



CHAIRMAN'S UPDATE

The Official Newsletter of DC Council Chairman Phil Mendelson



April 2025

ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

The following are remarks I gave at April's annual meeting of the Washington Economic Partnership

The forthcoming budget for next fiscal year, which begins this October 1st, has not yet been submitted to the Council. But the Mayor has stated over and over that one of her top priorities is to invest in our downtown and turn the corner on the still-lingering effects from the pandemic.

I completely agree with this priority, and I think it safe to say that the Council – which is different than the Council of 4 years ago – also shares this priority. In the last couple of years we have implemented new policies to provide real property tax relief to small businesses. In the last year we worked with the Mayor to improve incentives for the conversion of vacant downtown office buildings to housing. In the last few months we have acted to revise Emergency Rental Assistance (ERAP) to reduce the burden of economic vacancies in our rental housing market. And I predict that the Council will act this year to reform TOPA (the Tenant Opportunity to Purchase Act) to make it easier for housing developers to attract capital. We recognize that much needs to be done to the District's regulatory framework restore the District as an attractive place to invest capital.

A month ago I would have said that TOPA reform would be adopted before the summer recess, but then we expected to have received a proposed Fiscal Year 2026 budget on April 2nd, and, as I stand here, I don't know when we will receive the budget and so work on major legislation has been stalled.

The delay is not due to the current problem with Congress and our current year's budget, because the so-called "pencils down" on the FY 2026 did not happen until April 9th. But let me say this about Congress: they made a mistake. It adversely affects the District. The Senate figured this out March 14th, when by unanimous voice vote it approved a bill by Senator Collins. That was a month ago. I am hopeful the House will finally vote at the end of this month when they come back from recess. But I am not optimistic. The Speaker is struggling with dissension within his caucus, and so the District is of secondary importance.

The Mayor and I have a work around. The public got a sense of this when the Mayor notified Congress. But let me be clear: the cleanest and best solution is for the House to adopt the Senate's fix. It is complete, unambiguous, and unquestioned. You can be helpful by asking the House to adopt the Senate bill, without amendment.

Of course the biggest economic development news is progress with the Commanders and the RFK stadium site. Like you, I learned of this only in mid-April, and we need to know more. I have said many times that I support a stadium and welcome the return of our football team, but without the investment of public dollars. The devil is in the details. Is this really going to cost us close to \$1 Billion – when you factor in the horizontal costs, funding from Events DC, the commitment for additional funding in six years, debt service on our borrowing, and the NPS parkland offset promised to the Senate? What capital programs, if any, are being displaced from our budget? The Council will look at these questions carefully.

The District has its challenges. But we are strong financially -- especially compared to other cities. Hopefully the proposed budget for next year will be submitted soon and then you will have your chance to weigh in.

SUPPORTING OUR LGBTQIA+ NEIGHBORS IN THE TIME OF TRUMP

The new federal administration has made drastic changes that have a strong impact on American citizens across the country. But while many focus on the federal workers of the Washington, DC region, the District's LGBTQIA+ community is under attack in ways that some may not even be aware. Not only are federal resources for this community being intentionally erased, there are efforts to make sure companies that rely on federal government grants and contracts are punished if they assist or even acknowledge the LGBTQIA+ community.

I have not spoken up loudly enough to reassure District residents who make up the LGBTQIA+ community that I stand with you. There are many ways the District government can be supportive of the community. That includes assuring our LGBTQIA+ neighbors that we will stand up against threats to their rights. This government values the diversity of our city. It is a crucial thread in the fabric of what makes D.C. great.

One way we stand with our LGBTQIA+ neighbors is by supporting the transgender and nonbinary communities who are under attack on multiple fronts. Specifically, we can ensure that our schools remain safe, welcoming spaces for transgender and non-binary youth, and that transgender and non-binary people in the District have access to gender affirming care. I will defend the policies and laws of the District, should they come under attack, that support the transgender and nonbinary communities.

We also will resist any effort to undermine our same-sex marriage law, which unfortunately has been messaged by some elected officials across the country. Individuals have a right to choose their partners (and their identity); it's not my business nor is it the government's. I helped shepherd the "Religious Freedom and Civil Marriage Equality Amendment Act" through the Council back in 2009 and I am proud of that. Full equality for same-sex couples remains a core value for me and the Council.

Finally, the District government, along with local LGBTQIA+ organizations, is preparing and planning to host World Pride this summer and there is no suggestion that we would cancel it. In last year's budget, the Council and Mayor set aside \$5 Million for the festivities, and we look forward to welcoming tens of thousands for this international celebration. The Metropolitan Police Department is working with the LGBTQIA+ liaison unit to maintain the safety and security of all people attending World Pride. The message is – and must be – that District is a safe place to celebrate for all.

There are many ways that the DC Council and the DC government have uplifted the work of LGBTQIA+ people in the District: The Mayor's Office of LGBTQ Affairs now has budget independence; we budgeted \$2 million toward the DC LGBTQ+ Community Center; and we recently funded the LGBTQ Black History project.

Right now – amidst the almost daily attacks on human rights – is not the time to be silent. Elected officials must continue to uphold DC values by publicly standing alongside our LGBTQIA+ neighbors. That's where I stand, and I'm sure Council colleagues, too.

Follow the Chairman

on Social Media



@chairmanphilmendelson



/ChairmanPhilMendelson



@ChmnMendelson



/@DCCouncil_COW



@chmnmendelson.bsky.social

Constituent Services Corner

A senior Ward 4 resident received a "Vacant Property" sticker on her property because it was mistakenly reported to the Department of Buildings after trash bags had been sitting on her front porch. She called our Constituent Services team, because she didn't have a computer to dispute the determination. We jumped into action! A DOB inspector quickly visited and confirmed that the property was inhabited. Our team also found out that the woman had not applied, but was eligible, for the Homestead and Senior Citizens Property Tax Credits, so we had that taken care of as well.

Your property misclassification need not be taxing -- just call our team to clear things up for you!

**Contact our Constituent Services Team at
(202) 724-8032 or ChairmanCS@dccouncil.gov**