

## **Heightened Conversations: Impacts of Building Heights in Capital Cities**

**March 5, 2013**

**National Archives – William McGowan Theater**

### **L. Preston Bryant, Chairman, National Capital Planning Commission**

Thank you Tom, very much. This is an extraordinary turnout and we're pleased you're here. My name is Preston Bryant and I have the honor of serving as the Chairman of the National Capital Planning Commission. So, on behalf of the terrific team we have at NCPC, and alongside our host of the National Archives, I want to welcome you to tonight's event.

Tonight's Heightened Conversations focuses our attention on the impacts of building heights in national capitals and other cities around the world. And as we know that's a subject of great interest here in Washington. For over a century, here, the federal Height of Buildings Act has played an instrumental role in shaping DC's very distinctive skyline, one that is recognized around the world.

Our skyline is not one that is dominated by big corporate towers, but rather it's a cityscape, where civic spaces, monuments and public buildings, are paramount. It's unique among American cities and as the nation's capital its character is a national interest.

At NCPC, we've undertaken this exercise very much in cooperation and in collaboration with the District of Columbia Government, specifically the Office of Planning. And we'll be conducting a Joint Height Act Master Plan. This was, this initiative was requested by Congress specifically, Congressman Darrell Issa of California, who chairs the oversight committee and who is part of the National Capital Planning Commission.

We'll undertake this study really based on three principles, three core principles, and these principles have been derived at or collaborated -- we've come to them together in partnership with the District of Columbia.

Those three core principles are these, for the study. First, ensuring the prominence of Federal landmarks and monuments by preserving the views and settings. Second, maintaining the horizontality of the monumental city skyline. And of course minimizing negative impacts to nationally significant historic resources, and the L'Enfant Plan is certainly one of those nationally significant resources.

National Capital Planning Commission and the DC Office of Planning will work over the next several months to undertake a series of technical studies. And those studies will evaluate the strategic changes to the Height Act based on the core principles, the three core principles I just noted.

All along the way we will be of course seeking public input throughout the whole process. We know that people have passionate views about the Height Act and we look forward to hearing from everyone, every step of the way. And our goal is to provide our feedback at the end of the study in this review back to Congress this fall.

We approached this study being very mindful that the choices we make will have long lasting impacts. The Height Act in concert with the L'Enfant and McMillan Plans and other major projects has created distinctive skyline and city fabric that we know so well.

At the same time this is an opportunity to fully explore how the next century's height and design standards shape Washington's growth and image both as a capital and as a modern city.

This Thursday, the day after tomorrow, March 7th, the National Capital Planning Commission, which is comprised of Presidential, House, Senate and District of Columbia appointees, it's a 12 member commission. We will be briefed on the steps and timelines of the work ahead. And I hope that you'll follow the work that we do. We also have setup a special webpage so that you can better follow the work we do, and that webpage is quite simply is [www.ncpc.gov/heightstudy](http://www.ncpc.gov/heightstudy).

We don't presume obviously to know all the answers for this. This is a century-old federal statute and we're really just breaking into it in the most significant way for the first time to study to see what if anything should be done.

We look forward to learning a lot from a lot of people along the way and that starts tonight with a most expert panel that we've put together who have traveled here from other cities around the world to relay to us the very 'Height Act-ish' kinds of issues that they also encountered as their cities have sought to grow tall and to wrestle with many of the density and growth issues that we experience.

And these other cities, they have -- each city has taken a very unique path to the contemporary needs of modern city with the historic urban fabric and the desires of existing communities. And those are certainly the issues that we are facing here.

Tonight -- tonight's conversation will be led by Professor Gary Hack. Gary teaches, practices and studies large scale physical planning and urban design. He is more than familiar with these kinds of issues as he hails from city of Philadelphia, which itself has had height issues and debates.

And Gary one time served on the Philadelphia Planning Commission. So, he brings a lot of practical experience. He also is a former dean of the University of Pennsylvania School of Design, has extensive public, private and civic expertise. Again, most appreciably relative to Philadelphia's Height debate.

We ask Gary to lead the discussion with tonight's panelist and frame their stories and lessons from other capital cities in a way that will illuminate the work that we have to do ourselves. So, with that please join me and welcoming Gary Hack.