



**COUNCIL OF THE DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA**  
**Agency Performance Oversight Hearing**  
**Committee on Libraries, Parks, Recreation and Planning**

**OFFICE OF PLANNING**

**Thursday, February 9, 2010**

Testimony of Alma Hardy Gates

Good Morning Chairman Wells and Members of the Committee. I am Alma Gates.

This testimony is submitted on behalf of the Committee of 100 (C100) on the Federal City, a group that has advocated on behalf of intelligent and smart planning and land use in Washington, DC since our founding in 1923. I represent the C100 on the Zoning Regulations Revision Task Force.

Before I address the Zoning Regulation Revision (ZRR), I want to bring to your attention The Comprehensive Plan Amendment Act of 2010 that was signed over one year ago. Council's hearing on the amendments was on September 28, 2010, however the amendments remain undistributed to the public. Given that zoning regulations cannot be in conflict with the Comprehensive Plan, it is critical to have the new amendments, many of which were written to enable specific changes to the zoning regulations.

C100 has been an active member of the Zoning Task Force and has submitted testimony before the Zoning Commission at every opportunity. We are supportive of some recommended changes and find others troubling, nevertheless it is reasonable to say the new zoning code will be significantly different in its organization and permitted outcomes. It is also reasonable to say the predictability of the current code is missing in the new regulations.

C100 met with OP to discuss the potential impacts of increased density in residential districts; but, those conversations were unproductive. C100 remains

concerned because there will be a loss of open space and more structure as the result of new rules that allow houses to be closer together, taller, with no story limits, and have less rear yard. To what end? Developers will be incentivized to tear down perfectly good houses that may be smaller, more affordable and right-sized for the streetscape in order to reap profit from building larger, more modern houses. The requirement to provide one off-street parking space per residential unit has been removed. The potential effect on stable neighborhoods is a loss of diversity, scale of housing, and open space. Is that what we want? It certainly isn't what Council said were DC policies in the Comprehensive Plan.

OP will assure you there have been hundreds of public meetings where input was solicited; but, these were a series of topic-specific work group meetings, not public meetings intended to inform the public of changes in the new code.

Even the Zoning Commission expressed concern at the failure of OP's public outreach attempts. In response, OP agreed to hold one public meeting per ward on the new zoning code. Is this realistic when it has taken three years to get the new text on paper? Does OP really expect to explain the contents of this technical manual in one two-hour meeting in each ward? When you think back to the numbers of meetings and focus groups OP held on the 2007 Comprehensive Plan revision, this companion document deserves ample prime time exposure, discussion and debate. Residents need to know exactly what changes are being proposed because they won't be able to complain once the code is enacted.

Harlan Cohen, a resident of Chevy Chase, DC, was quoted in the February 8 edition of the NW Current, "Allowing a house to expand to within five feet of the property line threatens its neighbor's light, air and views. It's not that I'm against all change, but we buy our homes with an expectation that the current zoning will protect us from changes that are not allowed under the current zoning." Mr. Cohen's concerns are similar to those of a number of posters on local listservs.

As chair of the Committee with oversight for Parks, Libraries, Recreation and Planning, C100 seeks your help to ensure OP schedules significant public outreach opportunities on the new zoning regulations; and, that whatever outreach is scheduled isn't during the summer when Council is in recess and the public is on vacation. Residents who have made significant investments in their property need to be fully apprised of changes being planned for their neighborhoods.

Indeed, it would be unfortunate if residents awaken one morning and ask, "What happened here?" Why weren't we told about these changes?"