



**Testimony to the Committee on Business and Economic Development  
Performance Oversight Hearing for the  
Deputy Mayor Planning and Economic Development  
February 15, 2023**

*Rebecca Miller on Behalf of the DC Preservation League*

Good morning, 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 over 50 years, the DC Preservation League (DCPL) has served as Washington's citywide nonprofit advocacy organization dedicated to preserving and protecting our city's historic resources. 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 all preservation projects encourage community development that is socially, economically, and environmentally sustainable.

For years, DCPL has appeared before Council to express its concerns over the deterioration of properties under the responsibility of the Deputy Mayor for Planning and Economic Development (DMPED). This ongoing failure to maintain properties has now resulted in the catastrophic loss of the last remaining barn in the District of Columbia, which burned down in a fire in early December. While you may think that it was just a barn, it was an instrumental piece to an ensemble of buildings that tell the story of the agricultural history of the District of Columbia and, specifically, the St. Elizabeths campus, a National Historic Landmark. According to the incident report provided by the DC Fire and EMS, which I have attached to my testimony, residents of the nearby shelter were known to congregate there.

**The “investigators on the scene agreed there was an open flame fire inside the barn. However, the reasons for that fire are unknown. As a hangout for transient individuals and based on my training, knowledge and experience; I know that there is a tendency for open fires to occur in vacant properties for a multitude of reasons. Some of the reasons include fires for individuals to stay warm, to cook, and for lighting. Often, these fires are left unattended or not extinguished properly which leads to a fire developing unnoticed.” – Page 5 of incident report.**

This well-known “hangout spot” is DMPED’s responsibility. While the focus has been on the southern end of the campus, this unique historic property was left to rot. The 2012 Master Plan for St. Elizabeths East called for the retention and reuse of the farm complex, including the 1884 dry barn. And I quote: “Restoration of the farm complex will offer opportunities for physical activity and access to healthy food that enhance the neighborhood’s livability. Additional programming on the site could include child, youth, and adult education, workforce training, small business incubation and development, and potential employment opportunities, while future building rehabilitation could provide an additional community resource such as meeting rooms.” Consistent with this approved Master Plan, the Barn must now be reconstructed to restore the historic integrity of the farm complex and provide these intended programming opportunities.

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The next buildings of concern are the historic Jon Fox Slater and John Mercer Langston Schools that were built for African American children. The contract for redevelopment of the site, which dates to the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, was awarded almost two years ago and is according to DMPED's pipeline website "in negotiation." Yet during this time, DMPED has not taken any steps to secure the school or deter continued deterioration. As you can see from the attached photographs, the buildings, particularly Slater, are showing visible signs of neglect. DCPL has asked the Council for years to intervene. The result of this failure to take preventive steps will be a much more costly redevelopment of the site.

An additional example of neglect by the District Government is Anne Archbold Hall, located on the Reservation 13 campus. Built in 1931-32 as the Nurses' Residence of the Gallinger Municipal Hospital (later, Gallinger Memorial and ultimately D.C. General Hospital), this was originally a major teaching institution for nurses. The site was designated a DC Landmark in 2006. DMPED's database shows the parcel that includes Archbold Hall as "in negotiation," placing maintenance responsibility on the District and not the future lessors. The pictures attached to DCPL's testimony speak for themselves.

The District Government should be embarrassed by the condition of these important buildings for which it has direct responsibility. Continuing to neglect them will only increase the cost of rehabilitation and renovation in the future.

The redevelopment of historic properties in this city has been proven to support a wide range of public benefits, including small business incubation, affordable housing, sustainable development, climate action and neighborhood stabilization. DMPED should be setting a high standard for stewardship and championing the reuse of the city's historic resources.

Finally, DCPL would like to address the Mayor's desire to "tweak" the Height of Buildings Act. The District of Columbia's character is one of its greatest assets, and its iconic skyline is one of the most recognizable in the world. Much of this is because of the Act. The assertion that increasing the height limit for downtown buildings to 160 feet will not have an impact on the city's landscape was debunked when studied less than a decade ago. Additionally, at the time, this proposal was resoundingly opposed by the residents of this city. Topographically, the core of downtown is approximately 30 feet higher in elevation than low-lying Pennsylvania Avenue. Therefore, a 160 foot tall building – in line with the Mayor's proposal – would appear taller than those along the avenue, disrupting views and creating cavernous streets. The Height Act is *not* standing in the way of affordable housing, economic development, or any other important goal.

