

**DC Historic Districts Coalition**  
Scott Roberts, Bloomingdale Historic District  
Email: ScottRoberts01@outlook.com

Statement Before the  
DC Council, Committee of the Whole  
Oversight of the Office of Planning  
February 25, 2025

Good morning, Chair Mendelson and Council Members,

My name is Scott Roberts, and I am a resident of the Bloomingdale Historic District who is speaking on behalf of the DC Historic Districts Coalition (DC HDC). The DC HDC is an informal alliance of individuals and organizations representing Washington, DC's 37 neighborhood historic districts and other individuals and organizations interested in the city's historic preservation, including residents of potential future historic districts.

The DC HDC has identified four issue areas to highlight this year:

- 1) DC HDC would like to start by pointing out the success of the city's historic preservation ordinance. The nearly 50-year-old *Historic Landmark and Historic District Protection Act* has made DC a national and international leader in historic preservation and urban planning. Since 1978, the well-crafted ordinance has shaped the city's built environment by protecting hundreds of historic landmarks and thousands of buildings and structures throughout the city's vibrant historic districts. The designation of landmarks and districts has not only protected DC's best architecture, design, and engineering, but also led to the recognition of Washington's numerous social histories – from important individuals to neighborhood and community culture. Through the preservation ordinance and its regulations, DC has held developers and architects to a higher standard of design that has made DC a place where people want to live and visit. This, in turn, has often led to the salvaging of historic fabric, which is more sustainable in a time of climate change.

We hope that the Council will continue to recognize the importance of the preservation ordinance and will be thoughtful about any proposed tweaks or changes that will unravel one of Washington's most successful pieces of public policy.

- 2) DC HDC would like to once again express thanks for expanding the DC Historic Homeowner Grant program administered by the DC Historic Preservation Office (HPO). This expansion was first included in the DC FY2024 Budget Support Act and DC HDC looks forward the program's continued funding. The program was expanded to all historic districts and landmarks, and increased the maximum grant amount to \$50,000. This expansion is critical to address affordability issues, as it will help eligible homeowners with maintenance and repair.

The DC HDC encourages the expansion and clarification of the grant program to include multi-unit buildings, such as condominiums and co-ops. The current legislative and regulatory language does not provide eligibility for multi-unit buildings, even when they are a historic landmark or within a historic district. There is clearly a need for this, as many condo and co-op boards throughout the city are seeking financial assistance and have reached out for support.

- 3) The DC HDC would like to highlight the need for increased and consistent enforcement of design guidelines in the city's neighborhood historic districts. Violations of these design guidelines occur

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regularly and often times, it is the historic districts' residents who are responsible for reporting these infractions to HPO and the Department of Buildings (DOB).

Unfortunately, there is currently no memorandum of agreement (MOA) between HPO and DOB, which has brought regular inspections and proper enforcement to a halt. DC HDC is hopeful that a new MOA will be executed as soon as possible, as this agreement is key to upholding the city's design guidelines.

- 4) The DC HDC appreciates the continued improvements made to the Office of Planning's PropertyQuest DC website, which has become a critical tool for historic preservation planning purposes. Once again, the DC HDC suggests that contributing buildings within historic districts be identified as a property's "highlights" on PropertyQuest in order to make the website a more complete tool. Within a historic district, a property's contributing or non-contributing status is an important distinction.

The DC HDC also appreciates the continued work that goes into HPO's HistoryQuest DC, which has become an extremely popular resource for Washingtonians and a way for them to learn more about their city's historic buildings and neighborhoods.

Thank you for providing the time for me to testify today. I look forward to any questions you may have and look forward to working with you throughout the coming year.