Compiled Public Comments

Submitted at Phase One Public Meetings and via the Project’s Online Public Comment Portal.
Phase one public engagement for the Height Master Plan began on March 5, 2013 with a capacity crowd of over 200 people attending the *Heightened Conversations: Impacts of Building Heights in Capital Cities*. This NCPC Speaker Series event held at the National Archives featured a panel of international experts who explored the impacts of building heights in capital cities around the world. The session featured remarks from Congressman Darrell Issa, chairman of the House Committee on Oversight & Government Reform. This was concurrent with the launch of the Height Master Plan website, the principal mechanism for outreach and notification. The study-specific website details the study’s approach and includes related study resources, a curated blog, a library of media coverage and thought pieces, and an online public comment portal, in which nearly 100 individuals comments have been submitted from citizens throughout the US. Online comments have ranged from simple, two-sentence observations to submittal of full academic dissertations.

The online submissions are viewable at:


NCPC also commenced a digital and social media campaign, generating, monitoring, and engaging with contributors on Facebook and Twitter using the Twitter hashtag #HeightDC.

**Phase One Public Meeting Series**

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<th>Location</th>
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<td>Petworth Library (Ward 4)</td>
<td>Monday, May 13</td>
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<tr>
<td>MLK Central Library (Ward 2)</td>
<td>Saturday, May 18</td>
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<tr>
<td>National Capital Planning Commission (Ward 2)</td>
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<td>Savoy Elementary School (Ward 8)</td>
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As part of phase one outreach, four public meetings were hosted at locations throughout the city to bring the conversation related to the shape, form and charter of the city directly to the each of the District’s wards. By the end of the phase two public meeting series, all eight of the District’s wards will have been included. Each of the phase one meetings were presented as an open house format: representatives from NCPC and DCOP provided a brief overview of the study and guiding core principles, and then held an open Q&A session with attendees. The public was then invited to visit display board for more in-depth one-on-one conversations with NCPC and DC Office of Planning staff. Each meeting saw an audience of roughly 50-75 people, comprised mainly of DC residents.
While public opinions on changes to Washington building heights varied drastically—some public comments staunchly defended the existing skyline while others pushed for development to the magnitude of Manhattan and Dubai—several consistent themes arose at each of the meetings.

**Comments on Case Studies**

Attendees commonly questioned the selection of cities represented in the case studies; in particular, issues arose regarding the number of international cities chosen. This was often backed by a comment that as the nation’s capital, Washington, DC should compare itself to domestic cities as opposed to foreign ones. Overall, attendees seemed to need more information on what guided the choice of cities for case studies, and the purpose of the case study analysis—whether it was to model DC’s shape and character after these cities, find cities with similar existing conditions, or simply determine best practices.

**Comments on Core Principles**

At the public meetings, presenters, boards, and public comment cards guided much of the discussion towards the study’s three core principles. A general concern was that all three principles looked to the past instead of the future (i.e. they were designed to protect the history of the city rather than accommodate growth).

**Principle 1: Ensure the prominence of federal landmarks and monuments by preserving their views and setting.**
While commenters agreed on the symbolic importance of federal landmarks and monuments, there were several mentions that private buildings could not only be added to the skyline without competing with civic structures, but could even frame and enhance desired views or corridors.

**Principle 2: Maintain the horizontality of the monumental city skyline.**
Of the three core principles, Principle 2 was by far most controversial. Many respondents took issue with the term “horizontality,” both the emphasis on the concept and the definition of the word itself. A popular criticism was that even with taller buildings, a horizontal skyline was still achievable as long as the height increase was uniform. On the other hand, a few pointed out that DC’s existing skyline was not “horizontal” at all, but rather punctuated by structures such as the Washington Monument, and steeples, and generally following the area’s natural rolling topography.

**Principle 3: Minimize negative impacts to nationally significant historic resources, including the L’Enfant Plan.**
The third principle was relatively uncontested—the majority of responses agreed that preserving the L’Enfant Plan was important. This seemed to guide the design of streets and there were a number of questions as the L’Enfant plan prescribed or intended for building height in the future Washington City. Additionally, it was noted that Principle 1 and Principle 3 were similar in objective.

**Primary Discussion Points**

**Affordability**
Aside from the principles and case studies, affordability was perhaps the most discussed topic, both during the Q&A sessions, one-on-one conversations with staff at the discussion boards, in the public comment cards, and
online. However, there was quite a bit of debate over the relationship between building heights and affordability. There was certainly agreement on the already-high existing prices, but some argued height increases would do nothing to ameliorate the current conditions whereas others said relaxing of height limits was essential for affordability.

**Density**
Density, too, was consistently discussed at all four public meetings, although once again attendees were not in agreement on how it would be impacted by height changes. This may have been part of a larger confusion about population growth and real estate, and how building heights played into these issues. The relationship between density, affordability, and height could be clarified in future meetings and outreach.

**Home Rule**
Many residents were frustrated that a federal Height Act existed at all, which is to say that even if they did not necessarily support increasing the limit, they felt the city (through the District of Columbia Office of Planning, presumably) should have greater jurisdiction over building heights. There was also the perception that the Congressional interests were mutually exclusive to those of the city and its residents, with no common shared interests. Indeed, a major point of confusion was the scope of public outreach for the study: why is it a national conversation when it should be a matter of home rule? This perspective was not surprising as public meeting attendees were largely local residents and much of their concern was rooted in the desire for neighborhood protection.

Conversely, comments received via the online public comment portal reflected a greater acknowledgement of Washington’s shape and form as a significant contributor to Washington’s symbolic role as the nation’s capital.

**Federal Interest**
As the conversation was taken into the neighborhoods and online there was, perhaps unsurprisingly, little discussion at the meetings and online specifically regarding the federal interest in building heights; the majority of attendees self-identified as residents, and as such the comments rarely shared a federal stakeholder’s perspective.

Additionally, NCPC convened meetings with federal stakeholders both as Facilitated Discussion Groups and individually with leadership and staff of targeted federal agencies. At these sessions a great deal of conversation focused on impacts to future federal security and communications infrastructure, facility operations, mission implications, and historic, cultural and symbolic resources.

**Overview**
Residents at all four public meetings and online provided varying perspectives on whether the Height of Buildings Act should be modified or updated; however there was certain agreement that it has thus far played an important role in shaping the city’s character, and a unique character, at that.

All phase one public comments provided in person and on the web are compiled below, and will be included as an appendix in the final recommendations and master plan transmitted to Congress.
Staff did their best to transcribe all handwritten comments. Originals are available upon request at the offices of the National Capital Planning Commission.
WORKBOOK COMMENTS

J. / Petworth, DC

**Principle 1:** The Capitol, Washington Monument, Lincoln Memorial, and White House should remain prominent. Street level views are most important to me. Height can be increased along 16th Street, NW, Pennsylvania Avenue, North Capitol Street, New York Avenue, and Florida Avenue in a way that the White House and Capitol building, the Washington Monument, and many more historically significant buildings would remain prominent as viewed from the street.

**Principle 2:** Taller buildings can certainly coexist with our skyline. A horizontal skyline means “squat”.

**Principle 3:** Building heights should relate to L’Enfant streets and public space.

**What else should we be concerned about?**
The overall Height Act should be varied according to location with DC. NoMa, Mt. Vernon Triangle, and Capitol Riverfront neighborhoods should all get the nod for increased height.

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**Sandi / Petworth, DC**

**General:** I believe it is a great idea for DC to have a voice regarding building height restrictions. Spain is a great model for DC to emulate -- build taller buildings outside of viewpoints of historic landmarks and districts. It needs to be made clear to reiterate that this is just a study, and it doesn’t mean the city will be filled with 80-story buildings in the near future. Residents, specifically African Americans and minority groups, are fearful of what will become of our neighborhoods because we already see and feel the effects of current development. Taller buildings can coexist with our skyline but it shouldn’t affect the L’Enfant streets, or other historic buildings and landmarks.

**What else should we be concerned about?**

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**Matt / Truxton Circle, DC**

**General:** Horizontal skyline should be preserved to serve as backdrop for monuments.

Heights could go up to 200 feet as long as buildings in an area are of a consistent in height. People mostly object to unevenness (Cairo, V Street Pop-Up, Tour Montparnasse). Some protrusions are OK as long as architecturally interesting (1301 K Street is nice to spot among other buildings, but is just too plain). Taller buildings are already happening whether we like it or not (Rosslyn). This is a chance to bring benefits to the District and locate centrally (i.e.: Union Station) for more efficient transportation.

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**Jamie / Silver Spring, MD**

**General:** I think that the Heights in the L’Enfant plan should stay the same or only slightly higher. I think areas outside of L’Enfant should be higher around Metro and transit centers to allow for dense transit oriented development.

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**Joseph / Petworth, DC**

**General:** New York’s skyline, while attractive, tends to create a darker and colder community in the afternoons. DC is a vibrant welcoming city and I am concerned the city will lose this quality if there is a concentration of taller buildings along major corridors. Taller buildings will NOT lead to more affordable housing.

**Michael / Chinatown, DC**

**Principle 1:** Washington Monument and Capitol. NO; Private buildings may define the skyline (Rosslyn already does).
Principle 2: Yes; if well designed and placed in clumps it could be a plus to the skyline, district, and federal interests. Horizontal skyline means less focus in individual buildings with focus on monuments and parks.
Principle 3: Consider across the board increases in L’Enfant to keep horizontality (around 100 feet). Allow pockets outside the District core in graduate in height.

What else should we be concerned about? “New Mall” areas (i.e.: South Capitol Street) for placement of future monuments. Give the District the option (not obligation) to increase building height.

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Ashley | Park View, DC
General: People have to be able to afford living in the city. Increased supply equals decreased cost.

What else should we be concerned about?
Why did you pick international cities as basis of comparison? Atlanta, a southern city, might have made a better example. Better case studies in terms of population/industry mix.

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Carole | U Street, DC
General: Raising height limits: Positives – Fits sustainability plan; helpful if tied to affordable housing.
Dangers – Disturbs light, trees, street maintenance due to litter that accompanies density. Tourism has benefited from current unique skyline, which is low.

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Anne | Truxton Circle, DC
Principle 1: Most of the “views” people talk about you can only see from a car in the middle of the street. Building taller buildings on the sides of the street would not obstruct our “Grand Avenues”.

Principle 3: Some neighborhoods are nice -- they are less dense, but downtown in business districts taller buildings make sense. I know a lot of people think the opinions of “new residents” do not count --but I have been in DC since 2005, and I am not going away. I vote, I pay taxes, one day my kids will go to school here. My opinion counts! Most Americans couldn’t pick-out DC on a map. Trust me, the “horizontal skyline” means nothing to them. Why give so much weight to the feelings of tourists besides “Congress said so”?

What else should we be concerned about? I am not concerned about the federal government. I am a federal employee. True feds will be just fine. Let’s worry about affordability and the welfare of the people who live here.

What is Washington's postcard image today and in the future?
Why is horizontality a core principle? Nobody seems to know what it means.
Ibtihaal | NoMa/Riggs Park, DC

Station 2: Philadelphia is horrible. Leave DC the way it is! There’s been enough change over the last 5 years. The historic monuments, neighborhoods, residents are most important image now and for the future. All of our historical monuments are prominent. The views of the National Monuments, The US Capitol, Lincoln Memorial, Jefferson, and the DC skyline. Sunlight and Vitamin D is very important. Private buildings should NEVER become prominent landmarks – EVER! Newer buildings cannot coexist with our historical skyline due to the grand architecture. Build in the outskirts.

New buildings heights will block views from Children’s Hospital. Increased height will change design of our great capitol building, and shadow the Smithsonian museums. Security is a concern. More buildings will lead to overpopulation. EMS and police will be overburdened.

What else should we be concerned about?
These new buildings will not offer affordable housing. Metro already is overcapacity and crowded. Height will change symbolism of our city in a bad way. Tourists will not see as much as they could (and they bring lots of $$$ to our city).

What is Washington’s postcard image today and in the future:

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Leon | Chevy Chase, DC

General: Taller buildings would in my opinion impact all of the items listed. I feel the current building heights are secure for DC’s skyline. Washington DC is the capital of the free world. That being said, we should be ourselves and learn from other growing vertical metropolitan cities. I don’t feel that the buildings could be set far enough back to protect our beautiful skyline. Zoning already allows for taller structures.

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Zillah | Petworth, DC

Principle 1, 2, 3: All monuments (including Frederick Douglas Home), and high points of the city -- should not be blocked (including Cardozo High School view). Building can coexist with a lot of study. The city’s open space should remain open.

What else should we be concerned about?
I am concerned about the tall buildings blocking the sunlight with green areas being spoiled around the city.

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Kedrick | Petworth, DC

General: The L’Enfant Plan and everything within it should be preserved. Private building should be a part of the skyline as long as they don’t compete with historic landmarks.
Casey | Shaw, DC
General: The principles set a tone of mitigating the negatives of a taller DC. No info is provided on the potential upside. Seems like an opportunity to frame a positive view of any changes. The principles seem sound but exclude concepts of accommodating new growth, maintaining affordability, etc.

The skyline is referenced several times but most important part of DC’s current form is inviting pedestrian realm and historic building stock. My biggest concern is the razing of old building stock to go taller and loss of pedestrian environment. Combine new height limit with form-based codes? Increased historic preservation? DC’s skyline + street frontage = competitive advantage

What else should we be concerned about?
If height allowed outside L’Enfant’s core city, is there a risk of creating another downtown and the historic core withering (again)?

None | Petworth, DC
General: Toronto is a good case study city
Preserve all of the prominent buildings/landmarks on The Mall:
- National Cathedral to Basilica
- View of Silver Spring
- Need to provide more rooftop terraces in multifamily buildings
- Neighborhoods with tall development

Principle 1: AFRH – preserve golf course other considerations
- Office market risk
- Retail market risk
- Housing market risk

Adam | Truxton Circle, DC
General: Protect the most important views + cluster tall blds. near transit outside those viewsheds
Today’s postcard: very small number of civic structures
Future postcard: more diverse skyline with clusters of height in River East + north of Fla Ave.

Principle 1: Capitol, Old Post, Wash Mon, Nat’l Cathedral, Basilica @ CUA
Civic structures are important as this is the nat’l capitol, but far more happens here than govt. Private buildings in the skyline show that real people live + work in DC.

Principle 2: Of course! As the model cities show, views + sections of a skyline can easily coexist with taller, more classic modern bldgs. Horizontal is not at all important to me.

Principle 3: No relation to any of those items need affect the heights of bldgs. Near transit outside the L’Enfant City.

What else should we be concerned about? Economics! The Height Act severely limits supply + drives office + residential rents up, pricing more + more out of the city + restricting access to the Capital. As the democratic bastion of the world, allowing the majority of families who want to live here to be systematically excluded borders on a national embarrassment.
**Shayan | Columbia Heights, DC**

**Most important views:** Views along The Mall, Union Station to the Capital, Tidal Basin to Monument and Capitol

I don’t think it is important to have only civic buildings define DC. Other building such as Rosslyn already show up in the civic skyline.

Taller buildings can coexist with civic buildings. It is important to preserve the Mall and surrounding areas. But having taller buildings in the distance should work fine.

Historic neighborhoods should be preserved. Places such as Capitol Hill should remain horizontal.

I don’t think it should be considered a bad thing to have large commercial buildings. Companies and successful business are part of America.

**What else should we be concerned about?**
Rising rents and housing costs are pricing out many people. Increasing supply would help.
A meeting exercise invited attendees, using sticky notes, to write their comments and affix them to a poster listing broad categories that strategic changes to the Height Act could affect (both positively and negatively). The following is a compilation of those contributions listed by broad categories.

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**STATION EXERCISE: HOW DOES BUILDING HEIGHT PLAY INTO THESE ISSUES?**

*Sustainability*
- Plants and people need more sunshine, less shade.
- Because very tall residential buildings cannot be well served by metro, which is at capacity, vehicle parking will be necessary—the ability to provide enough underground parking for very tall residential buildings at a reasonable price is unlikely—therefore surrounding residential communities will suffer from congestion, auto pollution and over parking.

*Affordability*
- Taller buildings will be more expensive—thus less affordable for businesses and residents. Transportation—DC is limited by the current metro system which is operating at its max at most times—no further capacity—taller buildings will exacerbate this problem.
- More expensive units provide tax revenue to support low income units. Cities need money to provide services.
- Higher buildings have potential to increase affordability through filtering (individual new buildings will be expensive but will relieve pressure elsewhere)

*Transportation*
- Taller buildings have potential for making transportation more efficient by concentrating population at transit nodes.
- Build high at Metro sites. Arlington did it. We have half the Metro stations in the system and have no smart use.

*Symbolism*
- You can see the fireworks from anywhere in the city! Don’t mess up the skyline!
- Example: tall buildings could diminish the White House if built along 16th St.
- Diversity of architecture
- Living cities have jobs, life on the street, residents downtown, and recognizable signature. From Virginia, our sight right now is of a pancake stack with a pencil in the middle.

*Housing Options*
- Removing restrictions will by definition increase options.
STA\(\text{TION EXERCISE CONTINUED: HOW DOES BUILDING HEIGHT PLAY INTO THESE ISSUES?}\)

**Walkability**
- Walkability is not about how high the building goes—it is about what goes on at ground level, first 2-3 levels where people live.
- Walkable streets + pedestrian scale = DC’s character and competitive advantage

**Security**
- The more people, the more people on the street, the more people/eyes on the street, the safer the street
- Very tall buildings could be targets for terrorists.

**Infrastructure**
- Developers have a purpose but shouldn’t be allowed to go forth unconstrained. Use developers to help pay for new/improved infrastructure. Pay to play? More $ to buy more height

**Economic Vitality**
- Stagnate and die.
- A 60-story tower provides/houses 10,000 jobs daily, 17,000 construction jobs, earnings of $600M at year in direct and indirect salary, taxes of $45M for real estate and income taxes to pay for parks, schools, and infrastructure.

**Density**
- Increased height \(\rightarrow\) increased density = ugly city views, increased commuter time/gridlock, increased crime, increased service needs, increased taxes, lower quality of life. Increased height + density = increased income for developers and realtors.
- Increased height = greater density. Our density is only about ¼ of Paris’. Density = smart growth, walkability, places to congregate, less crime (eyes on the street), fewer services required of people in high rises. Diversification of tax base—income taxes on the wealthy and real estate taxes, pay to schools and city services.

**General/Other**
- Surrounding neighborhoods profit/benefit from more people, stronger retail because more customers, entertainment options, food and beverage choices.
GENERAL SESSION QUESTION & COMMENTS
While the May 18 meeting was not recorded or transcribed, the audience asked the following questions to the project planners during the opening session.

- Given that NCPC and DC are stressing the horizontality of the city, why are we doing the study?
- Did Congressman Issa’s request come with money or was it an unfunded mandate?
- What District does Congressman Issa come from? What type of area is Issa’s district (how dense)?
- Have you looked at how building heights affect neighboring jurisdictions? Are you coordinating with neighboring jurisdictions?
- Who is the Commission (who do NCPC’s Commissioners represent)?
- In what ways will the results of the study become public? Will it be in the Federal Register?
- DC used to be about vistas into nature. But now the neighboring jurisdictions are building above the tree lines... So, I think the study should take into account that as they get taller, the horizontality of the skyline becomes less important.
- If the Height Act isn’t broken, why change it?
- You should dig out the Rosslyn (building heights) lawsuit. There’s a lot of information there. Arlington isn’t following the resultant MOA ...it prohibits signs from facing the Mall.
- Higher buildings aren’t necessary. If the goal is density, it can be accomplished in other ways.
- Residents, particularly low-density residential neighborhoods like in Ward 3 are opposed to higher buildings in the residential areas. Therefore the easiest way to accommodate more density is to loosen the Height Act. So we should focus on changing the Height Act.
- Isn’t the Office of Planning under the Deputy Mayor for Economic Development? And isn’t GSA selling public buildings? Therefore the study should look into how this privatization movement might impact the Height Study: E.g. if buildings in the Monumental Core are going to become private, what are we protecting?
- What are the height implications of the L’Enfant Plan?
- The study should look at the implications of high rise federal buildings near the Washington Monument.
- If you recommend higher buildings are you going to be looking at issues of form and quality?
WORKBOOK COMMENTS

Dan Miller | SW Waterfront, DC
General: Height limits should be significantly weakened. It drives-up rents, both residential and commercial. It contributes to a boring skyline. It prevents interesting architecture. I am in favor of a general loosening across the board. At a minimum the act should be relaxed beyond the L’Enfant core (i.e.: Petworth, Tenley, Anacostia, Navy Yard). This is a no-brainer. Chicago, NY, and SF, all show that private buildings can be part of a great skyline. No need to exclude them here in DC.

Mary Fraker | Capitol Hill, DC
General: I suggest investigating the possibility of a “Tysons Corner-like” redevelopment (both in terms of height + density) on the eastern edge of the Anacostia River. It would keep the additional height and density out of the L’Enfant City and it would also shorten commutes for those living in the eastern exurbs.

None / None
Case Studies: Edinburgh, Amsterdam, Prague, and Dublin. These cities are not included in the case studies, but each should be. They are especially important as cities that care about their form -- but are not capitals of the free world.

Stephen Crim | Logan Circle, DC
Principle 1: Allowing cities to enliven; cities are not museums. Of the 3 principles, #1 and #3 are important to me. Washington Monument, Capitol, Lincoln, Jefferson memorials are each very important views. White House. Private buildings should be allowed to become landmarks.

Taller buildings can coexist because they make skylines interesting. Also, why must everything “coexist” in a harmonious way? Juxtaposition and contrast can be beautiful.

“Horizontal Skyline” means “boring” to me.

I don’t yet have strong opinions about the questions w/ Principle #3, but I do like the design of tall buildings along parks and open space. Like along 5th Avenue/Central Park West in NYC. Height really only affects the “other considerations” if you expand the conversation to density. If we include density, then height can be positive for affordability, sustainability, housing options, economic vitality, and so on. Also, density outside of the DC central business district could help with the transportation congestion that comes with peak-direction commutes. Of course, density does not instantly translate to affordability, and we should not make exaggerated claims that removing the height act will improve affordability; in fact, removing the height act might affect these issues negatively.

