

**GOVERNMENT OF THE DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA  
DC OFFICE OF PLANNING**



**Open Government Report 2014**

To institutionalize a culture of transparent and open government, accountability, and to expand opportunities for resident participation and collaboration, this Report describes how the DC Office of Planning has and will continue to develop and enhance transparency, public participation, and collaboration. In accordance with Mayor's Order 2014-170, this report addresses the following topics:

**1) Transparency**

*Describe the steps your agency has taken or plans to take to be more transparent. Please include a description of:*

- *How and to what extent your agency shares information with the public, e.g. publication of information in the District register and on the agency website, press releases, and documents in the agency's FOIAXpress reading room.*
- *How the agency meets its obligations pursuant to the District's Freedom of Information Act and Open Meetings Act.*
- *Steps your agency will take to increase public access to information.*
- *Steps your agency will take, including an implementation timeline, to webcast live and archive on the internet board or commission meetings. (This question only applies to agencies that are overseen or advised by a board or commission that is subject to the Open Meetings Act.)*
- *How your agency has taken or plans to take steps to make more of its data available to the public.*

The DC Office of Planning (OP) utilizes extensively multiple channels to share information about OP projects, plans and initiatives with a wide variety of stakeholders, including Advisory Neighborhood Commissioners, residents, business owners and other private stakeholders, District and federal agencies, non-profits, and institutions. As detailed below, OP's divisions utilize the agency's recently revamped website, [www.planning.dc.gov](http://www.planning.dc.gov), Twitter and Facebook, the OP blog, *OPinions*, project-specific websites, mail and email notices, online feedback tools such as MindMixer, and the provision of hard copies of draft plans in multiple publically accessible facilities. OP, as an agency that regularly engages the public throughout its planning processes, hosts public meetings on evenings and weekends and has held "office hours" in the community and within its office to obtain further input on specific plans and projects. Additionally, OP publishes press releases or works in conjunction with the Executive Office of the Mayor to issue press releases and hold press conferences announcing major achievements and the completion of initiatives. These releases are distributed to local media, sister District government agencies and other stakeholders, and posted on OP's website as well as the Mayor's newsroom site.

OP's Associate Director for Operations and Finance serves as the agency's FOIA officer who manages the agency's obligations pursuant to the District's Freedom of Information Act. OP's FOIA officer responds to FOIA requests, utilizes the FOIAExpress website, attends required training, and compiles and submits each fiscal year an "Annual Freedom of Information Act Report."

OP presents its staff reports to the Zoning Commission, Board of Zoning Adjustment and the Historic Preservation Review Board hearings, which are all broadcast live online and archived.

### **Social Media**

OP utilizes social media as a key communication and engagement strategy to achieve several objectives:

- To inform and engage stakeholders in OP initiatives and critical urban planning issues in the District, the region and beyond;
- To expand dialogue on OP initiatives beyond in-person meetings and reach stakeholders not already actively engaged; and
- To notify stakeholders of upcoming community meetings and hearings (i.e., small area plan public meetings; Historic Preservation Review Board hearings); new OP plans, reports and data; new historic preservation cases; and other events and updates.

OP continues to use its Twitter (@OPinDC) and Facebook accounts to inform the public about OP initiatives and plans and upcoming community meetings and events. OP also monitors these accounts, particularly Twitter, daily to respond to questions and comments on OP projects, initiatives and data. OP also maintains a staff blog, *OPinions* ([www.op-inions.com](http://www.op-inions.com)) that showcases the voices of individual OP staff and promotes dialogue with the public on planning, urban design, transportation, historic preservation or other topics that intersect with the planning world. The blog serves as a complement to the official OP website, [www.planning.dc.gov](http://www.planning.dc.gov), which houses OP reports, plans, maps, data and other official documents.

