**GOVERNMENT OF THE DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA**

**Office of Planning**



**Fiscal Year 2018-2019 Performance Oversight Hearing**

Testimony of

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Before the

Committee of the Whole

Council of the District of Columbia

The Honorable Phil Mendelson, Chairman

John A. Wilson Building

Room 412

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10:00 a.m.

**INTRODUCTION**

Good afternoon Chairman Mendelson and members and staff of the Committee of the Whole.  My name is Andrew Trueblood and I am the Acting Director of the DC 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 2018 and the first quarter of fiscal year 2019.  I will also share OP’s upcoming priorities.

Mayor Bowser’s Fiscal Year 2018 budget made investments that supported our efforts to deliver on the promise of our shared DC values. These efforts include creating economic opportunity, making our neighborhoods safer, and providing more effective and efficient government services. The Office of Planning will continue that effort as we work each day to fulfill our commitment to provide every District resident a fair shot at opportunity.

The Office of Planning is tasked with planning for our residents through the lens of our neighborhoods and with planning for the city’s long-term health and vitality. We are charged with building toward a better city not only for our residents today, but for our grandchildren and our grandchildren’s grandchildren.

For decades, the challenges the District faced were about addressing population decline, fiscal insolvency, and providing basic public services. Planning during this period was about stabilizing our neighborhoods and economy and making the District a safe and attractive city. The District’s population is now over 702,000, an increase of more than 100,000 residents since 2010. OP forecasts that the District is on track to bypass its historic peak population (which was 802,000 in 1950), in the next decade. We have the top bond rating, healthy financial reserves and growing tax revenues. We have invested significant sums into our schools, parks, libraries and roads.

With these milestones come many opportunities as well as significant challenges about how we grow, how we ensure all residents have the opportunity to thrive, and how each one of us plays a role in achieving our shared values. The Office of Planning is committed to enlivening the Mayor’s vision to ensure that the benefits of our growth are shared across all 8 Wards and that we build toward a vibrant and inclusive city for all of our residents, as well as future generations. I would like to share with you more about how OP is structured, how we worked toward this vision in the past, and what our plans are for the future.

**OP ORGANIZATION AND WORK**

The Office of Planning has three primary divisions, each led by a deputy director. Our Citywide Strategy and Analysis team led by Sakina Kahn works on citywide systems like housing and transportation in addition to mapping and data analysis, primarily related to the Census. Our Community Planning and Design team led by Chris Delfs focuses on place-based, context-sensitive land use planning and design of our city’s unique neighborhoods. Our Development Review and Historic Preservation team led by Jennifer Steingasser focuses on project-level reviews and providing staff reports to the Zoning Commission, Board of Zoning Adjustment, and Historic Preservation Review Board. Finally, OP’s senior team is rounded out by our Chief of Staff, Malaika Scriven, our Counsel, David Lieb and our Communications Officer, Mekdy Alemayehu.

**NOTABLE ACCOMPLISHMENTS IN FY 2018**

The Office of Planning accomplished a great deal in FY 2018 and thus far in FY 2019.  OP has completed a number of recent projects that exemplify how we are addressing current and anticipated growth in the District.

In FY 2018, OP submitted legislation to the Council to amend the Framework Element of the District's Comprehensive Plan. DC residents have had many opportunities to participate in the process including, attending OP meetings, by submitting amendments, by testifying at Council hearings, by learning about the process and keeping up with progress via OP's [plandc.dc.gov](http://plandc.dc.gov) web site, and by contacting OP's Comp Plan team. Later in my testimony I will discuss next steps.

Last year, thanks to a partnership with the Kresge Foundation, we concluded a multi-year program of community engagement and creative placemaking called "Crossing the Street," which included 17 projects, 73 unique events, 333 artists engaged, and more than 17,000 participants.  Crossing the Street projects were designed to build community in areas of the District that are experiencing rapid change. They used arts and culture to activate spaces, foster conversation and collaboration, and highlight and support existing neighborhood assets. The project activated and elevated neighborhoods and involved a hundred different community organizations.  Crossing the Street provided a platform for OP to reimagine how we engage community and conduct planning. In the fall, we released a summary “zine” that highlights the various efforts.

In January 2018, the Mayor released a draft of DC’s first Cultural Plan, which was a collaborative effort between the DC Office of Planning (OP), the DC Commission on the Arts and Humanities (CAH), and the DC Office of Cable, Film, Television, Music and Entertainment (OCTFME). More than 1,500 community members and cultural stakeholders provided input to the plan, with more than 600 comments on the draft Plan. The Cultural Plan, which will be released shortly, provides a framework for strengthening arts, humanities, culture and heritage in communities across the city by increasing cultural participation, supporting artistic skill development, stimulating cultural production and informing decision-making. The Cultural Plan’s premise is: all infrastructure is a stage and all residents are performers. By acknowledging that culture occurs everywhere and is created and consumed by everyone, it seeks to broaden the traditional constituency of cultural stakeholders. The Cultural Plan lays out a vision and recommendations on how the government and private stakeholders can build upon, strengthen and invest in the people, places and ideas that define culture within the District of Columbia.