What is Washington’s postcard image today and in the future:
Michael Aiello | Eckington/NoMa, DC
General: Extra height often means empty streets. Look at Charlotte, Atlanta, and downtown LA.

The “bowl” mentioned; with taller buildings outside the L’Enfant City; is already here naturally: except the entire city is the bowl and reinforced by the surrounding jurisdictions pop-up, (Rosslyn, Bethesda, Silver Spring, etc.).

Rosslyn helps define our horizontal city, let them do what they want.

We would love to see how this could work. Initially, this make sense like one-off reviews of buildings, which makes the approval process less predictable.

Should prominent landmarks become private buildings in Washington’s skyline? yes, Old Post Office

Should a regional study include Arlington, Bethesda, Silver Spring, etc.? I happen to like knowing where flat DC ends and MD/VA begins.

Let Virginia and Maryland build-up. It sharpens the distribution and beauty of our horizontal city

What is Washington’s postcard image today and in the future?
Taller buildings mean nice views and high prices. NYC/SF have tall buildings and are pretty darn expensive.

What else should we consider?
Expand study to region. Perhaps just inside the beltway. Any urban area (Arlington, Bethesda, Silver Spring, etc.)

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None | None
General: You need to be aware that any mention of changing permissible heights potentially freezes development in the areas most likely to see changes (on edges of the city). No landowner will see if they think they will be missing a windfall.

Create early statements to confirm expectations about what likely impact will be in density (as opposed to height)?

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Sarah Gutschow | Columbia Heights, DC
General: I like the horizontality of DC, it makes the city very unique compared to almost every other city.

What is Washington’s postcard image today and in the future?
Similar to now, but with just more landmarks in NE, SE, and SW.

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Fredrick Harwood | Shaw, DC
General: A city’s livability and walkability has nothing to do with height. It has everything to do with what is going on at street-level. The setbacks, the open space, the interesting storefront windows, and plazas, retail choices, eyes watching the street. A city’s livability depends on street-level -- our street-level life on K, I, and L streets is sad. No setbacks, just "Kleenex" and bread boxes. Imagination limited by height limits.

The new Marriott, the "Kleenex" boxes at the old convention center site, built-out the property lines. A waste of space and opportunity.

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Eleanor Kelly Budio | Georgetown, DC
General: How will buildings height restrictions and/or changes to the DC Height Act impact historic districts and historic national landmarks?
**Hilary Malson | Shepherd Park, DC**

**General:** Thanks for hosting the meeting! This is very much a home rule issue and while I do believe Congress should have a say in the monumental core, the city via DCOP should direct height laws. I fully support that relaxing to the federal height of building act.

Washington’s horizontality is unique and an essential aspect to the sense of livability in the city. The character is immediately palpable - out of town guests always notice it favorably.

Density and horizontality can coexist creatively (visit Paris). Let’s do this thing!

The prominence of civic structures is a great. I love our English, cathedral-town look that this resembles - but does not need to be restricted to civic structures. The spire of Georgetown University is an example of this, and it could be joined by a few other similarly iconic private structures in the future. Private buildings can take on community significance.

What else should we consider? My only concern is the perception that raising the height limit will make DC more affordable. That’s a Band-Aid resolution, not a solution -- it will hold off rising housing prices for a period of time. Not sure how to solve this problem of affordability, but it must be done.

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**Richard Busch | Dupont Circle, DC**

**General:** We are the capital of the US; we do not have to look like every other city. Indeed, our 1791 plan is the basis of our unique look.

The horizontal nature of the L’Enfant City and the topographic bowl, at least on the DC side must be preserved.

The economic study tis critically important because of the notion that increased height will provide opportunity for more affordable housing. It will be important for OP to demonstrate how this is true.

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**John A. Williams | Foggy Bottom, DC**

**General:** Include the National Cathedral in protected areas. Best to exclude all of NW DC from any change.

1. Consider clusters of tall buildings in Anacostia and in Northeast -- east of Minnesota and South Dakota Avenues.
2. Who is behind proposed change?

Avoid succumbing to pressures from developers and the latest fads in the planning profession.

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**Sophia Liu | Columbia Heights, DC**

**General:** It is great that there are these public meetings and forums to get the public involved. However, I would suggest outreach efforts that can have an even greater impact by making information available beyond the digital. Flyers and ANC outreach might be ideas to reach other district residents.

Federal point of view vs. District point of view > important point to differentiate between the process and objectives where they overlap and don’t.

Relate effects of height to outlook/goals/needs of city. Principles of urban design balanced by the need of the city (goals/topics set independent height as different way to look at the issues).

**What else should we consider?** If heights do change in DC zoning, a phasing process that allows assessment and studies would be interesting to look at.
John M | Cardozo, DC
General: I believe that there is an overemphasis on aesthetic concerns and an under-emphasis on the more important ways that the issue intersects with local economic development and housing affordability. As DC grows - 1,100 people per month -- we can either make room or standby as housing costs get pent-up. In the last decade, DC has become a market (like SF and NYC) where increased housing demand leads to higher prices rather than increased supply. The worst crucial issue is an area’s affordability is whether it can expand supply. One note I wince when defenders of height limits laud it for “spreading development around”. That is synonymous with expanding the footprint of needlessly expensive areas, rather than preserving zones of affordability. The economic and housing consequences of height are much more important than the aesthetics concerns of the type of people who show up to these meetings.

Beth Curcell | Hill East, DC
General: The Anacostia Waterfront Initiative (AWI) is a major planning document similar to the comp plan and entailed many public meetings and work by OP. This important plan appears to have been completely ignored as a guiding principle. For example, high rise buildings in London are cited as a possible guide to changes in the Height Act. The AWI Plan needs to be incorporated as a planning principle.

Now high-rise residential buildings may or may not offer lower rents, depending on construction costs, quality, and/or government subsidy.

What else should we consider? Anacostia Waterfront Initiative Plan.

Clark Larson, AICP | Dupont Circle, DC
General: I understand the importance of the federal skyline on viewsheds, photos, movies, etc. Yet, I am more interested in how increased height limits can respond to the street level experience in the city. That is how I experience the city directly.

What else should we consider? Greater local economic development in surrounding neighborhoods with Height limits. Differential in federal height limit and existing building heights (existing potential).

Matt Kroneberger | Columbia Heights, DC
General: Nobody wants Rosslyn. Many of your case study cities have huge issues with not just affordable housing for low/middle income residents, but housing for all. As this city increases its urban population, it must capture the base as opposed to exporting it to Virginia or Maryland.

London’s view plan seeks to preserve views to civic landmarks such as St. Paul’s Cathedral. This approach applies to Washington, preserving views to the US Capitol or the Washington Monument. The San Francisco model analyzes affordability, taller (good), but also exports a tax base to the burbs as housing (re-imagine height /density).

What else should we consider? TOD has its opportunities here, yet developers are concentrating (naturally) their efforts in VA, MD for housing at Metro.

Ellen McCarthy | Chevy Chase, DC
General: I think it is great idea to provide a relatively small amount of extra height without increased density in Downtown DC. Encourage stepping back, but keeping the street-wall.
A meeting exercise invited attendees, using sticky notes, to write their comments and affix them to a poster listing broad categories that strategic changes to the Height Act could affect (both positively and negatively). The following is a compilation of those contributions listed by broad categories.

STATION EXERCISE: HOW DOES BUILDING HEIGHT PLAY INTO THESE ISSUES?

Livability
- I live in Rosslyn but work in DC and Rosslyn is a ghost town after 6pm, despite the very high daytime office population encased in skyscrapers.

Sustainability
- Height could affect weather. But green architecture could help to solve or find great solutions—green roofs, regulation with building height.

Visitor Experience
- What will be approved design and height of the old post office building?

Affordability
- (in response to another post) This guy is wrong about affordability. We need more supply to decrease prices.
- So far, it seems that the new tall “condo” buildings are primarily luxury/expensive—whether actual condos or high-end rentals. Building more of these—and taller—will not necessarily translate to significantly more affordable housing. I realize there is an affordable housing requirement for new construction, but developers generally do the minimum—and also are known to request waivers from those requirements.
- NYC has tall buildings... pretty darn expensive. (Same goes for SF)
- And yet even luxury buildings tend to decrease the level of housing prices by increasing supply.

Transportation
- Reasonable height limit increases should be focused around Metrorail station areas.

Symbolism
- The principles of baroque design that L'Enfant followed emphasize focal points featuring important and distinctive large buildings with the interstices filled by ordinary buildings of roughly uniform height. This is what we have now and it gives Washington a distinctive skyline second only to New York. Remember: if it ain’t broke, don’t fix it!

Housing Options
- Increasing Height Act limits threatens row house neighborhoods outside historic districts, particularly in combination with the already-existing inclusionary zoning rules.
STATION EXERCISE CONTINUED: HOW DOES BUILDING HEIGHT PLAY INTO THESE ISSUES?

Walkability
- Walkability and pedestrian scale has nothing to do with height—it has to do with what goes on at ground level—plazas, fountains, retail, entertainment venues, people watching, amount of foot traffic, places to sit.
- High buildings and walkability definitely do not go hand-in-hand because most cities that have embraced skyscrapers also embraced super-blocks, pedestrian bridges, etc.
- Away from the core/Columbia Heights, city isn’t very walkable—Ward 5, 7th St NW, single family homes—suburbs not city

Federal Presence
- The study appears focused on federal issues -- meaning that it relates to big-picture ideas. How and why would the federal position differ from the city’s (local) perspective? Perhaps that is to ask ourselves how we want our city to be seen nationally and internationally—what do we want our capital to say to the world about our priorities and ideas?

Economic Vitality
- I believe it is important to support economic development in neighborhoods beyond the existing downtown area. Allowing substantial increases in height limits in the monumental core could reduce the ability for underdeveloped neighborhoods to be reinvested in.
- What about economics? It’s important to address how height limits, which restrict supply, make the city less affordable in the long-term. Aesthetic arguments should also address how an aesthetic opinion changes affordability of office and residential space.

Density
- The medium density of DC is great for a full urban streetscape. Have you been to downtown Atlanta/LA/Charlotte lately? Dead zones.
- Can you increase the density of the city without losing the horizontal nature of the city?

General/Other
- What are the plans for historic districts?
WORKBOOK COMMENTS

Lindsey Dehenzel | U St./Shaw, DC

General: It is important to retain a historical core, but mixing in contemporary tall buildings to our skyline will only enrich our city. Right now, DC is comparable to Rome: all considered historic, shunning anything new and contemporary to be introduced to the city. But if we can shift our thought to one akin to Barcelona: a mixture of old and new, tall and low, historic and contemporary. The news that are important to me are driving on 395 from VA to DC and driving down 16th street toward DC. Taller buildings can coexist with our “skyline” with proper studies of key views in min. One of my other favorite views is driving down Rhode Island and seeing the taller buildings of Rosslyn in the backdrop.

Janet Quigley | Capitol Hill, DC

General: The Height Act helps, not hinders, the city’s success. Our uniqueness is our strength. Preserve our character and keep the Height Act city wide.

What else should we consider?

What is Washington’s postcard image today and in the future?

Liz | Columbia Heights, DC

Case Studies: Greater density is essential for all sustainability and housing affordability, and will help support a more extensive public transit network. Raising the height limit isn’t the only way to accommodate and support great density, but it would help. I’d like to see more tall buildings in residential and mixed-used areas, especially around metro stops (and eventually streetcar lines). The height limit can make it hard for apartment buildings to achieve economies of scale. My seven story condo buildings can’t afford an all-day front desk attendant, but we probably could if we were a twelve-story buildings. A mix of housing options—detached homes, row houses, small apartment buildings, large apartment buildings—should be the goal.

Christopher Brown | U St./Shaw, DC

General: If used as a device to reign in developers’ profit driven motives and acknowledge the cultural/tourism value of contemporary architecture, I think this study is valuable...otherwise I’m not sure it’s worth exploring. Shifting the focus of the city to non-federal buildings only has value if the city renews their interest in architecture as a significant cultural asset, not limiting the city’s assets to ONLY federal buildings.
What else should we consider?
I actually think the scope should be significantly reduced to focus the discussion more effectively. Presently, every issue relevant in greater Washington, DC is being brought into the fold of this discussion (affordability, environment, economic development, etc.).

What is Washington’s postcard image today and in the future?

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**Gary Malasky | Wesley Heights, DC**

*General:* The height limit gives the city a human scale. It also has had a great benefit in forcing investment outside the core.

The proposal that seems interesting is a modest increase in height but not the number of stories. This would allowed for a more varied roof line and some taller floors.

Should private buildings become skyline landmarks? Yes, if any are worthy. The Empire State Building is a prominent NY landmark. If there were a shorter building of equal architectural significance, a private building could become a skyline landmark.

To the extent greater height results in greater density, it should be in metro served areas.

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**Timothy Dowdy | Adams Morgan, DC**

*General:* Federal interest and local interests can be synthesized; the two are not mutually exclusive. “Local” DC needs an opportunity to grow, evolve, increase economic and urban vitality, and remain competitive, if at least from a sustainability standpoint. Increased building heights can strengthen all these elements at the “local” level. A strong city is in the best interests of the “federal” city, as this is the home and context for our government/democratic symbol. Taller buildings can “frame” desired views/corridors—taller buildings can actually increase the definition of these elements from a street-level experience! If the city is not afforded/allowed to increase height as a means to achieve its goals (growth and economics, sustainability, transit, sense of place) these benefits will go elsewhere where conditions are more hospitable.

What else should we consider?
PS—just because building heights increase, doesn’t automatically mean “big scary NYC.” Even a moderate increase cap (+5, +6 stories) could have/precipitate amazing and appropriately-scaled effects! Don’t be afraid!!
None / None

General: Part of the beauty of being in the US federal city is that civic structure/monuments do define the skyline and make DC distinctive. However, diversity in architectural style helps further define neighborhoods (e.g. Baltimore)—beautiful—eclectic architecture in good condition and bad. Also public spaces in DC should never be overshadowed.

What is Washington’s postcard image today and in the future?
GENERAL SESSION QUESTION & COMMENTS
The following summarizes questions asked at the June 4 public meeting.

Q: Is the committee looking at height requirements from a safety standpoint (e.g. fire systems?)
A: This is part of the deliberations the city would make as part of the zoning. However, not a federal issue.

Q: Should Arlington County be included in a height limit study?
A: This was debated a few decades ago, and coordination with and recommendations regarding Arlington County is not part of the scope of this study.

Q: NoMa radically redeveloped recently with a serious lack of park space—is this driven by federal height limits?
A: No; 20% of land in DC is parks and open space, more than most other cities. But would more height lead to more funding for infrastructure in the city (stormwater, transit, parks)? Yes.

Increasing heights will not necessarily better the architecture. Also, commercial areas are only one building wide on the avenues, and flanked by residential homes. Increasing height limits, even in only commercial areas, distinctly impacts the residential areas right next to them. As for affordability, taller buildings do not make real estate more affordable (e.g. NYC)

We need to consider non-economic values we would be affecting by changing building heights. Manhattan: taller buildings end up bringing more people onto the sidewalk at a frenetic pace trying to get things done and is unpleasant. We need to maintain the lower pace and quality of our streets, which makes it walkable and inviting to tourists.

The idea that federal government has any say in local affairs is odd; L’Enfant or federal buildings would not be affected by heights in Dupont or NoMa or other areas.

Q: What are the needs? We need to address this questions first: housing, commercial space, etc.
A: Entirely possibly that even if Congress allows higher limits, the city may not act for as long as 50 years or so. East end, West end, NoMa, Capitol Riverfront would not have been developed if higher buildings were allowed in the center of the city, which spread development out into other neighborhoods which has been very good for the city. Also, the point of the study is to address at what level the federal government should care.

DC is a classic example of Jane Jacobs. Only highest uses can remain in core, and innovative uses kind of get pushed out. I am concerned about intra-city sprawl; people want to be in central places.

Q: Has DC ever considered suing the federal government?
A: No.
Q: Don’t understand why federal interests have to be mutually exclusive to interests of the city and residents. Why can’t heights be used to enhance the L’Enfant city while allowing it to grow sustainably and remain competitive? Increased heights could be a real boon and draw for this place and solve a lot of issues simultaneously.

A: Our study does not discount the idea of shared interests. Also, the economic feasibility analysis does include an economic projection of challenges/benefits to the city itself.

Q: Why, as a national city, has this not become a national debate?

A: In essence, that’s the condition we have right now—in studying heights, maybe it’s time to allow the city to have a little more say around its local affairs—at what point does that local say begin to interfere with the federal interest? Things like the Mall are not just a national landmark but also a central point of the city that people deal with daily—these issues are not mutually exclusive, need to deal with all aspects.

Q: Congressman Issa signed this letter by himself; is this a personal letter or a committee letter?

A: It was a letter from the Committee.

Q: When will the public be able to see some of the modeling results?

A: During the Phase 2 meetings in late July/early August.

Q: An increase in height allows an increase in density, infrastructure, traffic, etc. and undergirding that whole analysis is major budgeting considerations. E.g. Waterfront BID for example is nice, but community is worried about density and traffic. Also, we have the 130 height limit now, and we’re not using it. What is the justification for reconsidering if we aren’t event maxed out?

A: These are issues dealt with in the District’s planning process after federal interest has been considered. A lot of people agree that we have a lot of nice single-family neighborhoods that are low rise and will never reach 130 ft. No need to wait until we build the city out to 130, because that’s not a city that we would want to live in. Rather, ask at what point building heights in the city affect the federal interest. Also, a conversation about height inevitably leads to conversation about density, which is not necessarily always valid. And once again, what is the federal interests in density, affordability, and economics?

Q: What types of effects would increasing the height have on property values, especially in regards to real estate speculation? Unleash a new wave of property bubbles?

A: We don’t know. This will be answered in Phase 2.

Q: Darrell Issa might leave position as Chairman after next year. Do we think things can actually be done between now and next year?

A: We are intent on getting things to Congress by this fall. It might be that we give a very narrow answer as opposed to a broad one, but we feel urgency because of that timeframe.

Q: Hypothetically, if we go through this process and give an answer, when at the local level will heights be established?

A: Probably ten years before any zoning changes if we do decide to anything in the short term. The Comprehensive Plan has to be updated first, following any Congressional action.
Q: We’ve become one of the greenest cities in the country. In the next 20 years, we may become one of the big renewable energy cities. Is this taken into account?
A: One of the things we would look to if we were to allow additional height would be solar rights. However, that’s part of the local progress, not part of what we’re presenting to Congress. Also, there is archaic language in the Height Act, and it doesn’t mention things like photovoltaic volts, etc. and could definitely be updated.

Q: In conceptualizing federal interest, views has been mentioned a lot. However, federal interest also includes buildings and real estate (for example, FBI building moving out of city for lack of space). Is the question of federal office space and federal needs of land use in the district part of the consideration?
A: Federal government is actually shrinking its footprint: flexible schedules, etc.

Q: Population of city has been going down and now is only recently rising again. Why do we think it will expand much beyond current capacity to absorb?
A: Based on current population and job growth projections, we will have serious capacity issues in the future. The question is should we continue to grow and will the current height limit continue to serve our needs into the future? We will need more to provide diversity in offices and other kinds of space; this is part of what will be studied in economic analysis.

Q: How are you defining sustainability and the federal interest? National Park Service, arboretum, viewsheds to Capitol—is that a federal interest? How much of a federal interest is stormwater infrastructure?
A: DC is #1 or #2 in sustainability now, but we want to hear from you what you think the scope should be re: sustainability, parks, etc.

Q: Studies tend to study things that are quantifiable, but a lot of quality of life issues are a factor here. How will walkability, open space, green space etc. be factored in here?
A: Some of that is a local concern, although some is certainly a federal concern.

Both positives and negatives to the Height Act; encourage discussion to move forward on grounds of interactions of tall buildings with streetview and street-level experience.

We’ve done a lot on K Street, downtown Washington, other places. Having the height limit has allowed us to grow sensibly—it gives us a good rational to make changes and to make them sensibly, but not to overbuild, not to increase density greatly, and not compromise green image.

We have 3 principles here, but Chairman Issa’s letter goes far beyond those principles. For example, Congress seems to be asking us to look at compatibility to local areas. Why only look at aesthetics when concerns of the people come far beyond that? WMATA is a tri-state authority—that is a federal interest, and doesn’t seem to be addressed.

We should first do modeling on how we got to where we are today. Might be interesting to look at how technology has impacted the development of DC, transportation, etc.
Q: What did we learn from the case study of Paris? Are the high-rise clusters of Paris comparable to Rosslyn?
A: Haven’t really drawn conclusions, more analyzing the approach. Almost every major city has asked itself these questions: What should our height be? What should our skyline be?

Height has everything to do with infrastructure, which historically in DC has been paid for by Congress and used as a way of holding back and not helping the city. City is disenfranchised because it does not have the ability to make decisions about its own destiny. Maybe there needs to be funding in this study to really comprehensively answer all the questions necessary.
WORKBOOK COMMENTS

K. Baker | Anacostia, VA

**General:** I’m glad DC is considering the height limit. DC needs to come up to the 21st century regarding taller buildings in DC. It is important to our economy. Thanks for carefully reviewing this. It is important that our city is vibrant and buildings included. The Federal Triangle, White House, Capitol Hill, and Tidal Basin views should be prominent and are important to me! Yes, other types of buildings should become landmarks. Yes, taller buildings can coexist with skylines. All things that currently exist should be taken into consideration. I personally like the location of taller buildings outside of major viewsheds idea.

**What else should we consider?**
Green space should be maintained (parks and walking spaces).

Shelley Ross-Larson | Georgetown, DC

**General:** Please keep height limit as it is throughout DC.

Emily Allen | Capitol Hill, DC

**General:** I have only been living in Washington for a year but I already love it more than Paris—the only other city I have lived in. Urban space across the pond was always cluttered and overwhelming whereas DC’s parks and wide avenues command my attention in a much more positive way. I think this is in part due to the style of architecture—white clean slates—that gives way to the natural beauty of the city.

**What is Washington’s postcard image today and in the future?**

Molly Hahn | Stronghold, DC

**General:** I come from the NYC area and I find DC so much more welcoming and manageable. The city is inviting and homey while still being exciting. There is so much to do. Yet I do not feel like I am trapped in buildings. I want DC to stay inviting. I feel a lot of pride in this city and its traditions even though I just moved here and I feel all Americans do because it is our nation’s capital. It should stay this way.

