



DC PRESERVATION LEAGUE

The mission of the DC Preservation League is to preserve, protect, and enhance the historic and built environment of Washington, DC, through advocacy and education.

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**TESTIMONY OF THE DC PRESERVATION LEAGUE
before
THE COUNCIL OF THE DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA
COMMITTEE OF THE WHOLE
Vincent C. Gray, COMMITTEE CHAIR
on
HISTORIC PRESERVATION REVIEW BOARD RESOLUTIONS
Tuesday, January 29, 2008**

Chairman Gray and members of the Committee:

My name is Rebecca Miller. I am the Executive Director of the DC Preservation League, and I want to thank you for the opportunity to testify before you on behalf of the organization today.

The DC Preservation League is here today to comment, not on the four candidates before you for appointment to the Historic Preservation Review Board (HPRB), but about the current and future makeup of the board.

Well in advance of the July 21, 2007 expiration of the terms of those six members, several organizations took the time to recommend individuals for nomination and re-nomination. The Office of Planning made recommendations as well. While these various recommendations differed somewhat, in general they reflected a consensus view that the HPRB was functioning well and that the majority of its members – in particular the professional members -- should be re-nominated. This view was expressed by DCPL to the Mayor on June 1, 2007 at a meeting in his offices and again in the fall at a meeting with Carla Braley, then director of the Office of Boards and Commissions.

DCPL was therefore surprised to learn in December that the Mayor had chosen not to re-nominate four sitting members, including two of the statutorily defined professional members. The Mayor did re-nominate two sitting members, Robert Sonderman (archeologist) and John Vlach (architectural historian). The Mayor did not discuss this approach with DCPL, nor, to our knowledge, with other HPRB stakeholders or any of the groups that took the time to provide recommendations. Additionally, the four new nominees have neither generally been connected with the work of the HPRB nor are they known to us to have been engaged in citywide historic preservation activities.

DCPL wrote to the Chairman two weeks ago requesting a postponement of today's hearings in order to meet with the four individual. These meetings were meant to be a conversation between the nominee and the three most active preservation groups in the city. Initially, the nominees were willing to meet with our groups. Subsequent to two bullying phone calls from the Office of Boards and Commission where we were told to "just take the Mayor's word for it" and that it was unnecessary to meet with the nominees, I received no communication from two of the nominees and was told by two others that they would only be willing to meet with us after the hearing was held.

The actions of the Office of Boards and Commissions in blocking the opportunity for key stakeholders in the function of the Historic Preservation Review Board is inexcusable and I hope the Chairman will take a serious look at their actions.

The HPRB is unique among all other State Historic Preservation Offices in that it performs not only the duties of a statewide advisory commission on historic landmarks, but also acts as a local historic design review board. Because the HPRB's mandate is to review the compatibility of alterations and new construction as it would affect a landmark or district, HPRB members are expected to be able to converse with architects and among themselves as a group, in order to make informed decisions regarding appropriate alterations and new construction.

Architectural review is partly subjective, but also based on training and experience. There are specific characteristics that the HPRB must take into account when making decisions regarding how to protect the key character defining features of a building or historic district, such as the scale, proportion, rhythm, or material of an addition, or the massing of new construction.

DCPL hopes that the Chairman encourages these nominees to meet with the interested community groups within the next two weeks, so that we may produce substantive testimony regarding their nominations.

Thank you for your consideration.

Rebecca Miller
Executive Director