**GOVERNMENT OF THE DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA**

**Office of Planning**



**Public Roundtable on**

**PR23-70, the “Director of the Office of Planning Andrew Trueblood Confirmation Resolution of 2019”**

Testimony of

**Andrew Trueblood**

Acting Director, DC Office of Planning

Before the

Committee of the Whole

Council of the District of Columbia

The Honorable Phil Mendelson, Chairman

The Council of the District of Columbia

John A. Wilson Building

Room 412

1350 Pennsylvania Avenue, NW

Washington, DC 20004

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2:00 pm

Thank you, Chairman Mendelson, Councilmembers, and staff, for holding this hearing today. As a proud resident of Ward 6, I am honored to have been nominated by Mayor Muriel Bowser to lead the Office of Planning. I welcome the opportunity to discuss my background, experience, and vision for the agency.

**Background**

First, I’d like to discuss my background. I hold a Masters in City Planning from MIT and a Bachelors from Princeton University's Woodrow Wilson School of Public and International Affairs. While at MIT, I worked with Professor Larry Vale to research public housing in the United States, including the Ellen Wilson Dwelling on Capitol Hill. I also researched alley dwellings, the building height limit, and affordable housing finance in DC. While focusing much of my studies on the District, I also had the opportunity to work on planning projects around the world in the Scottish Highlands; Florence, Italy; Mumbai, India; and Shenzhen, China as well as an affordable housing proposal in Linden, Massachusetts.

I have spent almost my entire career in DC and in public service on issues directly or indirectly related to planning. My first job in the District was a public interest fellowship at the DC Housing Authority (DCHA) in the Office of Planning and Development. I worked on the first round of the New Communities Initiative in Northwest One, including community engagement as well as support of the master plan. I also assisted with the planning, infrastructure, and financing for various redevelopment projects. I represented DCHA on major District policy development groups, including Inclusionary Zoning, green building, and the Comprehensive Housing Strategy Task Force.

I have also worked in the federal government starting at the U.S Department of Treasury’s Community Development Financial Institutions fund, where I worked on New Markets Tax Credit and stood up the Capital Magnet Fund for affordable housing finance. After Dodd-Frank Wall Street Reform passed, I had the opportunity to help stand up a new federal agency, the Consumer Financial Protection Bureau, which was led by Elizabeth Warren. I created a team to use data analytics to model consumer risk and help the agency deploy its examiners to various traditional and nontraditional financial institutions, including mortgage companies, payday lenders, debt collectors, and student loan servicers.

In 2013, because I wanted a stronger and more direct connection to my community, I came back to DC Government, joining the Office of the Deputy Mayor for Planning and Economic Development (DMPED) as the Deputy Chief of Staff. While in that role, I improved DMPED’s data capacity and transparency and worked on affordable housing initiatives, including an Affordable Housing Needs Assessment with the Urban Institute.

I was fortunate to have the opportunity to join Mayor Bowser’s transition committee, where I staffed the Open and Good Government and Full Democracy committee, which was focused on technology, transparency, and statehood. When the Mayor took office, I became Chief of Staff at DMPED, where I focused on agency operations, interagency coordination, policy development, special projects, and affordable housing.

In that role, I was charged with implementing the vision of the Mayor and goals of the Deputy Mayor. Examples include working on Our RFP, creating an Economic Intelligence team, assisting with term sheet negotiations for the St. Elizabeths Entertainment and Sports Arena, structuring the Yelp corporate attraction, setting up the framework for the Inclusive Innovation Incubator, marshaling the team and resources for the #ObviouslyDC campaign, and directing our efforts around the Economic Strategy and Opportunity Zones. I also led the Autonomous Vehicles Working Group, the Office to Affordable Housing Task Force, and worked on the Affordable Housing Strike Force. Many of these efforts have focused on achieving greater inclusivity in the District.

During my time at DMPED, I worked closely with numerous agency directors, staff across the District Government and countless residents and stakeholders. Since joining DMPED, I was able to work directly with three different planning directors and support various Office of Planning efforts. So when the Mayor asked me to serve as Interim Director of Planning in November, I was excited to hit the ground running.

**The Importance of Planning in the District**

I was excited to join the Office of Planning, in part because planning has an important history and place in DC Government. Washington, DC, is truly a city of plans. Familiar names like L'Enfant, McMillan, and Olmsted helped shape the city we live in today. More recent plans, such as the WMATA Metrorail plan, the Downtown plan and the Anacostia Waterfront plan still drive the physical and social attributes of our city. I have enjoyed the opportunity to once again review these and the numerous other plans at OP since I began at the agency. I see how they lay foundations for our city, but also how some have fallen short of ensuring we achieve the city we want. As the Director of the Office of Planning, I will work to support the Mayor and the District to build on and learn from these plans to move toward a future that is both vibrant and inclusive.

In recent years, I have seen much debate, strong and varied views, and a number of concerns about the challenges that the District is experiencing from its growth and change and how to address them. The Mayor’s Inaugural Address included a bold call to action for us to think differently and to take on some of these seemingly-intractable challenges. For example, while the District is a clear and recognized leader in affordable housing programs and investment, we see there is more to do. The Mayor called on the region to produce 240,000 additional housing units by 2025, with the District contributing a significant 36,000 of those units. This will help absorb the demand and create housing price stability, especially for the middle-income households. At the same time, we will need to ensure our affordable housing programs continue to work to meet the needs of the lowest-income residents.

