



Government of the District of Columbia
ADVISORY NEIGHBORHOOD COMMISSION 3/4G
CHEVY CHASE, BARNABY WOODS, HAWTHORNE

COMMISSIONERS

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ANC 3/4G Testimony Before the
Committee on Facilities and Procurement
Public Oversight Roundtable
September 25, 2019

Chairperson White, my name is Randy Speck, Chair of ANC 3/4G, and I am testifying on behalf of our Commission, which authorized this testimony at its September 23, 2019 meeting by a vote of 5-0 (a quorum being 4).

During the last year, ANC 3/4G has held regular meetings on the second and fourth Monday of each month, except for holidays and the month of August. All meetings begin at 7:00pm at the Chevy Chase Community Center and are open to the public for comments and questions. Our overall attendance rate for Commissioners is 90%. Approximately 500 people attend our meetings annually. Beginning in February 2018, our meetings are video recorded and uploaded to our ANC's YouTube channel at <https://bit.ly/2kT681L>. Video recors of meetings have been viewed approximately 1,500 times over the past year (an average of 80 viewings per meeting). Additionally, beginning in May 2019, our ANC distributes a monthly newsletter. We currently have approximately 1,000 subscribers with an average open rate of 40%.

Achievements Overview

Over the last two years, ANC 3/4G has supported the community in a number of important ways.

1. After a lengthy community engagement process, ANC 3/4G submitted a lengthy report and recommendations to the Mayor's office about how best to modernize our community center. As a result of those efforts, the Mayor included and the Council approved \$19 million for a modernized community center, \$11 million more than was initially included. I will discuss this project in more detail shortly.
2. After hearing from residents, working closely with city agencies, and discussing at ANC meetings, representatives of ANC 3/4G testified at 12 performance oversight and budget committee hearings in preparation for the FY2020 budget.
3. ANC 3/4G routinely hears applications for the use of public space, licenses to serve alcohol, and permits to construct any number of home or business improvements. For each of these applications, we carefully consider the impact on the resident or business owner, the impact on the community, and how best to assist the applicants with achieving their goals while preserving community space or other worthy objectives.



4. ANC 3/4G formed the Ingleside Expansion Task Force to ensure minimal impact on the community during a major expansion of Ingleside Retirement Community. Ingleside has now almost completed two multi-story independent living buildings and added a new health care center to serve its residents. Recognizing the potential negative impact that this large construction project would have on the surrounding neighborhood, ANC 3/4G negotiated a Memorandum of Understanding with Ingleside that specified steps Ingleside would take to minimize disruption from construction and to assess fines when contractors violated the MOU. The MOU was incorporated as part of the Board of Zoning Adjustment's order. As a result of these agreements, construction has proceeded smoothly, and when fines have been assessed, the proceeds from those fines have been directed to local non-profit organizations.
5. ANC 3/4G has worked with the community and city agencies on a number of controversial issues, including the installation of bioretention cells to capture storm water, the issuance of permits for two homes for sober living, and the construction of sidewalks on residential streets. In each case, ANC 3/4G has worked diligently to ensure that the community voice is heard by city agencies, that residents are represented, and that the Commission acts to achieve the greatest good for the larger community. Our ANC, over the past 9 years, has worked closely with DDOT officials and residents on the Oregon Avenue Road project, from the initial planning phase, to numerous community meetings, to the final contract phase.
6. In an effort to ensure the community is well informed, ANC 3/4G maintains an extensive website with records from all meetings, posts videos of meetings to our YouTube channel, distributes detailed minutes to over 10,000 people via Community Listserves, and circulates a monthly newsletter.

Chevy Chase Community Center

We wanted to take some time to discuss our ANC's involvement in the modernization plans for the Chevy Chase Community Center. The District had initially included \$8 million for upgrades to the Community Center in its FY 2018-FY 2023 Capital Improvements Plan. In July 2016, the ANC recognized that this amount would only address cosmetic issues when the community needed new or substantially enhanced space. Because the Community Center is a vital, long-term asset for our neighborhood and because decisions made in the next few years will have ramifications for decades, the ANC sought the community's views.

We conducted an extraordinary level of community outreach in our planning process well before there was a sufficient budget for this project. A typical modernization project would not begin community engagement until after a budget had been appropriated and many preliminary framing decisions had been made. The ANC sought to turn that process on its head so that it could integrate residents' input from its inception. We held 16 public meetings over 16 months to discuss and debate the Community Center's future. We visited other community centers to gather information and ideas. We met with officials from the Department of Parks and Recreation, the Department of General Services (DGS), the Public Library, and the Office on Aging. We conducted a comprehensive survey, gathering almost 1000 responses from households representing at least 1500 individuals. We enlisted the abundant talents and expertise of our neighborhood's survey designers, architects, and data analysts to review information and examine options. We compiled the available facts in useable formats. In sum, this community-centered, collaborative process has produced documented analysis and supportable recommendations.

The ANC took extraordinary steps to ensure that its survey was comprehensive and representative. Survey questions were community driven. The easy-to-complete online survey was widely publicized in media, through emails, and in door-to-door canvassing. This exhaustive survey process produced especially useful



results. We identified the demographics of all respondents and cross-tabulated the data by respondents' particular characteristics — e.g., to determine whether seniors' answers differed from those who were responding on behalf of children. We ranked relative interests in programs and facilities to identify the community's priorities. Among other findings, the data showed strong interest in an appealing physical space, open areas, sustainable structures, a performance space, gymnasium facilities, and nurturing current hallmark programs (e.g., fencing and ballet). This analysis helped shape the ANC's conclusions and recommendations about the necessary programs and facilities in a modernized Community Center.

