



**Government of the District of Columbia
ADVISORY NEIGHBORHOOD COMMISSION 3/4G**

CHEVY CHASE, BARNABY WOODS, HAWTHORNE

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**ANC 3/4G Testimony Before the
Committee on Facilities and Procurement
Budget Hearing on the
Office of Advisory Neighborhood Commissions
March 27, 2019**

Chairperson White and members of the Committee on Facilities and Procurement,
I am Randy Speck, Chair of ANC 3/4G (Chevy Chase), and I am testifying on behalf of
our Commission, which authorized this testimony at its March 25, 2019 meeting by a
vote of 6 to 0 (a quorum being 4).

Unlike executive branch agencies, the Council oversees and directs the work of
the Office of Advisory Neighborhood Commissions (OANC). The Council appoints the
Executive Director and uses its budget authority to set priorities for the OANC and, in
turn, for the Advisory Neighborhood Commissions (ANCs) themselves. The Council can
— and should — empower ANCs to be a vital force for local neighborhood engagement.
Although each Councilmember has constituent services staff, the ANCs are on the front
line and are most knowledgeable about citizen concerns and needs. Modest investments
to improve and facilitate the ANCs' ability to communicate with residents and fellow

commissioners will yield substantial dividends in terms of community participation, transparency, accountability, and confidence in our local government.

While the OANC provides some assistance and resources, the 40 individual ANC's are generally left to their own devices to acquire and implement effective communications technologies. Consequently, some ANC's and individual commissioners with the requisite skills and experience have used social media, video, newsletter platforms, and websites to reach out to their communities while other ANC's without those resources or know-how have lagged behind. Even the most advanced ANC could improve their technological communication capabilities. ANC's also tend to act within their own silos, only rarely interacting with each other to address common concerns or to share effective solutions.

We do not request larger allotments for individual ANC's. Some ANC's annually spend most of their allotments for office staff, office equipment, and community grants, but other ANC's regularly underspend their allotments and have surpluses year after year. Rather than appropriating money directly to ANC's, the Council needs to bolster the resources that the OANC can provide and make available to all ANC's and individual commissioners. Centralized acquisition of technologies that each ANC can implement will be more efficient than having individual ANC's conducting their own research, purchasing equipment or software at retail, and training commissioners and staff. The OANC can decide whether some technologies should be optional or whether some are so important that their implementation should be mandatory. The OANC should be the repository and disseminator for state-of-the-art technologies.

One relatively simple step would be for OANC to work more closely with the Office of the Chief Technology Officer (OCTO) to identify existing technologies that could be made available to ANCs at no cost that they could then adopt and implement. For instance, through OCTO, the OANC could provide a common host platform for ANC websites. For those ANCs that choose to, the OANC could provide a site for uploading videos of ANC meetings so that they would be readily accessible for the community. The OANC should have its own staff expert who can work with ANCs in using these newly available District-wide technology resources.

Additionally, technologies exist — and have been adopted in other cities — that will enable commissioners to communicate with some or all of their constituents and to get their real-time feedback on issues that the ANC should address. This will help to flatten the District government and make it less hierarchical and increase citizen involvement, thus creating a more participatory democracy to engage in the decision-making process. For instance, Seoul, Korea's mobile voting app (mVoting, <http://bit.ly/2Fb4z5d>) lets officials share information directly with residents to improve transparency and citizens' awareness of issues that may affect them. It also permits citizens to express their views to city officials, giving residents a timely, convenient way to register their opinions. CitizenLab (<https://www.citizenlab.co/about>) based in Brussels, provides a similar platform for collaboration between citizens and their representatives and has been adopted in more than 100 cities.

Implementation of programs like these will need to assure the integrity of the voting process and protection of participants' privacy, but these issues can be addressed.

There will also need to be a testing protocol before more general implementation. The OANC should have budget to evaluate technologies like these, develop implementation procedures, purchase necessary software, and make these communications programs available to commissioners.

Finally, there should be a common portal for commissioners to exchange information with each other and contribute to a growing knowledge base. Too often, ANCs have to reinvent the wheel when they face an unfamiliar problem. The OANC should provide a uniform tool where all commissioners can ask questions, share experiences, or seek other commissioners' review of and support for a position that affects the District beyond the borders of a single ANC. Commissioner should be able to simply and efficiently communicate with their colleagues, and the OANC should facilitate that interaction.

Some of these steps will require modest funding that the Council should appropriate in the FY 2020 budget. OANC should hire one additional staff person dedicated to working with OCTO and ANCs to acquire and implement technology. That appears to be a cost of about \$120,000. In addition, the OANC's FY 2020 budget should include funding to purchase software that can promote communications between commissioners and their constituents. Some of the available applications may be free or inexpensive. Nevertheless, the Council should appropriate \$100,000 in the FY 2020 budget to procure any needed software. The Mayor's proposed budget for OANC (<http://bit.ly/2U5vDMA>) includes no increase in staffing and only a modest increase in

funding for “nonpersonnel services.” This is inadequate to address ANCs’ communications needs.

If we expect to lead the way as a 21st Century city, we need to take full advantage of the best available technological tools to connect ANC commissioners with their communities and with each other. We strongly urge the Council to include \$220,000, or whatever is necessary, in the FY 2020 budget to help us move forward toward achieving those goals.