

2014



mayoral candidate questionnaire



Muriel Bowser



David Catania



Carol Schwartz

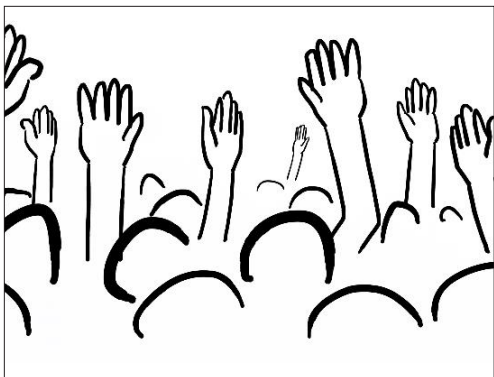
DC Preservation League Washington DC 2014 Mayoral Candidate Historic Preservation Questionnaire

The DC Preservation League, with the input from its partners put forth a questionnaire to the 2014 candidates for DC Mayor to gain insight on their views on critical issues affecting the preservation, protection, and economic reuse of the city's built heritage.



QUESTION 1: Historic buildings have been restored and rehabilitated to accomplish a variety of DC public policies. For example, the former M.M. Washington School in Shaw was recently designated and with the help of Federal Historic Preservation Tax Credits was rehabilitated as affordable senior housing. In other parts of the city, such as Anacostia, historic commercial storefronts have been restored to house small, local businesses that benefit from lower rents compared to redeveloped commercial areas. Would you favor expanding the number of historically designated buildings and how would you envision using these resources, when available, to fulfill public policies?

BOWSER	<p><i>Washington DC – our Nation’s Capital – continues to leave an incredible mark on history, largely because of the historic monuments, buildings and homes that have been preserved and treasured. It is because of the work of the DC Preservation League, the Historic Preservation Board and informed citizens that millions continue to visit our historic city, making tourism one of our more important industries. I have long been committed to maintaining our historic buildings and districts to ensure generations to come are able to remember the legacies of generations past. As Mayor, I am committed to ensuring that we continue to take a balanced look at continued historic designation and wherever possible leverage city resources, land, buildings to preserve the historic characteristic of the District.</i></p>
CATANIA	<p><i>The District has one of the largest inventories of protected historical properties in the nation. Historically designated buildings can play an important role in supporting public policy goals, such as increasing access to affordable housing, offering cost-effective commercial space for local entrepreneurs, providing an outlet for our creative economy and improving quality of life. As Mayor, I will ensure that the District maximizes the use of these important properties for the betterment of neighborhoods across the city, and I am willing to work with communities to determine whether or not expanding the number of historically designated buildings can help us meet our goals. For example, the District must do more to address the housing affordability crisis facing our low- and moderate-income residents and our most vulnerable populations, including senior citizens, victims of domestic violence, homeless families, and returning citizens. Historic buildings are an extremely valuable resource that we can use to address this crisis. Given the shrinking inventory of available land across the District, it is often more economically advantageous to retain existing housing – a significant portion of which falls within historical districts – rather than undertake new construction. With the availability of federal tax credits, combined with full implementation of a local low-income housing tax credit program, we can better utilize these structures to meet a critical need of residents.</i></p>
SCHWARTZ	<p><i>What attracted me to Washington, DC nearly 50 years ago was its beauty – its architecture, its greenery – as well as its glorious diversity. It should come as no surprise then that part of what appeals to me most about projects like the ones mentioned is that they help protect our diversity, be it allowing District seniors to remain in the city they call home or promoting economic growth in one of our most under served parts of the District. But just as importantly, the fact that we are able simultaneously to preserve our city’s beauty through restoring its signature historical architecture rather than tear it down for new development, is also appealing.</i></p> <p><i>Fortunately as Mayor, I would have both the planning and economic development components under my purview. Through these, I can help steer developers and entrepreneurs towards properties with historical value. I will also consider offering tax relief and incentives to those that wish to redevelop commercial properties in historic buildings, particularly in those areas already classified as Economic Empowerment Zones (see question #5 for more detail)</i></p> <p><i>As for whether or not I would support the expansion of the number of historically designated buildings in the District, without fully understanding the current criteria that is used to establish this classification I cannot say with absolute certainty that I would expand them. However, because the definition of “historical” is always a fluid one and only relative to a particular time and place (your question below regarding Mid-Century Modern architecture is a perfect example of this), I would work to ensure that the criteria are reviewed – with input from organizations like the DC Preservation League – on a regular basis.</i></p>



