Chairman Anthony Hood
DC Zoning Commission
441 4th Street NW Suite 200 South
Washington, DC 20009

May 25, 2017

Dear Chairman and Commissioners,

Attached find the submission by members of DC for Reasonable Development and OneDC who live and work and have families in the Shaw neighborhood near the PUD site in ZC case No. 16-24.

We were approached by the Applicant's legal team about a case but it was never clear it was about this instant PUD application and zoning case (we were under the impression it had to do with a PUD approval under appeal just next to the PUD site). Nor did the Applicant's legal team ever explain as to what reason or for what purposes the conversation would be about and for what ends.

So while we appreciate the Applicant's offer to meet through their counsel, it was unclear to us as to what purposes specific to this PUD application. And, we would hope that after tonight's meeting at the Commission there would be a better opportunity to have a discussion, especially given the underlying land is public property and the acute needs to help DC families in this housing crisis.

In evaluating the public needs in Shaw for affordable housing, we are seeking at least 3-bedrooms for families with incomes in the 0% to 50% range. And, we seek to see this PUD application promote locally owned businesses to be staffed by trained local residents receiving a living wage.

We believe the PUD application needs serious improvement through further discussions with the affected community and our members, or in the alternative, outright denial by the Commission.

Regards,

s/n/ Chris Otten, co-facilitator
DC for Reasonable Development
202 810 2768
dc4reality@gmail.com

In service to our organizational partner:

Organizing Neighborhood Equity DC (OneDC)
and their directly affected members living, working & playing in the Shaw neighborhood

Testimony May 25, 2017
DC Zoning Case No. 16-24

OneDC and DC for Reasonable Development are non-profit community groups and organizational partners with members living, working, and playing in the Shaw neighborhood and in the area surrounding the PUD site at 8th and O Streets NW.

We understand the deal between DMPED and the Applicant is that "at least 30%" of the units need to be affordable. That means 30% of the units in this PUD application set at so-called affordable housing costs is set as the absolute floor of what must be included in this PUD project by the law. In this case, the Council has not tied the Commission to a maximum limit on the numbers of affordable units, especially now during a major affordable housing crisis in the District.

Since the PUD site is public land, a "substantial" amount of affordable housing, particularly affordable for low-income DC families, is required through zoning development review via the directives of the Comprehensive Plan.

This means the PUD application must include far more than 30% of the units as affordable, they must be for families (3-bedrooms and more) and at far deeper affordability levels.

The Comprehensive Plan speaks to creating and maintaining good neighborhoods by expressing residential developments across a range of types of housing, i.e. for single professionals, seniors, small families, big families, extended families.

In this PUD application, the vast majority of the units are for wealthy single professionals as 2-bedroom units are not for families. Councilmember Kenyan McDuffie recently highlighted this issue during the introduction of legislation requiring housing built with city money to consist of family units at 3 bedrooms or more (see Attachments). This project fails the Comprehensive Plan policies seeking to maintain working-class families across a spectrum of bedroom sizes in our Shaw neighborhood.

We also understand the deal between DMPED and the Applicant expects a moderate-sized building of no more than 8 stories and without a habitable luxury penthouse.

The PUD application before you now requests approval for a project that seeks 11 stories of habitable and commercial space, including a habitable luxury penthouse that won't be accessible by low-income residents. The proposed PUD penthouse is discriminatory and fails the Fair Housing Act and Human Rights Act. However, it is the significant increases in density and height that are wholly in contravention with the law and Comprehensive Plan.

The PUD application is asking the Commission to go beyond the authority of the Council and their density desires found in the deal between DMPED and the Applicant, a deal that set the purchase price of the land at $1,000,000.

Since the Applicant is seeking significant extra density than what was anticipated by the Council and more than allowed by the Comprehensive Plan policies, especially as these policies relate to protecting the low-rise built environment of the surrounding area (CC-NNW-2.1-B; CC-NNW-2.1-C; *inter-alia,* including the CP land use policies protecting the surrounding neighborhood), any extra market rate housing thus associated with the extra density must reduce the overall benefits of the project as the extra density will indeed only serve the bottom line of the Applicant (especially if the price of the land stays at $1mil) and won't serve the affordable housing needs of DC's struggling families (see Attachments).

Further, IZ regulations require permanent affordability for the “affordable” units set at housing costs at 60% AMI or lower. This application makes no claims and shows no evidence as to the guaranteed permanent affordability of the so-called affordable units. To the contrary, we believe the deal that may have been struck between DMPED and the Applicant says that either party can cancel the affordability covenant at any time upon their own discretion and without public review or provision of rationale.

Moreover, the PUD Applicant's proposed 80% AMI units are not considered affordable in DC and cannot be deemed "affordable" by the Commission unless this is an experiment in Orwellian word play. It is this simple, $1500/per month studio or 1-bedroom rentals or condos are not affordable and will not serve families who are in the middle of a affordable housing catastrophe in the District.

Vulnerable and at-risk existing affordable housing in the surrounding area and their owners/renters have not been surveyed by city planning agencies. The lack of a local demographics analysis of the affected local neighborhood, especially as it regards existing family units and truly affordable family units, demonstrates a wholesale disregard of the comprehensive public planning required in the PUD development review.

It is a fact there are no affordable units in this PUD application that serve families or extended family in direct contrast to the needs and priorities of the Comprehensive Plan and other critical planning documents and programs in the city. The vast majority of market-rate and luxury penthouse units as proposed in this PUD application can and will continue to destabilize the existing family homes in the surrounding area, specifically in context of the cumulative large projects in the area.

The cumulative affects on land values by the PUD project and by adjacent projects (like the one just to the west that was recently approved by the Commission and the large luxury projects to the north) must be properly evaluated as these other projects also consist of largely studio/one bedroom units not suitable for DC families. DC's affordability index is based on a family of four, yet the Applicant in this case and for other large projects nearby are being built for singles, or dormers for individuals making high annual incomes.

Just because gentrification is on the rise in Shaw, doesn't mean it has to be exacerbated, or worse, not even considered. The Office of Planning must analyze the surrounding area, evaluating land values and individual vulnerable properties through sound survey techniques by expert city agencies at the local level.

The decade of speculation run amok in DC cannot and must not happen on DC public land. The city has very acute needs that must be met by this PUD project, truly affordable housing needs for families. Further, it is not conclusory to believe the PUD approval will increase gentrification pressures and destabilize the surrounding area, which is largely low-rise two and three story homes and low-density commercial.

This PUD application, when taken into account of the others in the area, must stand out and strive for 100% affordability and for 100% family units, especially given it is proposed to be built on public land.

Beyond housing, the Commission must set as a condition during development review developer investments in public services upgrades, such as the surrounding infrastructure per the requirements of the DC Comprehensive Plan. And these conditions must not be allowed to reduce the price of the land otherwise the Commission must consider the lack of investment without subsidy as a negative aspect of the balancing to be done for this PUD application.

Finally, the lack of evaluation of adverse affects by this PUD application, especially in context of cumulative impacts of the several large projects in the area, makes this PUD application and review by the Office of Planning fatal.

The PUD regulations require at least the evaluation of impacts to existing public services in the surrounding area, like on the capacity of our public transit (bus & metro), infrastructure, environment, noise and air quality, pollution and refuse, light and air, impacts to the existing utility capacity, emergency response time, etc.

The capacity of community facilities (schools, recreation centers, libraries, police stations, fire stations, hospitals, clinics, etc.) must be examined at its baseline to determine if the existing public services can continue to adequately serve the existing surrounding residents and area, and simultaneously serve the cumulative new projects and many new residents coming in.

Furthermore, none of the commercial components of this PUD application have been evaluated to understand their true benefits to the area, or vice-versa any potential adverse effects. A fact-finder cannot determine land use impacts if there is no understanding of the land uses involved. To this end, the Comprehensive Plan speaks of commercial entity promotions for local serving businesses made up by local entrepreneurs and staffed by local residents. We do not want chain stores on publicly owned land offering minimum wage to folks not living in Shaw, and we expect this as a condition in the final order if granted.

