Testimony for the DC2050 Roundtable: Equitable Development, Community Preservation, and Comprehensive Planning

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Meeting date: October 26, 2026
Submitted: October 29, 2026

Good afternoon, and thank you for the opportunity to share my concerns.

I want to begin by acknowledging Binta Robinson and her comments about Crestwood and 16th Street Heights. Her concerns resonate with me because my family has ties to Shepherd Park, another historic neighborhood with significant Black homeownership.

A point raised today that I think is important is that a great deal is missing—not just from the tools being proposed, but from the District's overall approach to planning. Before we make consequential decisions about where and how our city grows, we need a clearer, more comprehensive picture of existing development, future opportunities, potential impacts on residents, and whether the benefits and burdens are being distributed equitably.

My concern is that developers without longstanding ties to our communities are already changing neighborhood character under existing zoning rules. Longtime Black residents have faced displacement pressures as redevelopment changes the communities they helped build. These are not simply parcels on a map. They are homes, family histories, and communities built over generations.

If residents are already experiencing these pressures under existing rules, what evidence do we have that broader changes under DC2050 will not intensify them? More development does not automatically mean greater affordability, racial equity, or better outcomes for existing residents. We need to understand not only how many units could be built, but who benefits, who bears the costs, and what protections will be in place.

I ask the commission to compare the proposed changes affecting Crestwood, 16th Street Heights, and Shepherd Park with development approaches in other parts of the District, including predominantly white neighborhoods. Where is additional density being directed? Is it concentrated along commercial corridors, or introduced into established residential blocks? Are comparable standards being applied to neighborhood preservation, design, and development quality? The District should publish this analysis so residents can understand the rationale behind these decisions and assess whether their impacts are equitable.

We also need a more complete assessment of where growth can occur. Shepherd Park already has development along Georgia Avenue and at The Parks at Walter Reed. Before asking residential streets to absorb additional density, the District should account for existing and planned growth and evaluate alternatives, including underused commercial properties, publicly controlled land, former federal sites, surface parking lots, and buildings that may be suitable for

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adaptive reuse. Not every site will be available or appropriate, but residents deserve to see that these options have been seriously evaluated as part of a citywide strategy.

Planning must also consider the quality of what gets built. Along Georgia Avenue, some newer buildings appear to have lower-quality exterior materials, poorly finished windows, or designs that do not complement the historic character of their surroundings. These observations raise questions about whether communities across the District receive comparable attention to design, construction oversight, and code enforcement. I urge the District to assess development quality across neighborhoods of different racial and economic compositions and ensure that standards are consistently applied. Equity must mean more than the number of housing units approved; it must include affordability, durability, neighborhood context, and protections against displacement.

Finally, a comprehensive planning process must include the people most affected by its decisions. I learned about this roundtable through word of mouth shortly before the meeting. Residents should not have to rely on personal networks to learn about planning decisions that could affect their homes and communities. Even with limited funding, the District can use ANC and civic association networks, existing email lists, libraries, community centers, and community partnerships to provide direct notice and accessible information. The commission should set minimum outreach standards, explain proposals in plain language, and show residents how their feedback informs decisions.

I ask the commission to take four concrete steps:

1. Publish a comparative analysis of proposed changes in Crestwood, 16th Street Heights, and Shepherd Park alongside development approaches in other DC neighborhoods.
2. Provide a citywide assessment of development opportunities, including existing and planned growth and alternatives to adding density within established residential blocks.
3. Establish measurable affordability and anti-displacement protections, alongside consistent standards for design, construction quality, and accountability.
4. Strengthen public engagement through direct notification, accessible education, and transparent reporting on how community feedback is used.

I recognize that the District must plan for future housing needs. But sound planning requires more than identifying where additional development could occur. It requires understanding what is already happening, examining alternatives, evaluating consequences, and engaging residents before decisions are made.

DC2050 should be guided by a complete picture of the city and a transparent explanation of why these choices are being made. We should not ask longtime residents to accept significant changes to their communities when key questions about equity, displacement, development quality, and alternatives remain unanswered.

Thank you.