land Institute, and planning directors throughout the DC Metro area to ensure we are tackling multi-jurisdictional issues together.

### **NOTABLE ACCOMPLISHMENTS**

The Office of Planning has accomplished a great deal during the last three years. I would like to highlight a handful of recent projects that exemplify how the Office of Planning is responding to current and anticipated growth in the District. In November, the Office of Planning published the Buzzard Point Vision Framework and Design Review Guide, a powerful model for how urban design can inspire and shape future development in an area projected to absorb 11.3 million square feet of new, mixed-use construction, including an estimated 6,000 residential units. The Vision Framework sets a course for a waterfront neighborhood that prioritizes connectivity, resilient buildings and infrastructure, and vibrant public spaces. The document will be used to influence building design and public realm improvements, as development projects go before the Zoning Commission.



Similarly, in a collaboration with the District Department of Transportation and the private development community, the Office of Planning has completed the Union Market Streetscape Guidelines. With these guidelines, OP aims to organize a hub of new development into a coherent and attractive public realm that enhances the distinct industrial character of the market, incorporates new commercial uses, and safely accommodates all users of the transportation network. Drawing on our experiences, the Office of Planning hosted a Design Forum in May of last year to educate other professionals and learn from the best and brightest architects and urban designers in the field.

OP has been entrepreneurial, winning several new grant awards for projects that will enhance the safety, livability, and cultural resources of the District, including: a public space stewardship guide, a placemaking intervention to advance Vision Zero safety goals, tree-planting on Olmsted boulevards, an online Civil Rights Heritage Trail, an evaluation of LGBTQ sites eligible for the National Register, and the development of an updated National Register nomination for the L'Enfant Plan.

As you may recall from last year, the Office of Planning had begun its series of Crossing the Street creative placemaking projects across the city, with the generous financial support of the Kresge Foundation. In 2017, using an arts and culture-forward approach, OP staged more than 40 events that were fun and inclusive and attracted upwards of 7,000 people. The Crossing the Street initiative provided a platform for OP to reimagine how it engages the community by creating experiences that connect people, inspire action, and celebrate the unique character of the District's diverse neighborhoods. The insights that we gained through the initiative have deeply



informed both amendments to the Comprehensive Plan and the strategic recommendations of the District's first citywide Cultural Plan.

The draft Cultural Plan, released for public comment on January 19, contains a set of proposed strategies to strengthen arts, humanities, culture, and heritage in neighborhoods across the city. OP received more than 3,000 comments from 1,500 participants throughout the planning process, which involved nine citywide public meetings, and more than 70 focus groups and partner events. Building on this rich stakeholder input, OP recommends ways to forge stronger connections between artists and existing programs, such as affordable housing and business development, as well as new partnership and funding models that will be crucial to cultural producers in the future.

The Historic Preservation Office (HPO) within the Office of Planning continues to be a champion of culture and heritage in the District, and to oversee the historic preservation review process. Last fiscal year, the Historic Preservation Review Board (HPRB) designated 11 new historic landmarks. Among the new landmarks are: a District school and recreational facility, six federal properties, the historic core of the Union Market, and a pair of apartment buildings being converted to affordable housing using federal historic preservation tax credits. In Fiscal Year 2017, HPO reviewed, on behalf of the HPRB and State Historic Preservation Officer, 5,225 DC building permit applications, 501 federal agency actions, and 492 District agency projects.

HPO also began Heritage Guides for Wards 2 and 3, which will complete the series of online guides for each ward; prepared an updated 2020 Historic Preservation Plan for public comment;



continued its twelfth year of partnership with Humanities DC on the DC Community Heritage program; and completed a highly publicized archaeological excavation at the Shotgun House property on Capitol Hill. Last year, the Historic Homeowner Grants program expended \$284,000 in grant funding to help 31 low and moderate-income homeowners keep their historic homes in good repair, bolstering the community fabric in the Anacostia, Capitol Hill, LeDroit Park, U Street, Mount Pleasant, and Shaw neighborhoods.