DCPL looks forward to working with DMPED in the future on proposals for the compatible redevelopment of historic sites that return these significant resources to productive and economically viable uses.

Thank you for your time.

Washington DC Fire & EMS Department  
2000 14TH STREET, NW  
Washington, DC 20009  
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info.fems@dc.gov

Incident Report  
2022-0199913 -000

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| <b>Basic</b>                      |                                   |                            |
|-----------------------------------|-----------------------------------|----------------------------|
| Alarm Date and Time               | 15:47:25                          | Saturday, December 3, 2022 |
| Arrival Time                      | 15:52:37                          |                            |
| Controlled Date and Time          |                                   |                            |
| Last Unit Cleared Date and Time   | 01:36:24                          | Monday, December 5, 2022   |
| Response Time                     | 0:05:12                           |                            |
| Priority Response                 | Yes                               |                            |
| Completed                         | Yes                               |                            |
| Fire Department Station           | 32                                |                            |
| Shift                             | D                                 |                            |
| Incident Type                     | 111 - Building fire               |                            |
| Aid Given or Received             | N - None                          |                            |
| Alarms                            | 1                                 |                            |
| Action Taken 1                    | 11 - Extinguish                   |                            |
| Action Taken 2                    | 86 - Investigate                  |                            |
| Casualties                        | No                                |                            |
| Apparatus - Suppression           | 17                                |                            |
| Apparatus - EMS                   | 29                                |                            |
| Personnel - Suppression Personnel | 40                                |                            |
| Personnel - EMS Personnel         | 71                                |                            |
| Property Loss                     | \$10,000.00                       |                            |
| Contents Loss                     | \$0.00                            |                            |
| Property Value                    | \$10,000.00                       |                            |
| Contents Value                    | \$0.00                            |                            |
| Detector Alerted occupants        | 2N                                |                            |
| Property Use                      | 819 - Livestock, poultry storage  |                            |
| Location Type                     | Address                           |                            |
| Address                           | 2722 MARTIN LUTHER KING JR AVE SE |                            |
| City, State Zip                   | WASHINGTON, DC 20032              |                            |

| <b>Situation</b>      |                  |
|-----------------------|------------------|
| Initial Dispatch Code | STRUCTURANY STRU |
| Final Dispatch Code   | STRUCTURANY STRU |
| Critical Incident     | No               |

| <b>Fire</b>                |  |
|----------------------------|--|
| Structure Type             | 1 - Enclosed building                                |
| Area of Origin             | 98 - Vacant structural area                          |
| Heat Source                | 60 - Heat from other open flame or smoking materials |
| Item First Ignited         | UU - Undetermined                                    |
| Cause of Ignition          | U - Cause undetermined after investigation           |
| Contribution To Ignition 1 | UU - Undetermined                                    |

| <b>Structure</b>    |                          |
|---------------------|--------------------------|
| Status              | 6 - Vacant and unsecured |
| Floor of Origin     | 1                        |
| Stories Above Grade | 1                        |
| Building Length     | 120                      |
| Building Width      | 60                       |

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### Structure

|                                  |   |
|----------------------------------|---|
| Total Square Feet                | 7200  |
| Fire Spread                      | 4 - Confined to building of origin            |
| Item Contributing To Spread      | 17 - Structural member or framing             |
| Type of Material Contributing To | 63 - Sawn wood, including all finished lumber |
| Detector Presence                | 2   |
| AES Presence                     | 3   |

### Authority

|                   |   |
|-------------------|---|
| Reported By       | (a)(2) - Carroll, Hakim<br>11:46:26 Tuesday, December 6, 2022 |
| Officer In Charge | - ,   |
| Reviewer          | - ,   |