QUESTION 2: Community engagement, plays a critical role in the decision-making process surrounding historic preservation matters throughout the city. Two bills recently introduced before the City Council (20-720 and 20-586), proposed changes to the Historic District Protection Act concerning the neighbor notification processes for permitted work carried out in historic districts. Do you think current public notification systems related to historic preservation projects and opportunities for public input (e.g. Historic Preservation Review Board hearings, Office of Administrative Hearings, and permit notifications) are adequate? How can Preservation Officers and other interested parties work to balance public input while maintaining a process that does not become burdensome enough to result in increased noncompliance?

BOWSER	<i>In 2008, I co-introduced legislation with Councilmember Cheh to ensure the rights of citizens are protected as neighborhoods weigh whether or not to become a recognized historic district. The legislation required a formal process whereby the residents within a given proposed historic district could indicate their preference for historic district designation. A balanced process is critical and given the far reaching economic impacts of these decisions, I feel that we are landing in the right place. The current process works for the residents and also achieves historic preservation goals. As Mayor, I will ensure the process remains open, transparent, and efficient.</i>
CATANIA	<i>Bills 20-720 and 20-586 both address an important issue – promoting transparency and accountability within the historic preservation process. While I have some concerns about the language of the measures as introduced, I agree that more can be done to allow for meaningful public notification of and participation in decisions regarding construction projects within historic districts. For example, I support efforts to provide neighbors with timely notice of proposed construction that requires historic preservation review. This can allow for greater public participation, including coordination with their Advisory Neighborhood Commission, before irreparable damage is done to the historic fabric of a neighborhood. I also believe that it is appropriate for property owners seeking to undertake construction to provide such notice. These efforts, however, must be balanced against the potential burdens placed on property owners and the potential for non-compliance. As Mayor I will work with our Preservation Officers and community stakeholders to enhance the current notification process so that we can better promote and protect those properties that are essential to our city’s historical and cultural history.</i>
SCHWARTZ	<i>I support the two bills 20-720 and 20-586 which only seem to strengthen the process and guarantees that neighboring residents are in the loop. The new legislation is set up in a way that leaves little room for noncompliance. Preservation officers and other parties can work together for the better good of preserving the rich history that is DC. Holding community meetings with all stakeholders (including the DC Preservation League) and other interested and/or affected parties to get input on the various projects is crucial.</i>



QUESTION 3: Several major projects are slated for development on or near historic sites in the city, the most notable of which are Walter Reed, McMillan, and St Elizabeths. Please state your position on each of these developments and your vision that the role historic preservation should play in economic development around the city.

