



**Department of Housing and Community Development
Ward 8 Check-In Meeting
April 8, 2015**

**The ARC
1901 Mississippi Ave SE
Washington, DC 20020**

This report details key information regarding the April 8, 2015 Check-In Meeting for Ward 8. The DC Department of Housing and Community Development (DHCD) hosted this event.



Event Overview

Starting April 8, 2015, the Department of Housing and Community Development (DHCD) held eight community check-in events throughout the District of Columbia. These public events were intended to update residents, business owners, and community stakeholders on DHCD's current and future projects, and attendees were encouraged to share their thoughts and concerns with DHCD. There were eight sessions, one in each ward. This report concerns the event in Ward 8, which was the kickoff for the series.

The DHCD team promoted this event in several ways, including flyers, posters, social media, and postal mailings. DHCD Director Polly Donaldson gave remarks detailing interagency collaboration, new DHCD initiatives, and general agency updates. DHCD staff briefed attendees on current and future projects in their community. Participants then engaged in facilitated discussions on specific issue areas. Multiple representatives from DHCD were present to provide context, present on their particular program areas or areas of responsibility, answer questions, and connect with community leaders.

During the group discussion period, participants were asked to provide feedback on the following four issues:

1. Home Ownership
2. Community Development
3. Housing Development
4. Housing Regulation Administration (Tenants)

Participant survey results can be found in Appendix A. The scribes' records and raw conversation notes can be found in Appendix B. Audience feedback notes in the Discussion Analysis section are edited for clarity, but generally follow the trajectory of emerging themes from the conversation.

Discussion Analysis

Following an informational session, event attendees broke into small groups to discuss the four issues identified above. The groups generated significant feedback on the issues they saw in Ward 8 and the solutions they believe DHCD should pursue. Similar key themes emerged between discussion groups, including affordability of housing, transparency around development decisions, neighborhood livability, and lack of awareness of DHCD programs.

Affordability of Housing

The need for affordable housing – both maintaining current units and creating new ones – was a prevailing theme during group discussions. In all discussion groups, participants expressed concern about long-time residents being pushed out of their homes and communities. Participants demonstrated a clear desire to retain housing options for low-income and underserved populations.

Audience Feedback:

- How do we define “affordable housing,” particularly for low-income and underserved populations?
- We need to increase affordable housing opportunities and protect current units.
- We need to increase affordable home ownership opportunities.
- Additional community engagement to promote protecting and creating affordable housing is critical.

Transparency Around Development Decisions

In the discussions, another theme that emerged was confusion around how development decisions are made in the District. Participants’ language indicated they felt excluded from development discussions and were generally unaware of how these decisions were evaluated and made.

Audience Feedback:

- When the city approves development, is there an affordable housing requirement?
- There is a need to ensure that developer investment in neighborhoods actually leads to affordable housing.
- What are the plans to bridge development funding gaps?
- More transparency around developer Requests for Expression of Interests (RFEI) and Notice of Funding Availability (NOFA) is needed. Are there specific goals? How are these opportunities and goals communicated to the community and developers?

Neighborhood Livability

Quality-of-life issues (e.g., traffic, accessible grocery stores, and blight) emerged as another theme. Participants discussed ways to improve Ward 8 and address longstanding issues. These recommendations stretched beyond services provided directly by DHCD and pursuing them would require interdepartmental engagement. Several participants expressed concerns about increased traffic congestion and persistent neighborhood blight. Others discussed specific ways to improve the quality-of-life in Ward 8, including siting a grocery store near a Metro station, encouraging local entrepreneurs to utilize commercial space, and increasing youth recreation opportunities.

Audience Feedback:

- We need to take care of blight.
- Addressing traffic is a priority.
- Recreational activity for youth needed.
- Housing development should include commercial development, including a full-service grocery store near Metro.

Lack of Awareness of DHCD Programs

Some attendees expressed a general lack of awareness about DHCD, its programs, and how District residents can access those programs. Others expressed confusion about specific DHCD programs and affordable housing options. As the discussions continued, many participants asked technical questions about specific city programs, including Section 8 vouchers, eligibility for the Home Purchase Assistance Program (HPAP) and its repayment requirements, the Acquisition Loan Program, and specifics of the Pilot Tax Credit Program. Based on this discussion, there is room for increased educational outreach with the community about these programs and DHCD's work in particular.

Audience Feedback:

- Request for internal training (at DHCD) to better inform and serve the public.
- Increased transparency and communication about coordination between the District Office of Planning and DHCD.

