

Height Master Plan for Washington, DC

PHASE 2

COMPILED PUBLIC COMMENTS

SUBMITTED AT PHASE TWO PUBLIC MEETINGS

SATURDAY, AUGUST 3, 2013 | TENLEY-FRIENDSHIP LIBRARY

TUESDAY, AUGUST 6 | DOROTHY I. HEIGHT/BENNING LIBRARY

WEDNESDAY, AUGUST 7 | MT. PLEASANT LIBRARY

TUESDAY, AUGUST 13 | DC OFFICE OF PLANNING



SATURDAY, AUGUST 3, 2013 | TENLEY-FRIENDSHIP LIBRARY

WORKBOOK COMMENTS

Robert Jack

Approach 3: Seems like a good compromise.

Sue Hemberger | Friendship Heights, DC

Approach 1: The best option at this time is no height increase. We're still trying to grow out and that will be harder to accomplish if going up (rather than out) is an alternative. Also, it's clear that current zoning doesn't use the full heights authorized by the Height Act. The Height Act isn't the current constraint, so there's no need to change it.

Approach 2: Our experience of the city's walkability is a function not of the ratio but of the built environment. To the extent that the ratio hasn't been "fully realized," it doesn't follow that raising heights to match the ratio will lead to increased walkability. More likely, walkability will be decreased as we lose human scale. Taller buildings don't enhance walkability.

Sherrie Berger | Mt. Pleasant, DC

Approach 1A: Yes

Approach 1B: No

Approach 2: Not sure what else means usually and where!

Approach 4: NO.

Jay Smith | Friendship Heights, DC

Approach 1: The best choice is clearly to maintain the existing Height Act, option 1A. The study completely fails to demonstrate any need to remove the limit, or any benefit. If it were true that there is additional demand for office or residential space, there is no reason it cannot be accommodated within current limits.

Approach 2: This approach is misleading, because the term "reinforce" suggests no change. But as described in the presentation, this means an increase in the height limit. The so-called "relationship" that is provided is no magic formula that is inherently a good result. This is phrased to sound like a modest change, but it is substantial.

Approach 3: None of these proposals (3A, 3B, 3C) has been shown to be necessary or to offer any real benefit. The study assumes, and does not demonstrate, that there is a need for additional office or residential space. There is plenty of capacity for many decades to come across the city as a whole. The proposal to lift the height act would eliminate protection for the city that currently prevents unnecessary and unattractive vertical development.

Approach 4: This is obviously not an option.

Economic Feasibility Analysis: The economic feasibility analysis is poorly done, as it assume, rather than demonstrates, that there is a need for additional office and residential development that can only be satisfied by lifting the height limit. The study also ignores the costs to the residents of DC of the infrastructure (transportation, emergency, sewage, etc.) of the proposed vertical development. To call this an "economic" analysis is misleading, as it assumes benefits, ignores costs, and fails to look at alternatives.

George Clark | Forest Hills, DC

Approach 1: Raising height will not make any increased housing more affordable by your own consultants' estimates. Issa's letter is not a Congressional request—if it were even a committee request ranking minority member Cummings would have signed the letter. This is an Issa request only—what are his motivations? As you know, when the Height of Buildings Act was passed, the House debate included extensive discussion about aesthetics, especially light and air, not just fire. Please don't try to mislead us on this.

Economic Feasibility Analysis: 1-2% greater share of office is speculation and w/o the margin of error of any study. Assumption of lower office rents requires overbuilding—do we want that? Do we want more Class A office buildings filled with non-tax paying commuters who we have to figure out how to get in and out of the city with our congestions? And we manage to constantly give away the potential new real estate taxes with TIFs and other unnecessary benefits for developers

Susan Kimmel | Tenleytown, DC

Approach 3: Unless DC can increase density of both residential and office space, the long-term consequence will cause it to lose out economically and further degrade the environment in terms of air quality. There needs to be more affordable housing and office space close in to avoid increasing commuting distances. We need long term (100 year) studies! Also, I am concerned that a 225 ft height limit would result in more boxy structure such as along K St. rather than elegant skyscrapers as seen in many American and foreign cities (London, Paris, Shanghai).

GENERAL SESSION QUESTION & COMMENTS

The following summarizes questions asked at the August 3 public meeting.