### Narratives

|                |   |
|----------------|---|
| Narrative Name | CAD Narrative   |
| Narrative Type | CAD Narrative   |
| Author         | - ,   |
| Narrative Text | <p>F220199913 E Type:STRUCTURANY STRUCTURE FIRE (NOT LISTED ABOVE)<br/>Sub Type:Disp:<br/>COMMENTS:<br/>428,38:51:14.3856) (a)(2) ANI/ALI STRUCTURANY STRUCTURE FIRE<br/>(NOT LISTED ABOVE) default IC VACANT<br/>BUILDING ON FIRE+2ND CALL @1547CALLER STATES HE SEE SMOKE AND<br/>FIREADV THE BARN ON CAMPUS ON FIRE CALLER STATES SHE SEE BLACK<br/>SMOKE Duplicate Event:Location = 2722 MARTIN LUTHER KING JR AVE SE DC :<br/>@SHELTER - 801 EAST MENS SHELTER AND HOUSING, Cross Street 1 = PINE ST<br/>SE, Cross Street 2 = MAGNOLIA ST SE, Type = DETGARAGE DETACHED<br/>GARAGE OR BUILDING FIRE, Caller Name =(a)(2), Caller Ph Number =<br/>(a)(2), Caller Address = LL(-76:59:37.5864,38:51:09.1007), Call Source =<br/>ANI/ALI, Alarm Level = 0FIRE INSIDEFlames and/or SmokeSomeone trappedNo one<br/>trappedENGINEBARN INON FIREOUTSIDE THE LOCATION ..End of Duplicate<br/>Event dataFOC MONITORING..3RD CALL.ENGINES: 32, 33, 25, 3, &amp; 27VACANT<br/>BUILDING POLICY IN EFFECT...DEFENSIVE OPERATIONS PER COMMAND<br/>BFC 3 REQ WFDWORKING FIRE-PER CHANNEL 02 BC3 WILL BE GIVEN<br/>STAGGING AREA MOMENTARILY 1557-TAC CHANNEL 06 FOR 2ND<br/>ALARM-2ND ALARM STAGING/. MALCOLMX AND SYCAMORE-Duplicate<br/>Event: DC : alias MILWAUKEE PL SE/M L K AVE SE DC, Cross Street 1 =<br/>MILWAUKEE PL SE, Cross Street 2 = MARTIN LUTHER KING JR AVE SE, Type =<br/>OUTOTH OUTSIDE FIRE-OTHER (EXPLAIN), Caller Ph Number =(a)(2),<br/>Caller Address =(a)(2), Call<br/>Source = ANI/ALI, Alarm Level = 0OUTSIDE FIREOUTSIDE FIREOUTSIDE<br/>FIREFlames and/or SmokeNo one trapped-CALLER STATES SHE CAN SEE FLAMES<br/>ON MLK AND REDWOODCHANNEL 02 NOTIFIED OF CALLSTREETS ARE NOT<br/>INTERSECTINGEnd of Duplicate Event data-ADDITIONAL CALL:MILWAUKEE PL<br/>SE/MLK AVE SE.....E29 IS TAKING THE REHAB<br/>UNIT...MALCON XAND SYCAMORE ,,,REQ MPD FOR TRAFFIC CONTROL</p> |