Action Items

DHCD will employ feedback from residents and stakeholders to guide its policy priority areas and communication procedures to better serve the community through a dialogue and process that benefits everyone in the District. There were several lessons learned from this event that could serve upcoming events and future work with DC residents:

1. The survey form should be modified to include a ranking system for *Most Important* to *Least Important* policy preferences. It's clear that survey respondents were confused about how to express their preferences, as there was no ranking system provided.
2. DHCD should utilize all available channels for information sharing and outreach, both about these events and about DHCD programs. Event participants had several ideas for how DHCD could raise awareness regarding the agency's programs and services.
3. DHCD could provide specific information about programs that help seniors and long-time residents remain in their homes, including the Tenant Opportunity to Purchase Act (TOPA) and senior assistance programs. At the event, participants asked numerous questions about protecting residents, and it's clear that it's a significant concern for the community.
4. DHCD could provide attendees at future events and presentations with information about how to contact city agencies that address quality-of-life issues, such as blight, traffic, and food access. Participants at the event raised concerns that were outside of DHCD's authority and are handled by other agencies.
5. DHCD should provide participants with additional information about the additional funding committed by Mayor Muriel Bowser to the Housing Production Trust Fund (HPTF). Event



participants had seen this announcement in the news, and had questions about its impact on the affordable housing pipeline.

Appendix A: Survey Results

Participants were surveyed about their priorities and how they heard about the event. 22 surveys were returned.

How familiar are you with DHCD services and programs?		
Response	# of Responses	% of Responses
Very familiar	1	4%
Familiar	3	14%
Somewhat Familiar	11	50%
Not Familiar	7	32%

Note: 80 percent of respondents were not familiar or only somewhat familiar with DHCD’s services and programs. This indicates a need for increased community engagement and education.

Most to least important priorities in your community (Note: It wasn’t clear on this round of surveys which number (1 or 6) was the most or least important priority.)		
Issue	Responses	Average Ranking
Redeveloping or restoring abandoned buildings	1,3,4,1,1,1,1,4,5,3,1,6,2,5	2.71
Access to storefront façade improvement and small business technical assistance	6,4,6,1,5,5,6,5,2,5,4,2,5,4	4.28
Access to first-time home-buyer incentives	2,2,3,3,2,4,2,3,4,4,3,4,5,6	3.35
Housing that accommodates the needs of the elderly	6,6,4,3,3,2,2,6,5,4,5,4,3,5	4.14
Access to affordable housing for purchase (single-family and multi-family)	6,1,2,5,3,3,1,3,1,2,2,5,2,6	3
Access to affordable rental housing	1,1,6,1,1,4,1,3,6,6,6,6,6,1	3.5

Note: It is very likely there was confusion around the numbering system in this response. For certain questions, such as “Access to affordable rental housing,” the high rate of 1s and 6s may indicate that respondents were confused about which number to use to express their top priority. We recommend either changing the numbering system



or including clear, explicit instructions on the survey form about which number is “top priority” and which number is “least priority.”

How do you prefer to hear about news, events, and other opportunities from DHCD?		
Response	# of Responses	% of Responses
Postal Mail	6	15%
E-mail	17	45%
DHCD’s website	3	8%
In-person meetings	4	10%
Social media	8	21%

How did you hear about the community meeting?		
Response	# of Responses	% of Responses
Email	9	33.33%
A friend or relative	5	19%
Social media	2	7%
Flyer or poster	7	26%
Other	4	15%

Note: Social media and electronic communications reach the widest audience, but the 15% of respondents reached by postal mail could indicate that this method is still necessary and could be particularly useful for reaching older residents.

What is your preferred social media network?		
Response	# of Responses	% of Responses
Facebook	3	37.5%
Twitter	4	50%
Instagram	1	12.5%
Other	0	0

Appendix B: Notes

The information below is a compilation of scribe and facilitator notes from each small-group discussion, organized by topic. Information and format for each entry varies as scribes recorded information in different styles, and some table participants requested certain information not be recorded.

Home Ownership

- Resident has a Section 8 housing voucher with increasing rent. She wants to own. What does DHCD provide?
- What are the requirements for HPAP?
- If you have previously been through HPAP, can you do it again?
- What percentage of HPAP do you pay back after five years?
- When the city approves development, is there an affordability requirement?

Community Development

- Plans to bridge gaps? How can community-based organizations fill community needs?
- RFEIs have specific goals?
- Plans for development near Metro/taking care of blight.
- We need to address the constant traffic jam off Suitland Parkway on the right side.
- What coordination between DC Office of Planning and DHCD?
- What effort is there to increase full-service markets with quality food? Site near Metro for a grocery store is a good idea.
- Recreational activity for youth needed.
- Housing development should include commercial projects.

Housing Development

- Affordable housing for folks with disabilities and fixed income is critical.
- Include local businesses and local contractors in development.

- Internal training to better inform/serve the public needed.
- What is the Acquisition Loan Program? How can it help District residents?
- Pilot Tax Credit Program (DC low-income housing tax credit) can do more to help people.
- The Notice of Funding Availability program can be used to serve the community.
- Defining affordable housing is challenging.
- Ensuring developer investment in neighborhoods really includes affordable housing

Housing Regulation Administration (Tenants)

- How can we keep or preserve existing rent levels?
- Have old rent controls been eliminated?
- How does rent control affect new developments?
- Too congested in Ward 8 – there should be no more building here.
- How do we create affordable housing with existing properties?
- 1309 Alabama Avenue SE needs the Tenants Opportunity to Purchase Act – tenants are being replaced and need the opportunity to protect themselves.
- Lack of housing for low-income. What does DHCD plan to do for this issue? There is no provision being made to provide for low-income residents.