

# Organizational Transition Strategy for the DC Historic Districts Coalition

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## I. INTRODUCTION AND METHODOLOGY

In 2009, Nancy Metzger and Rick Busch of the DC Historic Districts Coalition (“HDC”) approached the Southern Field Office of the National Trust for Historic Preservation for guidance in charting a future for the loose-knit coalition. At that time, the HDC was undertaking advocacy around issues related to DC’s historic districts and was providing a forum for quarterly discussions regarding topics of interest to historic neighborhood groups. Most participants in the HDC belonged to local neighborhood groups, which were typically the participants’ first priority – and the leaders of the HDC were no exception. With an apparent lack of new volunteers to assume a leadership role for HDC and no formal succession plan in place, the current leaders, Nancy and Rick, wanted to ensure that the coalition’s participants had an opportunity to examine the state of the coalition and to help make plans for the HDC’s future.

The leaders of the HDC and the staff of the National Trust’s Southern Field Office agreed to work together. The National Trust would gather information and input from coalition participants. The National Trust also would offer its own recommendations. And ultimately, HDC affiliates would establish a leadership transition plan for the organization.

First, the HDC and the National Trust agreed to survey the HDC’s “membership,” which is loosely defined by HDC and includes residents of historic districts, residents of undesignated historic neighborhoods, representatives of neighborhood organizations, representatives of historic preservation organizations, representatives of preservation-related businesses, and representatives of city agencies. According to Nancy Metzger, representatives from approximately fifteen of DC’s twenty-six designated historic districts have been active in the HDC. In March 2010, the National Trust sent out surveys to 136 members and friends of the HDC, using a list provided by HDC, in order to help gauge what is valued about HDC and what could be improved, as well as to explore future directions for HDC. The National Trust received thirty-eight returns – a very good sample size for the survey. Many people responded on behalf of HDC member organizations (thirteen organizations) or as individuals in historic districts (eight individuals from designated districts, and seven individuals from undesignated historic neighborhoods). A compilation of the survey responses was shared with HDC’s leaders, and a preliminary survey report – which is incorporated into this document – was created and shared broadly with the HDC.

Second, the National Trust convened and facilitated a meeting for the HDC in July 2010 of approximately fifteen representatives of DC’s historic districts, organizations and agencies. Input shared at that meeting focused on the survey responses and is included within Section III of this report.

Finally, the National Trust facilitated a two-hour mini-retreat in October 2010 to present for discussion possible scenarios for the HDC’s leadership succession and to solicit feedback about potential new organizational structures for the coalition. The survey responses, two facilitated meetings, and conversations with the current HDC leadership helped the National Trust form its own recommendations, outlined in Section V of this document.

## II. MISSION AND HISTORY OF THE HISTORIC DISTRICTS COALITION

The information presented in this section was provided by the HDC.

### Current Mission Statement

“The Historic Districts Coalition is an informal organization of representatives from many of the District of Columbia’s established historic districts and neighborhoods that have an interest in learning more about such districts in general and possibly becoming one.”

“The Coalition’s mission is to advocate for neighborhood preservation issues, serve as a mentor for new and would-be historic districts, and provide information exchange and networking opportunities between and among individual districts and groups.”

### Original Mission: A Coalition Formed to Strengthen Preservation Enforcement

Today’s DC Historic Districts Coalition grew out of the Coalition for Greater Preservation Enforcement (“CGPE”), which was formed during the mid-1990s by the Education Committee of the D.C. Preservation League (DCPL). The thought behind this action was that the collective strength of a group of neighborhood historic preservation organizations would carry greater weight and be more effective in articulating positions and needs than would that of single voices from individual neighborhood groups working separately. CGPE’s membership was open to representatives from any of the city’s established historic districts, and its mission was to work with other citywide historic preservation organizations, namely DCPL and the Committee of 100 on the Federal City, to strengthen the effectiveness of DC Public Law 2-144, the District’s historic preservation law, and the District of Columbia’s Historic Preservation Office (“HPO”) by advocating for additional resources, personnel and otherwise. The city was cash-strapped at the time; demolition by neglect was a serious problem; and HPO had no specifically dedicated inspectors. Historic resources were being lost.

