Talking Transition DC Town Meeting

DISCUSSION GUIDE

SATURDAY, JANUARY 17, 2015

Walter E. Washington Convention Center • Washington DC
Acknowledgements

Talking Transition DC is an innovative civic engagement, policy, and grassroots initiative that transforms the typically insular, closed-door process that occurs between administrations into an opportunity for broad civil discourse – and ultimately a stronger, more equitable democracy. Talking Transition DC brings together thousands of Washingtonians to join open conversations about our city’s most pressing public policy issues, share ideas, and raise questions that affect every neighborhood and every ward.

Sponsors

Talking Transition DC is a partnership of National Institute for Civil Discourse, DC Vote, DC Working Families, the Urban Institute and HR&A Advisors, Inc.

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Special thanks to our table facilitators and theme team members and volunteers who have donated time and services to this event.

The Talking Transition DC Town Meeting utilizes the 21st Century Town Meeting model pioneered by AmericaSpeaks and familiar to DC residents from Citizen Summits. For our work today the National Institute for Civil Discourse engaged Public Engagement Associates to implement the model to ensure that citizens’ voices are heard on issues that matter to them and the future of the city.
Welcome to the Conversation!

Today’s town hall meeting is an opportunity to talk with your fellow residents about the issues affecting every neighborhood and ward in DC, and to give Mayor Bowser input as she begins to govern. In particular, we’ll discuss your thoughts and concerns about our growing and changing city, and about the Mayor’s plans on jobs, education, public safety, and housing. Finally, we’ll talk about how to give residents a more effective voice in the city’s affairs.

What will happen today?

Through small group discussions and the use of technology, we’ll hear the views of everyone here today, and we’ll develop shared messages and recommendations. Here’s what you can expect:

- **Facilitated table discussions.** You will be seated with a group of other DC residents to discuss the issues on today’s agenda. A trained facilitator at your table will keep the conversation moving and make sure every voice is heard. A note-taker will record the highlights of the conversation on a computer.

- **Discussion guide and presentations.** This discussion guide has facts and information on the issues to be discussed today. You will have time to read each section before the discussion. A presenter on the stage will also briefly discuss each issue.

- **Keypad voting.** Throughout the day, you will use the keypads on your table to answer questions and vote on your preferences. You will see the results of the voting on the large screens and will know right away how everyone in the room feels about these issues.

- **Theming.** Notes from your table conversations will be sent electronically to a team of people who will read them and pull out the common themes. You will see this information on the large screens, and it will help set the group’s final messages.

- **Talking Transitions report.** Before you leave today, you will get a preliminary report on the day’s work. In a few weeks, a more detailed report will be available.

What is your role?

Today we ask that you participate fully at your table, listen to your fellow DC residents, and keep an open mind about ideas and points of view that are different from your own.

*Welcome to the conversation!*
Washington, DC: A Growing and Changing City

As DC residents, we see our neighborhoods and our city rapidly growing and changing around us. While much of it seems positive, change also brings challenges and concerns that have to be addressed. The more we know about and can understand what’s happening, the more we can help shape the future of our city.

DC is growing…and fast!

- **Population size.** Our city’s population is now at more than 646,000 people — a number we haven’t seen since the 1970s.

- **Rate of growth.** For the third year in a row, we are among the nation’s fastest-growing “states,” with an average of nearly 1,100 new residents each month.

- **Future predictions.** Our growth is predicted to continue, and could hit almost 733,000 people by 2022 — that would be a 22% increase from 2010.
The country is getting older, but DC is getting younger.

- **Elderly population.** From 2000-2010, DC’s elderly population fell by about 1,000, though it grew in a few neighborhoods, like Congress Heights, Spring Valley and Foxhall.

- **The 18-to-30’s.** In 2011, nearly 67% of newcomers to DC were ages 18 to 34, up from 57% in 2005. While 18- to 34-year olds now make up about 1/3 of our population, across the US, this age group is only about 1/5 of the population.

We look different than we used to.