The lack of impact analysis, the blowing out of the allowable density, the cumulative affects of this project along with others, the lost notion of using public land to serve the public need in a housing crisis for DC families – all together – show this PUD application must not be rubber stamped like the others. We ask that the Commission grant more time for more discussion with the community to find a project that truly serves the residents of Shaw, or to deny the PUD application outright for failing to meet the burden of approval.

Respectfully,

s/n Dominic Moulden
ONE DC

s/n Chris Otten
DC for Reasonable Development

ATTACHMENTS

Valbridge
PROPERTY ADVISORS

Lipman Frizzell & Mitchell LLC

Appraisal Report

1336 8th Street, NW
Washington, D.C. 20001
Report Date: July 8, 2015

FOR

Government of the District of Columbia
Office of the Deputy Mayor for Planning
& Economic Development
Mr. Joseph P. Lapan, Esq., LEED AP
Project Manager
1350 Pennsylvania Avenue, NW, Suite 317
Washington, D.C. 20004

Valbridge Property Advisors |
Lipman Frizzell & Mitchell LLC

Liberty Place at Columbia Crossing
6240 Old Dobbin Lane, Suite 140
Columbia, Maryland 21045
410.423.2300
410.423.2410 fax

valbridge.com

Valbridge Job No.:
MD01-15-0159.1

Valbridge
PROPERTY ADVISORS
Lipman Frizzell & Mitchell LLC

July 8, 2015

Mr. Joseph P. Lapan, Esq., LEED AP
Project Manager
Government of the District of Columbia
Office of the Deputy Mayor
for Planning & Economic Development
1350 Pennsylvania Avenue, NW, Suite 317
Washington, D.C. 20004

RE: Appraisal Report
1336 8th Street, NW
Washington, D.C. 20001

Dear Mr. Lapan:

In accordance with your request, we have prepared a real property appraisal of the above-referenced property. This appraisal report sets forth the data gathered, the techniques employed, and the reasoning leading to our value opinions. We have performed no services, as an appraiser or in any other capacity, regarding the property that is the subject of the appraisal within the three-year period immediately preceding acceptance of this assignment.

The subject property is a roughly rectangular shaped parcel of land identified as 1336 8th Street, NW in Washington D.C. The property contains a total of 13,306 sq.ft. and is presently used as paved surface parking.

We developed our analyses, opinions, and conclusions and prepared this report in conformity with the Uniform Standards of Professional Appraisal Practice (USPAP) of the Appraisal Foundation; the Code of Professional Ethics and Standards of Professional Appraisal Practice of the Appraisal Institute; and the requirements of our client.

The Government of the District of Columbia is the client in this assignment and is the sole intended user of the appraisal and report. The intended use is for financial decisions concerning the subject property. The value opinions reported herein are subject to the definitions, assumptions and limiting conditions, and certification contained in this report.

Based on the analysis contained in the following report, our value conclusion involving the subject property is summarized as follows:

VALUE CONCLUSION

Value Type	Value Premise	Value Perspective	Interest Appraised	Effective Date	Indicated Value
Market Value	As Is	Current	Fee Simple[1]	4/16/2015	$6,190,000

This letter of transmittal is not considered valid if separated from this report, and must be accompanied by all sections of this report as outlined in the Table of Contents, in order for the value opinions set forth above to be valid.

Respectfully submitted,
Valbridge Property Advisors | Lipman Frizzell & Mitchell LLC

Ryland L. Mitchell III, CRE, MAI
Senior Managing Director
Certified General Real Estate Appraiser
District of Columbia License #GA10020
rmitchell@valbridge.com

F. Ford Dennis, Jr.
Senior Appraiser
fdennis@valbridge.com

1. According to a representative of the owner, the property is licensed on a month-to-month basis to a nearby church with the owner of the subject possessing the right to terminate the agreement at their sole discretion.

inability to construct underground parking which eliminates a source of revenue and reduces the marketability of the proposed development.

Zoning

The highest and best use of comparable sale properties should be very similar as that of the subject property. When comparable properties with the same zoning as the subject are lacking or scarce, parcels with slightly different zoning but a highest and use similar to that of the subject may be used as comparable sales. These sales may have to be adjusted for differences in utility if the market indicates that this is appropriate.

Comparable Sale No. 2 is adjusted downward for its lack of required affordable units. Comparable Sale Nos. 5 and 6 are adjusted upward for their zoning requiring half low income affordable and half moderately price affordable units whereas the subject and the other comparables only require moderately priced affordable units.

Other

Aside from locational and physical characteristics, there are numerous other points of differences between properties that may have an impact on their value.

Comparable Sale No. 3 is adjusted upward for the historic buildings which must be incorporated into the development reducing the achievable density. Comparable Sale Nos. 5 and 6 are adjusted downward for their approvals in place at the time of sale.

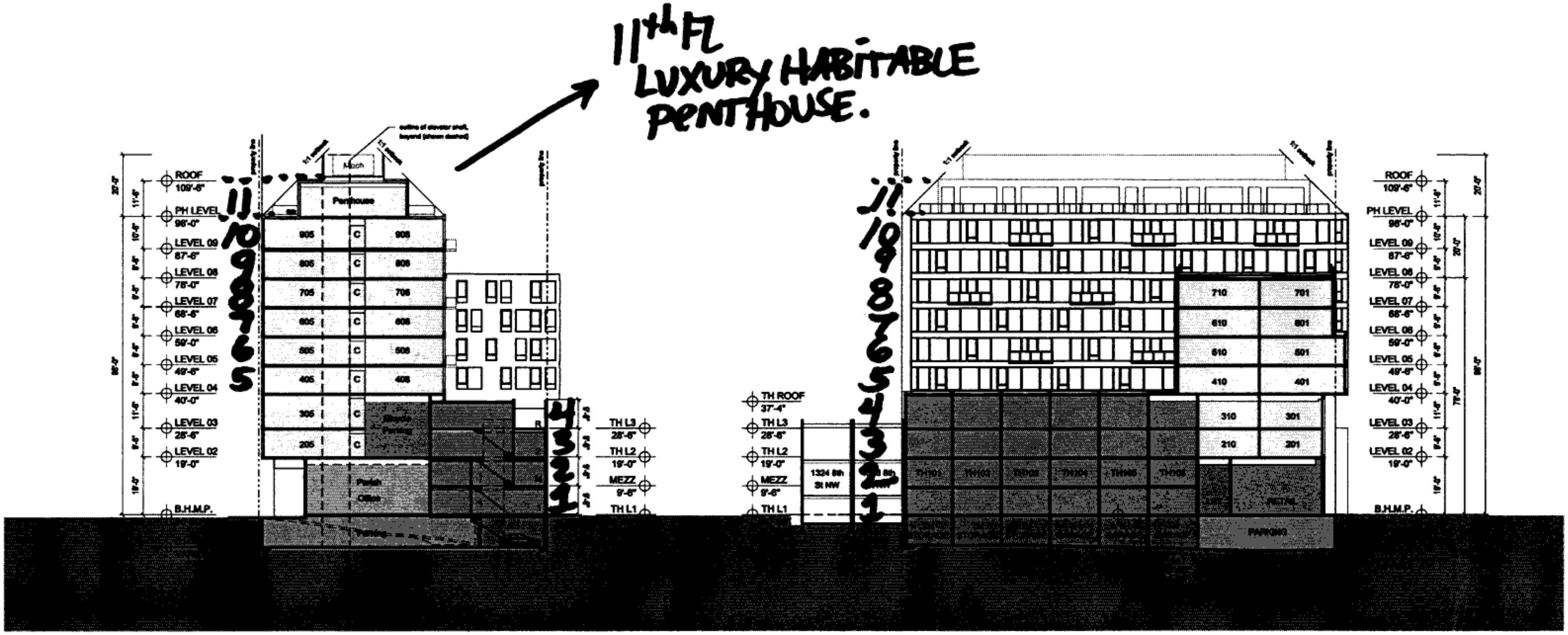
Summary of Adjustments

Based on the preceding comparative analysis, adjustments to the comparable sales are summarized on the following table. These adjustments are based on our best judgment and experience in the appraisal of similar properties.