**What else should we consider?**
Monuments should stand out not get overshadowed by a major business building.
What is Washington’s postcard image today and in the future?

Vincent G. Carter | DC
General: Viewsheds are important and should be maintained to currently identified landmarks. Greed, as in increased property taxes, should not drive building heights. I support studying the question of building height. NCPC’s role should be closely and carefully considered. NCPC can be too restrictive and dictatorial, yet it can contribute to great views of certain monuments.

What else should we consider?
How successful or not current high density areas, e.g. NoMa, have been when occupancy and tax revenue are evaluated.

Dan Guilbeault | Truxton Circle, DC
General: I like London’s model where important iconic buildings’ viewsheds are protected with taller clusters farther out. Density should be clustered around Metro with affordable housing minimums built in.

What is Washington’s postcard image today and in the future?
**Peter Kauffman | Dupont, DC**

General: I honestly don’t know what to think. I guess it’s a good thing you’re studying!

My question—if we raise the height limit by a small amount, will it really trigger any redevelopment? Will we have to wait for current 10-12 story buildings to get old and torn down before changes are made in downtown? Conversely, if we add a lot of heights will that encourage more full-block structures? I think it’s really neat to be in downtown with variety in each blockface, with several different facades in each block, and I’d hope that doesn’t change things.

**What else should we consider?**

I’d hope that renewed investment in downtown could fund infrastructure improvements (especially to transit—I’d love to see a separated blue/orange and green-yellow line tunnel).

**What is Washington’s postcard image today and in the future?**

![Postcard Image]

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**John Heermans | Kalorama, DC**

General: I would like to see the height limit act removed or amended to allow higher buildings. There are a lot of urban design options that could still preserve iconic/historic buildings. Viewsheds, design options, topography can all be used and let the city evolve to maximize its transit/density benefits.

**What is Washington’s postcard image today and in the future?**

![Postcard Image]
Paul Thistle | Takoma, DC
General: I am a new resident to Washington, DC, so my understanding of the city is novice at best. However, my perception as an outsider is that DC’s identity is constantly changing. Yes, many people have been born and raised in DC, but a large amount of people are transient, and that affects its identity. However, the issue of identity is not high on my list of priorities. As an educator, I think it is important to raise various issues and to encourage people to use their democratic voice. I believe other issues should be considered before the topic of the height act.

What else should we consider?
Removing the Height Act is not a bad idea. Before doing so, we need to consider all positive and negative reactions which it looks like is the case.

What is Washington’s postcard image today and in the future?

Brenda Lee Richardson | Congress Heights
General: Who does the height changes impact? Is ward 8 being considered as one of the pre-designated areas to study? The existing viewsheds from ward 8 are beautiful. Don’t want to see that changed. Taller buildings should co-exist in the downtown area only. I am more concerned about protecting and maintaining the neighborhood parks, historic buildings, and communities that we currently enjoy.

Affordability and housing options are often symbolic of gentrification. Economic vitality is fine as long as it includes all the people.

What else should we consider?
Sustainability means keep it clean and green. Don’t want to see any height changes at all.

What is Washington’s postcard image today and in the future?
**A. Lyon | Hillsdale, DC**

**General:** I would like to keep the current Height Acct. I want to keep the view of downtown—Capitol, monuments, etc.—from east of the river. I want to keep DC unique, apart from the rest of the world cities.

**Payton Chung | Ward 6, DC**

**General:** I value views across the city to the key monuments; these should always define the character of the city and the national capital. A horizontal skyline is a democratic one—all are equal under the law. It encourages the city to fill the blocks of urban fabric. That said, skyscrapers can provide visual interest outside the core, and great scope exists to adjust existing limits up—particularly in key corridors, and to prime views.

**What is Washington’s postcard image today and in the future?**

![Image of a postcard with buildings and symbols]

**Mary Buckley | Ward 8, DC**

**General:** Building heights cause congestion in more people, less space; more people with dogs—nobody complies with the “pooper scooper” laws—generates more garbage and poor livability; more stress with people living atop one another. DC will become another New York City and can’t see the stars!

**Annamarie Gray | Mt. Pleasant, DC**

**General:** It is important to remember that height does not equal density, necessarily, and height does not equal good architecture, necessarily. Any approach must be nuanced and must be varied and clustered around particular nodes and corridors. I think the height act should be amended to allow for taller buildings, but the city zoning process must address creative and strategic ways to add height (e.g. auctioning air rights for transportation and affordable housing funding; trading rights for variation in designs of adjacent buildings). But ultimately this should be a DC government issue, not federal. Congress should give DC the right to make that decision.
What is Washington’s postcard image today and in the future?
GENERAL SESSION QUESTION & COMMENTS

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

Q: My question is with regards to the height is with regard to how it will affect the clean air act, because even though we don’t honor it, we have the best air quality not like places like Denver. Can you imagine if ever a car stopped in a high traffic area, and those buildings which gather debris, when you put all that into consideration and peoples health who is not up to par—have they done the study how a larger building will affect air quality?
A: That’s not something we are specifically planning to study but there are places with taller buildings than DC and have managed to have decent air quality; it’s not so much the height of the buildings but the type of pollutions. Our biggest sources are particulates, with more people who will be driving how will that affect transportation, and we will study that.

Q: One of the things I would like to talk about is how it will affect the DC Zoning Act
A: I think we will be answering it a lot of different times tonight, because the Height Act dictates the maximum. If the federal height act were to change, DC zoning will not change until we look at the Comprehensive Plan. Nothing may change for a while, because we want development.

Q: I am concerned about the height act, how high are we speaking of for buildings? Are we talking about the Chrysler building? Twin Towers?
A: We have certain landmarks that are important buildings in the District, like the Washington Monument and the Capitol. We are talking about 1 story maybe 5 stories, and that is because we have that aspect of our city that we like, human scale. According to this principle, we could potentially see 180 feet, but because of the federal height act 130 is our limit.

Q: The vista I am very happy about, this kind of worries me and I can understand that because of changes in demographics, are we talking about an increase in population, and then what kind of infrastructure is needed to support that? Do you base your decision on projected population numbers?
A: We are talking about 3-4 year process for a comprehensive plan review; we think we already have the capacity for future growth at 800K so these changes are for the future, but at some time in the future we will need to review it. The comp plan only lists Capitol riverfront, NoMa, downtown, those are high density; we are not going into a residential area and make it high density.

I have two observations, considering affordability, thinking that will permit more affordable residences and that for me is not true and I don’t buy it because of NYC example. Second, we would be affected, can it coexist with our skyline? I don’t see how that is possible.

Q: My question is about the zoning laws, each ward has its own zoning laws?
A: Zoning is citywide

Q: Safety aspect...what is the safety aspect with regard what if it catches on fire, have we looked at those factors?
A: DC has one of the most up to date building codes, but were saying lets go up 2-3 stories, for people thinking they can add to existing buildings, building engineers will need to look at that.
Q: I live up on the Hill, but I envy my friends view, up on Stanton Rd. My concern would be if you pass this act for higher buildings, are there restrictions for the proximity to the Capitol?
A: We are taking very special care to model it and from that we will begin to understand the impact on the viewsheds, when you’re at the Capitol or on the streets. That is an NCPC item that we are paying a lot of attention to.
COMMENTS SUBMITTED VIA ONLINE COMMENT PORTAL
The Height Master Plan website includes an online public comment portal, providing the public the opportunity to submit comments and attach related media (documents, pictures, etc.). All submissions are published within 24-hours for public viewing and will be included as part of the study’s public record.

The following is a compilation of submissions received to date.

The online public comment portal is located at:
http://www.ncpc.gov/heightstudy/comments.php
**Lindsay Williams, Washington, DC (June 07, 2013)**

Mike: As you and your colleagues move forward on the Height Act study, I’d ask:

- Can NCPC/OP produce a diagram of widths of rights of way?
  - If so, can that “width” be associated with every property shape that it abuts, thereby allowing a determination and visualization of what the Height Act would allow (from the most permissive frontage)? If so, then a diagram of Height Act can be produced and even overlaid with limitations that zoning now imposes, often less but sometimes more (see below) that is “lost” to the greater restriction of the Act of 1910.
  - At the same time, where rights of way are less than 90 feet, the Act limits building heights to the width of the right of way. What rights of way are less than 90 feet? Maybe this should be in increasingly restrictive decrements: 90-80, 70s, 60s, 50s, 40s, under 40?
- Where in DC is the Height Act’s limit more restrictive than that allowed in Zoning (classic example being where height limit is stated as the same, but parapets height is counted in Height Act but not in zoning (up to 4 feet)? What about differences in the point from which “height” is measured?
- Should there be a relief provision from Height Act limitations as a kind of variance?
- In what areas of the District is Height Act the sole limitation (many receiving zones, perhaps elsewhere)?

Going beyond these, the question of right of way widths is one that also informs where visualizations should occur. Remarks noted that this would include such icons as Pennsylvania Avenue. I would look for this along all rights of way that are 110 feet or more, these being where Height Act allows (if commercial) 130. I would particularly think that visualizations along K Street from Mt. Vernon square to Rock creek (148’) would be important, as well as other 160’ rights of way such as Maryland and nearly all of Virginia Avenue (both of which feature railroad tracks, often elevated, in portions of the r.o.w. at this time). Widths can be unsettled where multiple rights of way abut, as they do where freeway slices thru the area with flanking service lanes or sections of older L’Enfant streets; South Capitol where the interstate ramps exist is another that is particularly wide, wider than it is from about I Street south to the bridge. Finally, other than L’Enfant plaza and the SW Urban renewal plan, are there other areas where there is a “special” measuring point? Returning to visualizations, I would think some should be along particularly narrow rights of way as well, of which there are many in Adams Morgan and pockets of other often historic locations around the District.

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**Gary McNeil, Washington, DC (June 05, 2013)**

Thank you for the opportunity to participate. Although I have tremendous respect for both Harriet Tregoning’s office and NCPC, I found the format of the meeting somewhat puzzling and frustrating. As I understood our task, it was to think about the link between the federal interest in DC and the height limit, and how changing or maintaining the height limit might impact the federal interest, favorably or unfavorably.

But this very abstract concept was communicated somewhat clumsily by the speakers who introduced the meeting, and also the various boards around the room seemed to raise a different question, something like “how would we like the city to change?” As a first step in the process, I would have found a different meeting more useful--a brainstorming session or a focus group around the question “what is the federal interest in DC?” To me, the answer is not all obvious, and I found it impossible to think usefully about the height limit without better understanding the federal interest. Also, I think it would be a very intriguing idea to having the residents of DC speak to congress about their ideas of what the federal interest in DC might be. I understand process comments are not what you’re looking for at this point. Good luck!
Jacinda L. Collins, PE, LEED Green Associate, Washington, DC (June 05, 2013)
Good morning NCPC, I was not able to make my comments through the online portal; so please find below my comments from the event last night.

Station 2: What approach might we follow? Of the case studies exhibited, London is the best model. This approach would provide many developing areas of the city the chance to create something unique, while still protecting the prominence of the National Mall. Station 3: Principle 1 - What landmarks and monuments should be prominent? The Washington Monument and the Capitol Building should become the benchmarks for potential sightlines as they are currently the only prominent structures under the current height restrictions. With many of the buildings around the National Mall all being built to the same height, there are few views available of these two structures currently. Is it important for civic structures to define Washington’s future skyline? If polled, you will find that the DC’s skyline consists of the Washington Monument, Capitol Building, and the Lincoln Memorial. The horizontal DC skyline has already hindered the views of most notable civic structures. Thus, the current height restrictions have already diminished the participation in a general DC skyline. Should private buildings become prominent landmarks in Washington’s skyline? Regardless of height, private buildings have become landmarks. Private developers can easily create unique critically acclaimed taller buildings that can become the next generation of DC landmarks.

Principle 2- Can new taller buildings coexist with our skyline? As I mentioned the current horizontal skyline only allows 2 structures to ultimately define DC’s skyline. The addition of taller buildings with proper zoning and sightlines can create a more dynamic DC skyline. What does a “horizontal skyline” mean to you? As a fan of architecture and a traveler I will say that the current horizontal skyline of DC is not appealing. If every other building on the street was a historic structure with varying forms of architecture, then the horizontal skyline may not be that bad. However, the current DC height restrictions have created near identical boxes that make me feel that DC architects and planners are forced to adhere to limited model of conformity. This makes the non-National Mall portions of DC feel devoid of an identity. And if parts of the city cannot find an identity, then it will become very hard to bring people to work or live in other areas. As an outsider coming into the city, I will say that DC’s neighbor Arlington is doing a great job in creating multiple prominent areas within the city that are attracting businesses and residents. Principle 4 How should building heights relate to: Major parks and natural features? To me, parks and public spaces are more defined by their landscaping, accessibility, and features rather than the structures around them. Well placed and thought-out trees and artwork will make you forget that there is a 20 story building across the street. Other Considerations No one will deny that some height restrictions will remain in place for those high-security areas.

Traffic is a problem that all densely populated cities. Rush hour and event traffic in DC could benefit from other programs such as timing street lights for cars, more Metro stops, and other DC/VA/MD mass transportation projects. Regardless of building height, the city will have to be the champion for low income housing and work with the private sector to push this initiative forward. Many federal agencies have already moved and are planning to move to Virginia and Maryland. The FBI is the latest high profile agency that will leave DC in the near future. The agencies are not moving to skyscrapers; however they are moving to dynamic structures that make their employees feel better about coming to work. The new generation of federal buildings in Virginia and Maryland are green, have unique architecture, and have higher floor to ceiling heights that appeal to open workspaces and flexible floor plans. Tourism can only be enhanced with the addition of zones of taller buildings. Foremost there would be opportunities for more hotel rooms which would help drive down DC hotel costs, thus making vacations, conventions, sporting events, and concerts more appealing.

Matthew Steenhoek, Washignton, DC (June 03, 2013)
(Twitter) @NCPCgov @OPinDC at 103 yrs old I'd say its about time for DCHoBA to grow up and start taking some responsibility for its actions! #heightdc

Manuel Casas, Washington, DC (May 30, 2013)
I'm pro height rise building. It would make the city look more attractive, and a city of the 21 century. DC height rise restriction makes the city look antique and boring.
Sarah Gutschow, Washington, DC (May 21, 2013)
It was nice meeting at the DC Height Master Plan public meeting. It was great to learn more about the National Capital Planning Commission’s and the D.C. Office of Planning’s joint effort to study the impacts of the D.C. Height Law. I also enjoyed how interactive the meeting was and having the chance to offer some input as a long-time D.C. resident and an Urban Planner. As I mentioned yesterday, at the Bloustein School of Planning and Public Policy at Rutgers University I wrote a term paper on the D.C. Height Act for my Planning Law class. That paper is attached. (attachment submitted)

Eli Glazier, Los Angeles, CA (May 21, 2013)
(Twitter) Focus on context-appropriate building height guidelines to improve housing affordability while maintaining District character.

Frederic Harwood, Washington, DC (Shaw) (May 21, 2013)
(From Attachment) The District of Columbia’s commercial real estate is more expensive per square foot than Manhattan’s financial district. The area’s traffic is the worst in the country, with ever-expanding sprawl adding to the nation’s longest commuting times. Only 11% of the metropolitan area’s 5.7 million residents live in the District of Columbia, among the lowest percentage in the US and well behind New York City’s 43%, Los Angeles’ 30%, and Chicago’s 28%. We rank well below... (attachment submitted)

Frederic Harwood, Washington, DC (Shaw) (May 21, 2013)
This article identifies the impact of building high in terms of construction expenditures, construction jobs, construction salaries, and, once the building is finished, annual operating cash flow, employment, and salaries/earnings. In addition there are tax implications for the city and state for both the construction and the year to year operations. Finally, any building has an impact on the existing commercial and residential real estate market, and that is discussed as well.

The article ends with a discussion of Berlin and Paris, and the implications for Washington, DC. In going through the data, I note one slight correction. On page 6, the last paragraph beginning "More recently,..." the second line should read "2008, has generated $2.028B in total construction expenditures, including $1.26B in Philadelphia, resulting in 17,293 construction-related jobs...etc." just a small change.

I hope the partners find these analyses helpful. I have enjoyed working on them, and it is something I really believe in. (attachment)

Dan Maceda, 475 K St NW DC (May 19, 2013)
No changes to the height limit until we build out NOMA, near Southeast, and Mt Vernon Triangle. If the height limit is raised we will have fewer but taller buildings and the continuation of surface parking lots.

P. P. Campbell, Jr., Washington, DC (May 17, 2013)
As to terms and provisions, I would also like to see how seemingly similar provisions of the Height Act and the present Zoning and other development codes can trip up expectations of developers and residents alike. For example, the height of a parapet counts under Height Act and doesn’t (if four feet or less) in zoning. What are allowed roof structures under both? Etc. This is a question the Senate’s sitting representative to NCPC asked when the Height Act study was introduced earlier this year; it’s worth addressing in the present endeavors.
**P. P. Campbell, Jr., Washington, DC (May 17, 2013)**
The vast preponderance of regulations have rules that are more or less clear and, importantly, a relief valve. In zoning and building codes, there is a process to seek a "variance" of some kind from a body (BZA) or ranking official ("code official"). For the Height Act, there is none.

What if — at least outside the L'Enfant area an authority were created to allow variances from the Act, be it otherwise left as is or as modified. This would be in keeping with the functions of the Zoning Commission (created 10 years after the Height Act) as it is now constituted, with hefty Federal representation and input. Height Act variance cases could be heard by the ZC (as it does with campus plans, and there could be a mandatory referral of any Height Act valance to not only NCPC (as with Foreign Missions) but also the Commission on Fine Arts (at least where it has jurisdiction).

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**P. P. Campbell, Jr., Washington, DC (May 17, 2013)**
The record should reveal insights from Federal capitals, including Ottawa, Canberra, and Brasilia; and major cities in the U.S. (Chicago, Denver, Houston, Baltimore and Philadelphia); and beyond (Shanghai, the "Houston of Heights" -- no restrictions, total central control, no citizen input, no ANCs, no City Council that is not within Party control, etc.) In effect, a summary not only of "Practices" but analysis and conclusions against the core principles to lay-out potential "Best Practices to Support the Core Principles." It is important to review the context in which the Height Act of 1910 was adopted, shortly after elevators were common -- and when most aerial views would have been from natural promontories or hot air balloon.

The threat to which the 1910 Act responded was unchecked verticality that would, over time, block the views of (and from) significant federal places: Congress, Washington Monument, etc. The Act imposed a 130 ft limit, less where streets were narrower. The Act did not contemplate setbacks (other than roof structures) for allowing tiers of additional height - - something taller buildings in would come to utilize (notably the Empire State building). Tiered height can allow views that are meaningful and respectful that would not be the same if there were an extensive visual barrier brought about by flanking buildings of essentially the same height from one to another and occupying most of all of their parcel.

The Lewis plan of the 1950's introduced not only the concept of bulk (reflected as floor area ratio, among other things.) The Lewis Plan also articulated "Federal Interest" whose thoughts remain timely. For one, Lewis noted the value of the Commission on Fine Arts as a way in which to promote overall design of federal projects.

The Lewis plan proposed controls on density that were adopted and proposed taller buildings in various zones - limited to not unduly obstruct light from reaching the areas around them, with controls on something the plan called "angle of light obstruction." This part of the plan was rejected when most other parts were adopted. This lesson is more relevant to District as they consider respective amendments to the Comp Plan and zoning.

The study should make explicit the vast increase in human occupancy of roofs. Roofs were an attractive and economical place to toss utilities, and the views from rooftops of the past looking over American cities, including Washington, was filled with mechanical clutter. Now, such areas are limited in total area (percent), setbacks, and typically screened. But, increasingly roof amenities create and exploit value that was ignored in the past, particularly when blended with green features. Revisions to the 1910 Act, (as well as, eventually, the Comp Plan and zoning), should identify unintended barriers to such benefits.

The most ambitious part of the effort is the pace proposed -- delivering recommendations to Congress this Fall. (attachment submitted)
**Thomas Taylor, Judiciary Square (May 16, 2013)**
In order to remain competitive with adjacent jurisdictions, the District of Columbia should judiciously select portions of the District outside the historic L'Enfant plan to raise the height limitations. The high-rise buildings in Rosslyn negate any argument that higher limits would contribute to the degradation of the Federal presence in the center of the city. Outside the L'Enfant plan and historic districts are several nodes or corridors that would benefit from high rise structures. As a corridor example: all of the south side of New York Avenue from the Amtrak rail crossing to the Arboretum. As a node example, a new Metro Green Line infill station at St. Elizabeth's campus.

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**Kevin Waskelis, Washington, DC (May 14, 2013)**
If you are against altering the limit then you are basically saying that it's ok that DC's rents are egregiously high and that the traffic is terrible. I'm sorry, no skyline or community character is worth such costs. It's unfair for people who have lived here longer to shut the door on newcomers who can barely afford the prices in DC and are sick of the traffic.

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**Lasse van Essen, U street, NW DC (May 14, 2013)**
I support higher rise buildings especially near metro stops. Maybe it will bring down the cost of housing slightly, and it makes a lot of sense to create density near metro. P.S. I live in a single family row house - but not everyone can afford that or should want that.

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**Max Bergmann, Washington DC (May 14, 2013)**
Get rid of the height limit and allow developers to build as tall as possible. We need more density and more housing.

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**Carol Casperson, Fairlawn neighborhood (Washington East) (May 13, 2013)**
Residents East of the River are concerned about their view being blocked by buildings, bridges, etc. that are built between them and the downtown and mall areas.

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**Amber, Washington, DC (May 13, 2013)**
Which problem will modifying/eliminating the height limit solve? It won't reduce the cost of housing. DC is a desirable area, and developers will continue to build expensive housing. It won't fix the boxy architecture either. It'll just make taller boxy buildings (this is a zoning/style problem, not a height problem). The proposed changes to the law are a solution in search of a problem.

