



District of Columbia City Council Committee of the Whole

**Testimony on the District of Columbia's Recommendations
on the Federal Height of Buildings Act of 1910**

By Janet Quigley, President, Capitol Hill Restoration Society

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Chairman Mendelson and members of the Committee of the Whole, thank you for the opportunity to testify today. My name is Janet Quigley and I am testifying on behalf of the Capitol Hill Restoration Society. CHRS has promoted historic preservation and residential quality of life on Capitol Hill for more than 50 years.

I want to thank you for holding today's hearing and to commend the National Capital Planning Commission for their thoughtful and responsible report on the Height Act Master Plan. There is no compelling reason to change the Height of Buildings Act of 1910. In addition to aesthetics and history, CHRS believes there are four good reasons to support the Height Act and no good reasons to change it:

- The Height Act spreads development across the entire city so that every Ward can benefit and grow.
- It provides predictability for our real estate market, one of the healthiest in the country.
- It attracts visitors who come to appreciate our nation's history and who contribute millions in tax revenues.
- It supports the L'Enfant Plan, which is a National Landmark.

The Office of Planning recommendation would create many problems:

- It would concentrate development downtown.
- It would obligate the City for yet to be determined millions in additional utility and other infrastructure costs.
- It would result in a net drain on city resources.
- The rush of applications to change existing buildings would create a "zoning and historic preservation employment act" for years to come.

I don't know what the budget was for the nine consultants who worked on this study, but we can thank one of them, the Partners for Economic Solutions, for clearing up a few misconceptions and exposing the drawbacks of any changes to the height limits. For example the economic consultant found that the law of supply and demand does not apply as might be expected:

- Taller buildings are more expensive to build and they command higher rents.
- Taller residential buildings will do nothing to make housing more affordable.
- Taller office buildings cannot provide the parking that businesses demand.
- Incremental revenue might be in the 1% range.
- Additional infrastructure costs were not factored in, but would be too significant for developers to cover. This means the city would have to pick up the tab, most likely wiping out any modest increases in revenue.
- The estimates are only valid for 5-10 years, but are being used to make decisions for the next 40 years.

Mr. Chairman, I believe that the proposal to change height limits is a solution in search of a problem and would do irrevocable damage to our remarkable home town. Washington, DC is a healthy, thriving city with an enviable real estate market and budget surpluses year over year. Its success is not in spite of the Height Act, but thanks to it. For these reasons I urge Council to reject the Office of Planning's recommendations and instead affirm its support of the Height Act which keeps our City strong.