SUMMARY OF SALES AND ADJUSTMENTS

No	Location	Date	Price	Permitted Bldg Area	FAR	Unadj. $/FAR	Trans Adj	Trans Adj. $/Sq Ft	Location/ Access	Phys'l Chars.	Zoning	Other	Adj. $/FAR
1	2002 11th Street, NW	Dec-14	$2,200,000	24,646	7.2	$89.26	12.0%	$99.98	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	30.0%	$129.97
2	1427 -1429 Rhode Island Avenue, NW	Jul-14	$7,275,000	37,086	6.0	$196.17	0.0%	$196.17	-10.0%	0.0%	-10.0%	0.0%	$156.93
3	1921 -1925 14th Street, NW	Mar-14	$7,700,000	68,688	7.2	$112.10	5.0%	$117.71	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	30.0%	$153.02
4	1711 Florida Avenue, NW	Feb-14	$14,900,000	108,855	4.2	$136.88	2.0%	$139.62	10.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	$153.58
5	2337 -2349 Champlain Street, NW	Nov-13	$5,280,000	35,000	2.5	$150.86	0.0%	$150.86	10.0%	0.0%	5.0%	-10.0%	$158.40
6	1212 9th Street NW	Aug-13	$11,300,000	60,000	2.5	$188.33	1.0%	$190.22	0.0%	0.0%	5.0%	-10.0%	$180.71
7	1011 -1013 M Street, NW	May-13	$8,000,000	78,408	7.2	$102.03	0.0%	$102.03	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	$102.03
						$89.26							$102.03
S	1336 8th Street, NW	Apr-15		39,918	3.0	$196.17							$180.71
						$139.38							$147.80

The adjusted unit prices suggest a value range of $102.03/FAR to $180.71/FAR. Eliminating the extremes, the range is $129.97/FAR to $158.40/FAR with four of the sales suggesting a unit value of $153.01/FAR to $158.40/FAR. Placing the most weight on those four sales, a unit value of $155.00/FAR is estimated for the subject property. The subject property can be developed to a maximum FAR of 3.0 or 39,918 sq.ft. of improvements (13,306 sq.ft. x 3.0) which includes bonus density from the mandatory inclusion of affordable units. Applying the unit value of $155.00/FAR to the subject property's permitted 39,918 sq.ft. of improvements results in a market value indication of $6,190,000, rounded.



Cross Section
Through Townhouses

Longitudinal Section
Through Townhouses

Inclusionary Zoning Maximum Household Income Limits & Maximum Rents and Purchase Prices, 2012 – 2014

The following is a completion of the Inclusionary Zoning Income Limits and Maximum Rents and Purchase prices from 20012 through 2014. Please refer to this document when applicable rents and purchase prices for IZ developments when leasing/selling units for the first time.

Income Limits						
Household Size	*50% of Area Median Income*			*80% of Area Median Income*		
	2012	*2013*	*2014*	*2012*	*2013*	*2014*
1	$37,625	$37,555	$37,450	$60,200	$60,088	$59,920
2	$43,000	$42,920	$42,800	$68,800	$68,672	$68,480
3	$48,375	$48,285	$48,150	$77,400	$77,256	$77,040
4	$53,750	$53,650	$53,500	$86,000	$85,840	$85,600
5	$59,125	$59,015	$58,850	$94,600	$94,424	$94,160
6	$64,500	$64,380	$64,200	$103,200	$103,008	$102,720

Maximum Allowable Rent						
Number of Bed-rooms	*50% of Area Median Income*			*80% of Area Median Income*		
	2012	*2013*	*2014*	*2012*	*2013*	*2014*
Studio	$941	$939	$936	$1,505	$1,502	$1,498
1-bedroom	$1,075	$1,006	$1,003	$1,720	$1,610	$1,605
2-bedroom	$1,209	$1,207	$1,204	$1,935	$1,931	$1,926
3-bedroom	$1,478	$1,408	$1,404	$2,365	$2,253	$2,247

Maximum Purchase Price						
Number of Bed-rooms	*50% of Area Median Income*			*80% of Area Median Income*		
	2012	*2013*	*2014*	*2012*	*2013*	*2014*
Studio	$128,800	$117,900	$115,800	$227,200	$214,600	$211,400
1-bedroom	$141,300	$116,600	$114,200	$253,800	$220,100	$216,600
2-bedroom	$145,200	$122,800	$119,800	$271,700	$247,000	$242,700
3-bedroom	$174,600	$141,900	$138,400	$329,300	$286,800	$281,800

Updated December 18, 2014

WWW.EASTOFTHERIVERDCNEWS.COM

Going, Going, Gone: How DC's Vanishing Affordable Housing Is Affecting Us All

The Numbers

BY WES RIVERS

It's getting harder and harder to afford an apartment in DC. Virtually no low-cost housing is available in the private rental market and rents continue to rise at a break-neck pace. This is squeezing the budgets for many residents, and it is putting an increasing number of families in desperate situations without a stable place to live.

The lack of affordable housing not only affects the ability of residents to thrive, but it also affects the ability of the District to remain economically strong. When families put all they have toward rent, they cut back on food and spend less to support local businesses. When parents cannot afford bus fare, they lose their jobs. When children live in homes with mold or rodents, they can get asthma, the leading cause of school absences. When families who cannot afford to live in DC are forced to move, it is increasingly difficult to operate a strong service industry.

This year the Mayor and DC Council can take steps to ensure that residents with a wide range of incomes can afford to live in this city and contribute to its vitality. They must develop a comprehensive housing strategy and find new resources to pay for programs that provide struggling residents a stable home.

Rents Continue to Surge

The District has seen an influx of residents, including many college-educated young people, which has increased demand for housing and pushed up rents. While the population growth has expanded the city's tax base and helped the economy recover from the recession, it is seriously crimping the ability of many residents to find a place to live.

Rents have grown rapidly for nearly all residents – whether they live in low-cost, basement apartments or in luxury, high-rise lofts. But the impact has been greatest on low- and moderate-income households that heavily rely on low-cost units.

The number of low-cost apartments was cut in half over the last decade. Apartments with monthly rent and utilities below $800 fell from 58,000 in 2002 to only 33,000 in 2013, according to DCFPI's latest study of US Census Bureau data.

The number of units remaining below $800 roughly matches the number of federally and locally subsidized housing units. This suggests that there are very few, if any, low-cost units in the private market. Without any private options, it's no wonder that there are 70,000 households on the waiting list for the DC Housing Authority's programs.

Household Budgets Strained

On top of surging rents, the District's economy is not producing the jobs or wages thousands of residents need to afford rent. About 40 percent of the District's renters have had flat incomes since the beginning of the rental boom. Residents without a college degree faced declining wages and higher rates of underemployment, meaning they had to take part-time jobs when they would prefer to work full-time. Shrinking paychecks and higher costs mean that residents are putting larger shares of their incomes toward rent and cutting other necessities – like food and transportation – to make ends meet.

Very low-income households are feeling the greatest pinch on their budgets. Two-thirds of low-income households spend more than half their income for housing. But they're not alone. More and more, moderate-income residents are being squeezed. Even households with incomes up to $54,000 have seen their rent increase dramatically, with one-third now facing a severe housing cost burden.

Housing Instability Is Bad for Everyone

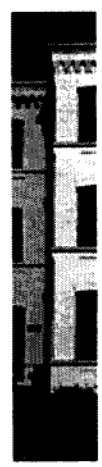
Families that spend the majority of their limited budgets on housing costs face instability that can lead to barriers to employment, education, and good health. More resources going toward housing means less for food, health care and transportation.

High housing costs may force families to rent substandard housing with health hazards like mold and rodents. It may also force families to move a lot or double up with another struggling family. These situations can introduce toxic stress that may make it difficult for parents to hold down a job or kids to concentrate in school.

What's worse is that housing instability can add to the city's growing number of families that are homeless. The limited affordable options have made it hard for the District to manage a skyrocketing number of homeless families, because transitioning out of shelter and finding homes is so hard.

