

GOVERNMENT OF THE DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA
Office of Planning



Fiscal Year 2020 and 2021 to date 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
1350 Pennsylvania Avenue, NW
Washington, D.C. 20004

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12:00 pm

Good afternoon, Chairman Mendelson, Councilmembers, and staff of the Committee of the Whole. My name is Andrew Trueblood and I am the Director of the DC Office of Planning (OP). I am pleased to share with the Committee the activities and accomplishments of the Office of Planning during fiscal year 2020 through the second quarter of fiscal year 2021.

The Office of Planning has three Divisions and 77 FTEs. Our Citywide Strategy and Analysis division led by Sakina Khan, includes two teams; a citywide team that works on systems including housing, transportation, and sustainability, as well as a data team focused on visualization, analysis, mapping, and operating the District's State Data Center, which coordinates with the US Census. Our Community Planning and Design Division, led by Anita Cozart, includes our neighborhood planning and urban design teams. Our Development Review and Historic Preservation Division, led by Jennifer Steingasser, includes two teams focusing on project-level implementation through efforts supporting the Zoning Commission, Board of Zoning Adjustment, and Historic Preservation Review Board. It also includes our State Historic Preservation Office. Our senior team is rounded out by our newly-hired Chief of Staff, Vivian Guerra, our Counsel, David Lieb and our Communications Officer, Mekdy Alemayehu.

FY 20 Priorities

In February 2020, at OP's last performance oversight hearing, I outlined the agency's three priorities for the fiscal year: (1) moving the Comprehensive Plan update to enactment, (2) advancing the Mayor's housing agenda, and (3) working towards a full and complete count for Census 2020. At the time, we could not have known how much would change less than a month later, when Mayor Bowser declared a public health emergency in the District.

COVID-19 has presented tremendous challenges to all of the District's residents and businesses. At OP, the public health emergency has impacted our working environment, as our entire office, with the exception of our preservation inspectors, has been on situational telework since March 2020. It has impacted how we have been able to engage with the public, as social distancing necessitated a shift to primarily online meetings and outreach. And, it has impacted our workplans, as OP has provided extensive support to COVID-19 response and recovery efforts. I am proud to say, however, that even with the unforeseen and unprecedented challenges of FY 20, OP achieved the goals that I spoke to last February, while also supporting critical response and recovery work.

FY 20 Accomplishments

Comprehensive Plan Transmittal to Council

In FY 20, OP's top priority continued to be the adoption of the Comprehensive Plan (Comp Plan) update. In April 2020, OP transmitted the Comp Plan update to Council. The existing Comp Plan, which was enacted in 2006 and underwent a minor amendment in 2011, is reflective of the environment of two decades ago. It needs to be updated to address the current and future challenges of COVID-19 recovery, housing, equity, and resilience. The Comp Plan update seeks to address these goals through the lens of the physical space of the District, from housing growth in the context of systemic racism to immediate public health and public space challenges. It proposes specific narratives, actions, and policies that can help guide how the District addresses its goals over the coming years and decades.

At OP's last oversight hearing, the final public and ANC comment period had just closed and OP was reviewing comments and finalizing remaining updates to the Comp Plan. This comment period was just one of many ways that OP engaged tens of thousands of residents and stakeholders throughout the Comp Plan update process. Following the transmittal of the Comp Plan update to Council, OP has continued to communicate with residents regarding the Comp Plan update and opportunities to engage in Council's review process. At the Council hearings on November 12th and 13th, 2020, I shared details about OP's unprecedented outreach process and the proposal, so I will refer to that for more details on our FY 21 Comp Plan update activities. The Mayor and OP are pleased that Council will mark up the legislation to adopt the Comp Plan update. We continue to urge Council to move that process forward as quickly as possible. OP stands ready to start implementation right away.

COVID-19 Response & Recovery

In FY 20 through the second quarter of FY 21, OP provided considerable support to the District's COVID-19 response and recovery efforts through the District Economic Recovery Team, ReOpen DC, food security efforts, and public space guidelines. OP's 2019 DC Values Campaign, conducted as part of public outreach for the Comp Plan update, helped to inform the core values that have anchored the District's recovery efforts around health, opportunity, prosperity, and equity, which are now referred to as DC HOPE.