### Citywide Conference on Strengthening Preservation Enforcement (1998)

In May 1998, DCPL and CGPE organized a citywide historic preservation conference with the objective of developing ways to strengthen preservation enforcement. Nearly 100 people packed the auditorium of Sumner School for a day-long event to develop ways to move forward on the enforcement issue. Out of this work came a conference report, funded in part by the Hines Interest Limited Partnership and the National Trust for Historic Preservation, which detailed a three-part action agenda of immediate, mid-term, and long-range items to be addressed. Immediately and continuing over time, some of the most significant achievements came as a result of actions by DCPL, CGPE, and CGPE’s successor organization, the DC Historic Districts Coalition.

Among HDC's contributions have been the following:

- Provided testimony, in conjunction with DCPL and Committee of 100, at DC Council budget hearings and DC Council Committee of the Whole sessions on specific issues such as a grant program for homeowners in selected historic districts and on DC department and agency effectiveness (the latter resulted in HPO's staff eventually being increased, including first one and then, because of the work load, a second historic preservation inspector as well as additional staff members);
- Participated regularly in meetings with senior HPO officials followed by dissemination to the HDC of information from these meetings and other sources by way of a periodic newsletter;
- Conducted an open forum in 2006 with candidates for chair of the DC Council which provided an opportunity for the HDC, DCPL, and the general public to hear the candidates' thoughts on historic preservation and to raise issues with them;
- Arranged periodic HDC meetings that provided a venue to hear first hand from, and converse with, city preservation officials, the chair of the DC Historic Preservation Review Board, the director of the Department of Consumer & Regulatory Affairs, and the chair of the DC Council, among others;
- With HPO, established a task force of affected city agencies and private corporations for tackling the problems associated with installation of large utility boxes on front facades; and
- Conducted educational outreach to the HDC and the public, including a program on fundraising for non-profit organizations (2006) and a symposium on Contemporary and Compatible Architecture in Historic Districts (2009). These programs were made possible through grants from the Historic Preservation Office and the National Trust for Historic Preservation's Dorothea de Schweinitz Preservation Fund for Washington, DC.

### **Leadership Evolved**

The Coalition for Greater Preservation Enforcement began with a volunteer from the DCPL board and gradually morphed into an all-volunteer organization convened and coordinated by members of individual organizations affiliated with the coalition. Nancy Metzger of the Capitol Hill Restoration Society has led the organization since 2003. Under her leadership the organization changed its name to the "Historic Districts Coalition," to recognize the increased scope of interest and activities. The Coalition initiated many of the programs and outreach efforts outlined in the bullets above.

### **Current Organizational Status**

HDC has no formal legal status either as a nonprofit or any other kind of registered organization in the District of Columbia. Instead, the HDC has functioned as an informal but active and efficient tool for representatives from individual and potential historic districts. Much of the work of the Coalition has been handled by a small number of volunteers, most of whom are already active in their neighborhood organizations. Nancy

Metzger and Rick Busch have announced that they will “retire” from the HDC’s core leadership in 2011. The current leaders and other active members of the HDC agree that this is an appropriate time, therefore, to assess the current organizational structure and its work and to discuss what the Coalition should be doing in the future as well as the resources that are needed to accomplish these goals.

### **III. FEEDBACK FROM COALITION MEMBERS**

The following data and analysis were compiled through the National Trust's March 2010 HDC survey (appended) and the subsequent July 18, 2010 meeting (agenda appended) convened by the National Trust. A compilation of the survey responses was shared with HDC's leaders, who also attended the July meeting. In October 2010 a mini retreat (agenda appended) with HDC participants and the NTHP was held to discuss potential actions.

#### **Overall**

The HDC is valued by almost all of the survey respondents and July meeting participants, many of whom identify HDC's lack of volunteers and organizational capacity as critical issues. Survey respondents view advocacy before the Mayor and City Council, as well as education about the benefits of historic preservation and historic districts for the general public, as particularly important roles for the HDC. These two branches of government should remain the focus of activities no matter who is in office and regardless of their level of support for preservation. At the meeting, participants also clearly expressed their support for the networking and information-sharing functions of HDC.