So what is a family to do? Many residents are forced to move in search of better wages and more affordable places to live. An exodus of workers out of the District can threaten the city's economic vitality. Without a variety of workers with a wide range of incomes living here, the District will be unable to sustain certain parts of the economy, including our strong service industry.

The Mayor and DC Council Need to do More

To help residents maintain a stable home, policymakers need to develop a comprehensive strategy that produces more affordable rental units. This includes supporting programs that build more low-cost apartments, preserving what few affordable units we have left, and providing resources to programs that help District residents pay the rent. An important component of this strategy will be Mayor Bowser's commitment to put $100 million to the Housing Production Trust Fund.

However, it will take more resources to make these promises a reality. The Mayor and Council should look for new revenue to meet housing needs while also maintaining investments in other critical services across the city. One way to do this is to spend some of last year's $200 million surplus, rather than stick with current rules that require the city to save every penny. Not all of that money is available, but some of it could be used to provide temporary relief for what has become a crisis.

Mayor Bowser and the Council also could raise revenue in a fair way. DC has the lowest taxes for residents in the region, including property taxes that often are thousands of dollars less than our neighbors in Virginia or Maryland. Additional tax rates at the high end of our income tax or raising property taxes on DC's highest-value homes can raise significant revenue in an equitable way.

The fiscal year 2016 budget will be released this month, and it is important that the Mayor and the Council take it as an opportunity to make significant investments in affordable housing. This would provide stability and opportunity for District residents and help DC maintain its growing economic vitality.

Low-Cost Rentals Dwindle While the High-End Surges

	2002	2013
Total Rental Units	143,528	161,362
Below 800	57,756	33,433*
Percent of Rental Stock	40%	21%
800-1000	27,755	20,200*
Percent of Rental Stock	19%	13%
1000-1200	17,576	19,649
Percent of Rental Stock	12%	12%
1200-1400	12,812	15,010
Percent of Rental Stock	9%	9%
1400-1600	7,550	16,294*
Percent of Rental Stock	5%	10%
1600+	20,078	56,786*
Percent of Rental Stock	14%	35%

Source: DCFPI analysis of 2002-2013 American Community Survey 1-Year Household Estimates. All figures adjust for inflation. *Indicates a statistically significant difference in share of units.

Report: D.C.'s Housing Crisis Increases For City's Lowest Income Residents

by Christina Sturdivant in News on Dec 8, 2016 10:53 am

Photo by it used to be me

As some District residents waited outside in the cold overnight for a chance to secure affordable housing, the DC Fiscal Policy Institute released a report today outlining the effects of D.C.'s housing crisis on families in extreme need of low-cost places to live.

Although the city is seeing the most housing construction activity in decades, the District's investment in affordable housing is "not well targeted to the households in greatest need," according to the report. While 77 percent of the D.C. renters who need affordable housing have extremely low incomes, only 39 percent of affordable apartments backed by the city with public dollars since 2010 are within reach of these families.

In this report, D.C.'s extremely low-income households are categorized as families of four with incomes below 30 percent of the area median income (AMI), which equates to $32,100 a year. Most of these residents are employed or actively looking for work, if they aren't elderly or disabled. Many of them work in the service industry, retail, food service, or other jobs with low wages and only part-time options.

There are 43,000 D.C. households that are considered extremely low-income, according to the report. And 26,000 of them spend more than half of their income on rent. While one-third of these renters can't afford to pay more than $200 per month, only nine percent have housing at that price. Meanwhile, the majority of them pay more than $800 on rent although almost none of them can afford it.

This amounts to 62 percent of extremely low-income renters facing severe hardships, that's up from 50 percent ten years ago.

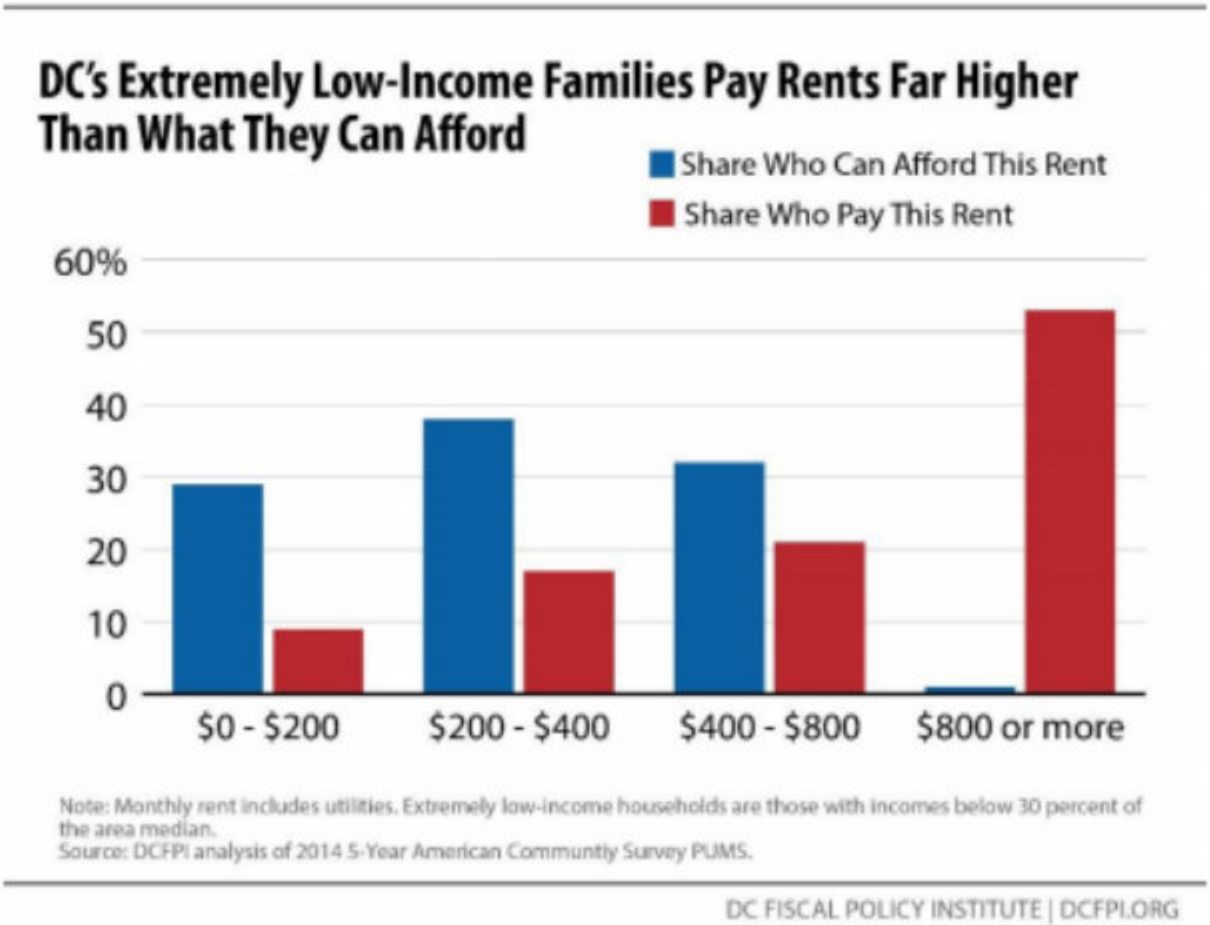


Chart courtesy of DCFPI

Because these families pay so much of their income on rent, they spend about $150 less per month on groceries than others and may be unable to afford transportation to work or school. And even though extremely low-income parents face high risks of depression, many of them don't have the money to travel to medical appointments.

In addition, they face high risks of being evicted and move frequently or become homeless, which often starts a "downward spiral, as families frequently lose belongings, lose their job, have to move in with family or friends, or move to neighborhoods of higher crime and worse-performing schools," according to the report.

The aforementioned 26,000 households includes one-fifth of all children in the city. Children who live in homes where the cost of rent is an issue or there are overcrowded conditions are more likely to fall behind in school or drop out altogether. Currently, the four-year high school graduation rates among black and Hispanic students are both at 67 percent compared to 93 percent of white students who graduated on time from the D.C. public school system.