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- Q: If we raise the Height Act, are changes going to happen immediately?
- A: No, because the heights of buildings is further limited by local zoning. The Height Act is a federal law; in order for changes to happen, Congress would have to change with the Height Act. After Congressional action, the District would have to undertake a public process to update the Comprehensive Plan, which would have to be approved by Council, and then undertake another public process to amend the zoning code—this would have to be approved by the Zoning Commission. These processes could take years.
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- Q: According to AAA, we are one of the top commuter traffic jam cities. If we were to increase density, it would be interesting to see how bad it would be to get to work. I think increasing heights would affect how Metro would run and how much more traffic there would be.
- A: Infrastructure is a good point, and it's not just Metro and roads—there's water and sewer, there's gas and electricity. All these things need to be considered if and when we have increases. We have 500,000 people who come into the city every day and leave when work is over. One possibility is that if we have more residential, we would be able to capture more people who work in the city to live in the city.
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- Q: I like the approach number 3, the illustrative clusters. However, in my neighborhood, we have a cell phone tower that's over 200 feet. Your images show these blocks on various heights—you should show more architecturally interesting buildings, like narrow ones in Chicago, especially in the area clusters, and to have Walter Reed as one of the illustrative clusters.
- A: There's the possibility of increasing height but not changing the FAR, which would result in more slender buildings. Given the time constraints of the study as requested by Congress, we didn't have time to do detailed architectural renderings, although between now and the final recommendations that's a possibility.
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- Q: Something in one of the earlier slides on L'Enfant's vision mentioned something about the trees along the street. When you increase building height you cut light, and I didn't see that consideration: the impact on the trees and natural environment.
- A: We did do a few light studies, although we ended up looking at a couple of pretty modest heights. We didn't identify a lot of impact on the tree canopy. [Note: the images for F Street NW looking east and looking west show the impact on shadows as the modeled building height increases.]
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- Q: When we look at the topographic bowl and development in Rosslyn that broke through the height, there was a great concern about tree height. What strikes you now about the city is the greenness. On all of the massings, that's what gets wiped out: the tree cover. I can't think of any of the areas in Maryland and Virginia with higher heights that are beautiful places to go. The Height Act has been a very important factor in making this a livable, walkable, beautiful city. We should look at how to get development throughout the city and not destroy what makes this city a beautiful one. Jane Jacobs has a concept on making denser cities out of low-rise buildings instead of high rise ones.
- A: You raise the very kinds of issues that we would be considering locally, although with the Height Master Plan we're not trying to do federally what would normally be done locally... in other words, we are not trying to use the height study to put in the federal law issues or topics that would more appropriately be part of a Comp Plan or zoning update.

- Q: I appreciate the visuals that this study produced; they are helpful, but none of them show the effect of the man on the street. This is a democracy, and the scale of the city is a reflection of the importance of the individual. There are also no shadow studies, as all of these were taken at daytime.
- A: We actually have a lot of street views and shadow studies for F Street, although they weren't included in this presentation in the interest of time.

Note: All of the visual models are available and can be sorted to show street level images:
www.ncpc.gov/heightstudy/modelindex

- Q: It would be interesting to further the study government-owned land, with eminent domain issues. The federal interest is important; there is a lot of government-owned property, and developer interests (e.g. the Old Post Office building).
- A: The trend in the federal government is as you've indicated: occupying less space, which results in a little less need for federal buildings.
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- Q: I really care about this city as it should be for the future, but there is a lot of the past well worth keeping. The economic study seems to be done from the perspective of developers by people who represent developers. Infrastructurally, I'm not sure that we have a sewer system that could handle adding more people, as well as our transit system. Also, I think we need an additional fourth principle: to improve the city for the residents as well as the workers.
- A: These issues often get pulled altogether, and while we are delighted to hear about them now, they're not really in the scope of the study. If the Height Act changed now, not a single thing in the city would change until we had a robust conversation locally, and then we could talk about strategic solutions (for example, having a "beauty contest").
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- Q: I know that Chairman Issa asked for the consideration of the L'Enfant plan and of the federal interest. The federal interest included areas like Old Soldier's Home, Fort Reno, etc. so why are Fort Circle Parks not part of the federal interest?
- A: When NCPC reviews these models and the analysis, these are the sorts of things the Commission will point out and make comments on what areas need to be protected. This is part of the discussion that will occur soon, and we have to look at the same models to understand what these impacts are.
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- Q: If you were to take the images of all the approaches except of the third one, you're always going to have a reaction when you see the brown blocks, a lot of which is unfortunately due to the visual process. If you could create something to emphasize the quality of buildings, like the London models, It would really help.
- A: That's actually the very kind of comment that would be useful as we see where we want to take this as we go forward. To an extent, we almost wanted people to see the worst case scenario of these modeling so people would know we weren't trying to mask the effect of heights.
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- Q: You started the presentation saying that the Height Act has helped spread economic development throughout the city, which is a positive thing. That principle seems to get lost as we have a conversation about changing the Act. How does that apply for the future? Also Chairman Issa specifically asked for a study of changes that are compatible with the neighborhoods.
- A: The way we considered the effects with neighborhoods is we took off the table most of the city, areas that are not designated for growth or transit centers etc. Additionally, implementation of this would probably be selective and over time, because if you suddenly flooded the real estate market it would have negative impacts.

