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Supporting Funding for Urgent Public Housing Repairs and Calling for Commitment to Maintain Public Housing Stock

June 19, 2019

DC Council
Committee on Housing and Neighborhood Revitalization
1350 Pennsylvania Avenue, NW
Washington, D.C. 20004

The ANC 4C Commission, at a duly noticed public meeting, with a quorum of 7 present at its June 19, 2019, meeting, voted, with 7 Yeas, 0 Nays, and 0 Abstentions to sign onto ANC 4B's letter calling for the DC Council to commit to maintaining and repairing our public housing stock.

- The Commission firmly believes in the value of public housing. As stated by Councilmember Brianne Nadeau (Ward 1), "The District's public housing belongs to the people and it is our duty to maintain it and curb attempts to privatize it." Jenny Gathright, WAMU, "D.C.'s Public Housing Stock Requires \$2.2 Billion in Repairs, Housing Authority Says" (Apr. 12, 2019). The Commission also firmly believes that public housing residents deserve safe, stable, and secure housing.
- As one of the District's largest landlords, the DC Housing Authority is responsible for providing safe, affordable, and well-maintained homes to nearly 20,000 of DC's most financially vulnerable residents. Many public housing residents are seniors, children, and/or have a disability. See, e.g., Morgan Baskin, The City Paper, "As D.C. Weighs How to Fix Its Public Housing, Families Keep Getting Sicker" (Mar. 20, 2019) ("By the DC Housing Authority's own count, 36 percent of residents who live in the 124-unit LeDroit Apartments are seniors; 40 percent have a disability. And one-quarter of the residents in Greenleaf are children, while 25 percent live with a disability.").
- Public housing residents face abysmal living conditions, including black mold, rodent and insect infestations, lack of hot water and heat, water leaks and in-unit flooding, and sewage backups, among other issues. See Morgan Baskin, The City Paper, "As D.C. Weighs How to Fix Its Public Housing, Families Keep Getting Sicker" (Mar. 20, 2019); Morgan Baskin, The City Paper, "Nearly One-Third of the City's Public Housing Stock Is at Risk of Becoming Uninhabitable" (Dec. 20, 2008); Morgan Baskin, The City Paper, "What Life is Like—Still—In D.C.'s Public Housing," (Aug. 16, 2008). Sixty-nine families have been approved for a public safety transfer but are unable to move to another public housing facility, in part because of the limited habitable public housing units. See Peter R4B-19-0506 – Public Housing Repairs Page 2 Hermann, The Washington Post, "Boy, 13, shot less than 3 months after younger sibling was wounded by gunfire" (May 6, 2019).
- The vast majority of the District's public housing stock is in severe disrepair. The DC Housing Authority has said 2,610 of its "extremely urgent" units require repairs before the end of the year (including homes with "collapsed ceilings, many square feet of toxic mold, ceilings and walls that don't fit together properly, plumbing systems damaged nearly beyond repair, or other conditions that might very well soon make them uninhabitable"), and that an additional 4,445 of approximately 8,000 public housing units across the city are in "critical condition," with conditions that if left unabated could threaten the long-term viability of the unit. Morgan Baskin, The City Paper, "Nearly One-Third of the City's Public Housing Stock Is at Risk of Becoming Uninhabitable" (Dec. 20, 2008).
- On April 11, 2019, DC Housing Authority Director, Tyrone Garrett, testified at the agency's budget oversight hearing that \$785 - \$850 million (\$45 - \$50 million per year for 17 years) is necessary to place the Housing Authority's housing stock in good repair with 20-year viability, while

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\$321 million (\$30 - \$35 million per year for 10 years) is necessary to address the capital needs for 2,610 units in the Housing Authority's portfolio "needing extremely urgent action" before the end of this year.

- Director Garrett proposed \$25 million over the first two years for repairs for 190 – 200 units by undertaking major rehabilitation and abatement of existing environmental hazards at one or two of the Housing Authority's 14 most urgent sites, plus \$10 - \$15 million per year for 10 years to address an additional 570 – 850 units by using the annual allocation to float up to a \$115 million 10-year bond to undertake major rehabilitation and abatement of existing environmental hazards at 2 or 3 of the Housing Authority's most urgent sites.
- The Housing Authority has indicated that converting residents from traditional public housing to the housing choice voucher program and demolishing public housing properties or transferring them to third-party ownership are possible strategies to address the public housing crisis. Vouchers are problematic for a number of reasons, including the limited supply of larger units on the private market, application fees and security deposits (which create a barrier to low-income voucher holders), and voucher discrimination. "[F]lagrant discrimination in housing ads is rampant in the District." Natalie Delgadillo, DCist, "New Bill Would Penalize D.C. Landlords Who Discriminate Against Housing Voucher Holders" (Mar. 5, 2019). See also Whitney Wild, Erin Spaht & John Mogor, WUSA9, "Advocates to DC landlords: Stop telling Section 8 voucher holders 'No'" (Sept. 18, 2018) (noting Craigslist ads with plainly illegal language such as 'No housing vouchers,' 'Vouchers not accepted,' and 'Owners will not be accepting Section 8 Vouchers.'). Flooding the market with vouchers creates increased risk of displacement of low income residents. Demolition and privatization raise additional concerns in a city facing massive displacement. See Jenny Gathright, WAMU, "D.C.'s Public Housing Stock Requires \$2.2 Billion in Repairs, Housing Authority Says" (Apr. 12, 2019).
- The budget proposed by Mayor Muriel Bowser on March 20, 2019, includes no funding for public housing repairs. During his April 22, 2019, presentation to Advisory Neighborhood Commission 4B, City Administrator Rashad M. Young was unable to provide a plan or timeline for funding public housing repairs. The Chair of the DC Council, Phil Mendelson, recently indicated an interest in reallocating \$30 million of Events DC's \$207 million "excess reserve" to fund public housing repairs, but DC's Chief Financial Officer, Jeffrey S. DeWitt, who serves on the Board of Events DC, has indicated he will not certify this reallocation.

Be it resolved that:

- That Advisory Neighborhood Commission 4C calls on the DC Council to continue providing as much funding as possible for DC Housing Authority repairs to public housing, but at a minimum \$25 million over the first two years plus \$10 - \$15 million per year for 10 years.
- That Advisory Neighborhood Commission 4C calls on the Committee on Housing and Neighborhood Revitalization and the DC Council to exercise oversight of the DC Housing Authority and any other relevant entity to timely develop a plan for full funding for necessary repairs for all public housing stock, including an assessment by the Council's Office of the General Counsel regarding the possible use of Events DC "excess reserve" funds, as well as consideration of dedicated funding streams.
- That Advisory Neighborhood Commission 4C calls on the DC Housing Authority, subject to oversight by the DC Council, to timely determine its ability to leverage bonds to turn guaranteed money over time into more immediately-available funds.
- That the DC Housing Authority, subject to oversight by the DC Council, employ a "build first" approach that prevents displacement and protects and promotes the rights of public housing tenants.
- That the DC Council commit to the retention and repair of public housing stock and reject efforts to privatize or otherwise relinquish ownership of the District's public housing.

The Commission also voted with 7 Yeas, 0 Nays, and 0 Abstentions to appoint the Commissioner for Single Member District 4C10, or any member of the Executive Committee in their absence, to be authorized to communicate this resolution and represent ANC 4C before the DC Council and respective Committees related to this matter.

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