In general, however, the aspects of HDC valued by respondents – and recommendations for improving capacity – are wide-ranging. More detailed input will be needed to help HDC narrow or more clearly define its focus, as well as to improve and sustain HDC's operations.

Several survey respondents feel strongly that HDC should represent undesignated historic neighborhoods and do more to help with district designation. Meeting participants strongly recommended that HDC should be careful to distinguish its work from that of the DC Preservation League and the Committee of 100.

#### **Part I: Historic Districts Coalition Members and Constituents**

Survey respondents are engaged in almost all identified preservation-related activities, with architectural and neighborhood history (twenty-four respondents) and education (twenty-two) topping the list. Most of the respondents also participate in design review (nineteen), testimony (nineteen), advocacy (nineteen), and consulting (eighteen). Almost no respondents were involved with housing (one), museums (zero) or real estate (zero).

Meeting participants pointed out that all of the people who participate in the HDC are DC residents. (Some of the members of the DC Preservation League and the Committee of 100 are not DC residents.) From an advocacy perspective with city officials, this is a compelling advantage since HDC constituents are likely city voters and live in DC neighborhoods.

Email is the strongly preferred form of communication (twenty-two respondents), followed by meetings or telephone.

## **Part 2: Obstacles and Opportunities in Washington, DC Historic Preservation**

### ***Obstacles to Preservation***

The top three obstacles to historic preservation identified in the survey were: Lack of public understanding of preservation, specifically historic district restrictions (seventeen respondents); Property rights concerns (twelve); and Political struggles, including lack of political clout (twelve). Participants in the July 2010 meeting expressed their strong support that HDC should continue its advocacy work, covering all historic preservation legislative issues, including budget hearings and legislative challenges. It remains a question whether or not HDC should focus on the Mayor and City Council or also give testimony to individual committees and agencies, as necessary, as well.

Several survey respondents noted a perceived conflict in DC between historic preservation and Smart Growth or “green” principles, as well as a lack of preservation incentives and enforcement. In different ways, respondents implied, and sometimes stated, that preservation suffers from public relations problems in DC. Several respondents indicated that the property owner concerns – particularly the expense and bureaucracy related to preservation – can be valid and should be addressed in advocacy positions to improve the city’s systems and preservation opportunities for homeowners.

### ***Opportunities for Preservation***

Survey responses to the “opportunities” portion of Part 2 were not as complete and frequently mirrored the “obstacles” portion, in terms of content. That is, the opportunities addressed the obstacles, such as the observation that political obstacles in 2010 should be addressed through a “change in administration.” Although the responses were extremely varied, the most commonly identified opportunity was educational programming about the benefits of historic preservation (twenty respondents). There was no consensus about the target audiences (e.g., general public, property owners, real estate professionals, etc.) or the type of educational programming that HDC should produce.

With regard to education, meeting participants also stressed the importance of inter-organization communication and sharing, as well as communication to the general public about the benefits of historic district designation. Meeting participants indicated that an HDC website – strongly supported by meeting participants – could include a list of historic district contacts and organizations, FAQ (frequently asked questions), and a calendar of activities, and could serve as a repository of information and a web presence for those organizations without websites.

With regard to opportunities for advocacy, questions raised at the July meeting included whether or not HDC should serve as “a single voice” for historic districts in advocacy

situations. Frequently, the HDC represents those groups that have expressly signed on to support an advocacy position proposed by HDC's leaders. It was recognized that a coherent position from all groups might be optimal for advocacy but too difficult for HDC to achieve from a capacity standpoint in every instance. Nonetheless, the question of how HDC creates its advocacy positions and whom HDC represents when it advocates remains an important issue that needs to be resolved.

### **Part 3: How the Historic Districts Coalition Operates**

Most survey respondents have been involved with HDC for at least three years (thirteen respondents have been involved for three to five years; fifteen respondents, more than five years) and have participated in quarterly meetings (twenty-three), email exchange (twenty-eight), and networking (twenty-one). Respondents are active, however, in all areas identified in the survey.

