

PERFORMANCE OVERSIGHT HEARING ON

The District of Columbia Commission on Climate Change and Resiliency

Before the Committee on Transportation and the Environment

Councilmember Mary Cheh, Chair

February 22, 2021

John A. Wilson Building

Testimony of Uwe S. Brandes

Chairman

Introduction

Good morning Committee-chair and Councilmember Cheh and all members of the Committee on Transportation and the Environment. My name is Uwe S. Brandes and it is my honor to serve as chair of the District of Columbia Commission on Climate Change and Resiliency. Outside of my responsibilities to the Commission, I am a professor at Georgetown University.

I am here today to:

1. Report on our recent progress in FY2020;
2. Highlight recommendations to the Mayor and Council from our recent report;
3. Share our goals for this calendar year and FY 2022;

All members of the Commission are honored to serve and collaborate with the Mayor and the Council in our collective efforts to focus on the ways in which climate change is -- and will in the future -- impact our citizens and our city. Our Commission's core tenet is to bring an independent lens to the District's challenges associated with climate change. We believe the District government and all members of our community must mobilize to face this challenge head-on -- in a dedicated, long-term manner -- and that any effective response requires strategic collaboration between many, many parties, including: DC agencies, our regional and federal partners, and between the public, private and non-profit sectors.

We believe climate change is already impacting every resident of the District and that it will continue to require critical attention from the District of Columbia for many decades to come.

Members of the Commission are humbled to serve on a Commission which embodies such a critically important charge.

Over the past year, the public health emergency associated with Covid-19 has cast a chilling and humbling light on our city and tested the resilience of every single citizen. Recently, the Commission formally adopted the following statement on the nexus of climate change and systemic racism:

The District of Columbia Commission on Climate Change & Resiliency affirms our commitment to working collaboratively to imagine and foster a District of Columbia which is free of systemic racism, where every person enjoys the social, economic and political power to thrive. Further, the Commission believes that shocks and stressors, like the current pandemic, are amplified by climate change and represent an even greater risk to black and brown people. Thus, the Commission recommits, with a keen sense of urgency, to sound the alarm in areas of need, while championing strategies to mitigate the damaging impacts of climate change for communities of color in the District of Columbia, especially in areas of environmental justice, health access and equity.
(Adopted September, 10, 2020)

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) represented the first full year of Commission meetings and included the production of our first report. FY2020 (2019-2020) represented our second full year of regular activities.

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. 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.

The Commission meets quarterly in a public session which is advertised in the D.C. Register and on the Commission's website: dccccr.org.

Members of the Commission

All seats of the Commission are filled and includes the following:

Uwe S. Brandes, Chair
Jason Turner, Vice Chair
Molly Rauch, Secretary
Chester McPherson, Treasurer
Jim Dougherty
Alan Etter

Maureen Holman
Anthony Kane
Peggy Keller
Sandra Knight
Melissa Lavinson
Colin McCormick
Chelsea Mervenne
Stephen Moore
Vaughn Perry
Kate Zyla

Overview of Commission Activities in FY2020

In FY2020, the Commission conducted the following activities:

- Quarterly Public Meetings - The Commission conducted quarterly public meetings which were advertised and open to the public. In these meetings the Commission hosted presentations from many District agencies, including Department of Energy and Environment, Department of General Services, Office of Planning and other non-agency entities such as DC Water, Pepco, the Public Service Commission, the Black Emergency Managers Association and individual neighborhood organizations.
- Strategic Planning Retreat - The Commission conducted an off-site strategic retreat to establish the future agendas for quarterly meetings and discuss the organizational development of the Commission.
- Agency Engagement - Individual members of the Commission engaged multiple agencies in strategic planning and coordination activities in support of organizing upcoming Commission meeting agendas.
- Interim Report - The Commission transmitted its first report at the beginning of FY2020 (October 2019) and presented its findings to multiple stakeholders,

including the Washington Council of Governments and the Washington and the Greater Washington Board of Trade.