BOWSER	<p><i>In working with the community, developers and the DC Preservation League on Ward 4 projects, we have ensured that economic development and historic preservation can go hand and hand.</i></p> <p><i>Under my leadership, a community process was used to ensure that the residents were engaged in the development plan for Walter Reed. I am committed to making sure that the important historic structures are maintained per the plan. We can't lose the history of Walter Reed, it must be incorporated throughout the project. We still have a long way to go before a shovel is in the ground, but I am committed to seeing that the project is successful.</i></p> <p><i>Like with Walter Reed, I am committed to bringing the community together, ensuring that community input is incorporated in the process and that the community is informed and engaged throughout the development of the project. This is how you create accountability around historic preservation, affordable housing, transportation, planning and other community needs. In both the McMillan and St. Elizabeth's projects, greater community input into an open and transparent process would strengthen the outcomes.</i></p> <p><i>As Mayor, I will support the responsible development of each of these big city projects – including the responsible and respectful re-use of historically significant structures. There are major opportunities for to increase affordable housing, senior housing, grocery stores, parks and jobs.</i></p>
CATANIA	<p><i>I support efforts to redevelop Walter Reed, the McMillan facility, and St. Elizabeths campus and believe that each can play an important role in improving the lives of District residents across the city. These projects provide the District with an unprecedented opportunity to develop a post-secondary infrastructure to prepare residents for the central role applied sciences will play in future economic competitiveness. I also support efforts to use such projects for the development of affordable housing and senior residences. At the same time, these properties tell an important story about the history of our city and we should prioritize efforts to protect that history as we move forward. For example, the east campus of St. Elizabeths has a rich agricultural history dating back to the 1860s. Two of those original agricultural buildings remain today and we should make efforts to integrate these structures into redevelopment plans moving forward. With regard to the McMillan development, I believe community concerns regarding the retention of historically significant green space must be given appropriate consideration and weight as the property is developed.</i></p> <p><i>This is a principle we should apply to development across our city. Not only does historic preservation maintain our cultural and historical legacies, but it is also a proven catalyst for economic growth. Historic preservation helps support downtown/commercial revitalization projects, increases cultural and heritage tourism, and creates critical new jobs for residents.</i></p>
SCHWARTZ	<p><i>In each case, I am heartened to see that development at Walter Reed, McMillan and St. Elizabeth's has taken great strides to preserve and/or repurpose existing structures. Considering the size and scale of each of these projects, it would be a shame to lose some of the defining and iconic characteristics at each location, particularly in a city like Washington, DC which is known internationally for its history. And with all redevelopment of historical sites and buildings, both large and small, great pains should be taken to not only ensure preservation, but that the redevelopment serves the broader purpose of serving the community as a whole: bringing services to neighborhood where none existed, adding green-space to the landscape, or supporting diversity, much like both McMillan and Walter Reed have designated between 15% and 20% of units for affordable housing.</i></p>



QUESTION 4: Over the past few month issues surrounding “pop-up” additions constructed on top of historic row houses (located outside of historic districts), have become more prevalent. Residents and homeowners adjacent to these additions have voiced strong opposition and the need for regulation. In July, the Office of Planning proposed zoning text amendments to address the pop-up controversy and the Zoning Commission voted in favor of the text amendments as a rulemaking case with a public hearing to take place later this fall. What is your opinion on this matter and what regulations do you think would best address the need for density while maintaining the character of the District’s valuable older historic residential neighborhoods, both those designated and those not?

BOWSER	<p><i>The pop-up issue is a challenging issue, especially in neighborhoods experiencing rapid redevelopment. Neighbors are concerned about converting single households into multi-family units, changing the look and feel of blocks and neighborhoods, so much that some pop-ups have permanently prevented neighbors’ solar panels from being able to function. While some changes are needed, it is up to the Zoning Commission and the community to find the right balance. We need additional housing units to keep up with our growth and to fulfill our affordable housing needs. Responsible development can achieve these goals, while also protecting the existing character of the neighborhoods.</i></p> <p><i>I will follow the Zoning Commission deliberation process to better understand all stakeholder concerns. The Zoning Commission has the power to both include predictability in the process, as well as preserve neighborhood character and standards.</i></p>
CATANIA	<p><i>I am concerned about the proliferation of pop-ups, as well as the conversion of single-family structures to multi-unit structures based on my personal observations in my neighborhood. It is appropriate to find a balance between the desire for increased housing density and maintaining the historical character and fabric of residential neighborhoods. The proposed zoning amendments put forth by the Office of Planning include elements that may help provide such a balance by imposing new height and multi-family conversion restrictions. These regulations could also help protect the availability of affordable housing options with three or more bedrooms, something in high demand given the District’s current affordability crisis. I look forward to the continued public conversation on this issue and as Mayor will work with stakeholders to implement changes that are in the best interest of our residents.</i></p>
SCHWARTZ	<p><i>The issue of pop-up additions that supersede the spirit of zoning and historic preservation restrictions is very concerning. Not only does this potentially impinge upon the rights of fellow property owners, it frays the fabric of DC’s historic architectural makeup. Preserving the District’s unique legacy and residential streetscape will be an important priority of my administration. I feel the recommended zoning text amendments seem to strike a good balance, but would await the testimony presented at the hearings this fall before making a final determination.</i></p>