Thirteen respondents indicated that HDC had asked them to volunteer for HDC; sixteen respondents indicated that HDC had not asked them to volunteer. However, only eight respondents indicated that they now volunteer for HDC more than one hour per month. Although twenty-two respondents answered that they would volunteer if asked, many offered caveats about their limited available time.

Respondents feel favorably about the HDC's effectiveness (questions 8, 9, 10) but most respondents believe that the HDC lacks the necessary resources to meet its mission (questions 11, 12, 13).

Respondents believe that it is important or very important for HDC to be viewed as representing diverse racial or ethnic groups (twenty-nine respondents), diverse socio-economic statuses (thirty), and geographic diversity (thirty-one). Respondents believe that HDC should represent both designated historic districts (thirty-one respondents) and undesignated historic neighborhoods (thirty).

In general, respondents seem very comfortable with the HDC's participation in controversial issues, though the issues identified vary widely. HDC's lack of involvement in past district designation battles, particularly Lanier Heights and Chevy Chase, was noted unfavorably by some respondents. Participants at the July meeting suggested that HDC representatives could partner with the Historic Preservation Office to meet with undesignated historic neighborhoods, and/or supply potential districts with educational materials, perhaps via a new website.

Respondents were not overwhelmingly satisfied or dissatisfied with current HDC activities and participation. The highest satisfaction ratings occurred for "information and services provided" (question 24). Meeting participants stressed that opportunities for face-to-face meetings are key to sharing information amongst the groups which participate in the HDC.

In the survey's comments sections (questions 26, 27 and 28), many respondents expressed that they agree that advocacy and education are very important functions of the HDC,

reinforcing the findings in Part 2 of the survey. Many respondents also noted that HDC's organizational capacity is limited ("More support to HDC Coordinator," "Running the HDC is too much for any one person", and "More people need to take responsibility"). Meeting participants also noted that one way to reduce the HDC's burden of organizing educational activities would be to partner for workshops or symposia, or to simply market activities developed by DCPL and individual neighborhood groups.

Survey respondents expressed different ideas about what would be the best avenues for increasing HDC's organizational capacity, though several suggested a more formal structure for the coalition. Meeting participants noted that each historic district/participating organization must identify a point person and update the contact information as necessary.

One final note: Although most of the survey respondents have been associated with the HDC for more than three years, a surprising number of respondents answered "Don't know" or "Not sure" in response to basic questions about the HDC's operations.

#### **Part 4: Capacity of the Historic Districts Coalition**

Respondents agreed or strongly agreed with all of the statements listed in Part 4 of the survey, representing a division of opinion (or a lack of strong opinion) about the future direction of the organization and its structure. Notably, many respondents answered "Don't know" when asked to comment on whether or not HDC should elect a board and officers (twenty-two respondents), establish a formal membership (twelve) or raise funds to hire professional staff (fourteen). This uncertainty also was reflected in the follow-up meeting as well, although most participants did not feel that hiring professional staff was advisable.

In short, the coalition's stakeholders believe that HDC should dramatically improve its organizational capacity, but many are unable to make recommendations for how to do so.

## IV. SCENARIOS

The National Trust used the feedback supplied from the March 2010 survey, the July 2010 meeting, and extended conversations with the HDC leaders to create a set of three possible scenarios for HDC's future. This section describes those potential scenarios, as presented to members of the HDC at the mini-retreat facilitated by the National Trust on October 2, 2010. The National Trust proposes the three scenarios for the HDC's consideration.

Each scenario addresses three key issues that emerged over the course of the survey and subsequent discussions: HDC's leadership, audience and constituency, and activities. For each scenario, as presented during the October retreat and in this report, the National Trust has attempted to address the following questions:

- ❖ Leadership:
  - Does the HDC have the leadership structure it needs to accomplish its goals?
  - What is the ideal leadership structure for the HDC?
  - How should the HDC recruit, select, and sustain leadership in the future?
  