We developed our recommendations systematically. First, we used the survey data and community meetings to identify those programs that the Community Center needs to support. Second, we determined what facilities will be required to accommodate programs and activities, again relying on survey data where applicable. Third, we estimated the space requirements for each of the necessary facilities and whether they (a) can fit within the existing structure, (b) would need an addition to the current footprint, or (c) dictate construction of an entirely new building. Fourth, we projected the costs of a modernized Community Center using DPR's experience and standard estimating factors.

As a result of these efforts, ANC 3/4G published its lengthy report and recommendations and submitted them to the Mayor and others. As a result of this report and the extensive community engagement that preceded it, the Mayor included and the Council approved \$19 million to renovate the Community Center over the next few years. Currently, ANC 3/4G has set up three task forces to support this project – a design task force focused on the modernization itself, a construction and logistics task force focused on the impact to the surrounding community and communication during construction, and a programming task force focused on ensuring minimal disruption to current programs at the Center. ANC 3/4G has been frustrated that although funding became available almost a year ago, DGS still has not issued a notice to proceed for the design contractor. Consequently, the project is well behind schedule, and construction is not likely to be completed until the spring of 2022. We are concerned that this delay may increase the costs of the project unnecessarily and deprive the community of the value that it expected from the appropriated funds.

Obstacles/Barriers/Challenges

ANC 3/4G has identified communication with city agencies regarding construction projects in the neighborhood as a major challenge. Too often, ANC 3/4G is informed late or not informed at all about upcoming road work, bioretention cells, sidewalk construction, or other major projects. Agencies are often late to advise residents about these projects that affect their daily lives. If agencies keep commissioners in the loop, they can assist in getting word out to the community, but failure to advise the ANC or directly inform residents invariably leads to uninformed, misinformed, and upset residents. Additionally, the median age of our ANC is 46. Many of our residents are senior citizens. While many are fluent in the use of electronic forms of communication, too often that is the only way that a project is communicated to residents.

The ANC and neighbors spent over three years trying to get DCRA to remediate issues surrounding 5301 and 5303 Connecticut. Meanwhile, the partially demolished building and rubble strewn site became a neighborhood eyesore. During this period, the ANC and neighbors had numerous conversations with DCRA and achieved a couple of Stop Work orders, but the developer did little to improve the situation. Finally, with new DCRA administrator Ernest Chrappah, things are slowly coming around and the buildings have been removed by the owner. However, a major new problem has arisen due to lead contaminated dust caused by the developer demolishing the derelict building with a bulldozer.



We urge the Council to ensure that the Department of Transportation, the Department of Consumer and Regulatory Affairs, and the Department of Energy and Environment always provide the required notice to affected residents and our ANC about upcoming projects in the neighborhood. Further, if representatives from these agencies are meeting individually or in small groups with residents about issues that have come or will come before the ANC, Commissioners should be informed of those conversations proactively.

Related to this communication challenge is a concern that city agencies too often fall behind on timelines for planned construction projects with little explanation to affected residents about the reasons for the delay. For example, the Oregon Avenue reconstruction project has now dragged on for more than eight years, and DDOT typically goes silent for months with no communications or explanations about the delays. Although work was expected to begin by now, we still don't have an expected schedule or project website that can keep residents up to date on what to expect. While delays in construction projects are common, in each case it has been our ANC that was contacting the relevant agencies to learn what had happened and to gather information about the new timeline. This construction project directly affects residents' who live on and use Oregon Avenue. We urge the Council to ensure that District agencies communicate directly with the ANC and the public when the timeline for a project changes.

Budget:

Over the last two years, ANC 3/4G has used its allotment from the Budget to support important community projects, to ensure that meetings are productive, and to increase community participation in local affairs.

We have provided grants to local non-profits including Northwest Neighbors Village and others. We have hired an office manager on a part-time basis to ensure that phone calls and emails receive a response and that documents are ready for Commissioners and the community at each of our meetings. We have purchased office equipment to support our work as well as video equipment to record meetings and share those recordings with the public.

We are grateful that the Council included \$100,000 in the FY 2020 budget "to fund the procurement or licensing of a mobile or desktop application to assist Advisory Neighborhood Commissioners with outreach and engagement with their constituents." Our Commission had advocated for this appropriation and, with commissioners from other ANCs, has identified electronic applications that could be used to significantly enhance commissioners ability to connect with their constituents. We have attempted to organize commission chairs from across the city to consider our options and how we can best use the funds that will be available on October 1, 2019. We need more effective participation from the Office of the Advisory Neighborhood Commissions and the Office of the Chief Technology Officer to take full advantage of this opportunity. We request the Committee's assistance to get input from these agencies and other commissioners to move this important initiative forward.

We also appreciate the Council's decision to increase funding for all ANCs beginning with FY 2020. For our Commission, that will mean about \$2,886 more a year. We are now considering the best way to use this additional money for our community. Among other things, we will consider whether it should be used for community grants, improved technology, or perhaps cooperative programs with other ANCs that can pool their



money to provide a greater impact. We urge the Committee to monitor how ANCs spend their larger budgets to ensure that residents are getting value from this enhanced appropriation.