The Mayor has said that the District, as one jurisdiction in a larger metropolitan area, cannot solve our big issues alone. High-level issues like housing and transportation require regional coordination and action in order to achieve our goals. We have already seen success with WMATA funding and strong forward momentum on housing coordination. OP is a critical agency for working with regional partners to ensure we can grow equitably and address critical concerns around housing and transportation. Since starting in November, I have chaired the Metropolitan Washington Council of Governments (MWCOG) Planning Directors Technical Advisory Committee to discuss housing and I have weighed in at MWCOG’s Transportation Planning Board for the importance of coordinating housing and transportation planning. I have worked hand in hand with Director Donaldson from the Department of Housing and Community Development who co-chairs the complementary housing committee.

Over the last four months, I have worked to improve engagement with stakeholders and residents. I have already begun talking to and meeting with interested parties, in order to begin hearing about their ideas and hopes for the future and to discuss how OP can best engage moving forward. Through these engagements, I have come to believe that, while various stakeholders may have strong and passionate disagreements about how to address our challenges, we share many fundamental DC values, from equity to vibrance to stewardship of our natural and fiscal resources.

To plan for a future that lives up to our values and positive vision, we need to have honest and difficult conversations about what growth means and how the District will change. Learning about residents' positive vision for the District's future is one way we will start these conversations. Through strong engagement and dialogue, as well as alignment with the Mayor’s bold vision, we can work to further realize our values and see a future that is prosperous for all residents.

In closing, I have summarized OP’s Priorities for FY 19 in the following section of this testimony. I have previously shared these priorities in OP’s Oversight Hearing and will now conclude my remarks. Thank you for the opportunity to share my background, qualifications and plans for the Office of Planning. I look forward to continuing to work with Council as we strive to make the District a city that lives up to our values. I can now answer any questions you may have.

**Office of Planning’s Priorities**

Since taking my current role in November 2018, I have focused on ensuring the operations of OP are working smoothly through clear direction and empowered management. I have also worked to advise on long-term thinking, while continuing to deliver products and analysis in the short term. I have worked with the incredible senior team at OP to develop three top priorities for the next year.

First and foremost, we know that the Comprehensive Plan amendment process is critical to complete. There is a great deal of interest among numerous stakeholders in addressing the uncertainties of its completion. I will continue to work with Council to support them in passing the framework element with all due speed. This is a critical path item which must be done prior to the Office of Planning completing and sharing a draft of the remaining 24 elements and two maps. While waiting for Council’s action, OP has continued to review the numerous public and agency amendments and plans to re-engage the community this Spring with a broad readout of the values and themes we have seen during the review process. This will help us prepare an updated Introduction Element and pave the way for public review prior to final submission to Council.

While we continue to focus on the Comprehensive Plan, OP must also work on other critical planning efforts. Housing is the top of these. Given the Mayor’s call to not only produce more housing, but to ensure that all parts of the District are part of this effort, we are developing a housing systems analysis and plan, in conjunction with our housing agency counterparts. This will not only be the basis for our regional efforts with the Metropolitan Washington Council of Governments, but it will also help inform a community discussion about how all parts of the city will be a part of our growth, both in overall housing and in affordable housing. This analysis will help guide where the District can create more affordable housing in high opportunity areas and preserve existing affordable housing. In addition, it will address the growing need to produce “missing middle” housing and homeownership opportunities. The housing analysis will help us quantify and understand both where opportunities are geographically as well as what types of changes to policies and regulations may be necessary to achieve the outcomes we need.

The third priority is a focus on community planning. In conjunction with the new Office of East of the River Services, we plan to both support the implementation of existing plans as well as to update or create new community plans in neighborhoods that are facing change or that are facing ongoing barriers to vibrancy. In addition, there are other areas of the District that would benefit from updated or new area planning efforts. Our tools for this work include not only Small Area Plans, but also design guidelines, vision frameworks, retail toolkits and other tailored analysis and products. We find these efforts can often help a community better understand its goals, challenges and opportunities and better align stakeholders and the District government. They often help clarify fears and concerns and provide a framework for a positive path forward.

There are two additional areas of focus that we will begin ramping up as the Comprehensive Plan effort abates.

First, we will be picking up efforts around our industrial land uses and opportunities. As our landlocked city continues to grow, this space is increasingly contested. The Ward 5 Works plan from 2014 provided an important framework for understanding this conflict and working to resolve the land use challenges through various means. In addition, the recent Cultural Plan highlights opportunities for improving our maker and creative spaces, which are often in industrial areas and becomingly increasingly unaffordable. OP will work to review recommendations and opportunities to address these issues.

Our final focus area is about our internal practices. Specifically, we will work to make our engagement and data visualization practices best in class, under the overarching goal of better meeting residents where they are. OP has long had engagement and data analysis practices that are critical for our work. But we can be more intentional about developing, refining and documenting these, not only for OP but also for the District Government more broadly. We have already started creating data visualization and analysis products that are more accessible, digestible, and interesting.

We are also looking to improve our engagement methods to ensure as many stakeholders as possible participate in our efforts. We will be evaluating new tools and strategies to make sure we hear from more residents. One opportunity for this type of engagement work will be Census 2020. OP has been working closely with the Mayor’s office to help achieve the Mayor’s goal of improved response rates throughout the city, especially targeting hard to reach neighborhoods.

**CONCLUSION**

I want to thank the Committee for this opportunity to discuss my background and qualifications. I look forward to working with you, Chairman Mendelson, and the members of the Committee and am now happy to answer questions you may have.