In April 2020, Mayor Bowser launched the District Economic Recovery Team (DERT), led by the Office of the Deputy Mayor for Planning and Economic Development (DMPED). OP has worked with DMPED and other agency partners including the Department of Housing and

Community Development (DHCD) and the Mayor's Office of Policy (MOP) to conduct research and analysis and to monitor economic and housing trends to inform the District's economic recovery strategy. Key initiatives have included research into the opportunity for commercial to residential conversions, working with the Urban Land Institute on an advisory report regarding economic recovery and resilience strategies for the central business district, and serving on the Mayor's Saving DC's Rental Housing Market Strike Force.

In the spring of 2020, OP assisted with the development of the ReOpen DC Advisory Group recommendations, which involved working with a variety of stakeholders to propose phased reopening strategies with mitigation guidelines by sector to ensure a safe and responsive process. I served as the Committee Director for the overall ReOpen DC effort and coordinated the steering committee and the eleven sector committees as they developed recommendations for Mayor Bowser. Several members of the OP team developed the public engagement strategy, including a tele-townhall and an online survey that received over 15,000 responses from District residents, workers, and business owners.

In addition to supporting the ReOpen DC Advisory Group, OP, in conjunction with the Deputy Mayor for Education (DME) and DC Health, led the development and implementation of a reopening plan review process for colleges and universities. OP helped support these institutions through the COVID-19 emergency, while also protecting the health of students, faculty, staff and the communities in which they are located. This included providing and implementing strong public health safeguards to prevent community spread.

The District’s Food Policy Team, housed within OP and led by Food Policy Director Ona Balkus, has provided critical response and recovery support throughout the COVID-19 public health emergency. The team supported emergency operations through mapping food resources in the District and developing and coordinating food distribution programs. Additionally, in coordination with OP’s Development Review team, the Food Policy Team developed the Farmers Market waiver application process for phase two of reopening. In September 2020, the Food Policy team released *Food Access & Food Security in the District of Columbia: Responding to the COVID-19 Public Health Emergency*, a report that evaluates and makes recommendations to address food access needs during and following the public health emergency.

Members of the OP Design and Development Review teams, in partnership with District Department of Transportation (DDOT), Alcoholic Beverage Regulation Administration (ABRA), and DMPED, were also instrumental in the development of new guidelines as part of the District’s re-imagining of public space during reopening, including the buildout of “streateries” to expand outdoor dining and the Educational and Academic Retail Shops (EARS) pilot.

Housing

Throughout FY 20, OP continued to advance Mayor Bowser’s housing initiatives with our agency partners, including DMPED and DHCD. At the beginning of FY 20, the Mayor’s Housing Equity Report was released, which made the District the first major city in the nation to create area-specific goals for equitable affordable housing. This report included an inventory of

dedicated affordable housing units and targets for new affordable units by planning area, which were informed by OP's analysis as well as public outreach.

The Housing Element of the Comprehensive Plan amendment was updated to reflect Mayor Bowser's housing goal to produce 36,000 new housing units and 12,000 affordable housing units by 2025 and to address pressing issues across the housing continuum, from homelessness to homeownership. The updated Housing Element includes definitions and policies related to housing affordability; physical, economic, and cultural displacement; and housing for specific populations like seniors and multigenerational households. The Council's timely consideration and passage of the Mayor's Comprehensive Plan update is more critical than ever, as the District faces continued housing pressures that have been exacerbated by the impacts of COVID-19.

In FY 20, OP's Development Review team proposed Expanded Inclusionary Zoning, also, referred to as "IZ Plus" to the Zoning Commission. IZ Plus expands the existing Inclusionary Zoning requirements of the Zoning Regulations to create an increased affordable housing set-aside requirement for certain map amendments. This provides the District with another tool to produce affordable housing in a more equitable way across the District. OP hosted a virtual roundtable in July 2020 to gather feedback on the proposal and in November 2020 the Zoning Commission voted to take action on the proposal. IZ Plus was adopted by the Zoning Commission on March 11th, and will take effect upon its publication in the DC Register.

In September 2020, the Zoning Commission took final action on OP's recommended text amendments to the alley lot regulations contained in several Subtitles of the Zoning Regulations.

These amendments will streamline the text and support additional housing and affordable housing options in alleys.