Last year, OP completed the Buzzard Point Vision Framework + Design Review Guide.  This plan provides development and design guidance for the Buzzard Point area, including specific guidance on building for resilience, a new Riverwalk, the new South Capitol Oval, and integration of Audi Field, the new home of DC United, into the surrounding neighborhood.  Residents and visitors from across the region are experiencing the new amenities and streetscape of Buzzard Point, with several new developments planned and on the way for what will be a well-designed waterfront neighborhood with more than 11 million square feet of new, mixed-use construction, including an estimated 6,000 residential units.

OP is also scheduled to release its Downtown East plan.OP led this planning initiative for this community in the bustling heart of the District, sitting at a point where the commercial vibrancy of Downtown meets the evolving residential and mixed use character of the Mt. Vernon Triangle and NoMA neighborhoods. It lies on the doorstep of Union Station, a primary gateway to the District, and is near major institutional hubs of the U.S. Capitol and Judiciary Square. It is also currently undergoing a rapid transition with several million square feet of new commercial development in the pipeline and a projected 33% increase in the number of residents within the next few years. With large-scale development projects bringing renewed interest and reinvestment to the area, the District, along with local stakeholders, has created a plan for shaping a livable urban neighborhood that serves the needs of its community.

Earlier this month, in a commitment to transparency, OP and the DC Office of Chief Technology Office (OCTO) released a beta data visualization platform, to help residents, researchers, and stakeholders better access and visualize our State Data Center resources. This visual platform is a one-stop shop for a variety of demographic information. This new innovative tool will make Ward-level data more accessible to the public and will produce easier more practical ways for every resident to understand the work we do.

In the FY 2018 budget, OP awarded and closed out three grants related to federal parks:

* Anacostia Coordinating Council for its “Engaging Ward 8 Residents in Woodland Restoration” project to clean up three east-of-the-river national parks;
* Anacostia Watershed Society to design and install a photographic fence screen along the Anacostia Waterfront Trail near the National Park Service’s Benning Road maintenance yard; and to
* Friends of Georgetown Waterfront Park to make repairs to the park’s signature fountain in Percy Plaza.

Our Historic Preservation Office (HPO) continues to promote stewardship of the District of Columbia's historic and cultural resources through planning, protection, and public outreach, and to oversee the historic preservation review process.  Last year the HPO completed “Preserving for Progress,” the 2020 District of Columbia historic preservation plan, partnered with Humanities DC to complete eight projects exploring the legacy of the year 1968 in the District’s history, and provided $100,000 in grants to homeowners in historic districts to keep their homes in good repair. In addition, HPO reviewed over 5,600 DC building permit applications and conducted over 650 construction inspections which yielded nearly 50% increase in fines assessed in historic districts and on historic buildings.

Through its dedicated work on zoning cases, OP’s Development Review team has been able to translate key objectives in the Comprehensive Plan and Mayoral Priority into reality.  During FY18, there was a slowdown in new Planned Unit Developments (PUDs) filed; however, this was offset by new map amendment and zoning text cases which address expected growth called for in the Comp Plan.   Additionally, OP managed 14 PUD and Zoning Commission design review cases that were either approved or still remain in progress.  This represents over 7.1 million square feet of new development, and includes:

* About 3,600 new housing units, including about approximately 790 new affordable units
* $8.5 million dollars in contributions to the Housing Production Trust Fund (HPTF);
* About 120 hotel rooms;
* 2.9 million square feet of office space; and
* Over 340,000 square feet of retail space.

Also in FY18, the DC Food Policy Council, housed here at OP, and led by Director Ona Balkus, determined that its top priority for the year was to promote promoting healthy food access east of the river. Under this goal, the FPC accomplished the following:

* Created ‘advocacy guides’ to help residents understand DC Council’s legislative process as it relates to healthy food access and their communities.
* Received the Kaiser Permanente Foundation grant to develop a DC Food Workforce Development Strategy which would strengthen the food sector workforce, thereby creating more living wage jobs and support local businesses to target underserved areas.
* Co-hosted the first Community Dinner in Ward 8 with DC Greens Community Advocates. Residents were invited to share dialogue on solutions to improving food access within their neighborhood.

Among agency hires, I want to single out three new positions that are now filled: A Senior Counsel, a third historic preservation inspector, and a communications officer.  This is the first time that OP has had an attorney and a communications professional, and I’d like to thank the Council for its support of the Office of Planning and its budget over the years.

**LOOKING AHEAD: FY 2018-2019 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 the work and initiatives of the Office of Planning. We look forward to working with you, Chairman Mendelson, and the members of the Committee on continued progress for the District of Columbia. I am now happy to answer questions you may have.