- **Declining African American population.** DC’s racial mix continues to change. Although the city was majority African American beginning in the 1950’s, that majority began to shrink steadily starting in the 1980’s. By 2013, African Americans were just about 50% of the population.

- **Other groups coming in.** In recent years, as African Americans have continued to move out of DC, other groups have been moving in – and they are more likely to stay. Between 2000 and 2010, roughly 50,000 more whites, 9,700 more Latinos, and 7,900 more Asians moved to DC. DC is one of few cities, however, where most of the population growth is being driven by an influx of whites.

- **Language diversity.** 15% of DC residents over age 5 speak a language other than English at home, compared to 21% of the US population.
Newcomers increase our education level overall, but many of us have been left behind.

- **Lots of college and graduate degrees.** DC has the nation’s highest percentage of adults over age 25 with college and graduate degrees. And yet, people moving to DC are even better educated than that. In 2011, 65% of new residents had bachelors’ or graduate degrees, compared to 42% of the people already living in the city.

- **High school and basic literacy lag.** In some parts of the city, however, as many as one in three adults lacks a high school diploma. Citywide, nearly 20% of adults do not have basic literacy skills.

Some neighborhoods are booming, but DC is more and more expensive.

- **Development boom.** Luxury condos and new commercial developments are popping up all over the city. But the growth tends to be concentrated in a few areas of the city, like Columbia Heights, NoMa, Shaw, and the Waterfront.

- **High costs.** DC is now one of the most expensive places in the country to live. In 2012, the price for goods and services was 18% higher than the national average.

- **Expensive housing.** Real estate development is driving up home and rental prices. In 2005, over 65,000 rentals were available for under $800/month; by 2012, only about half as many were available for that price.
Our civic structures are being upgraded, but the job isn’t nearly finished.

- **Schools.** 40% of the city’s 106 active public school buildings will be new or completely modernized by summer’s end; since 2000, 75% have undergone major construction.

- **Transportation infrastructure.** DC has an aging transportation system. Many streets have not been rebuilt for 50 years, and we need major improvements to the Metrorail system, to dozens of bridges, and to traffic signal and lighting systems around the city.

- **Playgrounds.** Since January 2010, the city has renovated more than 50 playgrounds and added 14 new ones. But about 30 playgrounds still need to be modernized.

- **Public housing.** 22% of DC’s 8,300 public housing units have been rehabbed recently, but the great majority of the remaining units are also in need of repair. Many were built in the 1960s, but some were built in the 1930s, and there is a lot of work to be done.
Messages for the Mayor about Jobs

Compared to many other metro areas, the Washington region made it through the Great Recession fairly well. And, when it comes to employment and economic opportunity in our city there are some encouraging signs.

The positive trends include:

- **Overall, unemployment is down.** The unemployment rate in DC dropped from just over 10% in November 2010 to 7.4% in November 2014. In Wards 7 and 8 — which consistently suffer from unemployment that is much higher than the citywide average — rates fell by a remarkable 40% during that same period.

- **New jobs are coming.** More than 28,000 private sector jobs were created over the past two years and experts predict there will be another 87,400 new jobs in DC by 2020. Our growing technology sector is leading the way, along with the tourism and hospitality industries. As a result of this growth, we are less dependent on federal spending.

- **Minimum wages will rise.** The new minimum wage increase means most low-wage workers will see their earnings and disposable incomes increase.

- **Youth summer employment remains a priority.** The DC summer youth employment program celebrated 35 years this summer, with 12,500 youth placed in jobs.
But for many in DC, the picture on jobs and employment is not so rosy:

- **Unemployment levels vary widely across the city.** Although the citywide unemployment rate is currently 7.4%, it is 16% in Ward 8 and 14% in ward 7. In Wards 2 and 3 it is only 2.5%. And, our 7.4% rate is still well above the national rate of 5.6%. Finally, nearly 10,000 low-income youth across our city are out of school and work.

- **Many lack secure employment.** Although the DC area has one of the highest median household incomes in the nation (at about $65,000 in 2013), in many parts of the city, median income is substantially less than that: it’s about $25,000 in Ward 5, $26,700 in Ward 8 and $31,800 in Ward 7. Nearly 40% of DC children have parents who lack secure employment.