DCFPI lists several ways that the city can alleviate the housing crisis and subsequent hardships by directing a greater share of its housing production and preserving existing subsidized housing to support extremely low-income residents.

Contact the author of this article or email tips@dcist.com with further questions, comments or tips.

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Investigations

The D.C. Housing Department forfeited millions as families waited for help

By Debbie Cenziper, Sarah Bowman, Lillianna Byington and Robin Eberhardt May 6

Just before her 100th day in office, D.C. Mayor Muriel E. Bowser stood before a packed house at the city's historic Lincoln Theatre and called on taxpayers to make an unprecedented investment in the poor.

For the first time, she announced, the District would devote $100 million in city funds each year to the Housing Production Trust Fund — a lifeline for families struggling to find a place to live in one of the least affordable cities in the country. "If we're going to be a city where families can stay and grow, we must do more to create opportunity for them," Bowser (D) said during her State of the District address in March 2015.

But at the city agency entrusted with producing homes for the poor, officials were giving up millions of additional dollars from another essential source of affordable housing money: the federal government.

The D.C. Department of Housing and Community Development was forced to forfeit $15.8 million in the past three years after repeatedly missing key spending deadlines meant to ensure that federal housing money is properly managed at the local level, The Washington Post found.

The spending problems predate the Bowser administration, but most of the bills came due soon after the mayor took office and launched her affordable housing plans.

No other housing agency in the country returned more affordable-housing money to the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development between 2014 and 2016 than the District's — which forfeited 22 percent of all the money that was sent back to HUD in the three-year period, an analysis of federal data shows.

The $15.8 million sent back could have provided rent vouchers for a year to roughly 1,000 of the city's poorest families.

"This is insane," said Will Merrifield, a lawyer at the nonprofit Washington Legal Clinic for the Homeless. "That they would allow this money to go to waste is absurd."

The funding came from the HOME Investment Partnerships Program, which for 25 years has provided seed money to developers willing to build or renovate low-income housing. HUD, which oversees the program, estimates that $1 in HOME funds can leverage $4.28 from other funding sources.

HOME money can also be used to provide down-payment assistance to buyers or to fund vouchers for families that cannot afford rent on the private market. The program — the largest federal block grant for affordable housing — has produced 1.2 million affordable units across the country in the past quarter-century.

The District's housing department was forced to return millions in HOME dollars even as the homeless population soared, more and more families moved into shelters, and the waiting list for rent vouchers remained closed to new households. Nearly 40,000 families are waiting for vouchers — those near the top of the list signed up well over a decade ago.

"My kids say: 'Mommy, what's wrong? Are we going to be homeless?' " said 31-year-old Carolyn Harrison, who took three buses to a $10.75-an-hour cashier's job in Maryland before losing the position. Though her husband works nights in a residential facility for veterans, the couple can afford only a $300-a-month unit subsidized by a homelessness-prevention nonprofit group.

Now, the lease is up, and Harrison doesn't know where she and her husband will go with their three young children. She has been waiting for a voucher for nearly 10 years.

"I'm not looking for anyone to do it for me," she said. "I'm just looking for guidance and assistance to get my life back on track for my kids."

City officials acknowledged the loss of HOME money and said they have taken steps since Bowser became mayor two years ago to strengthen the operations of the housing department.

"We knew that we inherited something that wasn't functional in the way that it needed to be, and the team has been very good at turning that ship around," said Andrew Trueblood, chief of staff to the deputy mayor for planning and economic development.

The housing agency's director, Polly Donaldson, said that when she took over in 2015 the department had 40 vacancies, management issues and a shortage of housing developers willing to take on HOME-funded projects. Top staffers met weekly to discuss HOME deadlines, find ways to recruit nonprofit developers and communicate with HUD, she said.

Sending money back to HUD, Donaldson said, "really incentivized and mobilized us even more to get this system fixed."

"Federal funds continue to be a very important source of funding for us in the District," she said. "We must use these funds, and that is my mandate."

Despite the loss of federal funds, Donaldson said, the housing department in the past year allocated $20 million in new federal dollars, including money from the HOME program, and $106 million in local dollars from the Housing Production Trust Fund.

All told, the District has spent $600 million of its own money since 2001 on housing, producing more than 9,500 units, according to the city.

But the housing department's management of that money has drawn sharp criticism.

D.C. law requires the housing department to spend 40 percent of trust-fund dollars on "extremely low-income" families — those earning no more than $32,580 for a household of four — and another 40 percent on "very low income" households — those earning up to $54,300.

City auditors reported in March that the department has spent far less: In 2014, only 32 percent of the trust-fund dollars were allocated to those two groups. In 2015, it was 49 percent.

"The majority of that money does not go to the people most in need," said Amber Harding, a lawyer with the Washington Legal Clinic for the Homeless.

Auditors also found that the housing department over the years did not verify the income levels of residents who did receive housing. And although the city has reported that thousands of homes have been built or renovated with trust-fund dollars since 2001, auditors found the department's records too "unreliable" to know for sure.

Auditors are now trying to build a database that tracks the trust fund's spending and production levels.

"Information (i.e. number of units, number of projects, and award amounts) from DHCD was constantly changing," auditors wrote.

The housing department is supposed to commission an annual independent audit of the fund, but no audit has been done, the District's auditors found.

"We were told . . . that they lack resources to oversee many aspects of the [Housing Production Trust Fund] program because they must devote resources to the federally-funded housing programs . . . and they do not want to risk the loss of federal funds," auditors wrote.

But the housing department ended up losing federal money anyway.

Hurting the most vulnerable

Housing groups said the HOME money could have been used to renovate blighted, dangerous rental apartments — in the District, 2,000 households live in units without kitchens or plumbing.

In Fairfax County, Va., and Montgomery County, Md., housing officials have used some HOME money to give out rent vouchers to cash-strapped families. Neither county has returned money to HUD in the past three years.

“The HOME program is critical to the work we do,” said Shauna Sorrells, a former HUD administrator who is the director of legislative and public affairs at Montgomery’s nonprofit Housing Opportunities Commission, which has used HOME funds to pay for vouchers. “We don’t leave any money on the table.”

In the District, the housing department considered plans similar to those in Fairfax and Montgomery. In a 2014 department memo obtained by The Post, administrators acknowledged that HOME money could be used to fund rent vouchers.

To do so, the department would have to modify its policies and a consolidated housing plan it submits to HUD every five years. The money would then be turned over to the D.C. Housing Authority, a separate agency that oversees the city’s stock of 8,400 public housing units.

The Housing Authority manages the city’s waiting list for public housing units and the city’s more than 11,000 rent vouchers. At current funding levels, only about 100 vouchers become available each year for new families. Although families’ needs can differ, an average voucher covers about $1,250 a month in rent, according to housing officials.

“The Housing Authority had a vehicle in place,” said lawyer Michelle Christopher, a former compliance manager at the housing department who is a staff attorney at a health-care agency in Louisiana. “We didn’t have to do anything but give that money over to them. We would have helped people.”

Nathan Simms, former deputy director of the housing department, said officials in 2014 were poised to transfer $3 million in HOME funds and had proposed an amendment to the city’s consolidated plan.

But the plan was set aside in 2015 when Bowser became mayor and Donaldson took over the housing department, he said.

“We were moving in that direction, and then the administration changed, and that was something they didn’t want to move forward with,” said Simms, a former U.S. HUD official who worked at the housing department from 2011 to 2015. “They had different thoughts. They wanted to put it into projects.”

Donaldson said the housing department has since listed rent vouchers as an eligible use of HOME funds in the city’s newest consolidated plan, which has been approved by HUD. But there are no plans to spend the money on vouchers this year, because other projects are more pressing, officials said.

“I can only say that, going forward and looking forward, we are making that possible, and we are, again, increasing options as best we can,” Donaldson said.

Housing advocates said the delays and struggles at the department over the years have hurt the city’s most vulnerable residents.

