



The Washington, DC region is great >> and it can be greater.

Feb. 15, 2023

Oversight testimony: Office of the Deputy Mayor for Planning and Economic Development

Good morning. My name is Alex Baca and I am testifying on behalf of Greater Greater Washington, where I serve as D.C. policy director.

I've focused GGWash's work for the past several years on how to better use public land. We feel that the public ownership of land is fiscally smart—the District owning the land underneath a privately developed, privately owned affordable project, funded by HPTF dollars, offsets some foreclosure risk and allows the District to incorporate the value of the land into its assets—and critical to making the District's existing affordable-housing programs work better.¹

My oversight testimony for the Department of Housing and Community Development's FY23 performance goes into greater detail about land acquisition and how it can support the development of more income-restricted, subsidized ("affordable"²) units; you can read it [here](#). For the purposes of today's hearing, I'd like to keep it short.

GGWash would like the District to:

- Acquire land (DMPED, DHCD, OP),
- Upzone it (DMPED, OP),
- Ground-lease it (DMPED, DHCD), and,
- When the Comprehensive Plan is can be amended or rewritten, upflum it (DMPED, OP)

The District is already doing this. We were fully supportive³ of a ground-lease for the Belmont Crossing project at 4272 7th St. SE in October 2022. In October 2021, we organized our supporters to contact the council to urge members to "upflum" 1617 U Street, the Engine 9 site, from medium- to high-density; we are, likewise, fully supportive of the map amendment filed by Office of Planning to upzone the site from MU-4 to MU-10, which will enable around 200 housing units that would be impossible to build with an MU-4 designation.⁴ We would like the

¹ Specifically, DHCD's [development-finance programs](#)

² GGWash considers "affordable housing" to mean housing that is subsidized, by either public or private dollars, and income-restricted (and, therefore, means-tested). This follows the Office of Planning's definition of affordable housing in the [Housing Framework for Equity and Growth](#) (p. 2).

³ See our comments in support of the Belmont Crossing "disposition-acquisition" [here](#).

⁴ We will ask the zoning commission to approve [OP's map amendment request](#) at next Thursday's meeting.

District to ground-lease 1617 U, as it has done with Belmont Crossing, and, when the Comprehensive Plan is rewritten in 2025, “upflum” all its public sites to high-density. Following *that*, OP should file map amendments, as it has done with 1617 U, in advance of any specific development proposal or RFP, to ensure that its intentions, not a developer’s, are leading land-use changes.

We look forward to working with the committee, and with DMPED, to maximize the utility and efficiency of District-owned land to develop more housing, and more affordable housing, particularly in neighborhoods where nearly nothing—market-rate or subsidized—has been built.

Thank you,
Alex

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