

Historic Districts Coalition

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Testimony before the DC Council Committee of the Whole

Monday, October 28, 2013, 9:30 a.m.

Room 412, John A Wilson Building

1350 Pennsylvania Avenue, NW

Washington, DC 20004

Good morning Mr. Chairman and Council members. My name is Thomas Bower; I am here today representing the Historic Districts Coalition and as President of the Dupont Circle Conservancy.

The Coalition is an informal alliance of organizations and individuals representing Washington, D.C.'s historic districts—those that have been designated under the provisions of the Historic Landmark and Historic District Protection Act of 1978 (D.C. Public Law 2-144)—as well as others interested in historic preservation, including residents of undesignated neighborhoods and representatives of neighborhood organizations, historic preservation organizations, and preservation-related businesses.

As you know, the height of buildings in the District of Columbia is determined by the 1910 Height of Buildings Act, legislation now under review by the National Capital Planning Commission and the District of Columbia government at the request of Congressman Darrell Issa. The Coalition is hereto voice its strong opposition to the Gray Administration's draft response already sent to Congressman Issa, proposing that building heights in the area of the original 1791 L'Enfant Plan for the City of Washington be increased up to 25%, and that Congress allow the District to determine the maximum height of buildings outside the L'Enfant city. We believe that the 1910 Height of Buildings Act, through its effect on the physically shaping the nation's capital is no less important than the 1791 L'Enfant Plan and the 1901 McMillan Plan, which worked to revitalize L'Enfant's brilliant design. It has given those plans the third dimension, limited height that has created the human scale and iconic horizontal skyline that Washington enjoys today.

The following Coalition affiliates oppose Mayor Gray's recommendation:

- Historic Anacostia Design Review Committee, Greta Fuller, Chair
- Capitol Hill Restoration Society, Janet Quigley, President
- Historic Chevy Chase, DC, Richard Teare, Treasurer
- Frederick Douglass Community Improvement Corporation, Carolyn Johns Gray, President
- Dupont Circle Conservancy, Thomas Bower, President
- Citizens Association of Georgetown, Pamla Moore, President
- Logan Circle Community Association, Tim Christensen, President
- Historic Mount Pleasant, Fay Armstrong, President
- Sheridan-Kalorama Historical Association, Kindy French, President
- Sheridan-Kalorama Neighborhood Council, Christopher Chapin, President

- Advisory Neighborhood Commission 2D, David Bender and Eric Lamar
- Historic Takoma, Inc. Lorraine Pearsall, Vice President
- Tenleytown Historical Society, Jane Waldman, President

In addition, the following individuals associated with the Coalition oppose the Mayor's recommendations: Loretta Neumann, Scott Roberts, Leslie Kamrad, Mary Rowse, Evelyn Wrin, and Sally Berk.

The Coalition has been criticized for not being constructive in supporting the Gray Administration's rationale for height increases. We believe, however, that we are safeguarding the tenets of the 2006 DC Comprehensive Plan and its 2011 amendments, actions that were approved by the DC Council. We call your attention to the following elements in Chapter 10, the Historic Preservation Element.

Historic Preservation Goal: *Preserve and enhance the unique cultural heritage, beauty, and identity of the District of Columbia by respecting the historic physical form of the city (our emphasis) and the enduring value of its historic structures and places, recognizing their importance to the citizens of the District and the nation (our emphasis), and sharing mutual responsibilities for their protection and stewardship.* Page 10-3

Policy HP-1.1.1: The City's Historic Image

Recognize the historic image of the national capital as part of the city's birthright. After two centuries of growth, the original vision of the city remains strong and remarkable in an increasingly homogenous global world. Over the years this fundamental character has been protected by local and national laws and policies. It must remain inviolate (our emphasis). Page 10-5

HP-2 Protecting Historic Properties

Most of the city spreads far beyond its monumental core and out of the boundaries of the District of Columbia. The city's business center is richly endowed with lively commercial architecture and blessed by its unique mid-rise scale (our emphasis). Page 10-16, second paragraph

HP-2.1 District Government Stewardship

The District government should set the standard for historic preservation in the city.... Page 10-17

HP-2.3 The Historic Plan of Washington

The Plan of the City of Washington drawn by Pierre L'Enfant in 1791 has served as an enduring symbol and armature for growth of the national capital... Regulated building heights and mandated design review by agencies like the Commission of Fine Arts [have] further supported its enhancement and embellishment. Pages 10-19 (bottom) and 10-20 (top)

Policy HP-2.3.2: Historic Image of the City

Protect and enhance the views and vistas, both natural and designed, which are an integral part of Washington's historic image. Preserve the historic skyline formed by the region's natural features and topography and its historically significant buildings and monuments from intrusions such as communications antennas and water towers. Preserve the horizontal character of the national capital through enforcement of the 1910 Height of Buildings Act (our emphasis). Page 10-20 mid-page

HP-2.5 Historic Landscapes and Open Space

Policy HP-2.5.1: The Natural Setting of Washington

Preserve the historic natural setting of Washington and the views it provides.... Protect the topographic bowl around central Washington and preserve the wooded skyline along its ring of escarpments. Prevent intrusions into the views to and from these escarpments and other major heights throughout the city. Page 10-24

HP-3 Capitalizing on Historic Properties

Whether as an economic opportunity or a set of new challenges, historic preservation needs strong advocates to promote its importance among the host of priorities facing community leaders. Preservation draws strength by forging effective partnerships and ensuring the development of preservation leaders for the future. Page 10-27 (bottom)