

West End Citizens Association

Washington, D.C.

Boundaries: 15th Street on the East • Potomac Park on the South
Rock Creek and the Potomac on the West • N Street on the North

Written Testimony of the West End Citizens Association

Performance Oversight Hearing – Office of Advisory Neighborhood Commissions

Committee on Housing

February 11, 2025

I, Sara Maddux, President of the West End Citizens Association (WECA), am submitting this written testimony on behalf of the WECA on the following critical three points:

1. Clarify the Relationship between the OANC Legal Team (OANC) and the OAG in regard to ANC Legal Issues. In the course of revising the ANC-2A Bylaws, the Special Bylaws Committee received conflicting advice from the OANC and OAG on multiple provisions. The experience called into question OANC's ability to render correct and reliable legal advice, especially without experienced knowledge of applicable ANC case law.

This also raised the issue of the overall relationship between the OANC and the OAG. As an ANC Commissioner summarized it: OANC typically refused to collaborate or engage with OAG in any capacity, most often leading to two conflicting opinions on matters. This practice undermines the ability of either agency to assist the ANCs and caused Commissioners to engage in "opinion shopping."

It is recommended that both agencies should be in mutual consultation to avoid discrepancies in the future.

2. Return of In-Person ANC Meetings. With the switch to Zoom meetings during COVID, public participation was meaningfully diminished. First, it excluded participation by people without internet access or proficiency in its use. While a call-in option is available, it is of questionable effectiveness. Second, the use of the Zoom-only format has resulted in the arbitrariness of recognizing raised hands, unrealistic time limits on the members of the public, and too often not responding to questions from the public.

Theoretically the Chat function could have served as a replacement for the interaction among attendees at an in-person meeting. However, disablement of this function eliminated this possibility. In addition, removal of the identity of participants has eliminated citizens' interaction during and after the meetings, including citizen answers to some questions posed in the Chat.

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It is recommended that ANCs resume in-person meetings with Zoom meetings, if desired, as a supplement to and not a replacement for in-person meetings.

3. Training for and Follow-up with ANC Commissioners. Familiarity with and an understanding of ANC requirements under the DC Code, ANC Commission Bylaws, Code of Conduct and Ethics requirements, and Robert's Rules of Order are critical for the ANC Commissioners to fulfill their responsibilities in a lawful manner. This is especially important in regard to presentation of ANC official – as opposed to individual Commissioner – actions and opinions and the budget approval process.

It is recommended that ANC Commissioners receive OANC training or advisories on matters such as these and that OANC follow-up with individual Commissioners regarding both process complaints and complaints about objectionable behavior towards other Commissioners or members of the public.

Respectfully submitted by

/s/

Sara Maddux

President

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