- Q: I just wanted to clarify: you referred to in some of your drawings of the interactions of current zoning restrictions with the Height Act. It would be helpful to see what you're recommending, especially because we're currently going through zoning rewrites.
- A: An important point is that we're not making changes to height in the zoning rewrite. Our comp plan has designated areas that are high-density, and we're not making any changes beyond what the comp plan says. The zoning plan went to the Commission last month, but it doesn't talk about what we're studying. Those changes might involve another round of zoning changes, and could depend on pressures like demand and absorption.
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- Q: I'd like to go back to the point that the study principles of the Height Act don't mention the interests of the neighborhoods. Washington, DC is the nation's capital, but comprised of small, southern neighborhoods. Some parts of the city have gotten a lot of public investment, and a lot of others haven't. Even now the infrastructure throughout the east of the river is substandard, and it's a big impairment to having adequate facilities. If the Height Act is increased, it'll set off a wave of speculation. The city's investments are going to follow the wave of speculation, there will be tremendous pressure to rezone immediately, and once again we're going to starve parts of the city of the resources they need.
- A: Thank you for the comment – where do you believe investments should go?
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- Q: One of the things I'm finding a little difficult to discern from the models is, if we had no change in the federal Height Act but changed the zoning code, what would that result in? Before we tinker around with a hundred-year-old law that has served us well, it would be useful to understand what could be done before then.
- A: We'd rather look at tinkering with height at places with density already designated rather than having to pull up all the residential areas in order to accommodate growth and build out the entire city to the same height.

Note: The modeling study shows building heights at full build out under the current Height Act limit. The first height modeled in every sequence is at 130 feet, which is the current Height Act limit, but in many locations is above the current zoning limit.

- Q: Where is this coming from? Did the city work with Congressman Issa to request study on the Height Act, or did he request this independently? Also, I don't see any benefit to change it at all.
- A: No, we didn't go in to the original hearing thinking remotely that we would be requested to do this study. We haven't taken any position on this study, nor has the Mayor. He hasn't even been briefed on it yet.
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- Q: When you say the region is growing, what are you basing that off of? Especially if the federal government is downsizing.
- A: We'd like to think that the transportation investments and other strategic changes are making this place more attractive. Even as the federal government downsizes, we are more than replacing that with the private sector and a more diversified economy. We have a range of estimates about our growth, and we're about to bump it up again for the next 40 years.
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- Q: Could you tell us a little more about the implications of the penthouse issue?
- A: The very minor change that was being contemplated in the hearing was whether the penthouses should be allowed to be used for something other than mechanicals, because they are already there. The Height Master Plan grew out of this initial consideration of penthouses.

TUESDAY, AUGUST 6 | DOROTHY I. HEIGHT/BENNING LIBRARY

GENERAL SESSION QUESTION & COMMENTS

The following summarizes questions asked at the August 6 public meeting.

Q: If the federal government was to raise the height limit, would federal buildings be governed by DC zoning?
A: Federal government says that they don't have to follow by zoning, but by good efforts, they do. We didn't model those changes to federal buildings, however, most of our existing taller buildings are civic buildings.

Q: Architectural details to the models would be really helpful, because the blockiness of the models are off-putting to people.
A: We are not able to do it for all of the models, but we will try and see if the architects can do it to a couple of views, and what it would look like if it was more detailed.

Q: I'm a real estate agent and I want to know why we are asked to do this. I heard that somebody had a particular interest in increasing height for a specific building.
A: Congress did not ask for any particular buildings, but Congressman Issa came to our first meeting and said he didn't like the ugliness of our rooftops. Interested in ways those rooftop structures could be hidden and more beautiful buildings in the future. Can't speak for him, we are doing an honest thoughtful look at what the impacts would be.

Q: I'm wondering why you guys chose the Old Soldiers Home. Isn't that a historic district? Why was it considered for clustering?
A: We called it illustrative for a reason: it is a site where there has been a lot of development proposed (unique views to and from the city), so we wanted to look at what the impacts of taller buildings would be. This would be a process that we would look at when updating the comprehensive plan.

Q: Approach 1 (rooftop) - I thought I read that the new zoning regulations already address issues of rooftop and beauty, where mechanical and penthouse needs to be of similar quality and materials. Doesn't that exist?
A: Our existing zoning proposals does not go into great detail about rooftop and beauty, they are minor changes to the existing zoning. The existing zoning proposals do not include occupancy.

Q: Could we figure out how many square feet are available to build to the current limit?
A: We started that analysis and will have that information during the 3rd phase of our project with our recommendations. We have room to grow, and we will talk about that and how many years of growth that will get us and at what rate of growth. We will look at how different height changes might impact our availability of occupancy to the city.

Q: What is this for (worksheet) – Wants to know about the feasibility study (worksheet)
A: DCOP Chief of Staff Tanya Stern was unable to attend today for medical reasons, but we've printed out copies of the economic feasibility presentation for you to view. It looks at similar illustrative areas, and analyzes whether the economic conditions of those areas can justify the construction of taller buildings.

WEDNESDAY, AUGUST 7 | MT. PLEASANT LIBRARY

WORKBOOK COMMENTS

Frederic Harwood / Shaw, DC

Approach 1: Leaves the skyline looking like a pancake with a pencil sticking out of it. Limits the city's economic growth, jobs, retail. Limits the development of the "creative city," a place where creative people meet, interact, cross-fertilize to create technology, ideas, the future. Limits taxes to help lower income residents—taxes from increased densities of professionals and creative types generate tax revenue to build schools, recreation, and low income housing.

