

PERFORMANCE OVERSIGHT HEARING ON

The Commission on Climate Change and Resiliency

Before the Committee on Transportation and the Environment

Councilmember Mary Cheh, Chair

January 16, 2020 11:00 AM

John A. Wilson Building

Testimony of Uwe S. Brandes

Chairman

## **Introduction**

Good afternoon, members of the Committee on Transportation and the Environment. My name is Uwe S. Brandes and I am chairman of the Commission on Climate Change and Resiliency, having been recently appointed by Mayor Bowser. I am a professor at Georgetown University, where I direct the graduate program in Urban & Regional Planning and the Georgetown Global Cities Initiative.

I am here today to:

1. Report on the important progress the Commission has made in FY2019 -- our first full year of activities;
2. Report on our position from which to pursue our coming year of activities;
3. Highlight some of the recommendations to our recent report to the Mayor and Council.

I would like to share with you how inspiring this mission has been for all members of the Commission. All members have been honored to serve and collaborate with District of Columbia agencies and the Council in our efforts to bring more attention and focus on the long-term challenges and opportunities represented by our city's response to a changing climate. A core tenant of our collective effort is that climate change and resilience challenges need to be addressed in a dedicated, long-term manner and cannot be strategically advanced by any one agency, through a single discipline or within any one sector of the economy. Members of the Commission are humbled to convene across disciplines and across sectors to work on such a critically important charge.

## **Background**

The Commission was created by D.C. Law 21-185 in 2016. The law's objective is:

*To establish a Commission on Climate Change and Resiliency to assess the impacts of the changing climate and potential impacts of adverse weather events, the District's ability to mitigate and adapt to climate change, and the status of the District's ability to prepare, plan for, absorb, recover from, and adapt to adverse events, to require the*

*commission to transmit reports and recommendations to the Council and the Mayor, and to establish the Climate Change and Resiliency Fund. (D.C. Law 21-185)*

Early activities to form the Commission and its first steps of operation were closely tied to the District's collaboration with the Rockefeller Foundation's 100 Resilient Cities initiative. After important organizational activities in FY2018 (2017-2018), FY2019 (2018-2019) represents the first full year of Commission activities which have included a complete year of the Commission's quarterly meetings as well as the production of an inaugural report. While I have served on the Commission since its founding, I have only recently been appointed by Mayor Bowser to serve as chair of the Commission, replacing the first chairman, Kevin Clinton of the Federal City Council. On behalf of all members of the Commission, I would like to extend our deepest gratitude to Kevin Clinton who was instrumental in facilitating the activities between the District of Columbia and the Rockefeller Foundation which gave rise to the creation of the Commission and whose leadership helped stand up the Commission and its activities.

### **Composition of Commission Membership**

The Commission is composed of 16 members, 8 appointed by the Mayor and 8 by the Council. Members are appointed to one of eight designated thematic seats, including: energy, emergency preparedness, environmental science, public health, transportation, natural resources, environmental justice, and insurance. The seats on the Commission are fully appointed and filled, with the exception of the Council-appointed seat for environmental justice. Collectively, the membership of the Commission represents an extraordinary brain trust of committed District residents volunteering to serve the mission of the Commission. [Attachment A](#) provides a complete list of all current members, the organization the member represents, who appointed the member, when their term expires and their meeting attendance record.

### **Commission Meetings**

The Commission meets quarterly in a public session which is advertised in the D.C. Register and has supplemented these meetings with dedicated strategic planning workshops and with the

recent establishment of sub-committee meetings. For a fully itemized list of all Commission meetings, dates, times and locations for FY 2019 and FY2020 to date, please see below:

Date	Location	Time
12.5.18 (Quarterly Meeting) 3.13.19 (Quarterly Meeting) 5.22.19 (Quarterly Meeting) 9.18.19 (Quarterly Meeting) 12.11.19 (Quarterly Meeting)	DOEE 1200 First Street, NE	4:00 -6:00 PM
1.17.19 (Workshop)	Georgetown University 640 Massachusetts Ave NW	8:30 -11:00 AM

In addition to the quarterly meetings and workshops listed above, the Commission held coordination meetings and committee meetings via conference calls on the following dates:

- 4.3.2019 5:00 – 6:00 PM (All Members)
- 5.1.2019 5:00 – 6:00 PM (All Members)
- 6.5.2019 5:00 – 6:00 PM (All Members)
- 6.13.2019 10:30 – 11:30 AM (Knowledge & Risk Management Committee)
- 6.24.2019 5:00-6:00 PM (Governance Committee)
- 6.28.2019 3:00 – 4:00 PM (Knowledge & Risk Management Committee)
- 7/12.2019 3:00 – 4:00 PM (Knowledge & Risk Management Committee)
- 7.19.2019 3:00 – 4:00 PM (Knowledge & Risk Management Committee)

- 8.1.2019 9:00 – 11:00 AM (Knowledge & Risk Management Committee)
- 8.7.2019 5:00 – 6:00 PM (All Members)
- 9.24.2019 4:30-5:30 PM (All Members)

### **Overview of Commission Activities in FY2019**

D.C. Law 21-185 established a dedicated fund to support the work of the Commission from either District appropriations, private donations or federal grants. To date the Commission has received no funds in this dedicated vehicle from any source. All activities and work products have been produced through the volunteer work of Commission members and the limited staff support the Commission received from the District Department of Energy and Environment.

In FY2019, the Commission organized its activities in the following manner:

- *Quarterly Meetings* - The Commission conducted quarterly meetings which were advertised and open to the public. In these meetings the Commission organized presentations from various District agencies, including the Office of the City Administrator and the District Department of Energy and Environment, among others.
- *Strategic Planning Retreat* - The Commission conducted an off-site strategic retreat to establish the future agendas for quarterly meetings and discuss the strategic organizational development of the Commission. One of the key outcomes of the retreat was to establish sub-committees to conduct research tasks relevant to the Commission's mission. These were organized along the following themes:
  - Knowledge and Risk Management;
  - Governance and Accountability; and
  - Communications and Engagement.
- *Agency Engagement* - Individual members represented the Commission at dozens of strategic planning and stakeholder engagement meetings organized by various D.C.

agencies. Typically these meetings informed specific agency reports, such as Resilient DC which was produced by the Chief Resilient Officer in the Office of the City Administrator.

- *Interim Report* -- Per the legislation, the Commission prepared its inaugural report on the basis of activities conducted by the Commission. This report was transmitted to the Mayor and the Council at the conclusion of FY2019. The production of this report was made possible by many hours of in-kind service by individual members, meetings of the sub-committees and by the Commission as a whole.

### **Biggest Accomplishments of FY2019**

The biggest overall accomplishment of FY2019 is the completion of a first entire year of regular public meetings and activities in accordance with the legislation creating the Commission.

Specific accomplishments I would like to highlight include:

- The production of the inaugural report produced by the Commission, entitled *First Report to the District of Columbia*, which was transmitted to the Mayor and the Council on October 15, 2019. This report has been attached to this testimony as [Attachment B](#). This report is described in the legislation as the “Interim Report”.
- In-depth collaboration, support and assistance to the D.C. Chief Resilience Officer, other associated staff in the Office of the City Administrator and representatives of the Rockefeller 100 Resilient Cities initiative to help guide the formulation of the landmark *Resilient DC* planning document. This landmark document was released by the Mayor on April 29, 2019. Activities which were conducted in support of this effort included a special joint workshop between the Commission, agency directors and other members of the Mayor’s “Resilience Cabinet”.
- In-depth collaboration, support and assistance to DOEE staff and Council staff in support of ongoing activities, including the passage of the landmark CleanEnergy DC Omnibus

Amendment Act of 2018 (D.C. Law 22-257, passed by Council January 18, 2018, the DOEE *Climate Ready Strategic Roadmap*, to be released by DOEE January 2020, and the Draft Resilient Design Guidelines, developed by DOEE in 2019. We believe that these milestones and other ongoing DOEE projects represent precedent-making international best practices in the mitigation and adaptation to climate change.

