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Before the Committee of the Whole DC City Council

On Approval of the Proposed Update of the City's Comprehensive Plan

Tuesday, September 26, 2006

Chairman Cropp and members of the Council: Thank you for giving me an opportunity to testify on the proposed update of the City's Comprehensive Plan. I am here this morning, at the invitation of the Office of Planning, to represent the Comprehensive Housing Strategy Task Force, which worked closely with the Office of Planning on the housing component of the Comprehensive Plan. I strongly urge the Council to move forward promptly with its review and approval of the update of the city's Comprehensive Plan as proposed by the Office of Planning. We all need an updated comprehensive plan in place, so that much-needed policies—including housing policies—can be implemented without costly delays.

I was the co-chair of the Housing Strategy Task Force, along with Adrian Washington, who now heads the Anacostia Waterfront Corporation. The impetus for a housing strategy task force originated in the the Council, which perceived that the city had many housing programs, but lacked a comprehensive housing strategy. The legislation creating the Task Force was sponsored by former Councilman Harold Brazil and strongly supported by Councilman Adrian Fenty. Mayor Williams appointed a highly qualified, diverse group of citizens to the Task Force, the Council confirmed us, and we held our first meeting in June 2004. Over the next year and a half, we held fifteen task force meetings, all open to the public, as well as five community meetings in different parts of the city specifically designed to elicit public comment. We also created four Task Force committees, each of which held numerous meetings over the course of the year and a half. We briefed the Mayor and the Council on our recommendations in January, 2006, and posted our final Report on the web in April, 2006. Adrian Washington and I testified on our recommendations before the Council's Economic Development Committee on June 13, 2006.

Our Task Force perceived that the city faces a housing crisis. Rising demand for housing is pushing up prices and rents and making the city unaffordable for low and moderate income people and working families. We also perceived that the city has a major opportunity—in partnership with the private and non-profit sectors--to move toward the vision of a more inclusive city by creating new mixed income neighborhoods and bringing the East and West sides of the city together. We urged the city to double its efforts to preserve and expand affordable housing, to increase funding for the Housing Production Trust Fund, and to

implement a long list of policies that would make housing programs more effective.

Throughout its working life the Comprehensive Housing Strategy Task Force worked in close collaboration with Comprehensive Plan Revision Task Force—Adrian Washington served on both. The housing strategy and the Comp Plan efforts proceeded in parallel from the same basic data and research in order to avoid conflict around numbers and focus the energies of decision-makers on the policy choices in front of us. As a result, the housing strategy incorporated in the proposed update of the Comprehensive Plan is closely aligned with the findings and recommendations of the Comprehensive Housing Strategy Task Force.

As the Mayor and Ellen McCarthy have stressed, the effort involved in getting this proposal to the Council has been both long and intensive. Indeed, in my years of involvement with District issues, I cannot recall a major policy initiative that has had as much organized public conversation and input as this one. The Office of Planning is to be commended for its vision, perseverance, and hard work in bringing this complex and multi-layered matter to this stage. The proposed Comp Plan provides an effective tool for relating programs like the Housing Strategy to other city programs such as DDOT's transportation plan, the school facilities master plan, and the parks master plan. The proposed Comp Plan provides a logical framework for growing the city and growing the tax base. It channels development to underused sites, large sites, and the waterfront, while still conserving our neighborhoods. It provides a framework for achieving a thriving, inclusive City.

As you know, the Council has already acted on several recommendations of the Housing Strategy Task Force. The Mayor quickly proposed funding several of the key proposals, and Council almost as quickly agreed and provided the requested resources in the 2007 budget. The next important step in the process of implementing these recommendations is to move forward now to approve their incorporation into the city's Comprehensive Plan so that the frame is clearly set for the new administration and Council.

All of the work on these two large and important sets of policies – the Comp Plan and the housing task force recommendations – has taken place over the past 2-3 years under the watchful eye of the current Mayor and Council. Implementing both sets of recommendations is the job of this Mayor and this Council. I urge the Council to act now and not take the chance that both of these critical efforts will be bogged down for years in new rounds of time-consuming process. After a long, careful process with ample opportunity for public input, it is time to move ahead.

Thank you very much, Chairman Cropp, for your long service to the City and for keeping the Council's attention on this important issue.