



**Testimony to the Committee of the Whole
PR23-70, Director of the Office of Planning Andrew Trueblood
Confirmation Resolution of 2019
Thursday, February 28, 2019**

Rebecca Miller on Behalf of the DC Preservation League

Good afternoon, Chairman Mendelson and members of the Committee. My name is Rebecca Miller and I am Executive Director of the DC Preservation League (DCPL), Washington's citywide nonprofit dedicated to the preservation and protection of the historic and built environment of our Nation's Capital. I thank you for the opportunity to provide DCPL's comments on the confirmation of Andrew Trueblood to the position of Director of the Office of Planning.

DCPL met with Acting Director Trueblood in early January to discuss the organization's history, its advocacy work, and other educational and outreach initiatives to preserve, protect and enhance the irreplaceable historic resources of our city. DCPL has had a longstanding, positive working relationship with the Historic Preservation Office (HPO), and we hope that under Mr. Trueblood's leadership this relationship will continue.

We were encouraged at the meeting by Mr. Trueblood's affinity for alleys. There was discussion about activating alleys by encouraging the adaptive reuse of alley structures for use by businesses or residential units. Obviously not every alley structure is suitable for one type of use or another, but given the Mayor's goals of adding 35,000 new units, why not explore the opportunities? DCPL also expressed its willingness to work with OP to achieve housing goals with the caveat that these goals can't be met by just shoehorning all possible units into historic districts.

DCPL was pleased that Mr. Trueblood did not dismiss our desire to pursue incentives for historic preservation. The city has made historic preservation a matter of public policy for the last 40 years, and touts its historic status as a cultural tourism draw and driver of tax revenue. Abatements and other tax incentives have been offered to developers in the city for decades. It's high time that the city look at opportunities to encourage the owners in its 36 neighborhood historic districts to restore or enhance their properties.

Although not discussed in our meeting, I would be remiss if I did not relay the great concern expressed to DCPL about Mr. Trueblood's 2009 Master's thesis that focused on the Height of Buildings Act. Mr Trueblood concluded on page 151 of the document that:

"Additional height of three to four stories in Washington, DC could serve to improve the downtown environment and contribute financially toward improving the City. As importantly, it would serve as a relief valve on development pressure, as the core reaches complete build

out. Without such relief, the fiscal and urban vitality losses to the District and the metro area will start to become even more apparent, with more expensive space, increased dispersion and greater travel costs and distances. The suggested policy change would help avoid some of these while still protecting the skyline as it stands.”

DC did a full review of the Height Act under the past Administration. Proposed changes were met with substantial public opposition before local and federal review agencies. In the end, only the occupancy of penthouses was adjusted. Even today, data produced by Cushman & Wakefield show a 13.8% Class A office vacancy rate as of the end 2018; and with buildings at the Wharf and Capital Crossing coming online this year, that number will likely grow. Expansion to NOMA and Ivy City has happened because of the horizontal nature of the city. We don't need planning to grow taller, we need planning for growing smarter and greener.

DCPL hopes that Mr. Trueblood in his capacity as the Director of the Office of Planning will champion historic preservation as a proven vital tool in the economic development and resurgence of Washington's historic neighborhoods, downtown and main streets. The adaptive reuse of historic buildings can and should continue in both designated and undesignated areas of the city as part of a deliberate program to build healthy, equitable and resilient communities throughout our city.

Thank you for your attention.