Approach 2: The relationship of height to street width is irrelevant. Philadelphia has 1,000 foot tall buildings in 2 & 3 lane streets (40-60 feet). What matters is the quality of what goes on at street level—restaurants, retail, theaters, open spaces, plazas—not how high the buildings are. We are over-planning and over-engineering the building heights. New York, Philadelphia, Boston, Chicago, do not tie building height to street width—put something interesting on the street and building heights will be irrelevant.

Approach 3: Yes to all three. Eliminating height limits would especially benefit under-developed areas such as Benning Road, Anacostia—where the economic benefits of high commercial towers would trickle into the surrounding neighborhoods and provide jobs, both professional and service jobs. L'Enfant city would benefit because it is nearly 100% built out and economic growth stagnating. The bowl outside L'Enfant city would benefit with housing, people, residents who would support retail, creating creative jobs, and pay income and real estate taxes to benefit all residents. Yes to illustrative clusters, especially around Metro. Washington has more metro stations than the rest of the system combined (VA & MD) and yet we show very little of the smart cluster building so evident in Rosslyn, Silver Spring, and Bethesda.

Approach 4: Absolutely. Take the handcuffs off the city. New residents, new employment centers, more jobs, more tax revenue for better schools, parks, recreation and low income housing. Take off the handcuffs. The federal government should have no interest in our city outside the federal footprint. Let Anacostia, Howard-town, Florida Ave, H Street, let them grow, blossom, with new businesses, new residents, new creativity. Let the city's residents plan the type of city that grows, not stagnate like to mid-sized, sleepy government town. I can't see much difference in DC modeling between 130 feet and 220 feet as long as the vistas/view corridors are preserved.

Katharine / Mt. Pleasant, DC

Economic Feasibility Analysis: Great presentation and excellent public process so far. Thank you for inviting the public to be so involved throughout the process.

To me, it seems that the Height Act has helped shape DC into the place it is today, but it is reasonable to revisit it given the city's growth, changing needs, and the skyrocketing housing prices. I think that the values—particularly in terms of preserving view and horizontality—are great and can be accepted by all. It was clear from the presentation that the DCOP values housing affordability. (I particularly appreciated the comment on the problems of affordability in highly restricted cities like Paris.) I hope this can continue to be a top priority—it really needs to be given the changes the city is experiencing. Thanks for the comment on opportunities like inclusionary zoning.

On another topic—the innovative suggestions for FAR (maintain it) or a height "beauty contest" are interesting. It would be great if this process could help DC get more distinctive buildings as well as taller buildings. However, I'm glad DCOP is not suggesting unlimited/developer-determined heights. Mega-buildings like London's Shard do not seem right for DC and would be particularly problematic if the growth trends ever reversed.

Rollie Smith / Columbia Heights, DC

General: We need higher density to allow more people who work here to live here—and maintain diversity. Higher limits in certain areas outside of or even at the edge of the L’Enfant city will do that if we plan well. Tall ensures diversity in building heights and style. Why don’t you use the growth projection for the city and the analysis of what is already happening to lower income families and workers to kick off the session—people need to understand why.

Approach 3: Certainly the Topo Bowl outside should be considered. Ensure the diversity, and ensure the affordability through inclusionary zoning. Do it as an auction—allow builders to bid large projects that will both ensure the bottom line and the social good as well as appearance. Consider the land between more housing and new jobs.

Approach 4: Consider neighborhood planning areas and pods which allow developers to break height limits if they meet certain criteria. Why should the feds hold back the city and its neighborhood from doing its own planning?

E. Hajian / Lanier Heights, DC

Approach 1: As consider height, need to think about the pedestrian-level interaction with buildings. Most buildings should have space at pedestrian level for shops, services, etc. otherwise we risk negative effects of urban renewal and anti-social 70’s architecture.

Approach 2: Current height is just fine. 160 feet is not pretty—also would drastically change the character of the city. Current height in DC plan; NOT height act.

Approach 3: Has anyone looked at the impact raising height will have on road networks? Tysons, Bethesda, Rosslyn, have horrible traffic. Can DC streets, already third most congested in the nation, handle the additional traffic that will come with the increase in population that would occupy taller buildings?

Approach 4: Noooooo!!!!

Economic Feasibility Analysis: Traffic! Quality of life! Infrastructure! All costs to DC—need a thorough analysis to determine if it really would be economically beneficial from a public cost/taxation standpoint.

General: Great meeting! Thank you for holding these and letting DC residents provide their input. The speaker was very good.

Christy Kwan / Truxton Circle, DC

Approach 1: Visually looks fine, but would prefer a height increase so the city can capitalize on greater economic benefits associated with greater height increases.

Approach 2: This is my least favorite option because the viewshed does not appear to be protected. Especially if we want to preserve the viewshed of our monuments and iconic buildings.

Approach 3: Raising the height limit in illustrative clusters seems to be the most favorable. Increased height at clusters is a good balance to maintain the horizontality of the city but allow more spaces for commercial and residential.