OP is exploring adding dedicated communications staffing or services in order to comprehensively coordinate and expand the agency's community outreach and communications/media efforts. Many of these duties are currently performed by the Chief of Staff, who has other duties including overseeing human resources and legislative initiatives, supporting the Director in external engagement and managing several special projects. Other community engagement practices are managed by OP staff in various divisions including Neighborhood Planning and Revitalization and Design. Over the last three years, OP has greatly expanded its online and social media presence and has launched several innovative community engagement practices. An enhanced coordinated strategy will help OP to develop a comprehensive innovative and effective community engagement strategy that will build and expand neighborhood constituencies that are an integral part of OP's planning projects as well as better manage overall communications and media outreach.

**The Development Review Division** files reports and recommendations to the Board of Zoning Adjustment, the Zoning Commission, and the Historic Preservation Review Board. Large Tract Reviews, which are pre-permit reviews of large projects or subdivisions, include input from other District government agencies and the ANCs. Within 3 days of filing all of these reports are posted on the OP website, with a link to each type of case:

- [Board of Zoning Adjustment \(BZA\) Cases](#)
- [Zoning Commission \(ZC\) Cases](#)
- [Large Tract Review](#)
- [Summary of Planned Unit Development \(PUD\) Process](#)

There is also a cross reference link to the Office of Zoning so a citizen can access the full case record: [Office of Zoning](#) website.

Regarding updates to the District's Zoning Regulations, the Office of Planning has a dedicated site, [www.dczoningupdate.org](http://www.dczoningupdate.org), with a link, [DC Zoning Regulations Updates](#), from the OP website. The website has a full overview of the Zoning Update process with copies of all reports research and drafts. Additionally, OP has a Zoning Update blog site, [www.zoningdc.org](http://www.zoningdc.org), that also contains relevant information about the Zoning Update process, status, timeline and recent draft before the Zoning Commission. The blog site also allows for interactive dialogue on the zoning update.

OP has hosted more than 230 community outreach meetings across all wards to explain the draft zoning proposals as well as attending ANC meetings, in addition to participating in numerous Zoning Commission hearings on the zoning regulations update. OP has provided updated paper copies of the draft proposals to DC Public Library for placement in every public library and mailed a CD to every ANC office.

### **Historic Preservation Division**

The Historic Preservation Office (HPO) within OP, which also houses the District's State Historic Preservation Officer, regularly notifies the public of and posts online applications and staff reports for cases that will go before the Historic Preservation Review Board (HPRB) for review and decision. HPO also posts other content on OP's website (Historic Preservation is one of the main tabs on the site) related to preservation of the District's historic assets, such as the 2016 Historic Preservation Plan developed by HPO, the District's registry of historic landmarks, a list of all historic districts within the city, historical studies completed by HPO staff and information to residents about applying for HPO's Historic Homeowner Grant program.

In addition to its website, OP maintains transparency of its preservation operations through public notices via email (or US mail, if preferred) to all ANCs and an HPO public mailing list. About two communications per week are distributed on average. Notices are also posted on OP's website, Twitter and Facebook accounts, and reposted on community listserves. Subscriptions to the HPO email list are self-managed on GovDelivery and increased from 797 at the end of FY 2012 to 1,157 at the end of FY 2013 (a 45% increase).

As noted earlier, HPO provides public notice of and posts online cases filed for HPRB review. During FY 2014 there were 723 filings noticed as follows:

- 1) Notice of filed cases (minimum 15 days before the HPRB meeting) posted on OP's website and on the Board of Ethics and Government Accountability (BEGA) website;
- 2) Emailed notice of filed cases, listed by ANC (15 days before) to all ANCs; to all persons on the HPO mailing list on GovDelivery (includes all Council offices; currently 1,456 addresses); and to two community listservs;
- 3) US mail notice to all persons requesting hard copy notice (currently 36 addresses);
- 4) Second website post with meeting agenda and link to staff reports (5 days before) on OP's and BEGA's websites;
- 5) Second email and US mail notice in the same manner as #3 and #4 above (5 days before);
- 6) Third website post with a final meeting agenda and video link for HPRB's upcoming public meeting and hearing (1 day before);
- 7) Third email notice with a final meeting agenda and video link (1 day before);
- 8) Fourth website post of a revised agenda and new reports for any overflow meeting (5 days);
- 9) Fourth email notice with a revised agenda and a link to new reports for overflow (5 days);
- 10) Fifth email notice with the agenda and a video link for the overflow meeting (1 day before);
- 11) Fifth website post with the report of HPRB actions (week after the overflow meeting) on OP's and BEGA websites; and
- 12) A sixth email notice with the report of HPRB actions (week after the overflow meeting).

