

**Testimony before the Committee of the Whole on  
The District of Columbia's Recommendations on the Federal Height of  
Buildings Act of 1910**

Monday, October 28, 2013  
9:30 a.m., Hearing Room 412, John A. Wilson Building  
1350 Pennsylvania Avenue, NW  
Washington, DC 20004

Chairman Mendelson, esteemed Council Members, Ladies and Gentlemen:

I am William Brown, the President of the Association of the Oldest Inhabitants of the District of Columbia, the District's oldest civic organization. Dedicated since 1865 to preserving and promoting the District's history and civic accomplishments, the AOI is currently celebrating its 148<sup>th</sup> year of continuous service to the residents and civic leaders of our great city. One of the AOI's primary goals is the preservation, maintenance and promotion of both the L'Enfant and McMillan Plans for the District of Columbia. We are on record for opposing many proposed street closures and in support of the reopening of ill-advised street closings. The low profile of the city's skyline is an important element in maintaining the original vision for our city, the Nation's Capital.

The AOI is opposed to any changes in the Height Act. We are concerned that changes to the Height Act will be a slippery slope toward future, more frequent and more radical changes. We believe the NCPC staff has done an excellent job in analyzing the issues, creating graphic animations, hosting community forums, taking both written and oral testimony and presenting their findings in easy-to-understand recommendations. However, we do not support their recommendations to relax penthouse use regulations.

The AOI is *particularly disappointed* in the recommendations of the District of Columbia's Office of Planning as transmitted to the NCPC by Mayor Vincent Gray. These recommendations are contrary to what we heard at community forums and represent, we believe, an ill-advised attempt to assert District autonomy from the U.S. Congress at the expense of the District's century-old building height restrictions. This is not the time, place or circumstance for this debate.

In 1946, the District's population was approximately 899,000 residents (we realize that 'residents' are not households, however...). Today, the city's population has enjoyed a revival and now

approaches 633,000 residents. Let us encourage reasonable development within the current limits of the Height Act in blighted or underutilized areas of the city before we tamper with something that will forever change the character of our city.

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.”*

The Board of Directors and membership of the AOI respectfully requests that the District of Columbia Council pass a Resolution that opposes the position put forth by the Office of Planning and endorsed by the mayor.

“Thank You” for the time today to bring these concerns to your attention and for your support to maintain the Building Height Limits for the District of Columbia.

Respectfully submitted:



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William N. Brown, President