In FY 20, the District continued to offer financial assistance to low- and moderate-income homeowners to help with the cost of repairing their historic homes. These targeted, non-taxable grants were available in fifteen of the city's historic districts and landmarks. In FY 20, twelve grants were awarded, totaling \$255,314. This program will be ongoing at the same level of funding throughout FY 21, and residents of Bloomingdale are newly eligible this year.

Historic preservation reviews declined in the spring and summer of 2020, but have since returned to pre-COVID levels due to a construction rebound. After dropping 25 percent overall for FY 20, the Historic Preservation Review Board's (HPRB) case load recovered last fall to exceed the previous year's by 21 percent. Permit reviews by OP staff dropped by about 500 applications in the spring, but have sustained pre-COVID levels since last summer and are on track to exceed 6,000 cases this fiscal year. Construction inspections continued during the COVID-19 emergency and reached a 10-year high of nearly 750 inspections by the end of FY 20.

Working closely with the Department of Energy and Environment (DOEE), HPRB adopted Sustainability Guidelines in FY 20, supporting efforts to make historic homes more energy efficient. Similar to construction generally, solar panel applications dipped by 10 percent in FY 20, but returned to pre-COVID levels in the first quarter of FY 21. To date, OP's preservation staff has approved nearly 1,800 solar installations. This equates to 6.4 percent of the District's

28,000 historic buildings, slightly higher than the national rate of 6 percent of homeowners with solar panels.

With community partners, including the DC Preservation League, OP's Historic Preservation Office actively pursued National Park Service grants for research on underrepresented communities to expand appreciation of the District's historic diversity. Grant products just released include online story maps documenting the significance of Barry Farm and Kingman Park, and a 109-site online trail exploring 20th Century African American Civil Rights. OP's LGBTQ study produced two new historic landmarks last year, Annie's Paramount Steak House and the Slowe-Burrill House. A study of the District's Chinese and Korean Communities launched in 2020, and another on DC Women's History and Suffrage, awarded in 2020, will begin this year. These projects have brought \$177,000 in federal funds to OP's programs.

Census

March 2020 began the count for the 2020 decennial census. District efforts were led by Melissa Bird, the Executive Director of DC Census 2020, which was housed at OP. Counting all District residents in the census ensures that the District receives more than \$6 billion in federal funding annually to support vital programs. A complete count also ensures that all residents will have fair representation in the upcoming ward and ANC redistricting efforts. Prior to the 2020 Census, DC already had more population than Wyoming and Vermont. A complete count underscores how critical it is for DC residents to have full representation in Congress by becoming the 51st state.

Budgetary support from Mayor Bowser and Council allowed for the DC Census team, including government and community partners, to conduct an 18-month public engagement campaign that reached residents in all eight wards through outreach funding for 16 local organizations with extensive networks in historically undercounted communities. Grantees used innovative, hyper-local, culturally relevant outreach and education methods to reach hard-to-count communities.

DC Census also carried out an extensive marketing campaign that included print, radio and television ads; transit billboards and wraps, CVS bag inserts, door hangers, and more. DC Census had over 1 million social media impressions; and produced 25 PSAs, in 6 languages, featuring Mayor Bowser, Congresswoman Eleanor Holmes Norton, nationally recognized Chef José Andrés and other trusted community leaders. Census information was also shared at over 500 community events in DC, including over 883,000 online and social media engagements with underrepresented and hard-to-count residents.

Even in the face of the significant obstacles presented by the public health emergency, the team was able to quickly turn to new and creative ways to reach residents. Relying on the network of over 1,000 Census Ambassadors, grantees, sister agencies and over 40 additional community partnerships, we continued outreach while practicing safe social distancing. We launched multiple new campaigns including our nationally recognized campaign to reach children under the age of 5, where we distributed “I count too” baby bibs through our partnerships with the Children’s National Health Network, birthing hospitals, Mary’s Center and Thrive by Five. We created a QR code campaign which allowed census ambassadors to socially distance while providing online access to the census for residents at locations providing essential services.

Through our partners, an additional 50 online events were held during the public health emergency to promote the census, such as information panels, a live census Go-Go concert, YouTube series for kids, and a virtual step show.

The census count ended on October 15th with a total enumeration of 99.9% nationally, as well as in the District. Due to the unprecedented challenges presented by the COVID-19 pandemic, self-response rates across the country were lower than in 2010. Still, almost half of DC's census tracts exceeded the 66% self-response rate from 2010. In FY 21, OP will assist Council with ward and ANC redistricting efforts when data is received from the US Census Bureau.