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**Moogmar, Washington, DC (May 13, 2013)**
One of my favorite things about Washington is the open skyline character. Not having a lot of tall buildings lets the city feel more open and less congested. The lower buildings also make it possible to see the monuments from different points in the city. Both of these aspects enhance the appeal of the city and people do notice.

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**Matt Sloan, Washington DC (U Street Corridor) (May 13, 2013)**
The current height restrictions are terrible for our city. Additional height should be allowed on major arteries (Wisconsin Ave, 16th Street, Connecticut Ave, etc.) and specifically around metro stations. Further, any height restriction outside the immediate vicinity of the monuments makes no sense.
**Mary Elizabeth Kenel, Washington, DC (Brookland/Michigan Park/Catholic University) (May 10, 2013)**

I wish to ask that you hold the line on the present height limits. In the first place, the lower limits on height give DC a lovely skyline – and in the second place, the limits actually allow us citizens of Washington, Dc to see the sky! Already in my small neighborhood – near a Metrorail station in which there is much development going on – some of our iconic neighborhood views have been destroyed – obliterated by the proliferation of tall, ugly buildings. I know the value of being able to actually see the sky and enjoy a reasonable vista – I am from Manhattan – New York City – I love DC because it is not filled with skyscrapers and because one can actually see the horizon, at least from certain vantage points. In this highly automated culture, it is important to connect with Nature – the view of the sky – dawn, sunset – stars and moon – are a gift to us all – they help bring peace and healing to our often troubled minds and spirits. Bricks and concrete do not. Less height is a small step in the right direction.

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**Tony Varona, Chevy Chase, MD (May 10, 2013)**

We should follow Paris’s lead. L’Enfant used Paris as a principal inspiration in designing Washington, of course, so why not follow them in this endeavor as well, especially since (1) they’ve long had height restrictions similar to ours, and (2) they’ve recently (about three years ago) modified their own restrictions to allow for much higher rooflines in certain arrondissements. See here:


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**Jennifer Henderson, Washington, DC (May 09, 2013)**

As a resident of DC I urge the study to recommend that the height limits remain in place. The lack of skyscrapers gives DC a distinctive feel which is beloved by the residents and remembered fondly by tourists. Removing these limits would change the characters of neighborhoods and put more stress on our transit systems.

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**Nancy C Wischnowski, Chevy Chase, DC (May 09, 2013)**

The characteristic of DC as compared with most other cities that you can’t tell the difference from one to the other is the lack of skyscraper buildings. This is noticeable when you fly into Reagan National Airport or when you are standing downtown in the middle of the city. This city is beautiful in its simplicity and is unique in the country. Please do not think of caving in to developers who are only interested in money and profit from change- nothing else!

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**Robert Crooks, Washington, DC (May 09, 2013)**

My initial reaction to any proposal to relax DC's building height limits is that this would be a very bad idea which, sooner or later and regardless of any safeguards that may be included, will lead to the destruction of what is arguably a unique cityscape in the United States, for a city of comparable size. One only needs to look across the river to the urban disaster that is Rosslyn (or indeed, any other city in Virginia--a state which apparently eschews urban planning) to understand what the possibilities might be. Thoughtful commentators like Roger Lewis have recently argued in favor of some relaxation of the rules, clearly envisaging some strategic intensification of development around metro stops. But it is almost certain that high rise development, once allowed to get its foot in the door, in the longer term, will inexorably spread and progressively destroy what is unique about the city.

This is a city with a long history of corruption and incompetence. The more freedom city managers and elected representatives are given to influence the look and fabric of the city, the worse it will get.

Finally, one cannot help wondering what has prompted Congressman Issa, a man not entirely free from shadows of his own, to initiate these inquiries. I have carefully reviewed the background materials provided but can find no explanation. It would seem to me that, at the very least, Congressman Issa should explain himself. This is a man of limited experience as an elected representative who, as far as I am aware, has never served in state or local government
and has no apparent record of published opinion on matters related to city planning either in this city or in his constituency near San Diego. Nevertheless, he seems to have experienced some kind of conversion on the road to Damascus that has prompted him to launch ostensibly detailed and no doubt expensive inquiries into a question that has not been of any obvious contention in the 25 years I have been resident in this city and which, indeed, has served the city well for 200 years. I think the congressman, at the very least, owes everybody concerned a detailed explanation.

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**Jackie Young, Washington, DC Ward 5 (May 08, 2013)**
I am opposed to increasing the height limits in DC. We are a beautiful city, and any proposal to increase height limits will be a detriment to our environment. This city caters to developers already. Green space is being taken over by apartment buildings. We don't need or want our air space and sky views also taken over.

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**Rick Rybeck, Washington, DC (May 08, 2013)**
The height limit is an integral aspect of the District’s ambience and its real estate market. There is substantial demand for living and working space in and around the District. The height limit constrains development. Thus, the price for office and residential space is higher than it otherwise would be because the height limit restricts the size of buildings.

At the same time, the height limit has reduced land values to the extent that a market exists for development in excess of what the height limit allows. In other words, there might be demand for office space to fill a 20-story office building near Metro Center. But no developer will pay a price for land near Metro Center based on the income from a 20-story office building because such a building is not permitted. Therefore, developers will only pay for land based on the income that could be derived from an office building allowed by current height law and zoning. (Demand for office or residential space that cannot be accommodated in the Downtown fuels land price increases and development in suburban areas such as Bethesda, Arlington and Tysons Corner.) If the District relaxed the height limit in any part of the District where the market demand for space exceeded the supply allowed under the existing height limit, two things would happen: 1. The price of land would increase because potential development (and therefore the potential income) for each piece of land would increase. (In fact, land prices might even rise in anticipation of this change.) Thus, this publicly-created land value could result in a tremendous windfall to private landowners – many of whom are very affluent and absentee. 2. Some properties would be redeveloped to take advantage of the new height limits and this would increase the supply of built space. This would tend to reduce rents but higher land values would also be factored into the rents. Therefore, it is unlikely that residential or commercial prices or rents would decline, unless a “value capture” strategy was pursued simultaneously to relaxing the height limit.

A value capture strategy would entail reducing the property tax rate on building values while increasing the tax rate on land values. The lower rate on buildings would make them cheaper to build, improve and maintain. The higher tax rate on land values would return publicly-created land values to the public and help keep land prices down by reducing the speculative demand for land.

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The height limitations for buildings in D.C. should be maintained and we should avoid elevating or making exceptions to those limitations. D.C. should strive to be a model of a livable, low density city with medium sized structures and attractive neighborhoods where the air is clean and where there is minimal adverse impact on the environment. Encouraging low density neighborhoods with well-maintained homes and where both pollution and CO2 emissions are held to a minimum is a goal we should strive to achieve. Tall buildings will not encourage fulfillment of such a goal and will not even prove to be in the interests of long-term economic success. Visitors from around the country and world will be eager to visit an attractive capital that has resisted the tall building fad that is choking many American (and foreign) cities. The citizens deserve and want more for their capital city.
Kristen, Washington, DC (May 02, 2013)
There is PLENTY of room for development and population growth in DC without raising the height limit. Compare density in Adams Morgan or U St/Columbia Heights with places like Historic Anacostia and Minnesota Ave. Look at the empty real estate in Brentwood, Edgewood, Brookland and Fort Totten. Midrise development near these and other stations east of North Capitol could accommodate tens of thousands of housing units.

With the limit in place, this city previously housed over 800,000 people - nearly 30% more people than live here now. And there is potential for more than that within existing building codes. Further, we're already about to see a glut of apartments coming on the market in the next year. Let's see what impact that has on housing affordability before we rush to become New York (which, in case you hadn't noticed, isn't exactly affordable). With the limit in place, this city previously housed over 800,000 people - nearly 30% more people than live here now. And there is potential for more than that within existing building codes. Further, we're already about to see a glut of apartments coming on the market in the next year. Let's see what impact that has on housing affordability before we rush to become New York (which, in case you hadn't noticed, isn't exactly affordable).

Veronica Raglin, Washington, D.C. (April 21, 2013)
Washington should not look like NYC or other city with skyscrapers. It should maintain its character with building below the height of the U.S. Capitol. Increasing the density and height of buildings only serves to increase social and economic impacts associated with more buildings and structures. Further, as the nation's corner stone of democracy, it was well planned to support clear thinking without added congestion and security issues to the nation's governance.

Patricia Duecy, McLean, VA (April 19, 2013)
I just wanted to compliment you on your site, "Height Master Plan for Washington, DC." It is well designed. But, most important, it has given space to very thoughtful and articulate discussion of the topic. I'm looking at you from the Virginia side of the Potomac, and I'm very proud of both your facilitation of this discussion and the content of the contributing public. Thank you.

Michelle J, Washington, DC (April 17, 2013)
I grew up here and chose to move back to DC because of the human scale of the buildings and the character of the city that is created by the long-lasting preservation of height and scale. Washington, DC is moving in the wrong direction with easing the height restrictions and over-developing this city beyond what the infrastructure and the human psyche can handle. I echo other's comments that if I wanted no sunlight, wind tunnels for sidewalks, and an impersonal feeling city, I would live somewhere else like New York City so I could feel stressed out every day like a New Yorker. I don't understand why people first move here because of the character and livability and then want to change it.

Michelle Green, Washington, DC (April 17, 2013)
It saddens me to think that our lovely city may one day look like New York City and we will not be able to see the sight of day. If someone likes the idea of sky scrapers he/she should consider moving elsewhere. Or stick to Arlington or Silver Spring. Look at Philadelphia and while once they had a lovely skyline but it was destroyed when sky scrapers started over shadowing their lovely historical buildings. I hope this never happens to our nation's capital which was so expertly planned and which visitors from around the world flock to enjoy because of its lovely buildings and monuments.
Brad Gudzinas, Washington, DC (April 17, 2013)
"Relaxing" the height restriction seems unlikely to provide many of the benefits claimed. It is more important that we plan better for the land buildings occupy than it is to assume that height equals right (one can look to other cities to prove this is not the case). A thoughtful planning process should identify what we want DC to be in the future and determine whether it really is the case that we must fundamentally change our urban form to get there. Further, we must be clear in assessing economic, quality-of-life, and aesthetic motives behind such decisions.

Feval, Washington, DC (April 17, 2013)
There's nothing unique about a lack of skyscrapers. Small towns lack them too. But DC is a world-class city, and in order to compete with other world-class cities, or even compete with DC's own suburbs, it must allow building heights to rise.

John Bergin, Capitol Hill (April 12, 2013)
Washington is such a lovely city, I do not understand why we would want to change it for some canyons of concrete and glass. Once this has started here is no turning back.

Alice, Takoma, DC (April 11, 2013)
I'm glad to see this is being looked at. I feel strongly that height needs to be eased both for economic reasons and to enhance the architectural esthetic of the city. Our downtown buildings are boring boxes.

Jeffrey Levine, Washington, DC (March 19, 2013)
Very impressed with the quality and content of the English and German speakers at the Archives, creating a good international context from which Washington can move forward. Before the presentations, I felt Washington's beauty and uniqueness was due to its horizontal skyline. I now am more open to a sensitive exploration to varying heights.

Mike Jelen (March 19, 2013)
Low lying areas east of and below the Anacostia Ridge should be examined, especially around the Southern Ave Metro. Views from the western ridge of Rock Creek Park should be respected.

Adam Taylor, Washington, DC (March 13, 2013)
I strongly support significant relaxation of the height limit in all of Washington, DC, with a total repeal in strategic locations near Metro stations outside of the historic L'Enfant city.

The height limit combines with the city's wide thoroughfares to severely limit density and drives up prices for housing and commercial space, particularly downtown, where office rents are the highest in the country. Because we cannot change the street grid, and because it would be truly horrific to bulldoze the city's low-rise row house neighborhoods, increasing the height of buildings is one of the only tools available to allow for greater supply of residential and office space in the city's core and so reduce price pressure on local residents and businesses.

I understand the various interests involved with the possibility of changing the character of the historic center of the capital city, but allowing for a few extra stories in new developments downtown will do nothing to detract from - indeed, it would enhance - the experience of living in and visiting Washington. For these reasons, I believe residents can accept federal oversight of building height within the L'Enfant city. (Even if that federal oversight comes from Congress, where District residents remain unrepresented.) Outside of the historic core - below Florida Avenue and between Rock Creek Park and the Anacostia River - however, these concerns do not deserve the same precedence when weighed against the need to accommodate new residents and to provide needed and desired services and employment in a quickly growing city. In these areas, the federal height limit should be repealed in its entirety and District officials should
be free to adopt their own more tailored limits (e.g. via zoning rules, which already exist and which are currently being rewritten). At the very least, within specified distances of MetroRail stations, high-service bus routes and (in the future) streetcar routes, the federal height limit should be relaxed to the point that city officials can approve over-height buildings that meet particular needs or wants of the city, such as affordable housing, needed services such as grocery/retail in food desert areas, etc.

I appreciate the chance to provide my input to this important proceeding, and as a resident of the District of Columbia, I strongly encourage you to relax the height limit throughout the city and to consider outright repeal of the limit beyond the monumental core.

John Hines, Washington, DC (March 10, 2013)
I live in NW DC near Logan Circle. I would not be opposed to easing height restriction East of the Anacostia River. The "Anacostia" area has a lot of natural advantages--mainly spectacular views from many neighborhoods of the monumental core of DC. Imagine if developers could build taller buildings -- there would be some highly prized views which would enhance the value of development in that area.

Dan Miller (March 08, 2013)
The DC height limit harms the city, making it more expensive and less vibrant. And while it does preserve certain view sheds, it also deadens and destroys architecture in the nation's capital -- compare DC's skyline to the work of art that is Chicago's. Tall buildings are fully compatible with a beautiful city. The height limit should be repealed.

Alex Block, Washington, DC (March 07, 2013)
I very much look forward to this study. However, if the presumption from the start is that the height limits in the L'Enfant City should not be touched, I would argue that the study is not thorough enough. Currently, the L'Enfant city has all of the elements to accommodate more density. It is the location of most of our transit stations. It is the location of our most dense buildings right now. It is the area with the greatest market demand.

Dave Johnson (March 07, 2013)
Washington's character is unique because of the height limit. Please don't allow it to be changed.

Carmen Gilotte, Washington, DC (March 07, 2013)
This resident says NO! If I wanted to live in shady cold canyons surrounded by tall glass towers, I'd live in Chicago or NY. I live in DC because it's unlike any other city in the U.S. The character of this city is unique and is one of the things that brings people here. It is built on a more human scale. I've been here for 25 years and still love the park-like and open, bright design of this low-slung city.

David Marlin, Washington, DC (June 19, 2013)
Retain the height limitations!
Elizabeth Nelson, Washington, DC (June 21, 2013)
I am opposed to any changes to the Height Act. If a person wants to live in a city that is very dense and vertical, without height limits, (s)he has many options including Chicago and New York City. It seems fair to allow those of us who prefer a less-dense environment with abundant light and air to have this one city to suit our preferred style of living. It’s the Nation's Capital; it ought to feel different and special. It’s a world-class city with plenty of amenities, culture, commerce, entertainment, and housing yet it retains a human scale. Developers have plenty of opportunities to build tall building elsewhere - let them go elsewhere to do it.

Kevin, Washington, Washington, DC (June 27, 2013)
All of us want neighborhoods where we can raise our children and feel a sense of community. I support 5-6 story row houses in neighborhoods regardless of the width of the street in front of the building. This would allow homes (for example a row home divided into 2 units—a 3 level and 2 level, or moderate size condo buildings) with ample space for those who would otherwise move their families to, e.g., Arlington or Silver Spring, while also allowing a decent increase in the density of the neighborhood (which would, in turn, support more local businesses and services, increasing the quality of life for all).

Meg Maguire, Washington, DC (July 3, 2013)
I am opposed to any change in the Height Act. It has served DC well to create a beautiful and distinctive city with sufficient density and diversity to sustain a high level of economic development and an exceptional quality of community and civic life. Developers want to raise the limit and are putting great pressure on Congress, NCPC and OP to relent. But if the Act is modified, it will open a floodgate of new developer demands that neither NCPC, OP nor the Zoning Commission can possibly control. Experts on urban development -- Larry Beasley, Kaid Benfield, Ed McMahon and others -- have warned the city not to go down this road. Surely the leaders of NCPC and OP will not wish their legacy to be a city whose skyline was punctured and irreparably altered on their watch.

You are the stewards, not the executioners, of the goose that has laid a very precious golden egg!!

Tod Williams, New York City, NY (July 3, 2013)
The strength and quality of our character is one of our greatest assets as individuals and as a country.

Our Capital in Washington is unique in its planning and architectural character. Even as change is both inevitable and valuable, in such circumstances it must be done with extreme care.

As we consider our future we must strive to intensify our best qualities. In the case of Washington DC first and foremost is the way by which air or by foot, the great institutions that define our country, define our skyline. No other city of stature can lay claim to such an ideal.

We must respect standards that have withstood such tests of time.

Respectfully submitted, Tod Williams Billie Tsien

Peter Hugill, College Station, TX (July 4, 2013)
I’m often in DC on business. One of the things I love about DC is its relatively human scale—no ridiculously tall and overpowering buildings so that the true and human scale of the people’s capital is always apparent. The last thing anyone needs to do with DC is turn it into just another city riddled with tall buildings. That would destroy the lovely landscape that is there now.
Karen Votava, Wakefield, RI (July 7, 2013)
As frequent visitors to our nation’s capital city we are most concerned about the proposed abandonment of the long-standing height limits in DC. We have always admired the sense of open-ness and grandeur that is produced by the lower-profile mandated in the City and are horrified that this may change. PLEASE DON’T DO THIS!

Juliet Six, Tenleytown (July 8, 2013)
The Urban Land Institute recently wrote an eloquent piece on the proposal to change the Height Act. They state and I agree that we should “build better, not just bigger” the success of the character of our city, as it is today, should dictate any change rather than a plan to increase density which may or may not increase the supply of affordable housing. The character of the nation’s capital should indeed shape all new development. The “better” should include parking near all means of mass transit. The statistics show that our intermodal population tends to drive to their preferred means of transportation and those who walk must have a place to park their cars.

The Zoning Rewrite not only does not take into consideration the intermodal nature of the residents. In a transit zone such as Tenleytown all alternative parking minimums for the future have been eliminated.

Gary Scott, 445 11th St NE (July 8, 2013)
Alarming tall building being built on North Capitol Street out of scale with the US Capitol viewshed at end of N Capitol St. Maze of high rises being built near Union Station will mar the residential character of Capitol Hill.

Height limit must be maintained! Maintain the low scale beauty of the city.

Richard Byusch, DC (July 8, 2013)
Following are talking points that I developed for a meeting on the Height Master Plan scheduled for Tuesday, July 9, at 5:30 p.m. at the National Trust Headquarters here in DC. My personal impression is that this Height Master Plan is on a fast track given the fact that NCPC and DCOP plan to have legislation ready to forward to Congress this fall. Also, absent a position that rejects any change at all, it’s difficult to make other recommendations until the various height options are ready for review at the end of July or the first of August.

- During the past 200-plus years the growth and development of the District of Columbia, our nation’s capital, has been guided by the 1791 L’Enfant Plan for the City of Washington as executed by Andrew Ellicott; the 1901 McMillan Plan, which reinvigorated the L’Enfant Plan; and the 1993 Extending the Legacy Plan for the nation’s capital developed by the National Capital Planning Commission. Since 1910, the height of buildings in Washington, DC, has been guided by a formula of street width to building height.

- These plans are symbolic of not only our national life, but of how the federal government is supposed to function.

- As a result of the above, but especially the federally-enacted 1910 Height of Buildings Act, Washington has developed into a horizontal city unlike any other in the United States. That horizontality is broken by such significant federal structures as the US Capitol and its dome and the Washington Monument. Thus, the Washington skyline is unique, iconic, and recognizable throughout the world.

- Both the DC Comprehensive Plan and the Federal element of it have design elements that emphasize the horizontal character of the city.

- NCPC, now tasked with reviewing the 1910 Height of Buildings Act (along with DC’s Office of Planning) by Congressman Darrell Issa, Chair of the House of Representatives’ Oversight and Government Reform Committee, is the drafter of that Federal element of the DC Comprehensive Plan.
• Washington as a future city began its existence in a topographic bowl. During the past 100 years the existing federal height legislation served to retain unimpeded views to and from the upper edge of the geographic formation.

• Because of this legacy and because Washington is the capital of the United States it does not have to look like every other city in the land with a skyline punctuated by skyscrapers.

• Mayor Gray and Rep. Darrell Issa have talked about Washington’s building height limit restrictions as early as April 2012, per a Washington Post article by Tim Craig, entitled “The District’s political odd couple: Vincent Gray and Darrell Issa,” dated April 19, 2012.

Elizabeth F. Jones, Alexandria, VA (July 8, 2013)
The height limits make a Washington DC a very special place. It makes the city have a human element to it when there are not canyons of streets and buildings.

Residents and visitors realize DC is an unusual place because of the height limits and understand the city and the architecture in a way that is not possible with very high buildings. It is essential to keep the height limits in place.

Mary Pat Rowan, DC (July 8, 2013)
The Height Act restrictions on heights of buildings in Washington, D.C. should remain as stated in the Act not because change is unwanted but because this restriction of long ago has created a city of human scale which is beloved by the nation. This is not just for the downtown or the monumental core. This restriction should remain for all of Washington, D.C. because it preserves the views and vistas which are cherished and sorely lacking in other big cities. This horizontal city of great buildings and great vistas is an American treasure.

Charles I. Cassell, DC (July 8, 2013)
The current height limit in the nation's capital preserves the desirable uncluttered high density that now exists. This positive limitation should continue.