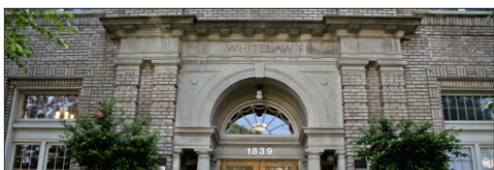
QUESTION 5: The National Trust for Historic Preservation recently released a study, based on data from Washington, DC, Seattle, and San Francisco, that demonstrated the unique and valuable role that historic buildings play in creating robust local economies and sustainable cities. If you are elected Mayor, what incentives, if any, do you think should be developed to encourage the rehabilitation and reuse of existing buildings and infrastructure throughout the city?

BOWSER	<i>As Mayor, I will do a thorough review of all development incentives, including historic incentives. As development continues in order to accommodate our growth, historic preservation should be incorporated. Historic preservation incentives are important to encourage the preservation of our historic structures, and, as Mayor, I will work with you to see what additional programs we can add to our toolkit to further this goal. A priority of mine is to provide increased incentives for lower and middle-income owners of historic properties.</i>
CATANIA	<i>Federal tax incentive programs have helped support the successful restoration and reuse of historic properties. Many jurisdictions across the nation supplement this resource through state and local benefits for properties within historic districts, including tax incentives for preservation efforts. These programs allow property owners, residential and commercial alike, to maintain and adapt historic properties to modern uses. Not only does this support local economic development but it also increases overall community satisfaction. The District, however, is the only jurisdiction in the region that does not have its own historic tax credit program. In addition, our Historic Homeowner Grant Program, which provides grants to low- and moderate-income households living in specific historic districts for certain rehabilitation work, is undercapitalized. This lack of local financial support means that many District residents are often unable to take advantage of available structures within historic districts, or, residents who already own historic properties have difficulty aging in place given the high cost of needed renovations that meet historic designation requirements. As Mayor, I will look to augment local financial incentives for historic preservation so that we can help spur economic growth while protecting the historic character of our neighborhoods for years to come.</i>
SCHWARTZ	<i>I will consider offering tax incentives and tax credits to those that wish to redevelop historical properties and infrastructure, from city-block sized projects to brick-paved walkways. Further assistance through fast-tracking the permitting process can also be provided to those developers that wish to redevelop historic buildings. Of particular note, redevelopment should be rewarded in Economic Empowerment Zones where services and housing can have the greatest impact. Bringing new life to an historic building not only preserves that building in a given neighborhood, but can also add to the vitality of that neighborhood.</i>



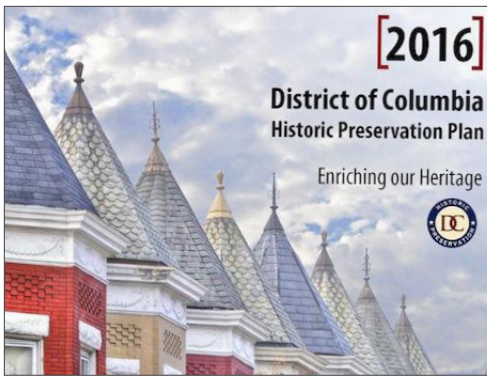
QUESTION 6: Mid-century Modern style architecture (constructed between 1930s and 1970s) is now at the forefront of discussion in the preservation community, both locally and nationally, as the next wave of architecture considered prime for historic designation. The potential preservation of modern structures such as the now razed Third Church and Urban Renewal developments found in the Southwest neighborhood have been considered controversial for designation. What is your position on preserving modern architecture in the city and the role these buildings and others play in telling the history of Washington, DC?