General: I understand the reasons why building massing is showing the worst case scenario, but it makes me concerned about the lack of open space that should be required with particular developments. For example, the new buildings in NOMA are at an acceptable height (and could expand higher), but lack the proper open space for a better experience at the street level. We must consider the ground floor experience in addition to the viewshed.

Bill Wright | U Street, DC

Approach 1: The existing Height Act seems to have served the city well, both aesthetically and economically. It seems like it would be wise to wait a while to see how demographic changes play out—we can always raise the limit later, but no one is going to cut floors off their buildings once they’ve been built.

Approach 2: It’s not clear why “reinforce” is the right word here. That makes it sound like there won’t be changes, which isn’t what most of the proposals seem to do. “Alter” or “recalculate” would be more accurate. It also feels like the width v. height ratios are about right currently. Our streets have an excellent feel—busy enough to feel lively but not overly congested for pedestrians.

Approach 4: This seems like overkill at the current moment. The need for this kind of change should be demonstrated much more convincingly before this is done, even in small ways.

Robin Diener | Dupont Circle, DC

Economic Feasibility Analysis: The biggest “shock” come from filling in at the current affordable rate. It feels like there is so much room to grow now [within] the existing envelope. It would be useful to know how much space remains to be developed at the current height limit.

Marcy Logan | Dupont Circle, DC

Approach 1: Require penthouses to conform in appearance to base building and block.

Approach 2: Already done. Keep it that way.

Approach 4: Not a good idea.

GENERAL SESSION QUESTION & COMMENTS

The following summarizes questions asked at the August 7 public meeting.

Q: My reaction is that even building to the current Height Act Limit (130 feet) would be bad enough. When we look at this view of 16th street, it's obviously a good thing we didn't.

Q: I noticed in the K street model you showed, some were raised and some weren't.

A: Some of those buildings might have been historic landmarks and were therefore taken out of discussion.

Q: Have you looked at how many of the penthouses have been built to the current height limit?

A: Most of the penthouses now are really just for mechanical systems. It's not our best feature; many rooftops here are ugly, though the good thing is no one is blocking your view. Even if there was a minimal height increase we could enforce making rooftops more attractive, perhaps by relocating mechanical systems.

Q: Does the economic feasibility analysis look at impacts on road networks, infrastructure costs, snow, maintenance, etc. Have we considered this?

A: Sort of. Our infrastructure capacity is being strained (water, sewer, roads). It does recognize it, therefore without investment coming from the occupancy of more spaces, we will continue to have that strain. Changes in property values and revenue would help finance these things. If we could capture more of the city's workforce, we may be able to alleviate some of the financial pressure.

Q: You had said historic buildings were left out of the discussions, is that the case even for approach #4?

A: I believe we excluded them, but a lot of the views were from a distance so it was hard to tell.

(Clarification: Historic landmarks are excluded altogether from the modeling study. None of the approaches model historic landmarks with increased height.)

Q: Columbia Heights was not included in the model but it could be, should it be?

A: We didn't pick every area for the study, but in the future when we may go more in depth we would look in areas in particular like Columbia Heights.

Q: The modeling shows a lot of uniformity (in height). What about the possibility of planned use developments for some based on density?

A: Perhaps we hold an auction giving the highest height to the prettiest buildings. Also not changing the Floor Area Ratio, we have heard good suggestions.

Q: Mr. Acosta brought up the idea that the streets would be affected. What are you doing to model at the street level? To get a sense of the height changes?

A: Great idea, perhaps a walking tour so we can look at shadows, looking at the street to height ratios...let me think about it.

Clarification: The collection of street-level images show how the city streets and pedestrian experience is affected by taller heights. That is the intent—to show impacts of taller heights at the street level. The F Street images are examples of shadow impacts.

Q: I've been led to believe that historically no buildings were supposed to go no higher than the height of the Capitol building, but the topography here will vary the height of buildings if given a specific height limit. The buildings here don't give us the feeling of a rapidly-paced NYC; the horizontal city is easy going. Going in the opposite direction, we lose that country feel. Why not leave the center city alone and change the heights further away from the center of the city.

A: One of the things about Paris, no one can afford to live there. We don't want that here.

Q: Did the study include an environmental point of view? Environmental impact studies? Does the Height Act allow for us to make more space for trees?

A: In short no. But we do have a sustainability plan that did quickly look at shadows and their effects on trees.

Clarification: The District's Comprehensive Plan also has increasing tree canopies as a goal

Q: Let's look at the ecology in Washington. One of the things we want is a greener DC. However, how can we achieve these efforts by increasing density, reducing air quality, carbon emissions?

A: Well we're not adding new impervious surfaces since all changes were made to existing buildings.

Clarification: The District's Green Building Act requires that sustainable features are built into new buildings. The District's Sustainable DC plan has 20-year goals and targets in several areas, including to improve air quality & reduce carbon emissions.

Comment: I love the tree canopy on Military Rd. Let's make K Street more like Military Rd? We need to decrease the CO2 blanket.