J. Doebuget, DC (July 8, 2013)
I have lived in DC for over 30 years and been a property owner in DC for 25 years.

Do not change the federal Height of Buildings Act of 1910 in any way. In areas outside the L’Enfant City, the local economic development goals, federal interests, national security concerns, and compatibility to surrounding neighborhoods, local residents input and other related factors are currently well served - and will continue to be well served in the future - by the existing legislation. This includes the federal and District governments. Do not alter the federal Height of Buildings Act of 1910.
**Paul Daniel Marriott, DC (July 8, 2013)**

I am a landscape architect and city planner, and former program director of the National Trust for Historic Preservation. The argument that the city of Washington needs to compete with the suburbs by lifting the height limit is illogical. Washington's population is growing and current trends (not just here but nationally) show a return to urban centers by youth. The intense construction currently underway in the city does not suggest a liability caused by the height limit. The view of "us vs. them" in terms of competition with the suburbs is a parochial--we are a single capital region (as well articulated when the Maryland National Capital Park and Planning Commission was established in 1927). Builders and developers will always want more, and will always place immediate goals and personal gain over the long term dignity and beauty of our unique capital. A CITY SKYLINE CLUTTERED WITH CRANES and a rising population is a POOR ARGUMENT for hardship and need for a change in height--in fact it is the opposite. Maintain the historic height limits--the law has created a desirable environment that is good for building.

**Meg Maguire, DC (July 8, 2013)**

NCPC and OP: "Best practices" need to address more than just economics. As Michael Mehaffy, a Portland, OR resident, points out in the attached article (http://bettercities.net/news-opinion/blogs/michael-mehaffy/14138/more-low-down-tall-buildings), "More Low Down on Tall Buildings." "The research shows that negative effects of tall buildings include: Increasingly high embodied energy of steel and concrete per floor area, with increasing height; Relatively inefficient floorplates due to additional egress requirement; Less efficient ratios of common walls and ceilings to exposed walls/ceilings (compared to a more low-rise, "boxier" multi-family form — as in, say, central Paris); Significantly higher exterior exposure to wind and sun, with higher resulting heat gain/loss; Challenges of operable windows and ventilation effects above about 30 stories Diseconomies of vertical construction systems, resulting in higher cost per usable area (not necessarily offset by other economies — these must be examined carefully); Limitations of typical lightweight curtain wall assemblies (there are efforts to address this, but many are unproven); Challenge of maintenance and repair (in some cases these require high energy and cost); Psychological effects on residents — evidence shows there is reason for concern, especially for families with children; Effects on adjoining properties: Ground wind effects Shading issues (especially for other buildings) Heat island effects — trapping air and heating it, placing increased demand on cooling equipment "Canyon effects" — trapping pollutants, reducing air quality at the street Social effects — "vertical gated community" syndrome, social exclusion, lack of activation of the street Psychological effects for pedestrians and nearby residents. This depends greatly on the aesthetics of the building, but there is research to show that a novel design that falls out of fashion (which history shows is difficult to predict) can significantly degrade the experience of the public realm and quality of place. This in turn has a major effect on sustainability." Everyone concerned about the Height of Buildings Act should read this article in its entirety and then judge the work of NCPC and OP against well-regarded research findings summarized by the author.

**Cornish F. Hitchcock, DC (July 8, 2013)**

I have lived here for almost 40 years and strongly support maintaining the current limitations under the Height Act. The low-lying character of the city gives Washington a distinctive feel befitting the Nation's Capital. I do not believe that things would be improved if we were to encourage Rosslyn-like development, even if it is removed from the Monumental Core. Washington is a city that belongs to all Americans, and busting the Height Act limitations would benefit the few at the expense of the many. Thank you.

**Richard Senerchia, DC (July 8, 2013)**

Development in DC is out of control. Stop trying to turn this beautiful city into an eyesore like Crystal City. The Nation's Capital should be a shining example to others, not one more ugly temple of rampant greed. Keep the Height Limit!
**Amy Ballard, DC (July 8, 2013)**
It would be a tragedy if this height limit was changed. The wonderful thing about great cities such as St. Petersburg, Russia is that there IS a height limit. People try and tamper with it all the time, but the fact is that the citizens want the view and vistas to be kept as an important part of the historic significance of the city.

**John Feeley, Brookland (July 8, 2013)**
We need to preserve the height act in Washington. All one needs to do is compare our city to Paris, where height restrictions are in force, and realize that scale and cross city monument views are worth preserving here too. Keeping business and residential heights as they are today preserves the views of our cities landmarks, not just from the windows of the best hotels, but from apartments and schools across the city. It isn’t just a question of preserving sight lines down our beautifully designed avenues its also about preserving sight lines from one neighborhood to another. From the Soldiers Home to National Cathedral to Healey Tower to the Islamic Center of Washington, our city has monumental landmarks that have been enjoyed by all for over a century. These monumental views for all citizens are a benefit of the popular democracy that our national monuments celebrate. It is the greed of a few that will be satisfied by altering our height restrictions here. And it will be a blow to the egalitarian spirit of our national city if developers are able to block out the views of less advantaged residents in order to provide ever higher, broader and, eventually, cramped views of our monumental core.

**Carol Schull, Arlington, VA (July 8, 2013)**
I strongly oppose altering the height limits to allow taller buildings in Washington, DC. Taller buildings would greatly diminish the city’s unique historic character and have a tremendously negate impact on its appeal and special charm. More density also would make the city a far less attractive and comfortable place to live and work (I work in the city). Please do not allow development pressures to ruin our magnificent, historic city. It is easy to observe the detrimental effects of new high rise, high density development in many once special cities around the world. Please don’t let it happen here.

**Eden Burgess, DC (July 8, 2013)**
Please do not raise the height limit. DC has a unique skyline that should not be threatened by high-rises and other eyesores.

**Oscar Beisert, DC (July 9, 2013)**
As long as there are blighted areas and vacant lots, as well as flat parking lots, how can we justify obscuring and/or diminishing the capitol building and the Federal areas with taller buildings? And as far as affordable housing goes, Washington, D.C. is not an affordable city. There will never be affordable housing for people. Raising the height requirement will only pave the way for the demolition of more older buildings (of greater construction quality) and the creation of larger condo and office buildings. Yes, perhaps the government will build taller buildings for public housing, etc., but what good will that do? Public and affordable housing should be smaller scale and mixed into areas rather than being in one massive complex (i.e. the poor section/the affordable section). NO.

**Christine, LeDroit Park, DC (July 9, 2013)**
I really think that the height limit should be maintained, it is the defining feature of our city that makes it livable and a distinct environment. One major concern I have is the lack of affordable housing, which many have commented would be at least somewhat alleviated with a lifting of the height restrictions. I disagree unless there are also policies that force development at below market rate, which of course means subsidies. Just allowing developers to build higher will only increase the inventory of market-rate housing, and will not address other issues.
Lisa Dunner, Bethesda, MD (July 9, 2013)
Please keep the height limitations as they are because we have a unique beautiful city. DO NOT RAISE THE HEIGHT!!!!

Rhegina Sinozich, Silver Spring, MD (July 9, 2013)
Please don't change the height limitations! We have an incredibly beautiful city precisely BECAUSE of the height limitations. Let's keep it that way. DON'T RAISE THE HEIGHT!!!!

Carlton Fletcher, Glover Park, DC (July 9, 2013)
I oppose any change in the present height regulations, as such an action would be at the expense of the prominence and dignity of the United States Capitol, the Washington Monument, and the Lincoln Memorial.

Sharon Bernier, DC (July 10, 2013)
Just look across the river to VA and see why we do not want to spoil our cityscape with tall buildings. It will become just like any other big city with less green space, not view of the sky and our wonderful monuments, more traffic etc. No to any change in the current law.

David P. Frenkel, DC (July 10, 2013)
I have lived in the city of Washington DC for more than 30 years. I have raised my family here. My daughter attended DC public schools. I have been active in my community. We frequently host guests at our house in Friendship Heights, DC from Europe and from other parts of the USA.

I write to express my strong opposition to efforts to raise DC's building height limit. Washington DC's building height limit makes it unique among major American cities. This uniqueness provides a more serene and livable feel to our city. It is something that every guest who has ever stayed with us has commented on – always in a positive light. Guests tell us that they love to visit Manhattan but if they had to choose a place to live, they would choose Washington, DC over Manhattan any time. Having grown up just a few miles from Manhattan, I agree with their assessment. Cities with skyscrapers have their own advantages but they lack the charm we retain in our nation's capital by keeping our skyline open.

Again, I urge the National Capital Planning Commission to reject plans to increase Washington, DC's building height limit.

Thank you.

William Brown, DC (July 10, 2013)
The 1910 Height Act has guaranteed the low-profile cityscape of the District of Columbia for over 100 years and has made the District of Columbia unique among the major cities of the world with its distinctive skyline.

The 1910 Height Act has been called the Third Dimension of the L’Enfant Plan. President George Washington issued the first building height regulations for the city on Oct 17, 1791, concerned as much about structural and fire safety as about urban design. While Washington’s regulations were suspended from June 25, 1796 until 1800, Thomas Jefferson extended the suspension until 1904 but personally hoped the new capital would emulate Paris with buildings “low & convenient, and the streets light and airy.” There is a sense that development pressures are fostering modifications to the Act; however, the District has just recently achieved its short-term goal of a resident population of 600,000 but it is nowhere near the all-time high of 899,000 in 1946. Let us encourage reasonable development within the current limits of the Height Act in blighted, underutilized areas of the city before we tamper with something that will forever change the character of the District of Columbia.
As Vancouver, B.C. Planner Larry Beasley warned in his presentation to the NCPC in 2010: “Take care not to open things up too casually. I dare say, those height limits may be the single most powerful thing that has made this city so amazingly fulfilling.” As Washington’s oldest civic organization, the Association of the Oldest Inhabitants is dedicated to preserving the District’s heritage through member reminiscences as well as preserving and promoting both the L’Enfant and McMillan Plans.

Linda Lawson, DC (July 10, 2013)
I strongly object to raising the height limits in Washington DC. 1. It destroys the vista of the city. I have visited Philadelphia a number of times. Even though one view shed up the avenue was preserved, the Penn building is now diminished by the new buildings towering around it. And the enjoyable pedestrian scale has been altered for the worse. The whole view shed needs to be preserved. 2. it destroys the historic nature of DC. DC has always been a more low-rise residential city than industrial. Early maps show small townhouses downtown. Whether new buildings are residential or commercial, the character of the city will be changed if higher buildings are allowed.

Jane Huntington, DC (July 10, 2013)
Instead of extending height limits in this distinct capital city, the District would be wise to support improvements in neglected neighborhoods. Rather than recreating Crystal City on iconic K Street, commit to revitalizing gateway avenues, as former Mayor Williams promised. New residents are settling in still fairly affordable neighborhoods near gateway avenues. Rhode Island Avenue, near where I live, presents many economically viable opportunities to serve old and new. We're hungry for vibrant neighborhoods. The erstwhile NCRC was charged with revitalization of underserved neighborhoods. Now that the task is in DMPED and OP, we urge you to steer development investments away from taller, bigger buildings, maintain height limits in the Nation's Capital, and invest in stabilizing and reenergizing neighborhoods.

Charles McMillian, Capitol Hill, DC (July 17, 2013)
The current framework for discussing any needs for changes to the DC Height Act pits a badly misinformed “bigger is better” understanding of “smart growth” against subjective aesthetic views and opinions. This false bias predetermines the wrong policy outcomes and serves the financial interests only of large, world-wide construction, law and banking firms while ignoring the substantive interests of DC, its residents, businesses and other US citizens who value a stable capital city.

Lilly Shoup, DC (July 19, 2013)
Hello, I am unable to make one of the public meetings, but wanted to submit feedback on the study. Please do not change the height act limits. I think that the current limits promote redevelopment in the city by pushing real estate development into underutilized areas. For example, redevelopment of the St. Elizabeth’s Campus would likely be halted if developers could build 100 story skyscrapers on K St. Leaving the height limits as is will ensure the city continues to grow and expand into new areas. I love this city and think the height act positively contributes to our city's image and broad appeal. Please do not change it! Thank you!
SUBMITTED ESSAYS, DOCUMENTS, AND POSITION PAPERS
The following documents were provided by attendees of the public meetings or submitted via the public comment portal on the Height Act Master Plan website.

**Contents (PDF attachments)**

- Suggested edits to Height Master plan core principles
- Excerpt: Height of Buildings in Washington, DC – Conference Report Congressional Record of May 21, 1910
- Excerpt: “The Federal Interest,” The Lewis Plan
  By Harold Lewis, 1956
- Why Change the Building Height Act of 1910
  By Ibtihaal Meleville, Submitted May 13, 2013
- The D.C. Height Limits: How the Restrictions Have Impacted Development in the Capital
  By Sarah Dahlia Gutschow, December 3, 2009
- Effects of the 975 Foot Comcast Center on the Philadelphia Economy: Implications and Opportunities for Washington, DC
  By Fredrick Harwood, Submitted May 13, 2013
- Wasted Space and Lost Opportunity: Washington’s Height Limits and the City’s Future
  By Fredrick Harwood, Submitted May 13, 2013
- Revising the Height Act of 1910
  Tenleytown Neighbors Association, September 17, 2012
- Statement of Janet Quigley
  On behalf of the Capitol Hill Restoration Society, June 4, 2013
- Letter to Congressman Gowdy
  Janet Quigley, July 18, 2012
- Letter to Executive Director Marcel Acosta
  Dorn McGrath, June 17, 2012
- Comments on Behalf of the National Coalition to Save Our Mall
  Judy Scott Feldman, July 12, 2013
OVERVIEW

In November 2012, the National Capital Planning Commission and the District of Columbia Office of Planning announced a joint Height Master Plan to explore the impact of strategic changes to the federal Height of Buildings Act of 1910.

Congressman Darrell Issa, Chairman of the U.S. House of Representatives Committee on Oversight and Government Reform requested the study following the committee’s July 19, 2012 hearing on “Changes to the Height Act: Shaping Washington, D.C., For the Future.” As stated in Representative Issa’s October 3, 2012 request letter, the study will explore potential strategic changes to the federal Height of Buildings Act of 1910 (The Height Act1) in those areas outside the L’Enfant City2 that support local economic development goals, while taking into account the impact on federal interests, national security concerns, compatibility to surrounding neighborhoods, local residents input and other related factors. NCPC and the District of Columbia were asked to determine the extent to which the Height Act continues to serve the interests of both federal and District governments.

The Study is Guided by Three Core Principles

- Ensure the prominence of federal landmarks1 and monuments by preserving their views of them and their setting and from them;
- Maintain the overall horizontality of the monumental city skyline; and
- Promote positive impacts and minimize negative impacts to nationally significant historic resources, historic and otherwise, including the L’Enfant Plan.

The Study is Organized into Three Phases

Phase 1: Overview, discussion of study principles and issues shaping federal and local interests, case studies. (Public meetings in May and June 2013).

Phase 2: Planning analysis results and identification of opportunity areas for strategic changes to the Height Act. (Public meetings in late July 2013).


The National Capital Planning Commission will then deliberate and act on the recommendations and transmit final recommendations to Congress.

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1 The Height Act is a federal law which provides uniform restrictions on the height of all buildings within the District of Columbia boundaries. The original L’Enfant City (also known as Washington City) generally includes all areas bounded by Rock Creek and Potomac Parkway, Florida Avenue and the Potomac and Anacostia Rivers.

1 “Federal landmarks or monuments” may be buildings, structures, or areas of land or water recognized as such by the Secretary of the Interior or other federal authorities [My intent here is to ensure the scope of this core principle includes features other than those in federal ownership, e.g., the National Cathedral and the designated portions of its grounds.]
HEIGHT OF BUILDINGS IN DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA.

MAY 21, 1910.—Ordered to be printed.

Mr. Campbell, from the committee of conference, submitted the following

CONFERENCE REPORT.

[To accompany H. R. 19970.]

The committee of conference, on the disagreeing votes of the two Houses on the amendments of the Senate to the bill (H. R. 19970) to regulate the height of buildings in the District of Columbia, having met, after full and free conference have agreed to recommend and do recommend to their respective Houses as follows:

That the House recede from its disagreement to the amendments of the Senate numbered 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, and 6, and agree to the same.

That the House recede from its disagreement to the amendment of the Senate numbered 7, and agree to the same with an amendment as follows:

Strike out the words "Eleventh and Twelfth" in said amendment and insert in lieu thereof the words First and Fifteenth; and the Senate agree to the same.

P. P. Campbell,
Geo. A. Pearre,
Wm. P. Borland,
Managers on the part of the House.

J. H. Gallinger,
Thos. H. Carter,
Thomas S. Martin,
Managers on the part of the Senate.
STATEMENT OF THE MANAGERS ON THE PART OF THE HOUSE.

The managers on the part of the House at the conference on the disagreeing votes of the two Houses on the amendments of the Senate to the bill (H. R. 19070) to regulate the height of buildings in the District of Columbia submit the following detailed statement of the effect of the action agreed upon and recommended in the conference report.

Amendments Nos. 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, and 6, to all of which the House agrees, provide that the inspector of buildings shall pass upon the plans and specifications accompanying any application which was filed in the office of the Commissioners of the District of Columbia prior to the adoption of the present building regulations of said District for the construction of a steel fireproof dome on any buildings in square 345 of said District, and shall make no changes in said plans or specifications unless for the structural safety of the buildings it is necessary to do so.

Amendment No. 7: As proposed by the Senate buildings could be erected to a height of 160 feet on the north side of Pennsylvania avenue between Eleventh and Twelfth streets NW. As agreed to in conference a height of 160 feet will be permitted on the north side of said avenue between First and Fifteenth streets NW.; and the House recesses.
The Federal Interest

A statement of what is believed to be the essence of the interest of the Congress in control of development in Washington was given in the Introduction (page 5). Of course, the Federal Government as an employer also has an interest, identical with that of any other employer, in an efficient and livable city for its employees.

At the present time, the provisions of the Act of 1910 establish absolute controls over height in business districts at 130 feet and in residential districts at 90 feet in order to assure the continued dominance of the Capitol and the Washington Monument and to preserve a relatively even cornice line along individual streets. These limits apply to habitable space and some, but not all, of the usual roof structures. It is believed that there is no justification for asking Congress to change these limits, although there is a need for putting an upper limit on the miscellaneous roof structures.

Therefore, a maximum overall height, to include all roof structures, of 150 feet is proposed for the Central Business District.

There is an apparent inconsistency in the Congressional distinction between commercial and residential districts. Why, one might ask, should a residential building affect the skyline more than a commercial building? Although there is no evidence to show that anyone in Congress was thinking this way, there is a good reason for the distinction. The hills surrounding the center of the city are occupied by residential districts, and a 130-foot building on one of these heights would start from an altitude of as much as 200 feet above the general level of the business district and the base of the Capitol building. Seen from afar (as from the National Airport), a 130-foot apartment building (with roof structures) built on Meridian Hill would reach 350 feet above sea level and appear to be three-quarters of the height of the Washington Monument and taller than the Capitol (elevation 305 at the top of the dome). Therefore, the distinction is worth preserving, as an expression of legitimate federal interest.

The immediate surroundings of important government buildings must be controlled in detail, and hence are not a suitable object for general rules. The Commissioners’ Schedule of Building Heights and the Fine Arts Commission form the proper channels for the federal interest here and should be used more fully.

The federal interest in light and air in the streets coincides with that of the private community. The Congressional control of height by street width could therefore be replaced by a zoning control if and when Congress feels that this phase of its interest would thus be adequately protected. This is desirable because the street width provisions have an unwanted by-product of limiting height and bulk erratically over the area of the business district.

The protection of light and air in the streets will be discussed further below, after other aspects of the height controls are discussed.

Compatibility with Residential Development

The commercial and industrial districts outside of the business center of the city are controlled, in general, so as to prevent the development of buildings which are incompatible with the surrounding residential development. A number of different situations are found.

Small Neighborhood Centers — These retail centers are most intimately associated with residential development. The uses permitted in them and the density permitted will be extremely restricted in order to make them acceptable as neighbors to homeowners who are jealous of the appearance of their neighborhoods. In conformity with this pattern, it is logical to permit only ground floor commercial use.

Community Business Centers — These commercial areas draw on a wider range of services at greater intensity per acre of ground than in the neighborhood centers; therefore the permitted bulk is larger. Parking requirements have been designed to force the developer to shoulder all of the parking load which he creates, since the major part of the trade for such an area will be auto-borne. The parking takes up ground floor space and necessitates putting part of the floor space above ground. A height of three stories will enable the designer, in most instances, to take advantage of the full bulk allowance, provide the necessary parking, and create an interesting design. Yet this is not out of scale with most of the residential areas that the community centers are associated with. Hence a limit of 45 feet is considered adequate. Small theater buildings and the few other special purpose buildings permitted in these centers can also be built within this height.

Major Outlying Business and Employment Centers — Several business centers now exist, and others will develop in time, which accommodate large numbers of office workers as well as retail and service businesses serving larger communities than the purely local shopping centers previously described. The business units involved will need relatively large buildings, consequently a much larger FAR will be allowed. However, parking requirements will be just as stringent so as to protect nearby residential areas. Hence, additional height must be permitted to allow the design of suitable buildings. Nevertheless, these should not be out of scale with the largest residential structures — the eight-story, 90-foot apartment buildings which are permitted in all apartment districts by exception, and in the highest density district as a matter of right. An illustration of the kind of development permitted in this district was given in Figure 6 (page 25).

Heavy Commercial and Light Manufacturing Areas — These areas occur in close association with residential development along major thoroughfares and along railroad lines. Current trends in construction for most of the uses
Why Change Buildings Act of 1910?

As a DC native and resident of the district, I am here standing firmly against raising the height limit of our prestigious and historical skyline. Over the last 5 yrs, DC has undergone many-many changes; some good for the district, some bad, much leaving unfinished or left imperfect (ex: streets left uneven, potholes, and excessive cement which puts a lot of strain/damages to our cars). The restrictions on the height of all buildings within the District’s boundaries were put in place for a reason and should not be changed to increase the height of buildings today. It will increase the amount of traffic within city limits, interfere with the health of our citizens and cause a severe overload of EMS and DCPD services that are already understaffed with a high work load. Not to mention destroy the ambiance of our old and historic architecture.

