

DC Historic Districts Coalition
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Statement Before the
DC Council, Committee of the Whole
Oversight of the Office of Planning
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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 three issue areas to highlight this year:

Once again, DC HDC would like to point 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 diverse 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.

- 1) Thus, in light of new challenges at the federal level, local preservation efforts have taken on a renewed importance. It is crucial that the DC Historic Preservation Office (HPO) and Historic Preservation Review Board's (HPRB's) professional work and independent decision-making continue to be supported by office holders and policymakers. Therefore, DC HDC continues to advocate for full membership on the nine-member HPRB. As of right now, there are only five active members on the Mayor-appointed, and Council-confirmed Board.
- 2) DC HDC continues to promote the success of the [Historic Homeowner Grant Program](#), which is administered by HPO. This grant program is critical in addressing affordability issues, by providing eligible homeowners with financial support for maintenance and repair projects.

Given the grant program's importance, DC HDC asks that the DC Council fully fund the program. Additionally, DC HDC encourages the expansion of the 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.

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- 3) DC HDC would like to highlight the need for any [enforcement of historic district design guidelines](#) in the city's neighborhood historic districts. Violations of these design guidelines occur regularly and typically it is the historic districts' residents who are responsible for reporting these infractions to the Department of Buildings (DOB), which is supposed to correct infractions, in coordination with HPO.

DC HDC is especially concerned about enforcement in the coming year, considering HPO no longer has in-house inspectors and DOB lacks inspectors trained to enforce historic district requirements. This enforcement gap undermines the purpose and integrity of the historic review process and the work of HPO.

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.