Since March 2020, the public health emergency has had a direct impact on the manner in which the Commission conducts its meetings. Just prior to the emergency, the Commission created a plan to conduct all of its quarterly meetings in a rotating manner in neighborhood locations across all wards of the District. Commencing with our March 2020 meeting, the Commission has conducted all of its meetings virtually via Zoom. We have not postponed a single meeting and members of the public have attended each meeting.

As a way of advancing our goals of community-based engagement, we have invited neighborhood-based stakeholders to participate in these meetings, including the opportunity to make a neighborhood-based presentation to the Commission. Pending the resolution of the public health emergency, we look forward to the opportunity to conduct in-person meetings in a community-based context.

FY2020 Accomplishments

Our most significant accomplishment of FY2020 was the transmittal to the Mayor and Council of our First Report in October 2019. This report can be found at: <https://dcccrr.org/reports/> Since then, the Commission has commenced the process of preparing its second report, due to be transmitted in October 2022.

The Commission's three most significant recent accomplishments include:

- Exploration of Environmental Justice Practices - A dedicated meeting agenda (June 2020) explored issues of environmental justice, community vulnerability and culminated in the Commission adopting a formal statement on the nexus of institutional racism and climate change. This statement can be found here: <https://dccc.org/>
- Exploration of the Prioritization of Resiliency Projects in DC Budgeting - A targeted review and discussion of how the District integrates considerations of climate change and resilience into the process of formulating the District's annual Capital Budget. This was explored in-depth in a dedicated meeting panel and discussion in December 2020.
- Strengthening the Commission's Administrative Practices - The Commission has adopted dedicated bylaws, elected officers and has created a public-facing website in order to advance transparency and accountability to the public. Specific rules have been established to encourage the public's participation in quarterly meetings.

Commission Goals for FY 2021

The primary goal of the Commission in FY2021 is to complete its legislatively mandated Second Report by October 2022.

Three primary themes incorporated into the Second Report will include:

- The New Federal Context -- Ensuring that the District of Columbia develops sufficient administrative capacity and administrative practices to appropriately leverage all federal climate change and resilience programs, initiatives, and funding. The Commission anticipates that this could benefit the District on the order of many tens of millions of dollars in grant funds per year.

- Environmental Justice Practices -- Continue to further refine the issues, definitions and practices associated with formally integrating environmental justice into decision-making and resource allocation in the District of Columbia. We expect this work to include significant collaboration with the newly formed Office of Racial Equity and the Chief Equity Officer.
- 2050 Carbon Neutrality Action Plan -- Engage, assist, review and approve the Department of Energy & Environment's formulation of a strategic action plan to achieve the legislated target of District-wide carbon neutrality by 2050.

Challenges Facing the Commission

The Commission faces important challenges, the single most important of which is:

- The Commission is in immediate need of dedicated FTE staff support. While staff members at the DC-DOEE has been supportive and collaborative to the Commission, no funds or staff have been dedicated to support the Commission. Today, our administrative, communications and research functions are being advanced by the volunteer support of the Commission members themselves. We have no staff or staff support and this status quo is unsustainable. D.C. Law 21-185 established a dedicated fund to support the work of the Commission from 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.

Commission's Top Recommendations for Addressing Climate Change and Resilience

The resilience of the District of Columbia and its citizens has been tested in many extraordinary ways by the public health crisis associated with Covid-19. As the Commission looks forward to FY2021, we recommend the Mayor and Council focus on following areas of action:

- Ensure that the vacated position of Chief Resilience Officer is filled at a senior level within the Wilson Building with duties to coordinate, prioritize and integrate resilience strategies and ensure the District is responsive to new federal initiatives;
- Explicitly integrate resilience into all operating and capital budget decisions;
- Implement measures of accountability and oversight to support taking short-term actions which are designed to meet long-term goals;
- Develop and adopt consistent direction for assessing climate vulnerabilities in decision-making that can be used by government agencies and critical infrastructure companies; and
- Improve engagement and communication tailored to a multiplicity of stakeholders including the public and private sectors, as well as all District residents.

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

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