- **People are not prepared for work.** Half of all jobs in DC require at least a bachelors’ degree, but in some parts of the city one out of every three adults lacks even a high school diploma. Citywide, nearly 20% lack basic literacy skills.

- **Job training and needed skills don’t line up.** DC spends over $100 million each year on “workforce development.” But our training programs often don’t line up with the jobs available now (such as in healthcare), or with those we expect in the future.

- **Childcare options are limited.** DC provides universal pre-K for 3- and 4-year olds, but only has enough licensed childcare spots for 25% of the city’s infants and toddlers. As a result, parents of these youngest children may have trouble holding down a job.

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**The Mayor’s Agenda**

Mayor Bowser’s transition plan includes these ideas for taking-on the city’s challenges in jobs and employment:

1. Support new and existing businesses by making it easier to navigate the city’s complicated tax and regulatory systems.

2. Foster a system that boosts small businesses: with a talented workforce, purchase-ready consumers, strong professional services, affordable office space, and a supportive government infrastructure.

3. Invest in and support new and growing business sectors such as tourism, hospitality and technology.

4. Attract and hold on to federal government investment and jobs to keep this sector strong in the city.

5. Make sure residents get quality training in construction, the digital economy, health care, trades, service delivery and other high-demand fields.

6. Launch the “DC First” program to focus government resources and hiring incentives on historically overlooked neighborhoods.

7. Bring our business taxes, policies and fees in line with our regional neighbors.
Mayor Bowser takes control of the city’s schools at a critical moment. There have been important changes and some good news during the past few years, as well as some on-going challenges.

These are some of the positive trends:

- **Enrollment is up.** In 2013–14, DC had its largest student body in over 25 years: 80,230 students, with 46,393 in traditional public schools. After five straight years of growth — and with increases projected in the number of children living in the city — enrollment in traditional public schools could reach 60,000 students by 2022.

- **Charter schools are a major player.** About 43% of the city’s students attend public charter schools on over 100 campuses. This is a higher share than in any other big city except New Orleans. And, the number is growing fast – charter enrollment was up 10% in the last year and is projected to be fully half of the city’s student body in a few years.

- **Test scores have gone up.** DC CAS (Comprehensive Assessment System) scores showed substantial improvements between 2007-2014: overall, math scores were up 23%, reading 14% and science 16%. Though the upward trend has flattened out in the last year, the tests show the highest 10th grade growth in 6 years. In 8th grade math, the achievement gap between black and white students dropped 20 points between 2005 and 2013.

- **School facilities are better.** 40% of the city’s 106 traditional public school buildings will be new or completely modernized by summer’s end; since 2000, 75% have undergone major construction.

- **Truancy is dropping.** After remaining steady for four years, truancy rates in DC — meaning the percent of students absent without an excuse on any given day — dropped from 27% to 18% between the 2012-13 and 2013-14 school years.
These are some of our on-going challenges:

- **We still have enormous achievement gaps.** Among many examples, 2013 reading scores for 8th graders whose parents were high school dropouts were 23 points below the scores of students whose parents were college graduates. Among 4th graders, white students scored 50 to 70 points higher in reading than Hispanic and black students.

- **School quality varies...a lot.** Depending on where they live, students in DC have very different educational experiences — in the skill and experience of their teachers, the variety of classes and activities they can choose, the amount of parent and community involvement, and the academic levels of their fellow students.

- **Enrollment is uneven across the city.** Last school year, in nearly 20% of DCPS schools, enrollment was at 60% or less of building capacity. About 30% of schools were enrolled at more than 100% of capacity. To right-size the system, over the last seven years the city has closed nearly 40 schools. It is currently looking to make major changes to school boundaries.

- **Our students aren’t graduating on time.** Nearly 30% of DC students aren’t graduating on time – across the country, the rate is only 19%.