Where do most people get their daily dose of vitamin D?; the sun. Building higher than the monument can and will block-out much needed sun rays. Not having enough vitamin D can result in an increase of health issues, such as rickets (a disorder caused by a lack of vitamin D, calcium, or phosphate. It leads to softening and weakening of the bones), osteoporosis (a disease in which bones become fragile and more likely to fracture. Usually the bone loses density, which measures the amount of calcium and minerals in the bone), diabetes (Lack of vitamin D can lead to diabetes, study finds from Dr. Ken Sikaris and his colleague Zhong Lu, both of which are pathologists at Melbourne Pathology in Australia, tested the blood levels of 5,200 participants as part of their research. After accounting for more than ten outside risk factors that may affect outcomes, the duo found that participants with the highest blood levels of vitamin D had a significantly reduced risk of developing type-2 diabetes compared to those with the lowest levels.), multiple sclerosis (people in parts of the world that get less sunlight, and therefore have less vitamin D, are more likely than others to get multiple sclerosis. researchers understand that during fetal development and very early childhood, certain proteins that are activated by vitamin D directly interact with the gene. Lack of vitamin D causes the gene to act in a way that increases the chances of developing multiple sclerosis. In other words, the news is that researchers now understand why vitamin D seems to matter in MS.) and heart disease (the same vitamin D deficiency that can result in weak bones now has been associated with an increased risk of cardiovascular disease, Framingham Heart Study researchers report in Circulation: Journal of the American Heart Association. In a study of 1,739 offspring from Framingham Heart Study participants (average age 59, all Caucasian), researchers found that those with blood levels of vitamin D below 15 nanograms per milliliter (ng/mL) had twice the risk of a cardiovascular event such as a heart attack, heart failure or stroke in the next five years compared to those with higher levels of vitamin D). Supplements are available over the counter, but why buy and take pills to increase a vitamin that you can get for FREE... using the Sun. As long as it isn’t blocked-out by these monstrous monstrosities.
Allowing the city to raise the building height limit means more space for more people, which will also lead to an even more increase of traffic in our already overpopulated city. This will only cause more congestion on streets, metro and parking. With traffic comes pollution; that too will aid to rapidly ruin the surfaces of our monuments. Commuting to and from work is already crowded and stressful. The last thing we need is more people commuting in and out of DC.

The last effect that I will speak on today is the insufficient amount of EMS and DCPD staff/officers. Most resent reportings showed an astonishing low number of Emergency Units to deploy to citizen around the entire city. Our wounded officers even get a slow response time for EMS. More people in DC will further overload the emergency responders’ capability to service and aid our citizens.

There are many close cities on the outskirts of DC for people to live and developers to invest. Casting a gloomy shadow on established residents should be out of the question. D.C. is not nor does it want to be N.Y, New Jersey, Miami, Chicago, or LA. We are the District of Columbia, and Capitol City of the USA. We should not be compared to any other state with representation in Congress, because we do not have 1. We should not try to emulate other cities, but rather should be proud of our prestigious monuments which mark important moments in our countries history. This is what tourists come to see when they visit the Nation’s Capitol; they go the N.Y.C for the skyscrapers. DC is known for its historical memorials/monument, cherry blossoms, and to witness legislature. Taller Glass building will overshadow everything. This is already happening on Capitol Hill and to name a particular sight; the 1100th Block of 5th Street N.E where a new apartment building is creating a loud stir. With all these concerns, what’s in it for the established residents? What do we get out of this change, “Who benefits from this change?” Seemingly the only people I see who are benefitting are the developers. They can build extra floors and make a substantial amount of more money when leasing or renting the extra units provided. I don’t feel it’s fair for established residents to suffer for the benefit of greedy investors. Maintain Our Historical Architecture, Save Our Skyline!!!!!!

DC's skyline is unique and no building should be higher than the National Monument.

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The D.C. Height Limits: How the Restrictions Have Impacted Development in the Capital

Sarah Dahlia Gutschow

Survey of Planning Law Principles, 970:517
Professor Judd Schechtman
December 3, 2009
As visitors to Washington, DC explore the city from the comfort of the omnipresent tour buses, they are often informed that the city’s relative lack of tall buildings is due to a strict height limit. Residents and tourists alike commonly believe that the local law was imposed in order to preserve the view of the Washington Monument and U.S. Capitol Building from all areas of the city. As it turns out, this frequently repeated bit of local lore is not quite true. Although the city does have stringent height restrictions, the law was actually passed by Congress in 1899 in response to community outrage over the construction of the Cairo Hotel in the northwest quadrant. In the past few decades, Washington has experienced an economic resurgence, prompting calls to abolish or modify Washington’s height restrictions in order to encourage greater density and alleviate high office rents. This paper examines the ways in which Washington’s height limits have shaped the city’s subsequent growth and how this issue fits into the broader question of zoning restrictions and economic expansion.

Washington, DC has been a planned city since its inception. When George Washington chose Washington D.C. to be the nation’s capital in 1791, it was supposed to represent a break from the traditional notion of a city, unencumbered by greedy commercial interests and unruly mobs like in Boston and Philadelphia. The site was a compromise location between Northern and Southern states, encompassing the preexisting port cities of Alexandria and Georgetown in Virginia, as well as a deepwater harbor in Anacostia. The French artist Pierre L’Enfant designed a Baroque-style, rectilinear grid for the city in order to provide grand space fit for the symbolic home of American ideals, filled with wide boulevards and public parks. L’Enfant’s design has continued to have a deep impact on not only the physical form of the city, but also the way
Washingtonians see themselves. Residents are proud to live in a city that celebrates the nation’s founding doctrines through grandiose architecture and urban planning.¹

While L’Enfant’s planned the horizontal layout, George Washington set a height limit for the city. In 1791, the same year as its founding, the nation’s first president set a 40-foot height restriction in order to “provide for the extinguishment of fires, and the openness and convenience of the town, by prohibiting houses of excessive height.”² Thomas Jefferson, the nation’s third president, envisioned Washington as “an American version of 18th-century Paris, with ‘low and convenient’ housing on ‘light and airy’ streets.”³ This shared vision for the city was based on an aversion to the narrow, polluted early industrial cities of Europe, rather than a protest against high buildings. Until the latter part of the 19th century, building heights were restricted by the large amount of water pressure needed to supply running water and the number of stairs that people were able and willing to climb.

The invention of the elevator and advancements in water pump technology in the 19th century allowed for substantially higher building heights. The era of the skyscraper began in 1884 with the debut of the Home Insurance Building in Chicago, rising ten stories and 138 feet above the city. Although buildings at this height and taller had existed since antiquity, including the Egyptian pyramids, the Home Insurance Building was the first to employ a load-bearing structural frame made of steel, henceforth known as the "Chicago skeleton." This early building method eventually allowed for the construction of the tallest “megastructures” of the modern


world, with the current record holder in Taipei, Taiwan topping out at 1,671 feet.⁴

Technological advances, industrial wealth and cheap energy allowed for this sort of innovation, but whether these structures actually have had a positive impact on the urban form is a separate consideration.

For the residents of Washington, tall buildings stood in stark contrast to the rest of the city’s low-lying, picturesque architecture. At the turn of the century, Washington was in the midst of the City Beautiful movement. The McMillan Plan, formulated in 1901, sought to fully realize L’Enfant’s vision for the city by bringing Old World glamour to the nation’s capital. At the same time that the city was building new public monuments and Beaux Art government structures, private developers were working to bring tall, modern architecture to downtown D.C. When the Cairo Hotel was constructed in the Dupont Circle area, it was reviled as a 14-story aberration that would dwarf the surrounding neighborhood.⁵

In response to protests, Congress passed the Heights of Buildings Act in 1899, which dictated that no new building could exceed the height of the U.S. Capitol. This act was amended in 1910 with the passage of the Building Height Act, which stated “no building shall be erected, altered, or raised in the District of Columbia in any manner so as to exceed in height above the sidewalk the width of the street, avenue, or highway in its front, increased by 20 feet.”⁶

As an addendum, the 1910 act allowed for "spires, towers, domes, minarets, pinnacles, penthouses over elevator shafts, ventilation shafts, chimneys, smokestacks, and fire sprinkler


⁶ D.C. CODE ANN. § 6-601.05 (2001)
tanks may be erected to a greater height," subject to approval by the District's mayor, "provided that penthouses, ventilation shafts, and tanks shall be set back from the exterior walls distances equal to their respective heights above the adjacent roof." This 1910 law still forms the basis of D.C.’s strict height limits, although local planners can make some minor exceptions, such as One Franklin Square, which at 210 feet is currently the tallest commercial building in downtown. The Old Post Office is the tallest structure overall at 315 feet, but it was built before the height limits were set.

These acts were issued at a time in American history when municipal governments were struggling to adapt municipal land use policies to better promote public safety and health and promote property values in Industrial-era cities. The first comprehensive zoning ordinance was issued by New York City in 1916, but this ordinance was predated by turn-of-the-century height and land use regulations. The authority to use police power in order to regulate building heights was granted by the seminal U.S. Supreme Court case Welch vs. Swasey, 214 U.S. 91 (1909), one year before the passage of Washington’s Building Height Act. In fact, Welch vs. Swasey was heavily cited in Village of Euclid, Ohio v. Ambler Realty Co., 272 U.S. 365 (1926), the case that established that the separation of land uses achieves a legitimate public purpose. Citing Welch, as well as other contemporary cases, Justice Sutherland wrote:

There is no serious difference of opinion in respect of the validity of laws and regulations fixing the height of buildings within reasonable limits, the character of materials and methods of construction, and the adjoining area which must be left open, in order to minimize the danger of fire or collapse, the evils of overcrowding and the like, and excluding from residential sections offensive trades, industries and structures likely to create nuisances.  

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7 Welch v. Swasey, 214 U.S. 91, 29 S.Ct. 567, 53 L.Ed. 923 (1909)

8 Village of Euclid, Ohio v. Ambler Realty Co., 272 U.S. 365 (1926)
**Welch vs. Swasey** was the first nation-wide authority to establish not only that the state could regulate the development of private property, but also vary that regulation according to district. The case concerns two statutes passed by Massachusetts in 1904 and 1905 that divided the city of Boston into districts where District A had a building height limit of 80 or 100 feet and District B had a building height limit of 125 feet. Accordingly, the plaintiff was denied a building permit because his proposed construction exceeded those limits. The plaintiff alleged that these regulations were a violation of his constitutional rights because it was a taking of his property without just compensation, as well as a denial of equal protection under the law. The plaintiff also alleged that the law was an illegitimate use of police power because it was based on aesthetic grounds, not public welfare, and because the creation of different height districts was arbitrary.

The plaintiff applied to the Supreme Judicial Court for a writ of mandamus to be issued upon the Building Commissioner of the City of Boston to issue the requested permit, but was denied on the grounds that the height restriction was a legitimate use of police power. The U.S. Supreme Court affirmed this verdict and reiterated that the 1904 and 1905 Acts were, “a proper exercise of the police power of the state, and are not unconstitutional under the equal protection and due process clauses of the Fourteenth Amendment.” Furthermore, they held that, “Where there is justification for the enactment of a police statute limiting the height of buildings in a particular district, an owner of property in that district is not entitled to compensation for the reasonable interference with his property by the statute.”

Thus, *Welch* determined not only that height restrictions are a legitimate use of police power, but also that they therefore do not qualify as government takings subject to compensation under the Fourteenth Amendment. Subsequent cases challenging the validity of height limits
were decided as applied, where variances may be obtained due to undue hardships or practical difficulties. In Washington, the 1910 Building Height Act granted the mayor power to issue variances for architectural embellishments, which was subsequently delegated to the Board of Zoning Adjustment. The plaintiff in *Welch* challenged the law on the grounds that it promoted aesthetics rather than public welfare, but the Court held that the act was legitimate because it was based on the protection of public health and safety, not aesthetics. Later cases, however, held that promoting aesthetics is a legitimate use of police power. The influential case *Landmark Land Co. v. City of Denver*, 738 P.2d 1281 (1986) held that a height restriction in downtown Denver meant to protect views of the Civic Center accomplished a legitimate use of police power and was therefore not a taking.

Washington’s first Zoning Ordinance, passed in 1920, divided the city into various height and use districts, with regulations for each district. The Zoning Act of 1938 established the police power of the Zoning Commission to regulate height. The act also declared that zoning could not supersede the 1910 Building Height Act. The formal structure of the zoning commission changed, especially after the passage of the 1973 Home Rule Act, but the height limit remained intact.10 The switchover from complete Congressional oversight to a locally elected town council and mayor brought some confusion in deciding how zoning regulations should be administered. In 1998, it was established that D.C. Council has the authority under the Home Rule Act of 1973 “to amend the Schedule of Heights of Buildings Adjacent to Public

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9 Landmark Land Co. v. City and County of Denver, 738 P.2d 1281 (Colo. 1986)

Buildings as long as any amendment is within the overall limitations set forth in the Building Height Act of 1910.\textsuperscript{11}

Throughout Washington’s history, Congress has generally favored a more conservative city plan, which has often come into conflict with the actual needs and wants of D.C. residents. In 1940, National Capital Planning Commission chair Frederic Delano actually suggested lowering the height limit. Washington is however susceptible to the same architectural and city planning trends affecting the rest of the country. After a general population decline and the devastating 1968 riots, a number of projects were proposed in order to revitalize the city’s shattered downtown. These urban renewal and highway building projects led to some attempts to construct much higher buildings. In 1968, the McMillan Bill was introduced, which proposed legislation that would raise the height limit to 230 feet. In 1969, Rep. Augustus Hawkins (D-Calif.) introduced bill H.R. 5528, in order “to authorize realistic, economic, and modern building heights and bulk in the District of Columbia”, proposing a 630 foot height limit.

These modern architecture-oriented bills were generally short-lived. After the 1973 Home Rule Act, D.C.’s local government tended to favor more growth-oriented planning policies, while Congressional leaders often sought to preserve the city’s historic character. The height limit was increased to 160 feet in some places through a zoning bonus and residential zones were given a 40-foot limit.\textsuperscript{12} Most recently, in 1994, Rep. Fortney "Pete" Stark (D-Calif.) introduced legislation to Congress that would negate long-standing interpretations of the 1910 Building Height Act. The introduction of the bill (H.R. 4242) was prompted by the proposed


construction of the WETA telecommunications facility in the Foggy Bottom neighborhood, which would have exceeded the area’s 110-foot height limit by 6.5 feet. Congressman Stark felt that "among the most attractive features of our Nation's Capital is its skyline” and wanted to prevent this view from being obscured by rooftop mechanical penthouses and other protrusions that might exceed the height limit. The bill was heard before Congress on April 26, 1994, where it was opposed by D.C. Delegate Representative Eleanor Holmes Norton, who felt that the bill was an intrusion in local affairs.\(^\text{13}\)

Another challenge to the local government’s power to regulate height limits came in the case *Techworld Development Corporation v. District of Columbia Preservation League*, 648 F. Supp. 106 (D.D.C. 1986).\(^\text{14}\) In this case, the District of Columbia Preservation League challenged the National Capital Planning Commission’s (NCPC) approval of Techworld’s proposed 130-foot construction as a violation of D.C. law. After the D.C. Corporation Counsel approved the proposal under a special maximum height formulation, the NCPC voted in favor of the project, including a rezoning and planned unit development approval. The court ruled in favor of Techworld because, according to the 1910 act, “there is no general private right of action for the HBA [Height of Buildings Act]” and the statute specifically authorizes the D.C. Corporation Counsel to approve height variances. Accordingly, the opinion letter of the D.C. Corporation Counsel would only be overturned if the plaintiffs could show that it was “plainly


The D.C. Height Limits

unreasonable or contrary to legislative intent.”

In recent year, controversies over who has the authority to regulate variances have taken a backseat to the overall question of whether or not D.C. should have a height restriction at all. Although citywide height limits are usually seen in terms of the city’s authority to limit growth versus the natural progression of population growth, it is also necessary to examine the issue of private property rights. Early land usage cases like Welch, framed the debates over zoning ordinances and building codes in terms of the right of the individual owners to determine the usage of their property in opposition to the rights of neighboring property owners and the public at large.

If an individual developer chooses to build a tall structure on their property, the building can bring down property values on neighboring properties by restricting scenic views, as in Landmark Land Co. v. City of Denver, or by blocking access to sunlight and air. Blocking sunlight and air may also affect vegetation on the street and in parks, making it difficult for plant life to flourish. If enough tall structures were built on a narrow, densely built grid, the lack of light and air could have an impact on the physical and mental health of the residents. Property values may also be diminished if the tall structures are seen as aesthetically unappealing, or physically dwarf neighboring structures.

In Washington, the debate has mainly centered on aesthetic considerations, which is often grouped under the heading of historic preservation. The changing form of American cities since the advent of the skyscraper and the automobile has brought ample evidence of the huge impact of modern design on urban life. The US National Trust for Historic Preservation was established in 1949, at a time when urban renewal projects and population declines began to pose a serious threat to the physical character of many older American cities. As the nation’s capital,
Washington naturally has been the site of many more important historical events than most mid-sized cities. Furthermore, the fact that George Washington and L’Enfant originally designed Washington to imitate classic cities in Europe is a good indication of how highly residents value historical urban form. The District of Columbia Inventory of Historic Sites originated in 1964, and now contains more than 700 designations encompassing nearly 25,000 properties, including landmarks, building interiors, artifacts, and neighborhood historic districts.\(^{16}\)

This is not to say that height restrictions are completely at odds with modern design, since modern architecture is distinguished by more than size. Although Washington architecture is mostly known for grand Beaux Art structures like the U.S. Capitol Building and the White House, the city’s downtown areas are dominated by squat 1970’s and 80’s-style office buildings, known disparagingly as the “Washington Box.”\(^{17}\) The downtown section, especially the famous K. Street corridor, is teeming with law firms, lobbying firms and non-profits, as well as a large number of restaurants, bars, drugstores and other services that cater to office workers. It is concentrated in the area north of Constitution Avenue NW, east of Rock Creek Park, south of M Street NW, and west of the U.S. Capitol. Downtown D.C. currently has the second lowest vacancy rate in the country, which has led the local government to expand the commercial area to surrounding neighborhoods. The Downtown Business Improvement District, a “tax-funded nonprofit that works to revitalize the city's urban core,”\(^{18}\) is working to bridge the gap between the well-established downtown near the White House and the recently gentrified Gallery District.


\(^{17}\) Van Dyne, Larry (March 2009). Tear It Down! Save it! *The Washingtonian.*

Place/Chinatown neighborhood.

Because so much of the city’s land is owned by the federal government and non-profits, the local government is constantly searching for ways to expand its tax base. In recent years, this continuous pursuit of local property tax revenue has been aided by a general trend towards urban living and gentrification in Washington, with many young office workers moving to historic neighborhoods within the district rather than the Northern Virginia and Maryland suburbs. This trend has been helped by Washington’s extensive Metro, which is currently the second most utilized subway system in the country.\textsuperscript{19} Furthermore, Christopher Leinberger of the Brookings Institute named Washington the country’s most walkable city in 2007.\textsuperscript{20} Young residents value good transit and walkability not only for their contributions to enabling a vibrant urban lifestyle, but also for their contributions to environmental sustainability. In the past few years, concerns over climate change have led to a worldwide focus on energy usage, pollution, waste disposal and other environmental concerns.

In the context of urban renewal, global population growth and climate change, many planners and economists have argued that all three issues can be alleviated by encouraging greater density in urban cores, rather than auto-dependant “urban sprawl” in the suburbs. Because they are capable of accommodating so much office space and residential space within in a small geographic area, many have asserted that encouraging the construction of taller buildings is the best way to increase urban density. Even Paris, the French capital so admired for its

\textsuperscript{19} WMATA Facts. \textit{The Blackburn Institute}. Retrieved November 26, 2009 from http://blackburninstitute.ua.edu

beautiful architecture and charming old streets, has been considering relaxing the city’s height restrictions in order to promote “sustainable development,” although the large majority of residents strongly oppose the plan.\(^{21}\)

In early 2007, the previously mentioned Christopher Leinberger of the Brookings Institute made a controversial speech at the National Building Association conference where he suggested raising Washington’s height limit in order to encourage density. Leinberger asserted that the height limits have deadened Downtown, led to drab, boxy architecture and reduced the municipal tax base. Furthermore, the regulations have promoted suburban sprawl, caused terrible traffic congestion and prevented Washington from becoming a world-class city despite economic growth and a large, expanding core industry – the federal government. Furthermore, the height restrictions force developers to limit retail store heights to 10 feet in order to save room for more office space, although most top retailers prefer 12 to 20 foot high ceilings. The previously mentioned Downtown D.C. Business Improvement District projects that only 57 million square feet of space remains for offices, shops and apartments in the central downtown. If development continues at an annual rate of 3 million to 3.5 million square feet, as it has for the past five years, the remaining land would be occupied by 2027, if not sooner.\(^{22}\) According to one analysis, no more space will be available in a 3.5-mile stretch from Georgetown to Capitol Hill within 15 years.\(^{23}\)


Residents like the height restrictions for quality of life reasons, whereas developers who already own property like the restrictions because they inhibit competition from new builders. The D.C. government, on the other hand, favors measures that will increase the city’s tax revenue. A 2003 study conducted by former Mayor Anthony Williams found that Washington would gain up to $10 billion in tax revenue over 20 years if the height limit were raised to 160 feet throughout the city. Although favored by Mayor Williams and Mayor Fenty, not all members of the local government wish to raise the height limits. Councilmember Phil Graham recently stated, "With all due respect to the great blustering city of Chicago, D.C. is a different place. You have a historical tradition. ... Without that height limit, it would just be another city of tall buildings."^24

The question of how Washington would have developed without a strict height limit was addressed by a recent issue of *Planning* magazine. The article found that current development has led to a positive trend of filling in parking lots and vacant sites with new buildings, creating continuity between the various neighborhoods. The pressure to utilize the entire lot in order to maximize available space causes developers to build with no setbacks, leading to “continuous urban frontages” rather than suburban style setbacks. The limited amount of space also leads development to expand beyond the traditional downtown, creating an even spread of buildings throughout the city. Combined with a strong historic preservation program and well-designed public transit, D.C. has developed into an “urbane place.” The author concluded, “Many other cities would do well to adopt D.C.-style development regulations for their central districts—limiting size by means of height controls and permitting tall buildings at special locations as

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exceptions and not the rule.”