Michael Wilkerson, a 55-year-old former security officer disabled by cervical degeneration, has been waiting seven years for a voucher.

He pays $300 a month to rent a basement room in Northeast Washington with a crumbling floor of dirt and concrete, no running water, and cracks in the ceiling that allow urine from the dogs upstairs to drip into his room. With no gas to warm the place, the winters are frigid.

Wilkerson is desperate to move out, but so far, he has not received a rent voucher, and his only income is $1,415 a month in disability payments from Social Security.

“I’m not asking for anything more than I need,” said Wilkerson, who washes with $1 jugs of water from Dollar Tree. “Just a comfortable place to lay my head.”

Losing unspent money

HUD allocates about $950 million a year in HOME funding, but it is up to hundreds of local housing agencies to decide how to spend their share of the money.

In exchange, housing agencies must meet two major deadlines: HOME funds must be placed under contract for a project within two years and be spent within five. In 2015, the rule changed, eliminating the five-year deadline and requiring that all projects be completed within four years.

President Trump’s 2018 budget proposal calls for eliminating the HOME program — part of $6 billion in potential cuts at the embattled federal agency. Housing advocates in the District and across the country said the loss of that money would devastate communities that for years have successfully leveraged HOME funds.

Nationwide, 72 percent of about 640 housing agencies did not have to return any money to HUD from 2014 to 2016 — spending a total of $2.9 billion, The Post’s analysis found. All told, about $72 million went unspent.

The bulk of that money — $43 million — was concentrated at 16 housing agencies that each returned $1 million or more, including those in New Orleans, Seattle and Colorado Springs. Prince George’s County, Md., returned $1 million.

HUD officials provided historical and financial data but declined to comment about the returned money.

In Newark, which sent back $4.4 million because of missed deadlines in prior years, blighted houses with broken windows and crumbling front porches languish in the shadows of the nearly century-old Cathedral Basilica of the Sacred Heart. About 20,000 people in the city are on a waiting list for affordable housing.

“It was really challenging to come into office and see we were about to lose funds, to be honest, so I fought HUD hard not to take that money,” said Baye Adofo-Wilson, who became Newark’s deputy mayor for economic and housing development in 2014. “But they have their rules and deadlines to keep. Those funds should have been used and projects should have been started.”

In the District — which returned three times more than Newark and 22 percent of all the money that was forfeited nationwide in the past three years — spending problems date back years.

In April 2011, shortly after Vincent C. Gray (D) became mayor, former HUD official John Hall took the helm of the housing department, with a $144 million annual budget and about 140 employees charged with using local and federal money to produce housing and revitalize neighborhoods.

The department had long been troubled: It had had more than 20 directors in 30 years and had been criticized by the HUD inspector general for improperly spending millions in HOME money on three stalled or substandard development projects.

Hall took stock of upcoming construction projects. “What do we have in our pipeline?” he recalled asking the department.

The answer stunned him: Few new projects were lined up. One of the least-affordable cities in the country was at risk of losing $7 million in HOME funds because of looming spending deadlines.

“Projects weren’t ready,” said Christopher, the department’s compliance manager at the time. “The developers didn’t have all their sources of funding and so you couldn’t even really run numbers to see if there was a feasible, viable project.”

Hall eventually readied eight projects just before HUD’s spending deadline that October, and then held orientations for developers to encourage new construction.

The loss of money, Hall said, “would have been catastrophic to the community.”

“My objective was to use every available resource to pour into the community that needed the help and the uplift,” he said. “I looked at it as a blessing that we had all these resources . . . that I could leverage.”

In June 2012, Gray moved Hall to the deputy mayor’s office and appointed housing veteran Michael Kelly to head the department.

Kelly promoted former HUD official Simms to deputy director. Simms said he found that HOME money from years earlier had been promised to developers who had not yet acquired land or to projects that were going to miss HUD’s deadlines. So the department had to cancel the projects, he said.

In November 2013, HUD wrote to the District, records obtained by The Post show, warning of a nearly $12 million loss in HOME money if the deadlines were not met.

Simms said the housing department continued to make changes, engaging developers and lenders and overhauling underwriting practices.

In 2014, the housing department returned $400,000 in HOME funds to HUD.

“We were getting a lot of languishing projects out the door,” said Simms, who worked as a debt restructuring specialist at HUD before taking the job at the housing department. “There was just a lot of coordination all the way around.”

But the deadlines were still coming due.

Waiting for better

In March 2015, two months after becoming mayor, Bowser appeared at the Lincoln Theatre for her first State of the District address, flanked by the Ballou High School drum line. She pledged to make good on her campaign promise by pumping $100 million into the Housing Production Trust Fund, up from $63 million the year before.

Bowser had just appointed housing department director Donaldson, who had built a career working with local nonprofit groups.

“Dr. [Martin Luther] King challenged us to develop ‘a kind of dangerous unselfishness,’ ”Bowser told the crowd. “We will do that by giving a little more to create and preserve affordable housing, to care for our homeless neighbors.”

That year, the housing department was forced to return $6.6 million to HUD for missed spending deadlines. In 2016, the housing department returned $8.8 million.

Housing department officials said that spending problems from prior years came to a head just after Donaldson became director but that the agency is moving swiftly to ensure that no more money is returned.

“I feel like we’re in a far better position today than we were a year ago or a year and a half ago, because we have better systems in place,” said Allison Ladd, the department’s deputy director.

As the housing department works to prevent future losses, 27-year-old Mareesha Branch waits for a better place to live.

Two years ago, a bullet tore through the living room window of her one-bedroom apartment in Southwest Washington. It traveled through two walls before dropping to the floor a few feet from where her 2-year-old daughter was napping in a room filled with Barbies and unicorns.

Branch lives in the tiny apartment thanks to a program for the formerly homeless run by another city agency, the Department of Human Services, which oversees the city's homelessness services.

She's grateful for the place — she and her daughter once spent nights at a shelter when Branch could no longer afford to rent a basement room on a $9-an-hour cashier's salary. But she cringes every time she hears gunshots outside or finds the street blocked off with crime-scene tape.

Inside the apartment, she has covered white walls that have turned a dull shade of yellow with her daughter's alphabet drawings, but she is hoping to move someplace else. She can't sign up for a rent voucher, which would give her more choice about where to live, because the waiting list closed more than three years ago and has yet to reopen.

"I want to let my daughter play outside," said Branch, who is planning to take a nursing aide course at the University of the District of Columbia. "I want to know that I can go to work and she can go to school, and we can come home and be safe."

Nona Tepper and Jingzhe (Kelly) Wang with Northwestern University's Medill Justice Project and Alice Crites of The Washington Post contributed to this report. Bowman is with the Medill Justice Project; Byington and Eberhardt are with George Washington University's School of Media and Public Affairs.

STANDARD EXAMINER

D.C. mayor says she'll expand fight to save affordable housing

THURSDAY , MARCH 30, 2017 - 5:45 PM

Aaron C. Davis and Peter Jamison

WASHINGTON - D.C. Mayor Muriel Bowser vowed to open two new fronts in the city's battle to preserve affordable housing on Thursday, saying she wants the council to create a new fund for the effort and wants the city to purchase low-rent buildings if it would keep them from being converted into high-rent, luxury housing.

Bowser's housing announcements, made during her annual State of the District address, offered a glimpse of how Bowser intends to spend a portion of growing city revenue in the budget she will deliver to the council next week.

The speech foreshadowed what is likely to be a central part of Bowser's 2018 reelection campaign. She said she would fight for prosperity for all Washington, D.C., residents - an evolution from the "pathways to the middle class" slogan that dominated her first two years in office.

Bowser, D, highlighted new efforts she said were underway, including holding delinquent landlords accountable and expanding efforts to recruit and retain city police officers.

"I promised to knock down barriers to opportunity, to protect the things that unify us, to reaffirm the values that make Washington, D.C., the greatest city in the world," Bowser said, according to prepared remarks she was to deliver at the University of the District of Columbia. "I am proud to say that we have delivered on those promises and the State of the District is strong."