- **Truancy rates are still high.** Nearly one-fifth of students are truant on any given day, and the rates are highest at schools in the most disadvantaged areas of the city.

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**The Mayor’s Agenda**

Mayor Bowser’s transition plan includes these ideas for addressing the on-going challenges in education:

1. Provide targeted support to schools that are on the brink of success as well as to those that are consistently underperforming.

2. Expand the number of “community schools” that offer health, social services and community programs in addition to academics.

3. Attract, develop and retain outstanding educators and school leaders.

4. Transform middle schools by 2020, by renovating school facilities and adding more academic and extra-curricular options.

5. Expand early childhood programs.

6. Improve the quality of special education by focusing on outcomes and teacher training.

7. Increase collaboration between DCPS and public charter schools.

8. Support innovations to lengthen the school day, increase school autonomy, and better evaluate schools.

9. Expand parent and family engagement efforts.

10. Provide more career and technical education programs for older students.
Messages for the Mayor about Public Safety

The safety of streets and neighborhoods — and the readiness of police and emergency workers to respond to problems quickly — is an enormous priority for any city. In some areas of DC, residents face these needs head-on every day; in others, they sit more in the background. But in the end, public safety concerns directly affect us all.

Over the last few years, DC has seen some positive trends in public safety:

- **Homicides and robberies are down.** Although homicides increased slightly in 2014, they are still 20% lower than in 2010, and nearly half the rate in 2004. The number of juvenile homicide victims decreased by more than 60% between 2010 and 2013. Gun-related robberies dropped by 9% from 2011-2014. Robbery-related homicides fell 22% in 2013 alone.

- **Court-involved youth are better served.** New programs in the Department of Youth Services resulted in a 37% drop in re-arrest rates between 2011 and 2012. Overall, 84% of participating youth avoided being reconvicted.

- **There are fewer hate crimes.** In 2013, hate crimes (nearly half of which are related to sexual orientation) decreased by about 22% from the year before.
Despite these encouraging signs, there are still many issues of great concern:

- **Gun violence is increasing.** Assaulsts with a gun rose 25% from 2011-2014. New “ShotSpotter” technology logged about 2,000 shooting incidents in 2013 (over 10,000 since 2011). Over a third of the city’s public and charter schools were within range (1,000 feet) of at least one burst of gunfire during the 2011-12 school year. DC also had an unusually high number of children struck by stray bullets in 2014.

- **Domestic violence and sexual assaults are on the rise.** Among the 105 homicides in 2014, 17 of the victims were killed by relatives or others close to them — up from 12 in 2013 and 9 in 2012. In 2013, more than 5,000 Civil Protection Orders were filed, a 14% increase from 2011. In the last year, sexual assaults increased by 15%.

- **Emergency services face ongoing challenges.** For more than 10 years, the DC Fire and Emergency Management System has struggled with staffing, fleet and equipment shortages and failures. Among a number of examples, in June 2011, 28% of the department’s ambulances were reported to be out of service because of mechanical problems. More recently, 40% of the ladder trucks failed inspection.

- **Truancy rates are still high.** Nearly one-fifth of students are truant on any given day, and the rates are highest at schools in the most disadvantaged areas of the city.

- **Problems are concentrated east of the river.** Public safety concerns are disproportionately felt by residents in Wards 7 and 8, which suffered from 45% of the city’s violent incidents in 2014; 30% occurred in just 10 neighborhoods.

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**The Mayor’s Agenda**

Mayor Bowser’s transition plan includes these ideas for “making Washington the safest big city in America:”

1. Improve policing by promoting community engagement, integrating new technologies (such as body cameras and mobile devices), and increasing accountability for police misconduct.
2. Provide resources to hire more officers and upgrade facilities.
3. Target improvements to those neighborhoods most in need of dedicated police resources, in particular strategies for the most violent and repeat offenders.
4. Prevent truancy and violence among youth by investing in effective education and work programs.
5. Increase the support DC provides to victims of domestic violence.
6. Improve emergency services by recruiting and retaining highly qualified paramedics and ensuring first responders have the equipment they need to do their jobs.
Messages for the Mayor about Housing

Washington, DC is in the middle of an incredible boom – new luxury condos and rentals are popping up everywhere, along with more restaurants, stores and transit options. To be sure, DC is changing before our eyes.