Although most modern planners favor dense urban cores in order to encourage “Smart Growth,” not all “Smart Growth” advocates favor skyscrapers as a means to promote density. Influential thinkers like Nikos Salingaros, James Howard Kunstler and Christopher Alexander believe that “high-rise buildings deform the quality, the function, and the long-term health of urbanism in general by overloading the infrastructure and the public realm of the streets that contain them.” In his influential book *A Pattern Language*, Christopher Alexander advocated a 4-story limit on buildings, with tall buildings reserved for landmarks and monuments, not work or living space. Michael W. Mehaffy writes of the negative environmental effects of skyscrapers, including the “heat island effect”, wind effects, building materials with very high embedded energy, excessive heat gain and loss, high production costs and inefficient floorplates. Due to these and other considerations, Mehaffy believes that the carbon benefits level off at the 4 to 6-story level. As for financial considerations, Carol Willis wrote in her book *Form Follows Finance* that building up results in diminishing returns due to increasingly complex and energy-dependent structural, mechanical, and circulation systems.

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Although some critics do advocate abolishing the height limit entirely, others believe a moderate lifting of the restrictions in selected areas would also benefit the city. Some have suggested that height limits should be lifted around major Metro stations that serve commuters from the Washington region, or only at transportation hubs away from the traditional downtown. Leinberger actually suggests that the regulations be retained in historic areas, such as the corridors along the Mall and along Pennsylvania Avenue between the White House and the Capitol.\(^{29}\)

On the other side of the spectrum, height limit fans suggest that the restrictions should only be lifted after other sections of the city are built out, since most of the city is devoted to low, single family homes, which are “a misallocation of the land, well under optimal density.”\(^{30}\) Rather than a fault of height restrictions, this is a function of poor zoning practice, which could be alleviated by more mixed-use zoning. If there were more residential development in commercial areas, this would also prevent those neighborhoods from being completely abandoned after work hours, which leads to crime and wasted infrastructure resources. As to the question of the "Washington Box," an office building with low ceilings and “square, unimaginative facades,” height limit fans blame poor architecture rather than restrictions, pointing out the number of elegant new buildings built in recent years.\(^{31}\)

If Washington needs an idea of how the city would develop if restrictions were lifted, it can look to Philadelphia, which lifted its height limits in the 1980’s, or Chicago, which lifted its


limits in the 1930’s. Although both of these cities are now home to numerous very tall buildings, the surrounding suburbs have experienced similar levels of sprawl to Washington, suggesting that factors such as zoning and transportation play a larger role in promoting suburbanization than height restrictions. Witold Rybczynski, an architecture critic at the University of Pennsylvania, stated that Philadelphia's skyline took away its distinguishing historic character and "It would be a shame if Washington became like everywhere else. It seems to me that we could have one city that was very different."\textsuperscript{32}

Perhaps it is this sense that Washington is different from the average American city that underlies the strong sentimental attachment to the height limits. Washington is unique not only in the United States, but also in the world, because it is a city planned to be a symbol of American ideals. Despite periodic proposals to change the historic limits, the chances of overturning the law seem slim because of the lack of support from Congress, as well as D.C. residents and some factions of the local government. If current zoning laws can be modified to allow for more mixed use development in underutilized, residential areas, it seems unlikely that the height limit will be substantially altered in the near future. If current population and economic growth patterns continue, however, the city will in fact run out of space one day. When this becomes the case, then as far the height restrictions go, the sky may be the limit.

\textsuperscript{32} Schwartzman, Paul (May 2, 2007). High Level Debate on Future of D.C. \textit{The Washington Post}. 
THE EFFECTS OF THE 975 FOOT COMCAST CENTER ON THE PHILADELPHIA ECONOMY: IMPLICATIONS AND OPPORTUNITIES FOR WASHINGTON DC
Frederic Harwood

Philadelphia’s 57-story Comcast Center was started in first quarter 2003, with demolition, and completed with occupancy 4th quarter 2007. In 2008, the developers, Liberty Property Trust and Comcast Corporation, retained Econsult Corporation to analyze the economic, fiscal and real estate market impacts of the Comcast Center on the City of Philadelphia and the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania.

The following is a summary of the Econsult final report, completed June 3, 2008.*

- One Time Economic Impact of Construction
  - $2B construction costs
  - 17,293 construction jobs
  - $650M construction salaries
- Annual Economic Impact of the completed and occupied building
  - $1.649B Operating Expenditures
  - 9,069 Employment
  - Annual Salary/Earnings $600M
- Tax Revenues to city and commonwealth from construction
  - Philadelphia $12.1M
  - Pennsylvania $44.5M
- Annual tax revenue from ongoing operations of the building
  - Philadelphia $22.7M
  - Pennsylvania $48.6M
- No negative impact on the existing commercial real estate market
- Positive impact on the nearby residential real estate market
- Qualitative benefits in commutes, green buildings, corporate magnet, and charitable and cultural contribution

**Economic Impact of Construction**

Within the City of Philadelphia, one time construction expenditures were $841M, plus $418M in Indirect and Induced Expenditures, totaling 1.26B in
total construction expenditures, supporting 5,400 jobs and generating almost $210M in salary/earnings.

Within the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania, the project accounted for an additional $769M in Indirect and Induced Expenditures, bringing the total construction expenditures in Philadelphia and Pennsylvania to over $2B. Construction employment in Pennsylvania outside Philadelphia was 11,887, bringing total construction employment 17,293. Total payroll earnings in Philadelphia and Pennsylvania were $650M, in 2008 dollars.

**One-Time Upfront Impact Attributable to Comcast Center During Construction Period, Based on Actual Direct Expenditures (in 2008 Dollars).**

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<th>Philadelphia</th>
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**Annual Gross Economic Impact After Occupancy (in 2008 Dollars)**

Within the City of Philadelphia, annual payroll, expenditures of the building’s tenants, and facility maintenance result in almost $1.16B in annual total expenditures supporting over 6,500 jobs and almost $460M in earnings in 2008 dollars.

Within the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania, the Center annually supports an additional $490M in expenditures, an additional 2500 jobs and an additional $140M in salaried earnings.
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<td>Total Annual Earnings/Salaries</td>
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<td>$600M</td>
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Analysis of employment patterns indicates that about 50% of the jobs are new to Philadelphia and would not exist if the Center did not exist. Similarly, about half the Direct and Indirect Expenditures and half of the earnings are new to Philadelphia and would not exist if the Center were not built.

**Tax Revenues from Construction**

One time tax revenues were collected for construction, and were calculated based on actual direct expenditures. Total revenues amounted to $56.6M, with $12.1M going to the City of Philadelphia, and another $44.5M going to the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania.

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<td>Corporate Net Income Tax</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total Local Tax Revenues</td>
<td>$12.1M</td>
<td>Total State Tax Revenues</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Annual Tax Revenues from Ongoing Operations Each Year after Completion, (stated in 2008 dollars)

<table>
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<th>Philadelphia</th>
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<tr>
<td>Wage and Earnings Tax</td>
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<tr>
<td>Sales Tax Revenue</td>
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<td>Business Privilege Taxes</td>
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<td>Total Annual Tax Revenue</td>
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<tr>
<td>Personal Income Taxes</td>
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<tr>
<td>Sales and Use Taxes</td>
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<tr>
<td>Corporate Net Income Tax</td>
<td>$18.4M</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total State Tax Revenues</td>
<td>$48.6M</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

About half of the tax revenue is new to the City of Philadelphia and Commonwealth of Pennsylvania, and would not have accrued had the Comcast Center not been built. A macro analysis finds that in its first 7 years of occupancy, Comcast center will have raised, cumulatively, an additional $119M in new tax revenue for the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania, and an additional $70M in new tax revenue for the City of Philadelphia. By 2030, 22 years after completion of construction, Comcast Center will have contributed, cumulatively, $250M to the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania and $151M to the City of Philadelphia beyond collections had the Center not been built.

Commercial Real Estate Market Impact

Comcast Centers 1.25 million square feet of space has not led to an oversupply, nor did it lead to the emptying out of downtown office buildings. All of the key commercial real estate market indicators were stronger in 2008 than when construction began in 2003. Comcast did not hurt the local commercial office market, even in the short run.

Impact on Residential Real Estate

Whether a development has a beneficial or detrimental effect on its surroundings can be calculated by the bid-price gradient. If the price of housing increases the closer you get to a property, it can be assumed to have a beneficial effect on the neighboring residential real estate market. Conversely, if the price of housing decreases the closer you get to a property, the stronger the property’s detrimental effect.

Comcast had a positive effect on residential properties within a mile, based on sales data of homes within 3 miles. Houses located within one mile of the
Center enjoyed an increase of 13.9 percent in property values, even as the
downtown real estate market values decreased overall in 2003-2007 by 10%.

<table>
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<td>410</td>
<td>395</td>
<td>375</td>
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</table>

Q1-03 Demolition Q1-2003
Q1-05 Groundbreaking Q1-2005
Q2-07 Topping off Q2-2007
Q4-07 Completion Q4-2007

Homes closest to Comcast Center gained about $100,000 in market value
between groundbreaking and occupancy. Homes within half a mile gained
$55,000, and homes within one mile gained $30,000. The depths of the real
estate recession that the Comcast effect was bucking is indicated by homes 2
miles from the Center, which lost $20,000 in value, while those 3 miles from
the center, which lost $45,000 in value between the start and end of the
project.

**Qualitative Benefits**

Comcast Center brings many qualitative benefits to Philadelphia. The
Center provides environmentally friendly Class An office space that allows,
in Econsult’s words, for the “natural filtering of older and more functionally
obsolete (or otherwise less attractive) buildings into higher-value uses.” In
other words, it allows the market to downgrade older and less efficient
buildings, creating more Class B and C space for start ups and small
companies, or making the demolition of obsolete buildings economically
feasible.

The Comcast Center is the first new LEED office project within the city. Its
1.25M square feet of space sits atop a subway and commuter train station. It
has large open floors like are favored by open space high tech firms, and it
has enough square feet to attract and house a corporate giant with lots of
jobs. It shows the way for other LEED projects.
Comcast has been a good corporate citizen as well, directly contributing $11M to local charities and cultural organizations between 2003 and 2007. Susan Roberts, wife of Comcast’s founder Ralph Roberts, is the namesake for a major theater downtown on the Avenue of the Arts. Comcast has contributed over $1B in “In-kind contributions, including public, educational and governmental cable channels, public service announcements, Newsmakers Website, and other free or discounted service.

Best of all, the size of the building “keeps much of Comcast Corporation – its headquarters, its operations, its jobs and its growth—within City limits, where its operating and charitable activity can most directly benefit the City and its residents.” Furthermore, investing itself in Center City may set the stage for other major corporations to locate in Center City, creating a locus for what Richard Florida has called the Creative Class. “Finally, the physical location of the Center stretches the office core of Center City, creating additional locational value for the city.”

**Implications for Washington DC**

Were the District of Columbia able to crack the height limit, the city could substantially improve employment, tax and revenue resources to tend to the needs of residents and neighborhoods, and become greener and stop contributing to sprawl.

600 and 900 feet is not unfeasible. Philadelphia has built nine 800-950 foot towers since 1983, while preserving vistas for important historical sites. Philadelphia’s high rises have extended beyond the central business district and now include the river and west Philadelphia/University of Pennsylvania. Philadelphia wants mixed-use development—commercial high rises alongside residential, to support the city’s retail, entertainment, cultural, and tourism base.

Paris and Berlin have similarly decided to build high, in full knowledge that important historical and cultural sites must be respected, and view lines preserved.

Paris has built 14 buildings taller than 490 feet in LaDefense, just west of Paris, and has raised the city’s height limit to 590 feet, starting with
developments in the 13th Arondissment. 600-foot projects are planned for the 17th and 15th Arondissments.

Berlin has 900-foot (300 meters) towers at Alexanderplatz, and has built 20-25 stories (200 meters) in Charlottenburg, at Technical University in East Berlin, near the Spree River near Humboldt University, at Potsdamer Platz, and in Dahlem near U bahn stops. At Wittenberg Platz a new 30-story building is under construction, and in a neighborhood called Friedrichshain, near Boxhagener Platz, a complex called Media Spree will be a planned development for offices, apartments, and skyscrapers. Whether the complex will go to 200 or 300 meters is still under discussion. Residents are afraid of loosing their access to the River Spree. City planners are just as determined to realize an important commercial and residential center on a prime spot along the river.

Every 900-foot tower adds to the Washington’s economy, its jobs base, and draws the creative class who in turn create support jobs for those with manual and service skills.

Every 900-foot tower provides 17,000 construction jobs and almost $1B in construction salaries. Every 900 foot tower annually churns $2B in operating expenditures into the local economy, 10,000 jobs, and annual salary and earnings upwards ob $1B. A substantial percent of those employees will choose to live within a mile of their workplace, adding to neighborhood vitality, with retail, entertainment and cultural opportunities.

For every 900-foot building, the city’s tax revenues from construction will be upwards of $15M, with an additional $60M to surrounding jurisdictions. Annually the city of Washington will collect over $25M in taxes, and the surrounding jurisdictions an additional $60M for the benefit of schools, the elderly, health care, transportation, parks and recreation.

Every 900-foot tower, built side by side with residential towers, keeps commercial zones vibrant and safe 24 hours. A 24 hour city creates recreational, cultural, social, and educational opportunities, but only if they are built alongside commercial establishments. A commercial zone that empties out at night is both dead and deadly.

The opportunity for Washington is clear. World capitals with traditions and history older than ours are adopting and adapting to high-rise commercial
and residential development. Paris, Berlin and London have adopted high-rise development. It is time for Washington Dc.

This article is a summary of Econsult’s 32 page report. The entire Econsult report can be accessed at

Frederic Harwood, a resident of Shaw since 1989, lived in Philadelphia from 1969 to 1989. He holds a PhD, and was a tenured associate professor at Temple University for fifteen years. In 1984 he co-founded a consulting company in pharmaceutical research and development, Barnett International. In 1989 he moved to Washington DC and became executive vice president of the Association of Clinical Research Professionals. In 1998 he resigned from ACRP to participate in a family-run businesses on U Street, from which he withdrew in 2002. He founded the DC Nightlife Association, and has served as its unpaid chair since its founding.

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1606 8th St NW, Washington 20001
202 438 4800
The 20 districts are located spirally around the historic city centre.
Summary

- Alt-Treptow, Berlin, Germany – Treptowers und Molecule Man von der Spree aus gesehen / Treptowers and Molecule Man as seen from Spree
- Quelle / Source
  - selbst fotografiert / taken by myself
- Datum der Aufnahme / Time of creation
  - 2005-09-22
- Fotograf / Photographer
  - Georg Stickers
- Bearbeitung / edits
  - Perspektive korrigiert / perspective corrected

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WASTED SPACE, LOST OPPORTUNITY: WASHINGTON’S HEIGHT LIMITS AND THE CITY’S FUTURE

Can a Congressman from Suburban San Diego Change the Face and the Economy of Washington

Frederic Harwood

The District of Columbia’s commercial real estate is more expensive per square foot than Manhattan’s financial district. The area’s traffic is the worst in the country, with ever-expanding sprawl adding to the nation’s longest commuting times. Only 11% of the metropolitan area’s 5.7 million residents live in the District of Columbia, among the lowest percentage in the US and well behind New York City’s 43%, Los Angeles’ 30%, and Chicago’s 28%. We rank well below other small-footprint cities: Boston’s is 13.6%, Seattle’s 18%, and Portland OR’s 26%, a city known for limiting sprawl. The Brookings Institute reports that 21.8% of the DC metro region’s jobs are within 3 miles of the Central Business District, compared with 31% in New York, 29% in Boston, 24% in Portland OR and 27% in Seattle.

The city contains almost half of Metro’s stations, yet none show the kind of smart planning evident in Arlington VA, where metro stations serve as walkable, high density housing and employment hubs. Prime high-rise sites such as the old convention center, the new convention center neighborhood, and NOMA north of Union station are relegated to mid-rise mediocrity. New metro development around burgeoning metro centers such as Mt. Vernon, Howard/Shaw, Petworth, U Street, and even Columbia Heights fail to support the kind of smart development evident in Courthouse, Ballston, Clarenden, Rosslyn, and especially Tyson’s Corner, where high density housing and employment are planned to sit atop Metro stations.

The world’s fastest growing cities, with the greatest job growth, are built at high densities using tall commercial buildings, as is the case with the District’s primary competitor for jobs, Tyson’s Corner. Yet the District acts otherwise. North Capitol/NOMA, the largest close-in opportunity for new
development, has been filled with undistinguished 8-10 story breadboxes. Other recent missed opportunities include the old convention center site, New York Avenue from Florida to 9th, 14th Street NW, Rhode Island from 17th to 7th NW, 7th from O to Howard University, Foggy Bottom, and North of Massachusetts Avenue NW. A building that shows the aesthetic downside of the height limit is 500 New Jersey Avenue NW, a graceful 12-story mid-rise that viewed from Massachusetts Avenue feels cut off just as it begins to soar. And pity George Washington University, a dynamic community whose growth is hemmed in by an obstreperous neighborhood and the city’s height limits.

The District’s height limit is based on the width of the street they are on, with caps set at 90 feet, 130 feet, and in a very few places 160 feet. Thus, 8-12 story buildings occupy locations that could support three to four times the number of jobs and housing on that site. Under the height limits, what open land remains, primarily the proposed Howard Town, the East Capitol/RFK Stadium waterfront, Southwest, and the Nationals’ stadium area, will not take full advantage of the city’s future needs for housing and jobs.

Downtown, completely built out, continues to be an important address, especially for law firms, lobbyists and policy centers. While Akridge did demolish the National Restaurant Association building at 17th and L, trading in a worn out 11-story building for another 11-story building is too expensive to support future downtown redevelopment. The District will have to build up or see jobs and housing continue to select Arlington and Tyson’s.

Vocal interests, especially in close-in neighborhoods, will fight to preserve the status quo, no matter what the benefits are to the larger community. They will argue for quality of life, livability, and historic preservation, to retain the small town scale of their overgrown southern city. But preserving the status quo denies the needs of a living city, the great capitol of a great country. Embracing the future includes building up.

Illustrative of the benefits of challenging height limits is what happened between 1984 and 1989 in historic Philadelphia to change that city’s height limits.
1500 block of K Street—A stubby tide of bread boxes
Photo Wiki Commons

“\textit{I think the squalor of your environment on the ground, which is where it really counts, is the shocking thing you should be concerned about.}” —not the height of the buildings. Architect Richard Weinstein
Southwest view from the Cairo in Dupont Circle. Most Washington monuments are obscured except when seen from Virginia. Photo Courtesy of Wiki Commons

PHILADELPHIA: A STUBBY TIDE OF UNDISTINGUISHED BUILDINGS

When the Alexander Calder-designed cast iron statue of William Penn was hoisted atop Philadelphia’s City Hall in 1894, it was, at 548 feet, the world’s third tallest structure, bested by only the 1,063-foot Eiffel Tower and the 555-foot Washington Monument. It rose well above the 288-foot US Capitol building.

Penn’s statue, like the Washington Monument, took on cultural and political meaning beyond its impressive dimensions. As a symbol of civic pride and power, it provided a height limit, never codified by law, which no building was to exceed, at the risk of taking on the city’s political and commercial establishment. In polls taken as late as 1984 more than 60 percent of Philadelphians supported the height limit.

As in the District of Columbia, many of Philadelphia’s developers proposed buildings that approached the height limit. One building, 1818 Market, came
within 18 feet of the 548-foot limit. To justify the economics of the project, the developer built every square foot allowed, built out to the property lines, with no set backs, open spaces, or architectural embellishments from the base to the top of its 40th floor. It is a breadbox, and it is as dull as white bread.

UPENDED KLEENEX BOXES

In fact, what Planning Commission chairperson Barbara Kaplan called ‘upended Kleenex boxes,’ dominated Philadelphia’s skyline. Penn Center, created in the 1950’s on the railroad tracks left vacant when Penn Station was demolished, is a three-block long collection of undistinguished 20 to 30-story glass and steel rectangles, a lifeless Rockefeller Center. As the New York architect Richard Weinstein noted in remarks before the Planning Commission, “I don’t know of a city that combines the splendor and amplitude of the great civic gesture of the past with such a mediocre new environment.” He could have been talking about I, K or L Street in Washington.

When the Philadelphia developer Willard Rouse III gained control of an important block at 17th and Chestnut, he challenged the Philadelphia height limits with a project he named Liberty Place. Nephew of James Rouse, the developer of Boston’s Faneuil Hall Marketplace, New York’s South Street Seaport, Harborplace in Baltimore, and the planned community Columbia MD, Willard knew a thing or two about developments that change cities and people’s lives for the better. Rouse proposed two 55-65-story buildings on his block, a proposal that created some excitement and considerable opposition.

The debate was contentious and heated. Historic preservationists, supported by Edmund Bacon, the city’s esteemed Director of Planning, along with near-downtown civic associations, vigorously opposed the Rouse plan. They warned of adulteration of the city’s historic neighborhoods, its walkability, along with the usual concerns about parking, traffic, noise, and congestion. Under the banner of livability, they touted Philadelphia’s presumed “human scale.” The mayor noted that many feared becoming another New York or Chicago. (Bacon would resign in protest.)

On the other hand, Rouse said the height limits virtually mandated mediocre buildings since buildings had insufficient floor space to make design and
architecture economically feasible. In response to a comment that the city’s economy was doing fine with the limits, Steve Poses, a restaurateur, said that might be true for law firms or office workers, but the nighttime vitality of the city, especially downtown, was nonexistent. Retail and hospitality were suffering.

HEIGHT HAS VERY LITTLE TO DO WITH LIVABILITY

Thomas Hine, architectural critic for the Philadelphia Inquirer, wrote that skylines have “very little to do, for example, with that often–praised Philadelphia quality of ‘human scale.’ It can be present or absent in buildings three stories tall, or 38 stories tall, like the old Philadelphia, or 60 stories like the new skyscraper generation. “It all depends on what happens at the first few levels, down where the people are. Verticality is a virtue on the skyline, but down below it is better to have texture, rhythm, detail and interesting stuff in the windows to draw the eye along the street.”