BOWSER	<i>The rules and laws that protect our historic assets need to be enforced. As it relates to potential projects that fall outside of the laws, an analysis of the building in collaboration with the community should be done. Community input and market dynamics should be considered in determining whether all modern architecture should be considered historic. However, there could be a good reason to protect certain buildings and, for now, this should be determined on a case-by-case basis.</i>
CATANIA	<i>Historic preservation is about preserving and protecting the District's built environment. Modern architecture is just one component of that built environment and I believe it is appropriate that we make efforts to include examples of such within our historically designated inventory.</i>
SCHWARTZ	<i>It is critical to understand, review and when necessary update the criteria used to designate an architectural style as worthy of preservation. As has been mentioned, the historical significance of an architectural style is relative to a particular time and place, and Mid-century Modern is no exception so I would be open to discussion on this issue.</i>



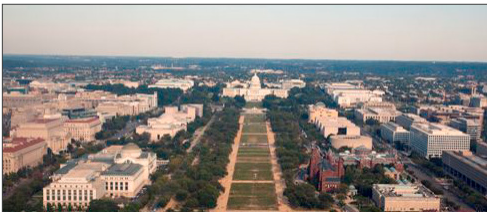
QUESTION 7: The need to preserve our existing affordable housing and create mixed income developments has become a critical issue in the District over recent years. How do you think our current historic preservation laws have affected affordable housing and are there changes that can be made to better support affordable housing?

BOWSER	<i>It is important that we have laws that not only encourage and incentivize developers to build affordable housing, but also protect our historic assets. As Mayor, I will work with the preservation community to review current laws and incentives to ensure we have the best policies and programs that encourage preservation. Renovation costs of historic properties can be significantly higher. Historic preservation can have a serious impact on residents living on fixed incomes in historic districts. Allowing our older generation to remain in their communities is a priority – as mayor, I will implement incentive programs for home improvement repairs and maintenance in order to reduce these burdens on seniors and people with disabilities. Read more about my affordable housing priorities here: http://murielformayor.com/press/priorities-for-district/</i>
CATANIA	<i>One of the biggest issues facing the District right now is the lack of affordable housing. We as a city must do more to ensure the development and maintenance of appropriate housing options for our low- and middle-income residents. I know we can achieve this goal while still ensuring the historic character of our neighborhoods. For example, a one size fits all approach to the use of properties within a historic district may not allow for certain flexibilities that help promote the development of affordable housing projects. In addition, the lack of local financial incentives to support the renovation and reuse of buildings within a historic district often makes it difficult to provide housing options for our low and middle-income residents. As Mayor I will undertake a full review of our historic preservation laws to determine how we can best balance the goals of protecting a community's history with the need for affordable housing.</i>
SCHWARTZ	<i>As one of my top priorities is affordable housing, my inclination would be to use, where possible, historic structures to that end. Having said that, there are clearly market forces at work as well, but I do not see the goals of each to be in total conflict. Examples such as the larger buildings found on the campuses of St. Elizabeth's and Walter Reed provide some opportunity to wed both.</i>



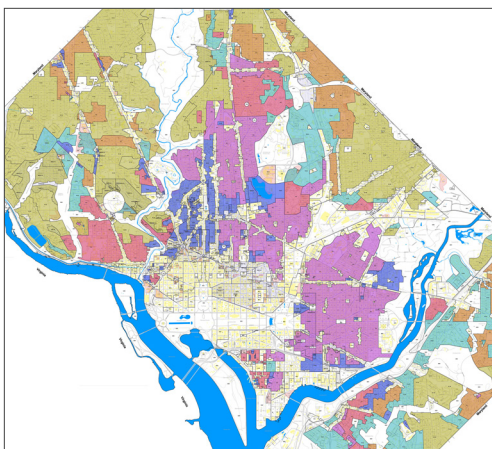
QUESTION 8: The District has a robust and lauded historic preservation ordinance and program that supports over 58 historic districts and roughly 730 individually listed historic sites. The Historic Preservation Office's operating budget continues to be inadequate to ensure reliable enforcement of the Historic Preservation Act. With increasing number of permit reviews and Historic Preservation Review Board cases involving major developments around the city, there is a critical need to ensure that the Historic Preservation Office is adequately staffed to ensure the efficiency and full operation of our historic preservation program. If elected Mayor, will you support increasing necessary operating budgets to a level that will facilitate the full implementation of the historic preservation law and programs?

