
Government of the District of Columbia



District Department of the Environment

Testimony

Of

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on

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Greening Washington and the National Capitol Region

The Honorable Eleanor Holmes Norton

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Good morning Congresswoman Norton and members of the House Subcommittee on Economic Development, Public Buildings and Emergency Management. My name is George Hawkins and I am the Director of the District Department of the Environment. I'm pleased to have this opportunity to discuss our involvement in efforts to green the National Capitol Region.

I want to state directly that I believe the work of greening the District connects to one of the most critical public policy issues of the day, creating a more sustainable urban environment.

For example, residents in cities use much less energy than their counterparts in the suburbs, walk more and drive less, and cover less habitat and farm fields with buildings and concrete than sprawling suburban subdivisions. And yet this answer also generates its own set of challenges – those associated with more compact living and urban designs, neighborhoods with aging infrastructure, residual contamination from past activities, hazards from lead paint and ground level ozone, and reduced access to remaining natural areas.

The imperative then is an urban agenda that captures the great opportunity and benefits that are derived from urban living, while responding to the challenges that stem from this arrangement. The Department is charged with a critical component of the urban agenda – protecting and enhancing the natural habitat of the District and the lives of people who live and work here. Achieving these twin goals is a fundamental prerequisite to creating the economic, social and natural vitality that defines any great city of the world.

In my testimony today, I'd like to outline four ways in which the District Department of the Environment, as well as the District government as a whole, is working to transform the District into a leader in environmental practices. First are the measures that have been taken in order to more effectively organize the government in order to address environmental questions. Second, I will describe a series of legislative and executive actions that have significantly

strengthened the District's sustainability efforts. Third, I will discuss the work of DDOE programs on the specific issues of energy, stormwater, the Anacostia River and enforcement. Finally, I will briefly describe some of the regional environmental collaborations that the District is participating in as part of the greater National Capitol region.

The District government has long offered a variety of services and policies that address environmental issues. However, in 2005, Mayor Anthony Williams elevated the importance of the environment in the District through the creation of a new, Cabinet-level agency: the District Department of the Environment. DDOE's establishment signaled a new era; one in which environmental programs would be consolidated in a central structure, so as to better develop a vision for greening the District. Since its inception, DDOE has successfully integrated programs from the Department of Health, the District Energy Office, the Department of Public Works and the District Water and Sewer Authority. As a result, it is now a full-service agency charged with conducting both the state-level regulatory functions as designated by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency and local, city-level functions such as implementation, inspections and outreach. Mayor Fenty has assured this agency's continued success by allocating appropriate staffing and funding for DDOE in the District's Fiscal Year 2009 local budget.

In addition to the efforts being undertaken by DDOE, Mayor Fenty has convened an interagency group, known as the Mayor's Green Team, in order to develop and implement innovative environmental policies and practices across District agencies. Since its formation in December 2007, the Team has grown to include over 80 members from over 40 agencies. It has formed work groups around 4 specific issues: Recycling, Greening your Building, Climate Change and Outreach. Most impressively, as part of its initial survey of existing environmental efforts within District agencies, the Team identified over 180 District programs and activities

related to improving the environment already in place. In the coming months, I expect that the Team will continue to solve implementation obstacles, reach out to District employees and residents alike, and contribute to an overarching environmental strategy for the city.

As the District government is expanding and restructuring to address environmental issues, a series of laws and executive actions will strengthen the District's green requirements. The Green Building Act of 2006 will require and incentivize the development of high-performing buildings and is one of the foremost laws of its kind in the nation. It includes Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design (LEED) and EnergyStar certification requirements for new construction and substantially renovated buildings, as well as a mandate that the District green its building code, to make environmentally-friendly construction standard practice. To limit the District's impact on our global climate, the Clean Cars Act of 2007 adopts the same low emission vehicle standards used by California and includes greenhouse gas controls. Additionally, the District recently finalized a new Municipal Separate Storm Sewer System (MS4) permit with U.S. EPA that contains meaningful and measurable deliverables to reduce pollutants carried by rain events into our waterbodies. Finally, the Mayor has appointed a Green Collar Jobs Advisory Council, which seeks to strengthen the District's economy by linking its businesses and labor force with the growing demand for environmental skills and services.

Much of the progress the District has made in recent years is a direct result of the DDOE's activities. Our individual programs cover a broad range of issue areas, from air quality to hazardous materials to fisheries and wildlife protection, and are central to implementing new environmental solutions at the ground level. For example, DDOE's Energy Office helps residents and businesses reduce energy consumption and promotes expansion of renewable

energy resources. Although only three percent of the District's energy is currently produced within the city limits, examining the District's energy use is an important part of understanding our impact on the environment both within the city and beyond its borders. Our energy conservation efforts include renewable energy source projects, outreach campaigns, small business assistance, appliance rebates, weatherization assistance and energy audits. Together, these energy programs, in combination with providing energy assistance to eligible households, help address global warming and our dependence on nonrenewable fossil fuels—two critical challenges facing this nation.