But while some DC neighborhoods are on the rise, those east of the Anacostia River have fewer people, less housing and lower incomes than they did ten years ago. In short, our prosperity is not shared equally, and people who helped build the city over many years are being pushed out. The ongoing decline in affordable housing is central to this issue and has become one of DC’s most pressing challenges.
Some facts to consider:

- **Our cost of living is high.** DC is one of the most expensive cities in the country. In 2012, the cost of goods and services was 18% higher than the national average. And, while personal income grew by more than 2% nationwide, in DC it grew less than half of one percent.

- **Housing costs are skyrocketing.** Although experts believe that only 30% of income should be spent on housing, about one in five DC households spends more than 50% of their income on housing; 66% of low-income households do so. The number of affordable rental units in DC dropped by 48% between 2005 and 2012.

- **Government-supported housing doesn’t fill the gap.** There are more than 70,000 people on the now-closed waiting list for new public housing units. In fast-growing neighborhoods, subsidized housing is at risk, with little chance new units will be built.

- **Homelessness is on the rise.** The shrinking supply of affordable housing — and lack of public housing options — has left more and more families with nowhere to turn. On any given night in 2014 there were more than 7,750 homeless people in our city, an increase of almost 13% from 2013. Tragically, 1,231 were families with children, 20% more than the year before.

- **High poverty rates persist.** Just over 18% of DC residents live below the poverty line ($23,492/year for a family of four), as do nearly 30% of DC’s children (compared to 23% nationally). Further, economic success in DC is closely tied to race and geography: 38% of Ward 8 residents are poor; 26% of African Americans, 22% of Latinos, 12% of Asians and 7% of Whites.

### The Mayor’s Agenda

Mayor Bowser has offered a series of strategies for addressing these issues:

1. Dedicate $100 million annually to increase affordable housing and produce 10,000 units each year.

2. Launch a system to connect residents to affordable homes and to government resources that can help them stay in those homes (such as tax credits and home rehab support).

3. Increase community involvement in development projects and focus development on traditionally overlooked neighborhoods.

4. Reserve at least 20% of units built on District-owned land for low-income households, and focus construction subsidies on mixed-income developments.

5. Reduce backlogs in public housing.

6. Make sure families don’t have to become homeless in order to get services and housing, and that the support systems that serve them are coordinated and effective.

7. Close DC General and develop smaller shelter alternatives.
Sources for the Facts in this Discussion Guide

**Washington, DC: A Growing and Changing City**
- Atlantic Media/CityLab
- DC Department of Parks and Recreation
- DCist
- Move DC
- Office of the DC Deputy Mayor for Education
- Sustainable DC
- United States Census Bureau
- The Urban Institute

**Messages to the Mayor about Jobs**
- Bowser Administration
- Annie E. Casey Foundation Kids Count Data Center
- DC Action for Children
- DC Comprehensive Housing Strategy Task Force
- DC Department of Employment Services
- DC Fiscal Policy Institute
- Federal Bureau of Labor Statistics
- Sustainable DC
- The Urban Institute
- United States Census Bureau
- WJLA News

**Messages to the Mayor about Education**
- Annie E. Casey Foundation Kids Count Data Center
- 21st Century Schools Fund

**Messages to the Mayor about Public Safety**
- Bowser Administration
- DC Metropolitan Police Department
- DC Office of the Deputy Mayor for Health and Human Services
- DC Public Schools
- The Urban Institute
- The Washington Post

**Messages to the Mayor about making DC an affordable city for all**
- Bowser Administration
- Annie E. Casey Foundation Kids Count Data Center
- Community Partnership for the Prevention of Homelessness
- DC Fiscal Policy Institute
- The Urban Institute
- The Washington Post

For full citations on the data and information presented in this Discussion Guide, please visit www.TalkingTransitionDC.com