



**Testimony to the Committee on the Whole
Oversight of the Office of Planning
Thursday, February 12, 2026**

Rebecca Miller on Behalf of the DC Preservation League

Good afternoon, Chairman Mendelson. My name is Rebecca Miller, Executive Director of the DC Preservation League (DCPL), Washington's citywide nonprofit dedicated to preserving and protecting the historic and built environment of our nation's capital for more than 50 years. Thank you for the opportunity to provide DCPL's comments on the Office of Planning's (OP) performance this past year. DCPL works closely with the Historic Preservation Office (HPO) and its parent agency, the Office of Planning, to help carry out its mission and, in doing so, support DC-led initiatives that successfully utilize historic preservation as a tool for economic growth and vitality across our city.

DCPL has long partnered with HPO to tell the histories of our unique and diverse neighborhoods. Recently, we have been working collaboratively to develop a more complete story of Washington's residents through context studies on underrepresented communities and topics such as the history of Affordable Housing in the city, with a special emphasis on housing for African Americans. These studies, funded by the National Park Service, help identify priorities for historic protection in traditionally underserved communities and provide a foundation for broader public education.

DCPL continues to be concerned that HPO does not receive the financial support it requires to be successful through OP's budget. Funding for several staff members comes from the National Park Service's Historic Preservation Fund and other agencies such as DDOT. The majority of HPO staff's work is regulatory, meaning reviewing projects and processing permit applications, and is essential to enhancing our city's economic and cultural vitality. Continuing to underfund this office and relying on federal funds for HPO staff salaries could be detrimental to the city's historic preservation program in the years to come.

In addition to HPO funding, DCPL is concerned that city leaders are impeding the DCSHPO's role in reviewing and exercising its signatory authority of federally owned properties. At the end of 2025, the General Services Administration (GSA) notified the DCSHPO of its intent to invoke an emergency clause in the St. Elizabeths West Campus Programmatic Agreement. This clause, intended for catastrophic building failure, was put forward under the guise that vacant buildings posed a security threat. DCSHPO had three days to respond; no response was sent. Leaving the advocacy for this National Historic Landmark to DCPL and the National Trust for Historic Preservation. One of GSA's justification for demolition is the lack of objection from the DCSHPO. This campus has been the subject of planning efforts for two decades. Thousands of staff hours have been expended on this consultation. Historic Preservation professionals do not proactively just sit back and allow significant historic buildings to be demolished, especially when they've worked for their protection for decades. We can only surmise that direction came from the Administration to not respond.

Enforcement remains a critical problem. Illegal construction is even more challenging to identify and control. HPO works with the Department of Buildings (DOB) on these issues, but both agencies rely on complaints from vigilant neighbors who are frustrated by the lack of reliable follow-up on these violations. DCPL was surprised to hear at the roundtable two weeks ago that the Chief Building Official, Nicole Rogers, wasn't aware that HPO no longer had enforcement officers. Ms. Rogers stated that DOB would work with HPO (their sister agency) to develop a process for enforcement in historic districts. Now that HPO no longer has its own enforcement officers, DCPL implores the city to devise a new strategy to combat illegal construction and violations of the property maintenance code, which too often result in demolition by neglect.

DCPL has testified for years about these interrelated enforcement issues. Because of the difficulty in achieving meaningful progress, the lack of reliable enforcement remains a key threat to the character of our historic neighborhoods and the quality of life and safety of residents.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify today.