HPO also currently requires applicants to provide notice of cases filed for HPRB review. This requirement was introduced on a test basis and will become permanent. The applicant is required to post a placard on the property (maximum 5 days after filing, to remain until the date of the HPRB hearing). The placard includes a brief description of the work, the HPO website and contact information for questions; public hearing date and location, and public right to comment. For cases to be reviewed by the Old Georgetown Board, HPO also makes a hard copy of each application and provides these to the Georgetown ANC 2E immediately after the filing deadline, along with a hard copy of the plans.

### **Other Types of Notice**

In addition to notice of permit and conceptual design reviews, HPO provides similar notice of Mayor's Agent's hearings and historic landmark and historic district applications. For Mayor's Agent's hearings, notice is also placed in the DC Register and provided to adjacent property owners. For landmark and historic district hearings, the notice is placed in the DC Register. HPO also provides a one-time emailed public notice of all raze applications anywhere in the District submitted for HPO clearance.

In September 2013, OP preservation staff completed the 2016 District of Columbia Historic Preservation Plan after a substantial community involvement process. The plan identifies program transparency by clearly identifying 13 major goals and 73 objectives addressing recognition of historic resources, appreciation of local history, historic resource protection, and preservation planning. Program initiatives, procedural improvements, and community engagement needs are specifically addressed with annual targets. Copies of the plan are available to the public free of charge, and it is posted on the OP website along with an implementation report on the previous plan.

OP continues to promote transparency and understanding of preservation standards through improved design guidelines for work on historic properties, including more detailed citywide guidelines on specific types of alteration and construction. For proposed historic districts, HPO also develops design guidelines tailored to the building characteristics and preservation issues specific to the particular neighborhood. In FY 2013, HPO prepared design guidelines for the Anacostia Historic District and proposed Meridian Hill and George Washington/West End Historic Districts. These improvements provide clearer guidance to DC residents and businesses, streamline building permit reviews, and promote consistent treatment of property owners.

### **IT/GIS Division**

The Office of Planning generates a broad variety of maps and map-related datasets in the course of its work, and uses multiple approaches to share this information with the public. OP maintains a library of maps that can be downloaded directly at <http://planning.dc.gov/node/616172>. On that same page is a Map Order Form that anyone may use to request off-the-shelf or custom map products from OP. Increasingly, OP provides interactive online mapping tools – everything from the popular <http://PropertyQuest.dc.gov> to interactive Comprehensive Plan maps such as <http://bit.ly/WTRemF>. All of OP's work is based on the same technologies and data formats used by the Office of the Chief Technology Officer (OCTO). PropertyQuest was used to answer key questions about sites in DC 63,705 times during FY13 – at DCRA's Permit Center, from agencies all across the city, by residents and by businesses (an increase of 26% from last year). It has helped OP provide a level of customer service that it could not possibly provide any other way.

OP also shares all of the key spatial datasets the agency develops through OP's partnership with OCTO. For example, updated Census boundaries, land use, and development pipeline data are all available to the public through <http://data.dc.gov>, a portal managed by OCTO. Improved 3D buildings were a notable contribution that OP made to the District's shared data catalog in 2014.

OP has made particular strides in improving the central management of data on cases handled by OP's Historic Preservation Office in the past year. OP anticipates sharing as much of this information as is appropriate directly with the public as well, now that it is collected in a central location. OP also released a completely updated website this year, making much of the agency's information substantially easier to find than in years past.