Comment: I would like to find out more info. It seems like there needs to be much more research. It's not just fire safety anymore. Every person that comes, comes with a carbon footprint; we don't have the infrastructure here to support these people.

Q: I am failing to understand the affordability aspect. Are you telling me that a landlord will all of the sudden provide affordable housing because of more space in his building?

A: I can't prevent a way for people to move here, but if we supply housing, housing prices will go down. We have inclusionary zoning as well—we decide (DC), not federal, how affordability will be addressed with more study.

Q: I'm thinking of local needs-population growth. Why do this? We're growing, lots of people moving here.

A: About 1100 people a month, 2.17% a year between 2008 and 2012. Mayor's sustainability strategy projects that in 20 years we could potentially meet our max population. Offices are taking up a lot less room, but residences not necessarily. One of the assessments we will be using is MWCOG population projections.

Q: How far below peak population are we now?

A: Post WW2 our greatest population was 850,000 - that included temporary housing for military and the barracks.

Q: Can our current carrying capacity accommodate population growth?

A: In the short term we can but not necessarily in the future. We want to accommodate those in the future.

Q: How can changes in the Height Act affect infrastructure systems (utilities)?

A: Climate related extreme weather events have contributed to extreme weather events, but we are undergrounding our utilities. We're going to have to make infrastructure improvements, enabling us to grow.

Comment: People are talking about our skyline, all I see is a pancake with a pencil. 130-200 doesn't make a difference to me. The clusters provide the most reasonable option. It lends a lot of variety to skyline.

Comment: Every time you double or triple the size of the building, you double or triple revenues and therefore support low and moderate income families at practically no cost.

Q: What is considered low density?

A: R-1 to R-4

Q: Why did House Committee on Government Reform—Darrell Issa—suggest this, was this out of thin air? Was he responding to a city request?

A: He requested that NCPC and the City analyze this matter last year when we discussed penthouse occupancy.

Comment: You are talking about "how we feel," well how crowded the sidewalk is affects how I feel.

Q: We talked about the simplicity of the Height Act, but it lacks language as to what the Height Act will actually say.

A: That is what the draft recommendation period is for, we don't have any language yet, until we hear from everyone at these meetings.

Q: I know you are combined with NCPC, but I feel you all have different interests. Will there be one or two reports at the end of this?

A: Marcel: We are trying to have just one report.

- Q: In response to the option of clusters-as a person who lives in a high density area, I don't think it's fair to allow low density areas that have the enjoyment of living in low density areas to continue to live in that way. It is not fair to people like me that I need to be subject to waking up next to a box.
- A: Well not everyone who lives in a high density necessarily sees density as a bad thing, they see it as a good thing, access to more goods and services, etc.
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- Q: What about the notion that increasing heights does not alleviate prices, however raises prices over all?
- A: No one is arguing that high rise is housing is the most affordable type of housing but from an economic standpoint, more supply will allow for more affordable housing.

TUESDAY, AUGUST 13 | DC OFFICE OF PLANNING

WORKBOOK COMMENTS

Staff did their best to transcribe all handwritten comments. Originals are available upon request at the offices of the National Capital Planning Commission.

Peter Kauffmann | Dupont Circle, DC

Approach 1: Please tell HPRB to stop chopping floors off of buildings.

Approach 2: As long as we protect viewsheds, I'm totally okay with raising things.

Approach 3: Again as long as we add in viewshed protections, I'm okay with all of the suggestions. I especially like the London approach from the Phase 1 meetings of having protected corridors.

Approach 4: I'd like to see more economic analyses before this is done. Maybe this is the year 2100-2200 discussion?

Sarah Gutschow | Columbia Heights, DC

Economic Feasibility Analysis: It seems to me that increases in height as proposed would have minimal positive impacts on housing affordability. The city is not lacking in either space nor housing in residential areas, it is lacking in transportation options in reaching far-out neighborhoods and is further lacking in safety and police presence in those areas. Changes to the zoning code and additional investment in infrastructure would have much more impact. Furthermore, the zoning code should be changed to increase the number of mixed-use buildings and diversity of uses in current neighborhoods. Additionally, there is no evidence that housing is more affordable in cities and neighborhoods with high rise buildings, e.g. midtown Manhattan or Rosslyn. The height increase would primarily benefit commercial developers of office and other space in downtown areas. Although, I would support a modest increase in heights in high growth areas, but I don't trust the city government to stop with modest, incremental increases.

GENERAL SESSION QUESTION & COMMENTS

The following summarizes questions asked at the August 13 meeting. All responses were provided by Harriet Tregoning, Director, DC Office of Planning, unless otherwise noted.

Q: Could you speak about translating feet to stories?

A: 130 ft in Washington is about 10-11 stories; in some buildings, it's 12 stories, although they feel kind of cramped. One feature of Washington buildings is somewhat low ceiling heights because developers cram as many stories into buildings as possible.

Q: Part of the reason for this study is the economic viability for the city, but you didn't address that here.

