



**Testimony to the Committee on the Whole
Performance Oversight Hearing for the
Deputy Mayor Planning and Economic Development
February 27, 2019**

Rebecca Miller on Behalf of the DC Preservation League

Good morning and thank you Councilmember McDuffie and the members of this committee. My name is Rebecca Miller and I am the Executive Director of the DC Preservation League (DCPL).

For more than forty eight years, the DC Preservation League has served as Washington's citywide nonprofit advocacy organization dedicated to the preservation and protection of the historic resources of our nation's capital. DCPL invests significant time, effort, and funds to work with local agencies and stakeholders on preservation-related issues across the District of Columbia. The organization works diligently to ensure that these preservation projects encourage community development that is socially, economically, and environmentally sustainable.

DCPL consistently presents the case that historic preservation is a major economic driver for development in our nation's capital. I come before you today to discuss the approach of the Office of the Deputy Mayor for Planning and Economic Development's (DMPED) in dealing with historic properties slated for redevelopment.

When I first started working for DCPL in 2003, it appeared little coordination took place between the DC Historic Preservation Office and DMPED prior to an RFP being issued. Most RFP's barely mentioned a building's historic status, and most certainly did not include a description of the building's or site's character defining features. This is all necessary information for development teams to make informed proposals to the city. DCPL is pleased to see that the RFP's that have been coming out of DMPED now include much more substantial information about a building's protected status and historic features.

Chairman McDuffie, at a previous hearing on the disposition of the Crummell School, you had asked the members of the community testifying about their experience with DMPED's MYRFP process. I'd like to share a previous experience that DCPL had with the redevelopment of an historic site in hopes that it is a formula for the future...

In 2006, a request for proposals was issued for the Old Naval Hospital, a DC Landmark, and one of the District of Columbia's Most Endangered Places because of its derelict condition. There was quite a bit of public interest in the building for use as a community center. Other potential uses



included housing, offices etc. DMPED determined a short list of prospective projects, and coordinated a panel of interested parties that included the ANC, citizen members, the DC Preservation League and the DC Historic Preservation Office (HPO). The panel received presentations from the development teams and made a recommendation to DMPED as to what it considered the most appropriate proposal for the historic landmark. DMPED accepted the recommendation and the redevelopment of The Hill Center began in 2007. The award winning project opened in 2010 and has been a tremendous success story for Capitol Hill and the District.

Other processes have not gone as smoothly, and DCPL has to wonder why the RFP process followed with the Old Naval Hospital hasn't been replicated with other community landmarks. Crummell School comes to mind. The community submitted a proposal along with several other development teams. HPO tells me that they did review and offer feedback on the submissions. However, DMPED selected a proposal with a tremendous amount of density that entirely surrounds the historic school without ever contacting HPO. This puts HPO and the Historic Preservation Review Board (HPRB) in a difficult position when a developer applies for design review with a proposal selected solely on DMPED's performance requirements with no consideration given to its effect on the historic resource.

DCPL strongly recommends that DMPED actively work to incorporate historic preservation tools in their strategies and goals for economic development. In cities across the United States, historic preservation has become a fundamental tool for strengthening communities. The promotion and utilization of historic and cultural sites have proven to be effective in supporting a wide range of public benefits including small business incubation, affordable housing, sustainable development, neighborhood stabilization, job creation, heritage tourism, and economic development. DCPL urges DMPED to consider the public benefits of historic preservation and actively incorporate preservation-related tools such as historic tax credits, heritage tourism, and preservation-based commercial revitalization to strengthen and enhance future economic development strategies.

DCPL looks forward to working with DMPED in the future on proposals related to historic sites to support compatible proposals that put these important resources back into productive and economically viable uses.

Thank you for your time.