## **2) Public Engagement and Participation**

*Describe the steps your agency has taken or plans to take to enhance or expand opportunities for the public to participate in agency decision-making. Please include a description of:*

- *How your agency provides online access to proposed rules and regulations and secures public input on them. Please list links to specific websites.*
- *How your agency shares information and resources to keep the public properly informed, e.g. community meetings, public hearings, FAQs, and ways the public can provide input such as Twitter, grade.dc.gov, email contacts.*
- *How your agency identifies stakeholders and invites their participation.*
- *Steps your agency will take to improve public engagement and participation including any new feedback tools or mechanisms the agency is considering.*

OP conducts highly robust public engagement and outreach for its plans, projects and initiatives as part of its regular practices. Several OP divisions utilize public engagement throughout the development of OP projects, particularly Neighborhood Planning, which provides a dedicated Community Planner for each ward and partners with the community from start to finish in developing small area plans for DC neighborhoods; Revitalization and Design, which has collaborated with the public on initiatives such as Center City planning, the Vibrant Retail Streets Toolkit implementation, Franklin Park revitalization, and the Play DC Vision Plan to revitalize DC's recreational facilities and playgrounds.

OP values public involvement in the development of all plans completed by the agency in order to ensure that plans reflect the desires and aspirations of the people and neighborhoods of the District. In order to ensure consistency and predictability of public engagement during the planning process, OP has several procedures in place for public engagement. Its Neighborhood Planning Division, which creates small area or neighborhood plans in each ward, uses the following procedures; other OP divisions utilize similar process for other types of plans or initiatives:

- OP creates a project page on its website for each new Small Area Plan and recently has created project specific standalone sites that provide a wealth of information on the project while it is under development. OP also has created Twitter accounts for specific plans to further expand outreach.
- OP utilizes multiple means to obtain public input during plan development, including multiple public meetings and "office hours" held in the affected community; online feedback tools such as MindMixer; presentations to community organizations and ANCs by request; posting the draft plan online for a 30-day public comment period; holding a Mayoral public hearing to obtain public comments on the draft plan in person (this is a separate process that proceeds submission of the final plan to the DC Council for its public hearing and vote).
- Impacted Advisory Neighborhood Commissions (ANC) and individual Single Member District (SMD) Commissioners within the study area receive electronic and hard copy notices of all public meetings held on the plan/project. To facilitate communication and coordination, the ANC as a whole and all individual Single Member District

Commissioners within the study area are invited to participate on the Advisory Committee for the plan. OP also forwards information on its public meetings to impacted Ward Councilmember offices for distribution among constituents.

- OP establishes an Advisory Committee for each small area plan comprised of members from that community to communicate neighborhood priorities, guide OP on developing recommendations, assist in public outreach, and play an active role in the planning process. Committee members also receive electronic and hard copy notices of all public meetings held on the plan/project. OP identifies impacted stakeholder groups to invite to participate in the Advisory Committee, including ANCs, Single Member District Commissioners, citizen/civic/neighborhood associations, business organizations, institutions, and tenants/condo associations. OP also requests input from the impacted Ward Councilmember offices on groups or individuals that should be included on the committee.
- OP sends electronic or a hard copy notice to past meeting attendees who registered on OP meeting sign-in sheets
- As appropriate, OP also request the assistance of community liaison agencies for the government, such as the Mayor’s Office on Asian and Pacific Islander Affairs (OAPIA) and the Mayor’s Office on Latino Affairs (OLA), to forward notifications by way of their community and residential contacts/listservs, and to assist in ensuring language access services such as public notice translation or interpretation at public meetings.

As required by the Implementation Element of the District’s Comprehensive Plan (Comp Plan), OP plans to initiate in FY15 preparatory work and stakeholder engagement for the next amendment cycle for the Comprehensive Plan. Amendment cycles are to occur approximately every 3-4 years. Completion of and Council approval of the last major Comprehensive Plan update took place in 2006; the first amendment cycle was completed in 2010. Given the ongoing policy innovations in areas such as sustainability, transit, and temporary uses, OP anticipates there may be current Comp Plan policies that will need to be modified as well as new Comp Plan policies and actions to address the recommendations of studies completed since the 2010 amendment cycle. The amendment cycle will require a robust public engagement process in order to develop ideas for and obtain feedback on proposed amendments, prior to the Council’s public hearing process. OP intends to use the Comp Plan process to further expand its repertoire of public engagement strategies and tools, to incorporate innovations and reach constituents who have not been very involved in prior planning efforts.