But Bowser was also forced to spend part of her speech addressing a social-media firestorm sparked by how her police department has publicized cases of missing teens.

In recent months, the city's police department began distributing pictures of every missing juvenile on Twitter, including scores of teens who had appeared to leave home voluntarily and later returned safely, often within hours or days.

The frequent alerts, many of which have involved black teenage girls, went viral and were seen by millions nationwide, feeding a perception that the number of missing D.C. girls was growing rapidly. Bowser has sought to cast the increased exposure as a net positive, even as she acknowledges that the city was working to clear up misconceptions.

"We do all of this because it matters to me as mayor," Bowser said, "and it matters to the hard-working men and women of the Metropolitan Police Department who are bringing our missing children home.

"We remind our young girls and boys that we understand how tough growing up can be - the challenges they face are tougher than even what most of us experienced when we were their age," Bowser said. "They should know that there are adults who care and that we all want them to succeed."

Bowser's speech left unanswered the biggest question about the city spending plan she is scheduled to release Tuesday.

The mayor's office has estimated that cuts from President Donald Trump's proposed federal budget could cost the District $100 million or more annually. Advocates for the poor have urged Bowser to ask the council to delay or cancel more than $100 million in planned tax cuts.

The advocates say that delaying the cuts would be prudent to ensure that the District can fully fund social services.

The mayor did not address the tax question Thursday, even as she proposed increased spending on affordable-housing programs.

Bowser called for a third consecutive year of dedicating at least $100 million in taxpayer money to the city's Housing Production Trust Fund. The fund is the city's biggest pot of money to encourage development of affordable housing.

A recent independent analysis by the Office of the D.C. Auditor found the trust fund is so poorly managed that millions of dollars in loan repayments have probably gone uncollected from developers while many low-cost apartments in the program are occupied by tenants whose incomes have not been verified.

Bowser said she will ask the council to create a new account within the trust fund for preservation and fund it with a seed investment of $10 million, bringing the total funding allocation for the fund to $110 million.

The mayor said she would also begin utilizing a decade-old law known as the District Opportunity to Purchase Act. The law, which was written by Marion Barry, gives the city the right to purchase an apartment building in which at least a fourth of the units are affordable to very low-income residents. The law was designed to give the city additional leverage to maintain affordable units when an owner of a building is seeking to redevelop a property into market-rate units. The measure became law in 2008 but has never been used.

Bowser also said the city is making progress in holding a delinquent landlord of subsidized city apartments accountable.

In February, Bowser ordered city inspectors to examine all units in buildings operated by Sanford Capital after The Washington Post and Washington City Paper detailed years of poor conditions endured by tenants.

Those inspections unearthed nearly 1,100 housing code violations that carry fines of $539,500 if problems aren't fixed, Bowser said. An attorney for Sanford did not return an email seeking comment, but city officials said the company is fighting the violations.

Bowser also said she would ask Trump for approval to make major upgrades to federally owned properties in the District, including RFK Stadium, Franklin Square downtown and the city's three golf courses, which are now controlled by the Interior Department.

If accepted, Bowser's request could advance the idea of building a new 65,000-seat stadium for the Washington Redskins when they depart FedEx Field or a 20,000-seat arena capable of hosting the Washington Capitals and Wizards should they leave Verizon Center in the future.

The Washington Post's Fenit Nirappil, Jonathan O'Connell and Peter Hermann contributed to this report.

dc-housing

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Homelessness and Housing in Washington, DC

February 17, 2016

D.C. Mayor Muriel Bowser has been very vocal in her plans to continue to address the District's housing and homelessness crisis. With last year's $100 million investment in the city's Housing Production Trust Fund, the mayor demonstrated her commitment to increasing investments to improve services to D.C.'s homeless families and individuals.

Last week, Mayor Bowser unveiled a plan to close the dilapidated D.C. General Homeless Shelter and replace it with several homeless shelters across the District.

The Bowser administration is advocating that homeless families be housed in temporary shelters located in neighborhoods throughout the city.

All of the shelters – one in each ward – are projected to be on line by September of 2018, with the earliest, a facility for homeless women, potentially being ready sometime this year.

Up to 50 families would be housed in each shelter facility.

A series of community meetings in which residents and stakeholders were able to voice their concerns about the proposed shelters were held across the city. During the meetings, there were contentious debates regarding where the shelters should be located, the type of shelters (apartment vs. dormitory) that should be built, and whether or not the shelters should have private or communal bathrooms. However, despite the differences in opinion, the majority of residents and stakeholders agree that there is no greater time than now to address the city's homeless crisis.

The high rate of family homelessness is attributable to both the recession and the high cost of housing. The economic downturn resulted in a lot of layoffs while the cost to buy or rent in the District continues to rise, resulting in a recipe ripe for homelessness. The housing affordability crisis in the District is at an all-time high, and has a tremendous impact on the economic well-being of its residents. While discussions continue regarding the placement of the proposed shelters, the conversation must also include recommendations for preserving and constructing affordable housing in the District.

Today, there are hundreds of families being housed in shelters and motels throughout the District. There are also D.C. families residing in motels in Maryland. This large number of families without permanent housing is representative of the dire consequence of the lack of affordable housing, in addition to a number of other contributing factors such as domestic violence, addiction, mental illness, and unemployment.

While the District continues to implement plans to tackle the lack of affordable housing, it must simultaneously address the social service needs of at-risk families in order to ensure that barriers do not prevent them from accessing and maintaining housing.

LISC DC works with nonprofit partners, including So Others Might Eat (SOME) and Transitional Housing Corporation (THC), that utilize a two-prong approach to address the economic and social conditions that contribute to family homelessness. Both SOME and THC provide housing and comprehensive support services to homeless and at-risk families. We will continue to support our partners and invest in the resources and services required to help create the conditions in which temporary housing is no longer needed.

D.C. Council member McDuffie seeks more focus on affordable housing for families

Kenyan McDuffie (Associated Press/File) more >

By Ryan M. McDermott - *The Washington Times - Monday, March 13, 2017*

D.C. Council member Kenyan McDuffie is challenging Mayor Muriel Bowser on one of her administration's signature issues: affordable housing.

The Ward 5 Democrat introduced legislation that he says would ensure developers using city funds provide affordable homes for families. He also questioned whether city leaders have focused more on the number of affordable units and less on who needs those living spaces.

"As I reflect upon what has been a significant push by both the council and executive to create affordable housing, I must ask whether we have missed the mark," Mr. McDuffie said in a statement. "To date, our focus has been on affordable dwelling units. We have judged our success based on the number of units we have created, with little emphasis on the size of the units being built."

Enter the Family Unit Amendment Act of 2017, which Mr. McDuffie says would refocus the affordable housing effort to make sure families aren't being neglected.

Under the measure, the deputy mayor's office for planning and economic development would be required to produce a biennial report on the District's need for three-, four- and five-bedroom apartment units.

The bill also would require that at least 10 percent of rental units created via the Housing Production Trust Fund be set aside for families rather than single people. That means at least three bedrooms in each unit.

The $100 million fund hands out low- or zero-interest loans to developers who promise to build affordable houses and rental units. The fund uses money collected by the city's deed recordation and transfer taxes.

But statistics provided by the Department of Housing and Community Development, which oversees the fund, challenge Mr. McDuffie's claims. They show that the number of family units has increased over the past two years.

In fiscal 2015, about 6 percent of 795 units created via the fund were three bedrooms or larger. Few developers awarded money that year had plans for family units. The exception was the Spring Road Northwest project being developed by the nonprofit So Others Might Eat, where nearly half of the 37 units are set to have three or more bedrooms.

In fiscal 2016, the percentage of family units using the Housing Production Trust Fund nearly tripled. About 15 percent of the 1,102 affordable units had three or more bedrooms. Nearly 75 percent of the 94 units at Maplewood Courts in Southeast are family units, and about 35 percent of the 252 affordable units at St. Elizabeths East Housing in Southeast will have three or more bedrooms.

