Mayor Gray Urges 200 Foot Buildings in L’Enfant City
Would Allow Significantly Raised Building Heights in Neighborhoods

D.C. Mayor Vincent Gray and the D.C. Office of Planning have sent U.S. Representative Darrell Issa a report recommending drastic changes to the 100-year old law that has served as the blueprint for creating the iconic D.C. skyline and a livable city admired worldwide.

The mayor is urging that maximum heights of 130 feet for many downtown buildings be lifted to allow 200 foot buildings on avenues where there are symbolic and important views of our national landmarks. This could lead to major office development and more commuters filling DC-based jobs.

The report dismisses the importance of the height controls throughout the city and ignores the fact that there are significant views and historic features that need to be protected in neighborhoods, like Anacostia. This unprecedented move by the mayor would allow developers to expand big projects where residents often struggle to maintain character and livability and avoid displacement.

Residents at public meetings expressed alarm at sample images of height increases and asked if heights are already too permissive. “The Mayor and the Office of Planning clearly were not listening to DC residents. There was no support for big changes and, in fact, many groups opposed changes. There is a huge gap between what was presented in the study, the reaction to it, and the conclusion reached by the Mayor that we should reverse 100 years of predictable growth patterns”, said Nancy MacWood, Chair of The Committee of 100 on the Federal City.

The report written by the Office of Planning (“OP”) differs dramatically from the recommendation of its master study partner, the National Capital Planning Commission. The NCPC Executive Director’s draft recommendation largely found no compelling need to change height allowances and concluded that the Height of Buildings Act continues to benefit the city.

The OP report uses broad assumptions about population trends that are based on recession recovery short term trends and ignores the current slowdown in population growth and job development. The planning agency also eliminated much of the District’s underdeveloped land from their need analysis and assumed that the District will cater to the 1-and 2-person households living in high rises and not families in the future. “This could lead to over building and no help for structural unemployment or affordable housing”, said MacWood.

The Committee of 100 on the Federal City is a 90-year old citizen planning organization with members representing planning, economic, architecture, historic preservation, and legal disciplines. Its mission is to adapt the seminal L’Enfant Plan and McMillan Plan to the future growth of the District of Columbia. Its members participated in the master plan study throughout the summer.

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