Through its dedicated work on zoning cases, OP's Development Review team has been able to help translate key objectives in the Comprehensive Plan and other associated planning documents into reality. During FY 17, OP managed 47 Planned Unit Development (PUD) and Zoning Commission design review cases that were approved or remain in progress. Altogether, the cases represented all parts of the city and account for over 18.5 million square feet of new development, including:

- Almost 13,100 new housing units, including 2,530 affordable units
- Almost 600 hotel rooms;
- 4.6 million square feet of office space; and
- Almost 1 million square feet of retail space.

I would like to emphasize the significance of the number of proposed affordable units included in these projects because of the Bowser Administration's leadership and strong push for affordable housing. These 2,530 units are four times the number of Inclusionary Zoning (IZ) units that would have been yielded through matter-of-right development alone. In addition, PUDs led to a total of almost \$9 million in contributions to the Housing Production Trust Fund.



Likewise, OP has set a high bar for sustainable design through the PUD process. Thirty-three of the FY 17 PUDs have committed to LEED Gold or Green Communities construction, and they include at least 600,000 square feet (over 13.5 acres) of new green roofs and over 22 acres of publicly accessible park or plaza space.

### **COMPREHENSIVE PLAN AMENDMENT PROCESS**

I would like to wrap up my testimony by saying a few words about the Comprehensive Plan amendment process, which has been the agency’s top priority over the past two years. This process has given rise to thoughtful contributions from residents, organizations, and District agencies, and a continuing dialogue that has better illuminated the challenges facing the city. Following a very busy year of Comp Plan engagement in 2016—featuring a sweeping ad campaign on Metrorail and Metrobus, ANC Commissioner Workshops, and seven citywide public meetings—OP ramped up both our internal work and stakeholder interaction in 2017. Our efforts culminated with a formal “Open Call for amendments” from March 24<sup>th</sup> to June 23<sup>rd</sup> of last year.

Before and during the Open Call period, OP worked diligently to maximize community participation. We:

- Built a database and online application system to manage proposed Comp Plan amendments;
- Prepared and posted an array of references and guidance to assist the public with the submission process and amendment content;
- Held a Council staff training session;





- Held a third ANC Commissioner workshop;
- Hosted three professional forums, one each for Historic Preservation, Urban Design, and Transit-Oriented Development;
- Distributed 10 “Meeting in a Box” kits to community groups who wanted to hold their own meetings;
- Attended numerous ANC meetings upon request; and
- Conducted more than 100 hours of technical assistance sessions at 26 locations across the District.

The response we received from the community during Open Call was tremendous. A broad cross section of residents, organizations, and District agencies submitted a total of 3,064 proposed amendments, more than ten times the number of amendments received in 2011 and far surpassing our expectations. In consideration of the quantity and complexity of amendments, OP decided to organize the work into phases and tackle the Framework Element first.

On January 9<sup>th</sup>, I published an open letter to the community announcing that we would be moving forward with legislation to amend the Framework and shared the reasons for adjusting our project management approach. As I explained in that letter, it is imperative to establish a clear context and vetted basis for evaluating amendments to the remainder of the plan. We also wish to clarify and affirm the land use category descriptions in the Framework Element. In so doing, we ensure the PUD process can continue to serve as an effective tool for preserving and producing affordable housing and other key public benefits. Over the last five years, PUDs have resulted in the approval of nearly 6,000 affordable housing units, which is 3,500 affordable units



above what IZ regulations would have required alone. It is essential that we continue this progress.

Since introducing the Framework legislation, OP has been meeting with Council offices and key stakeholder groups who have submitted proposed amendments. We have received a great deal of feedback and expect more conversation in the coming weeks. The common message we have heard is a desire to expand the narrative about affordable housing and displacement. The Office of Planning has taken this recommendation to heart. We are acutely aware and concerned about the threat to affordability in the District and associated pressures that contribute to displacement of residents. We have begun considering important additions to the Framework that will further emphasize challenges in the District's housing sector, and look forward to honing language through the legislative process.

## **CONCLUSION**

In closing, I'd like to thank you for your leadership and support. We appreciate the opportunity to share our accomplishments and plans for continuous improvement and look forward to continuing to work with the Committee. This concludes my presentation. My staff and I are happy to address your questions at this time.