Bowser spokesman Kevin Harris attributes that jump to provisions introduced two years ago that awarded an additional six preference points to projects that included larger bedrooms. That means when developers try to secure trust fund money, a certain preference is given to applicants who promise to build family-size units.

"In the second year, the number of large family units was three times larger, which suggests that developers may be responding to this incentive," he said.

Mr. Harris said the mayor has not seen Mr. McDuffie's bill but remains committed to creating more safe and affordable housing for residents.

"Her administration has made unprecedented investments to ensure more residents have access to affordable housing and that work will continue," he said.

Mr. McDuffie said Monday that even with the gains in affordable housing, there's still room for the improvements outlined in his bill.

"It really only serves to underscore the need for this legislation and the need for reliable data on larger, family-size units in the District," he told The Washington Times. "The bottom line is that there is still room for improvement. The city's affordable housing policy regarding larger, family units should be data driven and goal oriented."

He said the 10 percent figure is not set in stone and he wants to work with residents and experts to determine what percentage is appropriate for the District.

The Atlantic

Will D.C.'s Housing Ever Be Affordable Again?

Over the next decade, the city's demographics will change dramatically, and housing policy will largely determine who gets to stay.

Kevin Lamarque / Reuters

GILLIAN B. WHITE | AUG 19, 2016 | BUSINESS

D.C.'s affordability problem arrived and grew—rapidly. For low-to-middle income households, average monthly rent in the District has gone up by between about $50 to nearly $400, adjusted for inflation, between 2002 and 2013. The number of apartments that cost less than $800 per month, adjusted for inflation, was nearly cut in half in that same time period. Incomes, meanwhile, have remained largely the same.

Now, D.C.'s government is trying to ramp up efforts that would ease some of the pressure on the housing market and help more middle and low-income residents stay put. To do this, they're relying on a mix of tax dollars from their own coffers and federal housing funds. Already, in the past two years, the District has significantly ramped up its own spending on affordable-housing projects in an attempt to create and rehabilitate more housing. The District anticipates that its largest federal funds will come in the form of an annual $13.7 million infusion from the Community Block Grant Development program. Another effort, known as the HOME program, will provide $3.7 million each year, and a grant from the National Housing Trust will dole out around $3 million a year for programs targeted toward residents who make less than 30 percent of area median income. The federal funds provided will be used for things such as grants and subsidies for housing, for improving public facilities and amenities in poor communities, rehabilitating old buildings so they can be put back into use, making much-needed upgrades to housing stock, and erecting additional affordable housing units.

Still, the gaps between what policies and plans can provide and what is actually needed are vast. Claire Zippel, a housing associate at the D.C. Fiscal Policy Institute, says that despite the fact that the city has spent a record amount on affordable housing in recent years, housing still accounts for only 3 percent of the city's total annual budget. "That's an absolutely tiny share compared to the investments we make in other critical areas like education, public safety," she says. According to Zippel's research, meeting the housing needs of all D.C. residents would require an investment of around $5 billion. The city's local-funds budget (the portion that is directly controlled by the Mayor and city council and not subject to

Congressional oversight) is around $7 billion. "Those numbers are not going to add up," she told me.

One tool that the District can rely on that won't bust its budget is inclusionary zoning. Through this program, developers who want to erect or rehabilitate properties in D.C. that either include 10 or more units or meet certain space thresholds must set aside a number of units to be doled out at lower prices. To make up for the lost rent revenue, builders are given a "bonus density," which allows them to create a building that's 20 percent larger than what the District would normally allow for their zone. The threshold for who can rent these affordable units varies a bit; some places require that these tenants earn less than 50 percent of area median income ($55,000 for a family of four); in other buildings, the threshold can be as high as 80 percent of AMI (around $87,000 for a family of four).

But because those thresholds can vary so widely, some have argued that this approach provides housing assistance where it isn't most needed. "It's just not the best use of our resources," Zippel told me.

Polly Donaldson, the head of the Department of Housing and Community Development, says that she understands those who would bristle at affordable units being set aside for those they see as high earners, but argues that it's important for the District to provide affordable housing on a continuum to stop the kind of displacement that occurs when rental prices rise. According to a report from the Urban Institute, about 40 percent of the apartments that would be affordable for the lowest-income tenants are instead occupied by households who could afford to rent a more expensive place. "What we're trying to do is prevent pressure from being applied in some of these other neighborhoods—Eckington Trinidad, Bloomingdale—where some people are moving to these more affordable places and some residents at the lower end of the income scale are at risk of getting pushed out due to the competition over rents," Donaldson said. Additionally, the inclusionary-zoning strategy can help families get a place in much nicer neighborhoods than they would otherwise be able to afford—not an immaterial achievement, as such neighborhoods often provide access to jobs, retail, good schools, and all of the other trappings of economic privilege, which research has shown can have a major impact on outcomes for kids and families.

Inclusionary zoning, to be sure, isn't the only tool the District is looking at—nor do city leaders think that it will solve the problems of the lowest-income residents. To help those groups whose needs aren't met by inclusionary zoning there's the Housing Production Trust Fund, which provides funds to help efforts with affordable rentals specifically for those earning less than 30 percent of AMI. The 2017 budget allots $100 million to the fund. But a recent audit raises questions about whether or not the fund is in fact spending as it should on low-income residents, or producing as much housing for them, as reported or required. There's also Section 8, interventions such as "rapid rehousing," and last-ditch services such as shelters—though all of those programs have become severely strained as D.C.'s housing crisis deepens.

Whatever the cause, the pace of affordable housing creation is simply too slow. "We'll produce or preserve around a thousand affordable housing units a year in D.C.," Zippel told me. "We have 50,000 low income people in D.C. who are severely burdened by housing costs." The problem is not just creating new housing, but stemming losses as costs rise and landlords opt out of their subsidies in order to take advantage of the ballooning market rates, such as at the Museum Square apartments in Chinatown, where long-time residents have been fighting eviction after their landlord's affordable housing contract expired.

Such situations could occur even more frequently in the future, that's part of the reason that preserving the affordable housing that exists is such a major concern. "Preserving a unit that's already affordable is a lot cheaper than building a new unit," says Elissa Silverman, a council member and part of the mayor's housing preservation task force. "We're making a much bigger investment this year to maintain those affordable units and get the vacant units back online."

Many critics of D.C.'s housing strategies lament the fact that the District has done little in the way of using existing buildings for the purposes of affordable housing, or ensuring that existing affordable units and buildings remain that way for as long as possible. On top of that, some have said that the District has been slow, if not irresponsible, when it comes to rehabbing vacant properties that are government owned.

The plans that the city has put in place—increased spending and a preservation task force, for example—are a start, Zippel says, but there are still some major concerns with whether or not the city is doing enough, and how much bureaucracy is inhibiting progress. The Tenant Opportunity to Purchase Act (TOPA), which could allow residents of affordable units to purchase their building instead of facing eviction, is an option, but one that is not as widely used as it could be in order to maintain affordability. And there have been challenges for those who have tried to use it. District Opportunity to Purchase Act (DOPA) would in theory, allow the city to step in to purchase buildings like the 302-unit Museum Square building in Chinatown, which was being taken off of the affordable housing market in favor of the private market, and keep them as affordable units. DOPA, Silverman says, would be helpful in the case that a TOPA attempt failed. But despite being passed in 2009 the act remains unusable because of the lack of regulation surrounding it, she says.

Just this week, the mayor's office announced a week-long review of the D.C. Department of Consumer and Regulatory Affairs, a $44 million agency responsible for a number of tasks, including keeping the public informed on topics such as vacant buildings, and building permits—that could help residents and the District preemptively deal with housing issues, something that residents say they have long failed to do. And the

D.C. Housing Authority, which operates public housing for some 20,000 families in the District, says that it would need more than $1 billion more to provide adequate housing standards for residents.

There's no question that the landscape of D.C. will continue to change dramatically in coming years. Already, the demographics of the city have been remade. The choices and plans that the city prioritizes regarding housing will have a huge impact on what the future of the nation's capital looks like, and who ultimately gets to live there.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

GILLIAN B. WHITE is a senior associate editor at *The Atlantic*.