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## Reform the administration of historic preservation

*Passed by 4 to 0 vote (with one abstention) at the legally noticed, public meeting of ANC1D on May 1, 2007, with a quorum present.*

Resolution: ANC1D advises the DC Council and Mayor to upgrade and reform the administration of historic preservation to assure transparency in policy and responsibility for beneficial impacts. Specifically:

- 1] Elect the majority of the members of the Historical Preservation Review Board, and move the support services to the same office as the Zoning Commission and Board of Zoning Adjustment. Four members should be elected for four year, staggered terms by districts comprised each of two wards. The chair should be elected at large.
- 2] Four members should be full time DC government employees who serve ex-officio or be the delegates of and report to the Director of the Office of Planning, the Zoning Administrator, The Deputy Mayor for Economic Development, and the Executive Director of the DC Commission on Arts and Humanities.
- 3] Recommendations by the HPRB should be appealable to a rotating panel of three administrative law judges who do not report to any of the four offices providing ex-officio members. This panel would then constitute the legal role as the Mayor's Agent.
- 4] The operations of the HPRB should be primarily within policy guidelines instituted by the HPRB, and focused on preserving, leveraging and further developing the distinctive historical character of designated districts. The intent is to add to the existing staff one program officer and one support staff person.
- 5] The HPRB should work closely with the impacted ANCs to make the policy and process transparent and the operations responsive to a balance of historical preservation and the needs of and benefits to the residents of the affected areas. All documentation, including staff reports, meeting minutes, and audio recordings should be provided at no cost to an ANC upon request.

**Why:** In meetings of ANC1D it has come out that the HPRB does not respond collegially to requests for the records of meetings on issues where an ANC has submitted resolutions or testimony. Instead, the ANC is supposed to pay about \$300 to a commercial contractor who records the meetings. Often the staff summarizes the motions, so even the actual wording of

the decision is not available at a reasonable price (which should be free) to the public and the ANC.

Furthermore, despite the legal mandate to work with the distinctive character of the neighborhood, the discussion in the ANC1D meeting revealed that the HPRB and staff have other priorities for their time, apparently the expansion of the number and size of designated districts. In fact, one exchange suggested that historic preservation in DC mostly runs off of country-wide guidelines rather than focusing on elements either of relative distinction or of local cultural significance.

Democratically based oversight, with almost half the votes deriving from the wells of expertise in executive agencies, should move historical preservation from the phase of tightly focused pioneers to a phase of long-term community buy-in. This transition is necessary for persistence in a democratic society where the contributions of a specialized élite must eventually find broad public support.