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Narratives

...20MIN DUR@ 1612MLK CMD ALSO USING TAC 07-----30  
MIN CURATION 1622-PER FLO....T14 TRANSFER TO T07 AT 1625-PGE838  
ENROUTE WITH THE TRANSFER 1625-MLK AVE COMMAND RELEASING R1,  
TW3 AND T10.....-40 MIN DURATION AT 1632-KING AVE  
OPERATIONS RELEASING E06 AND E02-KING AVE OPERATIONS REPORTS  
ACCOUNTABILITY IS EVEN.....-KING AVE OPERATIONS REPORTS FIRE  
IS STILL BEING PUT OUT.....-CANTEEN UNIT IS  
RESPONDING.....-A29 COPY TRANSFER TO E15 1637-50 MIN  
DURATION 1642-CAR01 REQ TO BE IN THE 2ND ALARM AT 1643-PGE838  
ADVISED IS AT E19 AT 1649-60 MIN DURATION 1652-KING AVE COMMAND  
REPORTS NOINJURIES AND NO DISPLACEMENTS AT THIS POINT AT1658-T14  
IS AT T07 QUARTERS AT 1700-70 MIN DURATION AT 1702-A29 ADVISED  
TRANSFERED TO E15 AT 1706-PER FLO E05 CONTACT FIRE OPERATIONS  
CENTER AT (a)(2) .....E05 COPY THE MESSAGE AT 1708-80  
MINDURATION AT 1712-KING AVE WATER SUPPLY ADVISED RELEASING  
CHANNEL 07....ALL UNITS WILL BE OPERATING ON CHANNEL 03 AT 1715-90  
MIN INCIDENT DURATION @1722FIRE KNOCKED DOWN...ACCOUNTABILITY  
EVEN...WILL BE ON SCENE FOR A DURATION...DISCONTINUE  
DURATIONSWILL CLEAR 07 MONENTAIRLYSTILL HAVE HOT  
SPOTS...HOLDING E32 E15 E33 T8 T7 T16 AMD EMS 2 M19 AND A32 CANTEEN  
UNIT REHAB UNIT DFCOP Duplicate Event:Location = 2720 MARTIN LUTHER  
KING JR AVE SE DC: @UCC - UNIFIED COMMUNICATIONS CENTER, Cross  
Street 1 = CEDAR DR SE, Cross Street 2 = PINE ST SE, Call Source = PHONE, Alarm  
Level = 0SPECIAL ADDRESS COMMENT:PSPD WILL BE MONITORING THIS  
LOCATION AND ARE AVAILABLE FOR DISPATCH 24/7.End of Duplicate Event  
dataKING AVE COMMAND HOLDING E15 E32 E19 T7 T8 T16 EMS2 A32  
M19Duplicate Event:Location = 2722 MARTIN LUTHER KING JR AVE SE DC:  
@SHELTER - 801 EAST MENS SHELTER AND HOUSING, Cross Street 1 = PINE ST  
SE, Cross Street 2 = MAGNOLIA ST SE, Call Source = PHONE, Alarm Level = 0End of  
Duplicate Event dataT07RELEASED FROM BOX --PER KING AVE COMMAND  
@1915 E33 ADVISED LEAVING THE FIRE GROUND ----@1952MLK AVE  
ADVISED ----RELEASING -- M19 T08 AND EMS2 @1957 AIR2 ADVISED  
LANDLINE IN SERVICE FROM THE FIRE GROUND @2153 PER BC3  
RELEASING E15,E32, E19, A32 AND BC3, TERMINATING COMMAND TURNING  
THE SCENE OVER TO E05, E17, E02 UNIT WILL REMAIN ON THE TAC  
CHANNEL @2158E29 AND E23 ON THE SCENE @0433E10 0700 FIRE  
WATCHE02 1000 FIRE WATCH

Narrative Name  
Narrative Type  
Narrative Date  
Author  
Author Rank  
Author Assignment  
Narrative Text

Fire Investigation

Incident

11:45:45 Tuesday, December 6, 2022

(a)(2) - Carroll, Hakim

INVEST

8

On Saturday December 3rd, 2022, at 1547 hours, fire suppression units within the third battalion were dispatched to 2722 Martin Luther King Jr. Ave SE WDC 20032 for the report of a structure fire. Initial 911 calls indicated that smoke and fire was visible emanating from a barn on the campus of Saint Elizabeth's Hospital in front of the 801 East

### Narratives

Men's Shelter. First arriving units arrived on the scene with fire showing throughout the interior and through the roof of a two-story barn-style structure consisting of wood frame construction (Interior and exterior consisted of wood framing). The structure was reported to be vacant, so fire suppression crews initiated defensive firefighting operations.

The structure transitioned to full fire involvement leading to the fire consuming all the structural members above the first floor causing the structure to collapse. Due to the duration of the fire and the collapse hazards presented the structure was deemed unsafe for entry. Fire suppression crews continued defensive firefighting operations overnight and fully extinguished the flames some time in the early morning hours. When the fire was extinguished, a fire watch was put in place to secure and monitor the scene until a fire origin and cause investigation was completed.

On Sunday December 4th, 2022, at approximately 0900 hours members of the Fire Investigation Unit and the DC ATF Task Force returned to the scene to conduct a fire scene examination to determine the origin and cause of the fire.

A systematic fire scene examination was initiated at the incident location on the exterior of the structure. Documentation included photographs, interviews, and notes. A full exterior investigation was done before moving to the interior of the structure. During the exterior investigation of the structure a site safety assessment was completed. Due to the duration of burn time for the fire, the structural integrity was severely compromised. Before making entry into the structure a designated entry and egress point was established to ensure the safety of investigators entering the structure.

