

**Testimony of  
The Committee of 100 on the Federal City  
In support of the Office of Planning's  
Fiscal Year 2002 Budget Request**

**Committee of the Whole  
Council of the District of Columbia**

**March 20, 2001**

Good Afternoon Chairman Cropp and members of the Committee of the Whole. My name is Jennipher Snowden, Executive Director for the Committee of 100 on the Federal City (the Committee of 100). On behalf of the Committee of 100, I am pleased to be here today to endorse the Office of Planning's FY 2002 Budget request.

The Committee of 100, founded in 1923, is the oldest citizens' planning and advocacy organization in the city. It has taken the lead in supporting comprehensive land use, planning and zoning and historic preservation. Our purpose is to protect the legacy of the L'Enfant Plan and the work of the McMillan Commission, preserving our historic buildings and districts, while enhancing our parks and communities.

First, we want to thank and commend the Council and the Williams' Administration for their continuous support and dedication in providing necessary resources to planning for our city. Great strides have been made during the past several years, as Director Altman has brought new energy,

balanced vision and appreciation for the need to involve citizens and communities. Mr. Altman has recruited dedicated staff to help lead OP's planning divisions. While most are months into their charge, we have seen obvious improvements in planning services and responsiveness, as well as the formulation of a comprehensive and discerning planning agenda.

However, this is just the beginning. More resources and work are and will be needed to continue to build upon its current accomplishments. We, therefore view the Office of Planning's budget request for FY 2002 as practical and manageable. This is a crucial step on the path toward a fully functioning planning operation for the Nation's Capitol.

Please allow me to highlight a few key components:

The OP's FY 2001 staff is comprised of 56 FTE positions. Approval of the additional 10 positions requested in the FY 2002 budget would increase the staff to 66 FTE's. This number continues to remain below comparable and surrounding jurisdictions. It should be noted that the additional 10 positions include the 8 positions in the Historic Preservation Division that has been recently transferred from DCRA to OP's Development Review Division. We think this consolidation is positive and beneficial. However, please note that this addition reflects an expansion of OP's function, while having a significantly diminished overall number of staff from traditional levels.

The Development Review Division has significantly increased its level of support for the BZA, the Zoning Commission and the Historic Preservation Review Board. However, this division has not reached its baseline of support. Consequently, the regulatory process has been perceived as being too slow, inconsistent and lacking clarity. Without the required additional resources, the increasing number of proposals, the complexity of the issues and the lack of sufficient staff time will clearly compromise the Division's progress. In approving the request for three development review planners and to establish funds for a Mediation Center, the Council will be enabling the OP to handle the majority of the cases before the Board of Zoning Adjustment, conduct additional zoning analysis, increase the level and quality of community involvement and assess land use impacts.

The Planning, Design and Information Technology Division has taken significant steps in modernizing and reinvigorating its capacity to serve other agencies, businesses and citizens alike. The maintenance, management and dissemination of quality information about the Nation's Capitol is critically important to good policy making and planning. Providing citizens and businesses with the information needed to make sound decisions is fundamental to the fulfillment of the Office of Planning's mission. The Committee of 100 supports the need for additional specialists to help serve the demand for services, and requests favorable Council consideration of funds

requested to ensure that reports, maps and other documents are provided and available.

Finally, the Historic Preservation Division is an important component of the economic redevelopment of the District. Currently, the District leads the nation in the number of protected structures. Yet, it is greatly impacted by insufficient personnel. The Historic Division seeks to restore previously lost staff positions and to maintain the status of a fully certified historic preservation program. The current staffing is not sufficient to maintain federal certification standards due to increased demands for staff review of building permit applications, conceptual design review and tax act certification applications. The request for one full time inspector will enable OP to efficiently manage and track ongoing enforcement actions and develop a program for conducting building inspections.

In summary, we would like to commend the Council and the Williams' Administration for the progress made in comprehensive city planning and reiterate our support for the Office of Planning's Budget Request so that the improvements may continue.

Thank you for the opportunity to present the Committee of 100's testimony in support of the Office of Planning's FY 2002 Budget Request.