Another area in which DDOE's programs are fully engaged is in reducing the detrimental impact of stormwater on our regional watersheds. The issue of stormwater cuts across many of today's chief environmental efforts, such as the restoration of our rivers, the promotion of sustainable development and pollution of our lands and waters. In response, DDOE is taking a number of steps. First, DDOE established an aggressive stormwater mitigation agenda in the aforementioned MS4 permit with U.S. EPA. Among its many provisions, the permit requires wider use of low-impact design practices, more stringent regulations for new development, and a revised stormwater fee structure that links fees directly to the volume of stormwater that a site generates. In addition, DDOE is currently building a new Stormwater Management Division, which will oversee the District's MS4 permit obligations and implement strategies to reduce runoff. DDOE's efforts complement the District Water and Sewer Authority's Long-Term Control Plan, which will reduce the number of Combined Sewer Overflow events that discharge stormwater directly into our rivers and streams.

The issue of stormwater is directly related to another of the District's primary environmental resources—the Anacostia River. One of Mayor Fenty's highest priorities is the

restoration of the Anacostia and its tributaries, which is both one of the environmental jewels of the District, and one of the most contaminated rivers in the country. Our efforts on this score are wide-ranging. First, to fully realize the potential of this water body, the Mayor directed the Department to develop a comprehensive action strategy for reviving the Anacostia which will be released this spring. This plan outlines short, medium, and long term actions that the District of Columbia can take to improve the water quality and habitat of the Anacostia River. Elements of this plan are already being implemented and include restoration activities in Watts Branch and Pope Branch streams, river clean-ups and additional water quality monitoring. A new set of green development standards, including greatly increased stormwater controls, will take effect this month for public and publicly-financed projects along the Anacostia. In addition to the formal Anacostia plan, DDOE's Watershed Protection and Water Quality Divisions actively engage other agencies, regional entities, residents and businesses to build support for Anacostia restoration.

In addition to the specific initiatives supported by DDOE's programs, the agency has placed great emphasis on issues of compliance and enforcement. We remain committed to helping individual parties comply with the District's relevant environmental regulations, be it through education, plan review, or certification programs. DDOE seeks to ensure that all requirements are understandable and clearly communicated from the outset. However, in instances when compliance is not achieved, the agency stands ready to take the full range of available enforcement actions, using inspections, notices of violation, and fines. We believe that this dual focus on compliance assistance and enforcement will signal the seriousness that the District places on environmental protection.

Finally, although the District has placed a great emphasis on what environmental action it can achieve through its own agencies and laws, we also recognize that it is of paramount importance that we work with surrounding jurisdictions, federal partners and even national campaigns to achieve the breadth of success and change that we desire. Regional cooperation is particularly critical, given the extent to which air quality, watersheds and energy use cut across administrative boundaries. To that end, DDOE participates in a number of regional and national efforts related to key environmental issues.

First, DDOE is active in regional partnerships relating to three of the National Capitol Region's watersheds: the Anacostia, the Potomac and the Chesapeake. The Anacostia Watershed Restoration Partnership, which is coordinated by the Metropolitan Washington Council of Government coordinates Partnership, is a coalition focused on the cleanup and restoration of the Anacostia watershed. Key governmental members of the Partnership include: the District of Columbia; the State of Maryland; Prince George's and Montgomery counties; U.S. EPA, EPA Region III; and the Army Corps of Engineers. We are also involved in the Interstate Commission on the Potomac River Basin, which determined the Total Maximum Daily Loads for the Potomac River, and have signed the Chesapeake 2000 Agreement, which set goals for reducing pollution loads to the Bay by 2010 and beyond. We believe that participation in these entities is crucial to meeting the challenges faced by our watersheds and we are committed to working through these important regional partnerships in the years to come.

Finally, the District of Columbia considers the issue of climate change to be one of the most significant challenges faced by urban jurisdictions. Therefore, the city has engaged with national partners in a multi-faceted strategy to reduce carbon emissions and address global warming. To date, the efforts taken include Mayor Adrian Fenty signing the Mayors' Climate

Protection Agreement, joining ICLEI's Cities for Climate Protection campaign, and signing on to the Climate Registry in order to calculate the city's carbon footprint as a precursor to developing a climate action plan. Mayor Fenty has also taken a leadership position to call on all cities to green their building codes to mandate greater energy efficiency. The District will propose new green building codes this spring that do just that—requiring new construction and substantial renovations to be 30 percent more efficient than the 2004 standards. These initiatives, and our associated programs that address climate change, will enable the District to move to the forefront among jurisdictions who have decided to tackle this issue on a local basis. We believe that these local contributions, in aggregate, will ultimately spark a greater national trend of committing to reduce greenhouse gas emissions.

To conclude, I'd like to offer my thanks once again for the opportunity to highlight both the issues facing the District and the exciting ways in which we are rising to meet our challenges. My conviction is that implementing a new urban environmental agenda is simply one of the most important issues facing our species--indeed all species. I am honored to have a hand in these issues in one of the great cities of the world and the capital of this great nation.