### **Commission's Goals for FY 2020**

The Commission's goals for FY2020 include:

1. Conduct a Commission workshop in February which develops the agenda of upcoming quarterly meetings and a workplan for the Commission's activities in FY2020. (February)
2. Conduct four quarterly meetings with targeted agendas. (December, March, June, and September)
3. Per the legislation, prepare a report to be transmitted to the Mayor and Council that establishes the timeline of regular report production by the Commission on a running three-year basis. (September)
4. Provide ongoing feedback and support to District agencies to advance the recommendations of the Interim Report, including establishing a process to monitor ongoing work of all agencies and communicating this to the public. (Ongoing)

### **Challenges Facing the Commission**

As a newly formed body, the Commission faces important challenges. The following represent the key challenges:

1. The Council-appointed position for Environmental Justice remains vacant. The Commission believes filling this position is of immediate, short-term priority.
2. The Commission is in need of additional staff support. While DOEE has been extremely supportive, no dedicated funds have been appropriated to DOEE or to the OCA to expressly support the administrative operations of the Commission.
3. The Commission has no dedicated communications portal (website or dedicated webpages) with which to communicate with the public in a normal, businesslike manner.
4. The Commission is still in the process of refining its approach to strategically engage stakeholder agencies and organizations beyond those that participate in the Mayor's Resilience Cabinet. These stakeholders include federal and regional agencies and

industry organizations. They also include other District agencies, such as the Public Service Commission.

5. The Commission is still in the process of refining its approach to the subject matter of environmental justice and climate justice in the context of the work of the Commission. These systemic challenges require special analysis in order to understand how the Commission can formulate a coordinated and integrated approach. The Commission has commenced this work, but it has not yet reached maturity.

### **Top Recommendations for Addressing Climate Change and Resilience in FY 2020**

The Commission's top recommendations are outlined in our inaugural Interim Report and are outlined below. These are described in greater detail in the full report, which is included as [Attachment B](#).

- 1) *Prioritize and Integrate Climate and Resilience Strategies* (p.7)  
Coordinate, prioritize, and integrate existing documented resilience strategies and objectives.
  - a) Prioritize and align the many resilience initiatives included in DC plans.
  - b) Establish high-level and District-wide climate change resilience indicators or metrics of success that have the necessary budget and authority to achieve outcome-based goals.
- 2) *Integrate Climate and Resilience into Budget and Managerial Decision-making* (pp. 7-8)  
Integrate resilience strategies into the process of formulating and finalizing the District's overall budget.
  - a) Adopt a resilience framework for all operating and capital budget investments and general government management decisions that prioritize the avoidance of long-term costs associated with climate change and resilience, and which is based on best practices of performing vulnerability assessments.
- 3) *Increase Accountability and Oversight* (p. 8)  
Increase accountability and oversight to support short-term actions designed to meet long-term goals.
  - a) Ensure that the Mayor, Council and Commission have actionable information on District agencies' existing climate mitigation, adaptation, and resilience efforts that will allow each of these bodies to identify needs as well as play a strategic role in exercising appropriate agency oversight.
  - b) Integrate resilience planning into the District Comprehensive Plan on an ongoing and regular basis in order to create a foundation for future legally binding and enforceable measures.



- c) Ensure that environmental justice is expressly incorporated into the formulation of all climate and resilience strategies and that these strategies can be effectively monitored and managed in order to enable all District citizens to thrive.
- 4) *Access and Apply All Available Climate Data* (pp. 8-9)

Develop and adopt consistent direction for assessing climate vulnerabilities in planning and investment decision-making that can be used by government agencies and critical infrastructure public authorities and private utilities.

  - a) Establish Resilience Standards for development in the District and establish directives to standardize and regularly update existing climate models and risk assessments.
  - b) Ensure continuity of operations for critical facilities, including non-District managed facilities, to help verify readiness for extreme weather events.
- 5) *Improve Communications and Engagement* (p. 9)

Improve engagement and communication tailored to a diverse set of stakeholders including the public and private sectors, as well as District residents.

  - a) Develop new information and communication frameworks such as dashboards and performance reports.
  - b) Increase the visibility of Resilient DC and Climate Ready DC plans for broader dissemination and increased public awareness.
  - c) Improve social media presence to promote and educate individuals on the District's climate change and resilience actions/goals.
  - d) Integrate resilience actions and sustainability initiatives into community engagement, outreach, and educational programs.
  - e) Foster new innovation platforms which empower knowledge and innovation partners to make game-changing contributions to the way that the District embraces its climate and resilience challenges.

Thank you for this opportunity to testify. I look forward to responding to any questions you may have.