The structure was a cow barn constructed in the early 1900s to accommodate the Hospital's herd of about 100 dairy cattle and their associated dairying operations. The building was approximately 120 feet x 60 feet, with foundations and basement of brick and a superstructure of wood. Additionally, concrete floors and columns were installed in the basement and first floor levels of the barn. The concrete floors and columns prevented the entire structure from collapsing into the basement and first floor. The second floor of the barn was not able to be accessed due to the collapse of the roof. The second floor presented a significant safety risk to investigators due to weakened flooring and structural instability.

Security staff for the 801 East Shelter reported the vacant structure was used as a "hangout spot" for individuals living inside the shelter. The structure had no working utilities.

Prior to making entry into the structure, two cadaver canines were introduced into the scene to search for the presence of any human remains since the structure was initially determined unsafe for entry. The cadaver canine search was negative.

The investigation revealed the fire originated on the first floor of the barn in an area beneath the lower roof. There was differential damage along the "B" side of the structure. Along the "B" side of the structure was significant mass loss to the wooden structural components and interior framing. In this area of the barn ("B" side of the structure) the fire patterns and damage observed were indicative of fire burning on the first floor and

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### Narratives

moving upward and outward throughout the first floor of the barn until the fire was able to extend to the second floor and eventually through the roof. The wooden structural members and framing of the structure provided all the fuel the fire needed to continue flame propagation and spread throughout the structure.

There was clear evidence of transient human activity inside and around the area of the barn. The entirety of the structure and all of its contents were consumed by the fire. During the fire scene examination, the burned remnants of clothing, cardboard boxes, totes of medical supplies, empty bottles, beer cans, food containers, charcoal grills, smoking materials, and other combustible items were observed. Because the fire burned for such a long duration and collapsed, the actual fuel load, the number of combustible items stored and the exact location of the combustibles inside the structure was not able to be determined.

All investigators on the scene agreed there was an open flame fire inside the barn. However, the reasons for that fire are unknown. As a hangout for transient individuals and based on my training, knowledge and experience; I know that there is a tendency for open fires to occur in vacant properties for a multitude of reasons. Some of the reasons include fires for individuals to stay warm, to cook, and for lighting. Often, these fires are left unattended or not extinguished properly which leads to a fire developing unnoticed. The fact there was a fire inside of this structure and it could be reasonably inferred that the fire was ignited but intended to be used for something other than nefarious reasons; it does not preclude or omit the idea that the fire was ignited intentionally and maliciously to cause damage to the structure. However, at the time this incident report is being written, there is not enough evidence to make a determination on whether or not the fire was a criminal act. Based on the fire scene examination, evidence and artifacts examined at the scene, and interviews conducted, I am currently unable to determine a specific sequence leading the ignition of this fire. This fire is classified as UNDETERMINED pending receipt of further information which may allow me to change my determination.

|                   |  |
|-------------------|--|
| Narrative Name    | T07  |
| Narrative Type    | Incident   |
| Narrative Date    | 13:06:36 Wednesday, December 7, 2022   |
| Author            | (a)(2) - Henry, Christopher  |
| Author Rank       | SGT  |
| Author Assignment | 1  |
| Narrative Text    | 2nd Due, took position on the A side per command. Setup for ladder pipe operations. Flowed the ladder pipe to extinguish fire. |
| Narrative Name    | E3   |
| Narrative Type    | Incident   |
| Narrative Date    | 16:59:55 Wednesday, December 7, 2022   |
| Author            | (a)(2) - Roop, Michael A   |
| Author Rank       | LT   |
| Author Assignment | 1  |
| Narrative Text    | Arrived on location, E3 supplied E-33 and crew assigned to T-7, to assist with setting up monitor nozzle.                      |
| Narrative Name    | E6   |
| Narrative Type    | Incident   |

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**Narratives**

|                   |   |
|-------------------|---|
| Narrative Date    | 00:26:45 Thursday, December 8, 2022   |
| Author            | (a)(2) - Trace, Mark  |
| Author Rank       | CAPT  |
| Author Assignment | 1   |
| Narrative Text    | 4th due on the initial box. Bumped to 2nd due on the 2nd alarm. Assisted with water supply. |

End of Report





















(a)(2)

(a)(2)

(a)(2)

FIRE MARSHAL  
POLICE



Slater and Langston Elementary Schools - February 2023



Photos by: Scott Roberts for DC Preservation League











## Anne Archbold Hall - February 2023







*Sylvia M. Randolph*



*Sylvia M. Randolph*