A: We have done some preliminary analysis of the economic impacts, although we're trying to take these approaches and look at the capacity that gets generated, and that's part of the analysis that we haven't completed yet. We understand that if changes are made we have to justify them, and for that we need not just one number but a variety of scenarios, which we will be including in our final recommendations transmitted to Congress.

Q: The images that you presented were very helpful, but they were monotonous. In reality, raising the height limit would allow some buildings to be high, but not all buildings. Instead of having all 225-foot buildings, we'd have more variation.

A: You make a good point. One consideration for us is that one of the beauties of the current Height Act is that it is very simple. The real issue for us is how we do this: the timing, the approaches etc. Whatever federal change we made would have to be fairly simple.

Q: You said you were not looking at raising heights in the residential areas and neighborhoods. You also mentioned historic districts and places not specified in the comp plan for growth. There are many places that are historic districts that you still designated in red, including public schools, recreational centers, and possibly creating a canyon around H Street. What was the basis for designating these areas?

A: What we're trying to do is look at the comp plan designation, not make up new areas where growth might happen. What we have corrected is that we've also taken off the table institutional and public facility uses. What you're seeing as an impact is more extensive than what the actual impact would be.

Q: When you build up these buildings and fill them with people, what happens when they come down to the streets? Also, DC is on a former swampland, which creates some additional considerations. We had a big sinkhole downtown once. Do we have the capacity to support the extra weight?

A: We do certainly have the issue of aging infrastructure, although nearly every American city has heights taller than ours and they have people stepping out onto the streets and enjoying the city. Regarding infrastructure, we are already constrained without any further growth. One of our objectives is for any incremental development to pay for improvements to infrastructure. Additionally, Washington has a huge number of people commuting in from other jurisdictions; if we can accommodate more residents within the city, we would have less traffic and less commuting.

Q: How much has the federal and local government in the region invested in Metrorail?

A: A lot. There is a commitment on the part of the federal government to do more which has been intermittently met since that commitment was made.

Q: I'm happy for this visual presentation, and frustrated by the lack of the economic impact presentation. Visually, it seems to demonstrate that the 130 feet is adequate, and I don't understand why we would change it other than that Darrell Issa has asked us to look at it. We're pretty much at capacity on road, transit, etc. and more population will be mostly singles and empty nesters, which does not create a healthy tax base. I don't know who is pressing for these changes.

A: Part of the point we tried to make in this presentation is that in this city we have already made decisions not to go to the limits allowed, for a variety of reasons. So it may not be in the places that are most appropriate for the height to be, but we are looking at what the federal Height of Buildings Act would allow us to do. I ask people to take the long view, because while we aren't out of land for development now, way before the next 100 years, we will be. But that is a justification that has to be made for any change, which will be part of the next phase of public meetings, which will include draft recommendations.

Q: I served on a committee with Congressman Issa for 16 years. In listening to this presentation, what occurs to me is that this isn't about Congress or the federal government; this is about the choices made by the city government, since you haven't reached the height limits under the federal act. My concern is whether or not the city government is looking for this opportunity to spur development using the Congressional letter as a catapult.

A: The basic reason is that we believe in the District of Columbia that it would be good for us to have autonomy over the height of our buildings and our city without having to ask the federal government.

Q: I don't think we should have any increase within 2 or 3 miles of the Washington monument, which would solve that problem. Secondly, a lot of questions were raised about zoning plans. Things still aren't going to be very tall unless the Zoning Commission decides to get rid of these.

A: We do have a zoning rewrite that's in front of the Zoning Commission now, but it doesn't address any of these issues about changing building heights. We're not changing building heights with the zoning rewrite, and we're certainly not getting rid of those other limits. We wanted to show what capacity we currently had for growth under the existing height act.

Q: To what degree did the study team consider time or timing, if at all, in the implementation of this?

A: Time is a hugely important factor. If the heights were allowed to increase by federal action, what would happen to the value of property if we suddenly released a ton of development potential? It wouldn't be good for the economy and wouldn't be good to the tax base.

Comment: I wanted to reinforce your observation about allowing more people who work in the city to live in the city, and accommodating those people and making it more affordable. Both of those things should be core questions as we go forward and do deeper analysis.

Q: I heard about developers wanting an increase in the height act. I'm a homeowner, and I see the value of not having more density. I feel like there was a lot of negativity towards developers, but homeowners would also not want heights increased since they would have lower real estate values.

A: It is true, that when we first went to a focus group of developers, their initial reaction was no because they could maintain their current real estate values. Changes would affect the value of their property. But more height options might allow for more graceful buildings, different price points for rents, etc.

Q: How do you determine whose viewshed gets impaired and whose doesn't? And what are the boundaries for Congress Heights?

A: We drew ovals. We didn't try to be neighborhood-specific, and wanted to show mostly what it would look like. We would do a much more careful analysis as part of a Comp Plan update. The city has city-wide inclusionary zoning, where 8-10% of new housing that would get developed would be permanently affordable, so the idea is partially that we would be able to get more affordable housing through affordable zoning. High rise construction is not the cheapest construction, and our cheapest housing is not going to be the three floors added on top, but by increasing supply we can help ameliorate the pressures on demand.