Speaking before the Planning Commission, the architect Richard Weinstein said that height of the skyline is a “red herring” that diverts attention away from the more substantial issues—“I don’t think the burning issue … has anything to do with height. I think the squalor of your environment on the ground, which is where it really counts, is the shocking thing you should be concerned about.”
Rouse argued that the development would make the city more livable, creating more walkable open space around the project if the project could go high. He noted his entire development does not exceed in square feet of floor space what could have been built on the site without exceeding the height limit—the development just distributes the space differently. By “going high, I can do something distinguished at ground level.” To get the floor space he needed to make the project economically feasible, he said he could build three squat buildings or two high ones. Going high, he said, would provide open, walkable plazas between the towers, and the lower levels of the project would support restaurants, health clubs, cinemas, fashion stores and other retail outlets to enhance livability. By building high, Liberty Place was able to add architectural embellishments, particularly set backs and open
spaces that made the buildings more graceful and elegant as they rose from the base. At 960 feet, 1 Liberty Place was 412 feet higher than City Hall.

Rouse hired the Chicago architect Helmut Jahn, and circulated architectural drawings contrasting the three squat mid rise boxes with two stunning towers inspired by New York’s Chrysler building. He refused to delay a year while the mayor named a commission to study the effects of breaking the height limits. The clock was ticking, he said, and he demanded a decision now—three squat or two graceful. Put that way, the choice was easy for politicians and citizens alike. Opposition melted in the face of the aesthetic and financial benefits. Good design, a new definition of livability, and economics won.

THE TIPPING POINT: JOBS AND TAX REVENUE

While the aesthetics helped persuade the populace, the potential economic benefit won over the politicians, and was decisive. A study by the city Planning Commission found that Rouse’s $600 million project would house 11,839 full time jobs. Of those, 10,890 would be office jobs, both highly skilled and lesser skilled. 40% or 4,356 would be new jobs added to the local economy. The remaining jobs—a projected 523 in retailing and 426 in the proposed hotel—all would be new. In addition, the project would create hundreds of temporary construction jobs and many more permanent, indirectly related service jobs.

The project would mean, in 1986 dollars, an additional $15.1 million annually in city tax revenue. By comparison the existing uses at the site generated a mere $640,000 in taxes annually and provided only 293 jobs, all of them in retailing. In addition, the development would provide an anchor for more development around it. In the final tally, city council supported the development by a vote of 14-2, and the project gained the mayor’s endorsement.

Planners and architects alike acclaimed its completion. In 1987, the New York Times architectural critic Paul Goldberger wrote “One Liberty Place is now finished, and the startling thing is that it is not only far and away the best tall building Mr. Jahn has ever designed, it is the best tall building that has been built in Philadelphia in more than 50 years…. The skyline, far from being destroyed, is in fact given new life by this building. It transcends the old order and establishes a new one at a level of quality good enough to
justify throwing away the old.... The skyline has been transformed from one of the flattest of any American city to one of the richest.” In 1990, Goldberger derided the “empty gesture” of “enforcing height limits out of respect to a monument.... It (Liberty Place) turned out to be not the violent destroyer of a beloved cityscape that its detractors had feared, but the finest skyscraper Philadelphia had seen in 50 years.”

The project brought national and international acclaim to the city, local pride, and spurred a generation of stunning buildings, including the 54 story Bank of New York Mellon building designed by Kohn Pederson Fox, the 53 story Bell Atlantic Tower designed by Kling Lindquist Partnership, the 41 floor Commerce Square designed by I.M.Pei, the 45-story Independence Blue Cross Building by Webb Zerafa Partnership, and the 57-floor Comcast Center designed by Robert A.M. Stern Architects. The economic benefits including jobs and taxes, have multiplied ten-fold – extrapolating the benefits of Liberty Place, the new buildings provide for 70,000-80,000 jobs, about 35,000 of them new to the city, another 3,000 retail and service jobs, and hundreds of construction and service jobs. Tax collections on the developed sites increased, in 1986 dollars, from about $6 million to $100 million in income and real estate taxes.

The 975-foot Comcast Corporation Center, completed in 2008, generated almost $2.03 billion in total construction expenditures, 1.26B of that in Philadelphia, including 17,293 construction-related jobs and $650 million in construction-related salaries, a third earned in Philadelphia, and the rest in the metro area. The Center annually supports 9,069 jobs, two thirds of them in Philadelphia. Direct and indirect employment earnings exceed $600 million a year in 2008 dollars, with three quarters of that amount earned in Philadelphia. About half of those jobs were new to Philadelphia. In 2008 dollars, annual taxes came to $44.5 million for the state of Pennsylvania, $12 million of that going to Philadelphia.

WE WERE WRONG—LIBERTY PLACE TURNED OUT TO BE A SWELL IDEA

In 1991, six years after predicting the Liberty Place development would make the downtown ruinously overbuilt, with legions of gutless design disasters, and would break a vital element of Philadelphia forever, the Philadelphia Inquirer printed a retraction, “Taking it All Back, Liberty Place Turned Out to Be a Swell Idea.” The Inquirer wrote, “One of the best things
about breaking the height limit is that ...there’s been no real downside. Views of City Hall tower were already obliterated from the west, and what is important to preserve, the major view corridors, has been done. The new buildings are taller, but no denser, than the old; they use up more air, but less ground. And that preserved ground is generally being put to good public use.”

Number 6, 1818 Market, defines Philadelphia under the height limits.
Legend:
1 Commerce Square twin towers – I.M.Pei, 41 stories
2 Bell Atlantic Tower, Kling Lindquist Partners, 53 stories
3 Independence Blue Cross – Webb Zerafa Partnership - 45 stories
4 Comcast Building – Robert A.M. Stern - 57 stories
5 Bank of New York-Mellon Building-Kohn Pederson- 54 stories
6 1818 Market is within 15 feet of the old height limit
7 Liberty Place 1 Helmut Jahn  61 stories
8 Liberty Place 2 Helmut Jahn 58 stories
Photo: courtesy of Wikipedia, Philadelphia Tall Buildings
1 Liberty Place 2, Helmut Jahn, 58 stories
2 City Hall, Height Limit
3 Liberty Place 1 Helmut Jahn, 61 stories
4 1818 Market, just under the height limit
5 Bank of New York/Mellon Bank Building, Kohn Pederson, 54 stories
6 Independence Blue Cross, Webb Zarafa Partnership, 45 stories
7 Commerce Square Twin towers, I. M. Pei, 41 stories
8 Comcast Tower, Robert A. M. Stern, 57 stories
8 Bell Atlantic Tower, Kling Lindquist Partners, 53 stories

Prior to the Liberty Place project (numbers 1 and 3), center city was noted by the squat “Kleenex boxes” to the right of City Hall. The two buildings immediately behind City Hall are Center Square, which come within a few feet of the top of City Hall. Because vistas of City Hall were already compromised by surrounding building, the priority became preserving important visual corridors instead of preserving a city-wide height limit.
IS CONGRESSMAN ISSA WASHINGTON’S WILLARD ROUSE?

Today’s Washington is faced with problems more severe than those facing Philadelphia in 1984. Washington is running out of commercial space and our low-rise fetish favors gentrification over new forms of housing. The area is beset by traffic congestion and future job and residential growth is stymied by real estate regulation. The city can grow up, or experience limited future population and economic growth.

As Philadelphia has shown, eliminating the height restrictions can preserve historic sites and vistas while improving the city’s livability, the street scapes, strengthening the retail base by providing more customers day and night, bringing high income white collar jobs as well as low skilled service and support jobs which could double or triple employment per building, and dramatically increase income and real estate tax revenues, all at little cost to the city—it costs marginally more to provide city services to a high rise than a mid- or low-rise.

But Washington has lacked the political and business leadership to address the height limits. There has been no Willard Rouse to provide a vision of a 21st century city that holds the leadership’s feet to the fire. And the city has lacked the political leadership to support the vision and push back against those who somehow think this international capital is best served by the inert streetscape and stunted skyline of a 19th century museum piece.

It is left to a Californian from suburban San Diego, Representative Darrell Issa, to direct the National Capital Planning Commission and the City of Washington Planning Commission to reconsider the city’s future, including the height limits. He has given the city an unexpected opportunity to reshape the future. Ominously, even before starting, the NCPC has made some assumptions:

1. To ensure the prominence of Federal landmarks and monuments by preserving views and settings.
2. Maintain the horizontality of the monumental skyline
3. Minimize the negative impacts to nationally significant historic resources, including the L’Enfant Plan.
In his March 5 comments before the National Capital Planning Commission, Rep Issa seemed to open the door to reconsider at least the horizontality assumption, commenting on what he called “a rooﬂine that doesn’t look this good. ... If you’re ... up in the tallest buildings, and you look out, ... you see a set of regulations that created, if you will, a ground level look that’s one way, and a rooftop level that is less than optimized.” There is nothing iconic about a skyline that looks like a short stack of hotcakes with a pencil standing upright in the middle.

In her closing comments, Washington’s director of planning Harriet Tregoning said one of her goals is to “preserve the iconic skyline—although I think Chairman Issa didn’t like every part of our skyline – that gives prominence to some very cherished national landmarks and monuments.” Rep. Issa has not quite kicked in the door—he is no Willard Rouse-- but he has cracked it open, if leadership wants to take him up on his offer.

ET TU PARIS?? AND BERLIN TOO!!!

In 2008, the popular Socialist mayor of Paris, Bertrand Delanoe, said, of his city, the model for Washington, that tall buildings are needed to ease the city’s shortages in housing and commercial space. Even though a 2007 survey showed 66 percent of Parisians were opposed to raising heights above 37 meters, the mayor said, “This is in the public’s interest.” In 2010 the Paris city council raised the height limit to 590 feet, starting with the 13th Arondissment, with 600 foot projects planned for the 17th and 15th. LaDefense, the business district just west of Paris, already has 14 buildings taller than 490 feet.

Mayor Delanoe noted that only 17% of metropolitan Paris’ 12 million residents live in the city, a percentage he deemed completely inadequate. He said that limiting units per building, as is done with height limits, drives up housing costs and makes fewer living units available. It drives higher prices for limited supply. Tall buildings, he said, increase the number of rent-subsidized units each building can support. Building high, he said, must be done for the future of the city, for needed housing, for more jobs.

Similarly, Berlin, another capital with a heretofore flat skyline but high tech ambitions, has opened the door to commercial and residential towers. Alexanderplatz allows for up to 300 meters, about 55 floors. Potsdamer Platz has half dozen buildings at about 200 meters, 25-30 floors. There are
numerous 20-25 story buildings in Charlottensberg, at Technical University, near the river Spree north of Museum Island, and a 30-story high rise is under construction at Wittenbergplatz. Media Spree is a planned development for offices and apartments on the River Spree, in central city near Boxhagener Platz. Undecided to date is whether the height will be 200 meters or 300.

Certainly Philadelphians felt no less passionate than Washingtonians about their historic monuments and landmarks, and the 18th and 19th century feel of their narrow European-style streets, and yet they found accommodation to preserve important vistas and sites while welcoming the future. Congressman Issa has given Washington an unprecedented opportunity to consider its future, and, in his comments about rooftlines, has even pointed the needle up “to the roofline.” As Mayor Delanoe said, height is about the future of the city, housing, jobs, smart growth. Paris is reworking George Haussman’s iconic 19th Century design. Would that Washington DC, Pierre L’Enfant’s Paris on the Potomac, had such leadership.

-30-

Frederic Harwood, a resident of Shaw since 1989, lived in Philadelphia from 1969 to 1989. He holds a PhD and was a tenured associate professor at Temple University for fifteen years. In 1984 he co-founded a consulting company in pharmaceutical research and development, Barnett International. In 1989 he moved to Washington DC and became executive vice president of the Association of Clinical Research Professionals. In 1998 he resigned from ACRP to participate in family-run businesses on U Street, from which he withdrew in 2002. He founded the DC Nightlife Association, and has served as its unpaid chair since its founding.

Harwood@gmail.com
1606 8th St NW, Washington 20001
202 438 4800

Other Suggested Photos

- Penn Center skyline Philadelphia before Rouse ...1970—a line of Kleenex boxes
- K/L Street corridors a line of bread boxes
- The view of monuments from Virginia—Washington monument, Jefferson memorial. The city is behind the monuments and high rises would not impede on those vistas.
- The view of monuments from Maryland/New York Avenue/Wisconsin Ave—non-existent
- 500 New Jersey Avenue NW, from Massachusetts Ave—cut off at the waist
- DC breadboxes with no set backs, no open spaces, moribund street life
- Ballston Metro development or Courthouse—smart growth
- Petworth Metro or Columbia Heights or Shaw/Cardozo—stunted opportunities for smart growth
TENLEYTOWN NEIGHBORS ASSOCIATION
Revising the Height Act of 1910
Adopted September 17, 2012

WHEREAS the Height Act of 1910 is a federal statute governing the District of Columbia, which restricts residential buildings to 90 feet and business to a height equal to the width of the adjacent street plus 20 feet (generally totaling 130 feet), plus some heights are extended to 160 feet along portions of Pennsylvania Avenue.

WHEREAS reviewing the Height Act to determine whether any revisions are desirable or necessary is understandable but that does not automatically mean amendments are necessary.

WHEREAS Washington is a city of monuments that should continue to be showcased through zoning and height restrictions.

WHEREAS in the areas around the White House, Capitol and federal agencies, height restrictions have been praised as enhancing security for the federal government.

WHEREAS Washington is one of the most attractive and lovely cities in America not only because of its monuments but also because of its tree canopy and open spaces and because pedestrians can see the sun, the sky and the stars.

WHEREAS some have proposed increasing heights from “L’Enfant to Tenleytown”, which would include neighborhoods across the entire spectrum of density and existing height.

WHEREAS Washington is a city of neighborhoods and each neighborhood has different and, in many instances, very desirable characteristics, which should be recognized and preserved in any consideration of amendments to the Height Act.

WHEREAS proposals to increase height along the main Avenues, Wisconsin, Connecticut, Georgia, New York, and others would dwarf residences abutting the avenues that are two story single family detached in some areas but might be harmonious with multi-story office buildings and warehouses in others.

WHEREAS any increase in height for buildings does not solely increase tax revenue it also would result in new infrastructure demands on services, such as schools, public transit, sewer, and water.

WHEREAS incentives through increased heights everywhere would not result in encouraging development in any particular area but rather would merely allow taller buildings wherever a greater profit might be realized in already flourishing areas.

WHEREAS increased heights may result in a few very tall buildings with large capacity absorbing such a large percent of the demand that development would be deterred across the rest of the city, which has benefited from a dispersal of development activity throughout the city.

WHEREAS there is unused potential available now that can accommodate new growth without any amendments to the Act or to DC zoning because current height restrictions allow more development in many areas.

Be it RESOLVED that the Tenleytown Neighbors Association supports preserving the overall building limits established in the Height Act because of the extraordinary contributions these restrictions have made to the distinctive character of the city of Washington.
CAPITOL HILL RESTORATION SOCIETY

P. O. Box 15264
Washington DC 20003-0264
202-543-0425
www.chrs.org info@chrs.org

July 18, 2012

The Honorable Trey Gowdy
Chairman, Subcommittee on Health Care, District
of Columbia, Census and the National Archives
2157 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Representative Gowdy:

The Capitol Hill Restoration Society, which is the largest civic organization on
Capitol Hill and one of the largest in Washington, was founded over 55 years
ago to help preserve and protect the integrity and appeal of the historic
neighborhood’s architectural and residential character. Similarly, we feel
strongly about protecting our city’s distinctive architectural character and
maintaining that heritage as a legacy for both Washington residents and the
Nation to enjoy and celebrate.

We are writing today to support the Height Act of 1910, which for 102 years has
been instrumental in shaping the beauty and unique character of our city. We
fear that lifting Washington’s height limits would irrevocably destroy the city’s
welcoming, livable scale and charm, which has drawn thousands of new
residents who contribute to the city’s economy, vitality, and diversity. It would
also diminish the iconic monuments and public buildings that stir feelings of
national pride and draw hundreds of thousands of visitors to the District each
year.

We are also endorsing the testimony in support of the Height Act that will be
delivered at your Subcommittee hearing on Thursday, July 19, 2012, by the
Committee of 100 on the Federal City, an organization dedicated to
safeguarding and advancing Washington’s historic distinction, natural beauty,
and overall livability. Their testimony articulates reasons for the Height Act’s
success in shaping Washington into the special city it is, and eloquently rebuts
arguments that eliminating height restrictions is necessary to achieve such
• **Economic Development:** The Height Act gives certainty, and if there is one thing investors like, it is certainty.

• **Affordable Housing:** Is it any coincidence that cities with towering high rises, like New York, also have expensive housing? Washington needs more affordable housing, but skyscrapers will not deliver it.

• **Livability:** Washington is for residents, not just government and businesses. Our residents deserve the same viewsheds, green spaces, tall trees and sunlight that the city’s core does.

If the Height Act starts changing, there will be no going back. We respectfully urge the Height Act be retained for the entire City. Let’s not kill the goose that lays these golden eggs.
CAPITOL HILL RESTORATION SOCIETY

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We are writing today to support the Height Act of 1910, which for 102 years has been instrumental in shaping the beauty and unique character of our city. We fear that lifting Washington’s height limits would irrevocably destroy the city’s welcoming, livable scale and charm, which has drawn thousands of new residents who contribute to the city’s economy, vitality, and diversity. It would also diminish the iconic monuments and public buildings that stir feelings of national pride and draw hundreds of thousands of visitors to the District each year.

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goals as economic investment and development, increased density, and additional housing.

The Height Act was passed for excellent reasons. The United States of America is a unique and special country, and a unique nation deserves a unique and special capital city. We have such a city today, and the Height Act has played a strong and constructive role in making it so. Rather than overturning it, which risks drowning our capital city in a tide of towering buildings like those in every other city, we should be vigorously upholding and enforcing it.

Sincerely,

Janet Quigley

Janet Quigley
President

Cc: Representative Paul Gosar, Vice Chair
    Representative Danny Davis, Ranking Member
    Delegate Eleanor Holmes Norton
    Representative Dan Burton
    Representative John Mica
    Representative Patrick McHenry
    Representative Scott Desjarlais
    Representative Joe Walsh
    Representative Wm. Lacy Clay
    Representative Christopher Murphy
    Representative Darrell Issa, Chair, Committee on Oversight and Government Reform
    Representative Elijah Cummings, Ranking Member, Committee on Oversight and Reform
    George Clark, Chair, Committee of 100 on the Federal City
    Rebecca Miller, Executive Director, DC Preservation League
    Erik Hein, President, Preservation Action
    Vincent Gray, Mayor
    Phil Mendelson, Chairman, DC City Council
    Councilmember Tommy Wells
June 17, 2013

Mr. Marcel Acosta
Executive Director
National Capital Planning Commission
401 9th Street, NW, Suite 500
Washington, DC 20004

Dear Mr. Acosta:

I regret that I was unable to attend the final meeting of Phase I of the current series of meetings on the Height of Buildings Act of 1910. Nonetheless, this is what I planned to say:

Leave it alone.

Let the Rosslyn’s, the National Harbors, Tyson’s Corners, and Silver Springs of the world have their say. This would mean less congestion for Downtown D.C. and other sites within the District. We don’t need any more congestion.

We have other, much more pressing problems to address. For example, our infrastructure is falling apart, our Metro (now more than 40 years old) is failing, more monuments are in need of repairs, our society is crumbling between the “haves” and the “have-nots”, two of our City Councilors are in jail and another has been indicted, we have no plans for the future, and yet we are talking about even more density. What a spectacle!

Let the suburbs, all of whom are independent, compete among themselves for more congestion. Build upon our assets. This is the ONLY Capital of the Free World -- we do not need to be seen “like” Dubai, Philadelphia, Houston, or any of the indistinguishable cities in the world. There is dignity in our present profile, and tens of thousands of tourists come here to see it every year.

Leave the Height of Buildings Act alone!

Very truly yours,

Dorn C. McGrath, Jr., FAICP
Former Chairman of the Committee of 100
Comments on behalf of the National Coalition to Save Our Mall by Judy Scott Feldman, Chair and President

July 12, 2013

The National Coalition to Save Our Mall would like to associate our organization with the comments by the Association of the Oldest Inhabitants of the District of Columbia. The AOI comments are copied below. Our nonprofit is dedicated to upholding the principles envisioned in the L’Enfant Plan and McMillan Plan for Washington that give Washington, DC, its special quality as a low urban landscape punctuated by monuments to America’s democracy.

On a personal note, I recall moving to Austin, Texas in 1978 and relishing the view to the pink granite dome of the Capitol Building there, only to return some years later and find it hidden and dwarfed by graceless skyscrapers nearby. No doubt the economic development arguments were strong. But the aesthetic effects were devastating. Economic expediency and private interests were given precedence over a respect for the longer view that would protect the urban landscape and the symbol of government. In Washington, the wisdom of the Founders who in the 18th century created our country and devised a plan for the Nation’s Capital based on founding ideals should be foremost as we consider any change that would put those ideas aside.

I attach a view from the Capitol showing Rosslyn development dwarfing the Lincoln Memorial and destroying the simplicity of the Mall's iconic axis.

Comments provided on behalf of the Association of the Oldest Inhabitants of the District Columbia by William N. Brown, President:

The 1910 Height Act has guaranteed the low-profile cityscape of the District of Columbia for over 100 years and has made the District of Columbia unique among the major cities of the world with its distinctive skyline.

The 1910 Height Act has been called the Third Dimension of the L’Enfant Plan. President George Washington issued the first building height regulations for the city on Oct 17, 1791, concerned as much about structural and fire safety as about urban design. While Washington’s regulations were suspended from June 25, 1796 until 1800, Thomas Jefferson extended the suspension until 1904 but personally hoped the new capital would emulate Paris with buildings “low & convenient, and the streets light and airy.”

There is a sense that development pressures are fostering modifications to the Act; however, the District has just recently achieved its short-term goal of a resident population of 600,000 but it is nowhere near the all-time high of 899,000 in 1946. Let us encourage reasonable development within the current limits of the Height Act in blighted, underutilized areas of the city before we tamper with something that will forever change the character of the District of Columbia.

As Vancouver, B.C. Planner Larry Beasley warned in his presentation to the NCPC in 2010: “Take care not to open things up too casually. I dare say, those height limits may be the single most powerful thing that has made this city so amazingly fulfilling.”

As Washington’s oldest civic organization, the Association of the Oldest Inhabitants is dedicated to preserving the District’s heritage through member reminiscences as well as preserving and promoting both the L’Enfant and McMillan Plans.