BOWSER	<i>We need more staff to accommodate the increase in historic projects. I am committed to adding staff to the Historic Preservation Office, ensuring community input and affordable housing goals are incorporated, in order to fulfill the city's historic preservation goals.</i>
CATANIA	<i>The District has one of the most robust historic preservation programs in the nation and we have made the protection of our historical buildings and landmarks a priority. As such, our Historic Preservation Office must have sufficient funding and support to carry out its mission. As Mayor I will work to fully fund the HPO so that it can better meet the needs of District residents. I will also undertake a review of the operational structure of our Office of Planning and the HPO to ensure that historic preservation issues are given appropriate weight with respect to citywide planning and development.</i>
SCHWARTZ	<i>Given the truly incalculable value of our city's distinct architectural heritage, the Historic Preservation Office will be a well-supported steward under a Schwartz administration. We can be both active and responsive only if there are adequate staffing and funding levels, which I will work towards right away.</i>



QUESTION 9: Due to a Congressional request, the city recently underwent a review of DC height limits with the Mayor's Office and Office of Planning supporting increases for a variety of reasons against the considered objections of all of several residents and preservation groups in the city. What is your view of this result and would you support an increase in the city's height limits, if this were to become a question again in your administration?

BOWSER	<i>I do not support increasing the height limit in Washington DC. As our Chairman has said, the Washington skyline is a monument itself, and I agree.</i>
CATANIA	<i>I believe there are sufficient infill opportunities to accomplish many of our city's housing and development goals without changing the District's height limits.</i>
SCHWARTZ	<i>I want to preserve our height limits. It is one of the aspects that makes DC so unique. The only exceptions I would even consider would be on the very outskirts of the city where vistas would not be affected, and only for affordable housing.</i>



QUESTION 10: Zoning codes and other forms of land use regulation are powerful tools that shape the look and productivity of a city. The city's current Zoning Ordinance was approved in 1958, twenty years prior to the enactment of DC's first comprehensive historic preservation ordinance in 1978. As a result, the outdated zoning regulations are often in conflict with and unresponsive to historic preservation priorities and the onus often falls on the Historic Preservation Review Board (HPRB) to weigh in on design challenges related to zoning such as new heights, setbacks, and grading. Clear and comprehensive zoning regulations that support the Historic Preservation Ordinance would help take the guess work out of these regulations for architects and developers, while simultaneously supporting growth and protecting historic resources. If elected Mayor, how will your office prioritize the zoning re-write currently underway and employ a zoning strategy that reinforces and supports historic designations?

BOWSER	<i>A complete zoning re-write is needed not only to address the historic preservation issues, but to ensure we are prepared to handle the priorities of today and the future. As Mayor, I will support a comprehensive re-write of the zoning regulations. As a councilmember, I worked with the Office of Planning throughout this process to address concerns raised by my constituents. I look forward to the Zoning Commission's work to ensure the comprehensive changes are adopted, at the conclusion of their public input process.</i>
CATANIA	<i>The District's zoning code and land use regulations should adequately reflect the needs of the District as it stands today and what our vision is for the future. We need to update outdated terms and definitions, address emerging environmental issues, and ensure that our laws appropriately incorporate issues related to the historic preservation of our neighborhoods. As Mayor, I will support the ongoing efforts to re-write the current zoning codes and ensure that there is continued public participation in the process.</i>
SCHWARTZ	<i>The rewrite of zoning regulations underway was far overdue, given the disconnection between the zoning ordinance and the comprehensive historic preservation ordinance. The re-crafting of any out-of-date regulations to give greater emphasis on preservation, as the city continues to grow, will be an important component of balancing our aims. The present lack of clarity creates not only unnecessary confusion, but also added need for adjudication by the Historic Preservation Review Board. My administration will be focused on ways of seeking the most straightforward rules to ameliorate these problems, while supporting the overarching goal of the preservation of our incomparable historic architecture.</i>