FY 2021 Priorities

In FY 20, OP transmitted the Comp Plan to Council and completed the 2020 Census count, which means that our office has begun to transition our resources to focus on new priorities for FY 21 and beyond. Our workplan for 2021 centers around three priorities: neighborhood vibrancy, public and civic life, and housing. Each of these priorities is guided by implementation of the Comprehensive Plan and furthering District recovery efforts from COVID-19.

Neighborhood Vibrancy

In December 2020, OP announced five new community planning initiatives: the Congress Heights Small Area Plan, the Pennsylvania Ave SE Small Area Plan, the Southwest Resilience Strategy, the Chevy Chase/Upper NW Small Area Plan, and North Capitol Crossroads. As the DC Council moves to approve the proposed Comp Plan update, these plans will use the update to further vibrant, equitable, and resilient neighborhoods with access to housing, amenities, and

public resources for all residents. OP is excited to launch these initiatives and partner with residents in neighborhoods across the District to develop community-focused and community-led plans that can support neighborhood-level needs and goals. If residents are interested in learning more, they can visit the DC Office of Planning website or call (202) 442-7600.

Public & Civic Life

In FY 21, OP is also prioritizing work on public and civic life in the District, through two key initiatives: the Public Life, Activation, Community, and Equity in Spaces Initiative (or “PLACES”) and the Civic Infrastructure and Facilities Initiative (or “CIFI”).

Our PLACES Initiative has coordinated OP’s public life studies, which utilize observations, public surveys, and analysis to provide guidance on how to better design our city’s public spaces and how they can better serve the needs of the people using them. In FY 20, OP released the Florida Avenue/New York Avenue Intersection Public Life Study and in January, OP released the Reimagining Reeves Public Life Study, which examined the intersection of 14th and U Street, NW. OP has leveraged our prior public life work on K Street, which coordinated a new people-focused vision for K Street’s public spaces, to support to DDOT’s K Street Transitway project.

In FY 21, the PLACES Initiative will continue to support recovery efforts, through continuing updates to comprehensive guidelines on Re-imagining Outdoor Space: Restaurants and Retail, in partnership with DDOT and DC Health, and through a high-level assessment of COVID-related public space initiatives that will inform medium and longer-term strategies for post-pandemic public space. Specifically, there are long-term opportunities to activate downtown spaces to

support “streateries,” “streetail,” special markets, outdoor exercise and fitness, cultural activities, or other events, which would draw residents, workers and visitors to downtown. OP’s public life and tactical urbanism initiatives can build upon the recent Urban Land Institute Central Business District Advisory Services Panel to support a robust recovery for Central Washington.

Also as part of our PLACES Initiative, OP convened the Commemorative Works Committee beginning in FY 20 and will continue this work into FY 21. The Commemorative Works Committee is tasked with developing criteria to review, evaluate, and provide feedback on applications for placement of commemorative works on public space. The Committee has worked throughout FY 20 and FY 21 to reimagine commemoration and how the District of Columbia can leverage this Committee to celebrate our local history, culture, and people.

A key component of our public and civic life work that kicked off in FY 20 is the interagency Civic Infrastructure and Facilities Initiative (CIFI). Stemming from one of the major themes of the Comprehensive Plan update, CIFI is focused on working with our agency partners, including several large footprint agencies and strategy, information, and finance agencies, to establish a more coordinated and data-driven approach to planning for public facilities in the District.

Housing

Housing continues to be a critical priority for Mayor Bowser, so in FY 21, OP will continue our work to advance various housing initiatives. I discussed many of the ongoing efforts above, including housing-related recovery work, support for commercial conversions, serving on the

Saving DC's Rental Housing Market Strike Force, and amendments to the zoning regulations, including further updates to the Inclusionary Zoning requirements ("IZ XL").

Following Council approval of the Comprehensive Plan update, OP will assess zoning as it relates to the update. This could include areas with new Future Land Use Map (FLUM) designations in high opportunity areas and additional proposals related to the Mayor's housing goals, with a focus on how design can serve to support density.

Conclusion

FY 2020 was a busy and unprecedented year, and OP staff have been critical to our successes. We are excited to continue to keep up the momentum in the upcoming year and provide even more planning support to our residents. 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 happy to answer any questions you may have.