Q: As a renter, a key concern for me is affordable rentals and housing. When I looked at the website, it said "no impact on bringing down rent."

A: This gets to the point I raised earlier: since we're talking about tall buildings, where the construction costs are highest, we're not expecting the units produced to be the cheapest in the city.

Q: I agree that this is an issue from the city, but I believe that the city should have the right to make its own determination as to what its height should be. We've been under Congress for a number of years, and I think the citizens in this room should have the opportunity to decide. My question is on the presentation of the different opportunity, how is that going to go to Congress? And how will Congressman Issa react?

A: I don't know how Congressman Issa will react. We can't construct an incredibly complicated scheme, but that's what you guys are here for. We gave you four options; maybe you'll give back some amalgamation of them, or some combination, to help us make a recommendation. Once we have more public meetings on draft recommendations, we'll also have a NCPC Commission hearing, and you'll be able to weigh in there. NCPC and the city will be responding to Chairman Issa on this, and we hope there will be things we can agree on and we look forward to the opportunity to make some recommendations.

Q: Will the citizens of the community be able to vote on where the buildings should be, or will it be an eminent domain kind of situation?

A: The reason we went back to the Comprehensive Plan, which was the product of several years of public planning and participation, is that we want to listen to the citizens on where growth should go. Before anything happened in your neighborhood there would have to be a zoning change, which is also a public process. There would be lots of opportunities for public involvement, and the intention is that we do this together.

Q: I'm all for increasing local autonomy, but if we do increase the heights of buildings to a higher level, what jurisdiction does the city have on requiring affordable developments, and will that increase the ability to have lower rents on housing?

A: With market rate construction we also get permanent affordability under the city-wide inclusionary zoning. Other things the city would naturally want to pay for with additional development would be additional infrastructure, transportation, parks. We do our business on a very small tax base because federal buildings and non-profits that own land are off the tax roll. The only way we can be financially responsible is to have the solid residential population, and this is the first decade in which we've seen population growth since WWII.

Q: I'm concerned that allowing taller buildings in certain parts will negatively impact development in other parts that really need it. Currently the height act allows growth in parts of the city that wouldn't otherwise get it. What is the current supply of office and residential space, and how much capacity do we have under existing regulations, and when will they be exhausted?

A: We will have answers to those questions when we are ready to make a recommendation, but we didn't want to wait to show the visual analysis because part of what people are concerned about is the visual impact on the city. But those are exactly the concerns to be raised as we proceed with the recommendations.

Q: I'm the ANC chair for eastern H St, and it makes me very nervous to see that horizontal red line on H St. It is the definition of how you can overwhelm the residential neighborhood, if the added height is put in there. I don't understand how that area got in there, since it seems like an inappropriate place for height. Also, if the existing sidewalk is too small to absorb current foot traffic, how will it accommodate more density?

A: It's not intended to say this is where height will go—we're looking at the Comp Plan to see what might be included, but also what is definitely excluded.

Comment: There isn't enough information to participate in this discussion. It lacks science and research. We asked the same questions last week at a public meeting, and we didn't even get into infrastructure and environmental impacts. There is no debate here, and there is no discussion. I can't believe this process, and I can't believe the hype around it.

Q: In addition to that, I was very excited to see the word periphery on one of these slides—developing the periphery. If indeed we need more capacity, why aren't we looking at putting that capacity on the periphery?

A: The areas we modeled include areas on the periphery, but you will note that the capacity of those areas based on the Future Land Use map in the Comp Plan isn't an enormous amount, although looking exclusively at the periphery is certainly a possibility.

One thing we're not talking about is the commercial/residential split, and building more houses doesn't mean the prices are going to go down. Also, developers don't look for the long-term money; they look for the short-term money. Whatever the city decides to do, the point is that the money comes from people who don't live here and don't have a long-term interest. Before you make any serious decisions, think about the motivations behind this.

Q: I would like to know at what point our public testimony will become part of the public record. I would also like to know when we will have a discussion of the full impacts.

A: We will be doing another round of public meetings in September. This is not a decision to change the heights of buildings in DC; this is about a decision to change a federal law that limits the heights of buildings. We won't be changing any buildings at all without a public process. This is about whether we have the right to look at the heights of buildings. We're not going to be do all those analyses just to ask Congress for the right to make those decisions ourselves.

Q: You mentioned in passing the Intelsat site in NW DC for the economic feasibility analysis. Are you assuming that the building will be demolished?

A: We're not making any assumptions. We're looking at whether that sort of location would be appropriate for additional height. That's something that we would look at locally. It's intended to be an illustrative site.

- Q: On the graphics, these aerial views just don't do much for understanding of the changes. I was wondering, why don't you have any view from Rosslyn?
- A: We didn't look at Rosslyn. We have Arlington Cemetery, and some aerials that might be equivalent to Rosslyn buildings. We have many more images on the online index that weren't presented today.
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Comment: Rosslyn is an example of busting out the heights. It's been huge success financially for Arlington County, but it's about the greatest collection of mediocre buildings ever put together.