### 3) **Collaboration**

*Describe the steps your agency has taken or plans to take to enhance or expand cooperation among departments, other governmental agencies, the public, and non-profit and private entities in fulfilling its obligations. Please include a description of:*

- *How your agency currently collaborates with the above parties. Please list links to specific websites if appropriate.*
- *Steps your agency will take to improve collaboration with the above parties including any new feedback tools or mechanisms the agency is considering, e.g. prizes, competitions, and other innovative methods.*

OP regularly collaborates with other District agencies, federal agencies, the public, as noted in detail above, as well as the private and non-profit sectors and institutions in fulfilling its obligations and supporting other initiatives. Just a few recent examples include:

- Co-led the creation of the District’s Sustainable DC Plan in partnership with the District Department of the Environment (DDOE), as well as providing funding through the FY13 Sustainable DC Challenge grant competition for District agencies to implement innovative sustainable projects: [www.sustainable.dc.gov](http://www.sustainable.dc.gov);
- Completed the joint Height Master Plan in November 2013 with the National Capital Planning Commission (NCPC). The District’s and NCPC’s recommendations led to an amendment to the federal Height Act that was passed by Congress and signed into law by President Obama in May 2014: [www.ncpc.gov/heightstudy](http://www.ncpc.gov/heightstudy);
- Participating in DDOE’s Climate Adaptation Study currently underway as an Advisory Committee member;
- Serving as a Charter member of the DC Silver Jackets team, officially established in 2014. The Silver Jackets team is a District-federal flood management coordination and planning group, modeled after state-level Silver Jackets teams in other parts of the country;
- Partnered with the Department of Parks and Recreation to complete the Play DC Vision Plan: <http://dpr.dc.gov/page/play-dc-master-plan>
- Partnering with DPR, the National Parks Service and the Downtown DC BID to revitalize Franklin Park: <http://parkplanning.nps.gov/projectHome.cfm?projectId=48509>
- Served as a member of the Mayor’s Business Regulatory Reform Task Force, which completed its study recommending improvements to permitting and business licensing in June 2014: [http://dcra.dc.gov/sites/default/files/dc/sites/dcra/release\\_content/attachments/Business\\_Regulatory\\_Reform\\_Task\\_Force.pdf](http://dcra.dc.gov/sites/default/files/dc/sites/dcra/release_content/attachments/Business_Regulatory_Reform_Task_Force.pdf)

OP has long worked especially closely with OCTO on Geographic Information Systems issues. OP’s CIO, Dr. Charlie Richman, sits on the Executive Committee of the DCGIS Steering Committee and is the author of some of the core GIS enhancements now used city-wide. OP already published its key datasets directly to OCTO’s databases, and relies on datasets shared by other agencies including OCTO, the Office of Tax and Revenue (OTR), and the Department of Consumer and Regulatory Affairs (DCRA). In the future, requirements for open data reporting will be provided by the Chief Data Officer. Tools such as OP’s <http://PropertyQuest.dc.gov> are used heavily by a broad range of customers, especially staff and residents in DCRA’s permit center.



Going forward OP looks forward to tighter integration with our sister agencies on a broad range of issues. The agency hopes to work with OTR on direct streaming of property data (they currently do not provide this), and with DCRA on improved streaming of data on permits and Certificates of Occupancy. OP notes that DCRA's systems still screen permit applications for historic significance through lists of lots that are in historic districts or contain historic assets. These lists are always out-of-date because new lot numbers are assigned daily. OP hopes to work with DCRA and OCTO to get to a point where their systems work by checking actual locations, as <http://PropertyQuest.dc.gov> does, instead of lot numbers. There also are enormous opportunities for streamlining processes across multiple agencies through expanded use of DCRA's ProjectDox system and through enhancement of that system to accept building plans in their original CAD formats and as 3D models. This would make it much easier to store and to use these models, would reduce burdens on applicants, and provide real opportunities for multi-purpose long-term use of these building plans.