- ❖ Audience and Constituency:
  - Who is the HDC's primary audience? Secondary audiences?
  - What are the HDC's constituencies, and how do they interact with the HDC?
  - Who is the HDC? How should the HDC define its "membership"?
  
- ❖ Activities:
  - Networking: How should the HDC help to network its participating groups?
  - Advocacy: For what should the HDC advocate? Before whom should the HDC advocate?
  - Education: Who would HDC seek to educate and about what issues?

Note: for the purposes of this report, "Audience" is generally external and consists of two main groups – the audience for political advocacy (Mayor, Council, HPO, agencies) and the general public. "Constituency" is generally internal and consists of the groups and associated individuals that have an interest in preservation goals and resources. "Membership," when used, is a subset of HDC's constituency and consists of groups that have joined in some official way.

### **Scenario 1: Informal Alliance of Organizations and Individuals**

Under Scenario 1 the HDC would continue to function as an informal alliance of local organizations and individuals who share a general interest in preserving DC's historic districts and neighborhoods. The HDC would function much as the HDC currently functions, with a new workplan structure and expanded core leadership. Through the new workplan, the HDC would set priorities for HDC's activities, including streamlining activities to what is most likely achievable under a limited-capacity model.

The HDC would not seek 501(c)3 status. The HDC would not pursue annual fundraising or donor cultivation under Scenario 1, although project-specific grant funding could be secured and administered in partnership with member organizations.

The HDC would charge a nominal new fee to participate as a member of the alliance.

### ***Leadership, Scenario 1***

Under Scenario 1, four volunteer leaders would agree to cooperate to establish and implement an annual workplan and to maintain a quarterly calendar for the HDC. Each of the four new leaders would take responsibility for one-quarter of the workload to administer the HDC. Each leader would serve as “chair” for one-quarter of the year. The four leaders would agree to lead the HDC by consensus of the four leaders. Responsibility for the HDC’s activities and programs would be divided among the leaders in a loose, committee-like structure. For example, each leader could agree to coordinate one quarterly meeting of the HDC.

Under this scenario, HDC’s four leaders, with input from the HDC’s members, would develop and adopt a set of general principles that would serve as broad guidance for the Coalition’s action. A few principles should suffice for the informal alliance. These principles would help define the operation and philosophy of the HDC – taking the mission statement a step further – and explain how and when the HDC would engage in advocacy or take on new issues. For example, the HDC’s four leaders might consider the following sample principles:

- The HDC will adopt and implement a written annual workplan. The HDC will refrain from pursuing activities that are not incorporated into the adopted workplan.
- The HDC will focus its efforts to network and inform organizations and individuals who share the HDC’s mission. The HDC will pursue partnerships to strengthen the HDC’s primary objectives to provide networking opportunities and information to stakeholders.
- The HDC will publically advocate to promote historic preservation in designated historic districts. The HDC will refrain from advocating when the issue in contention does not impact a majority of designated historic districts.

In taking public positions or giving testimony, under Scenario 1, the HDC would represent its “members“ who have expressly signed on to a particular position statement. The HDC’s annual workplan should include timelines for the budget cycle, testimony, and deadlines for members to sign on to the HDC’s position.

### ***Audience and Constituency, Scenario 1***

Under Scenario 1, HDC’s membership would remain loosely defined and similar to the Coalition’s current DC-based constituency. Members would include representatives of

501(c)3 organizations, representatives of informal neighborhood groups, representatives of various government agencies and commissions, professionals in preservation-related private businesses, and individual DC residents.

Based on strong feedback from the survey and subsequent meetings, each of the three potential scenarios presented in this report by the National Trust contemplate that the focus of HDC's advocacy should be to influence – primarily – the Mayor and City Council. Under Scenario 1, additional issues of special interest to designated historic districts and undesignated historic neighborhoods may be added to the workplan by consensus decision of the HDC's four leaders. Special issues could include advocacy to other government bodies or outreach to the general public.

Under Scenario 1, the HDC would not independently host educational events for the general public. Instead, a modest HDC website would provide basic information to members and the general public.

### ***Activities, Scenario 1***

Under Scenario 1, the HDC would convene its membership on a quarterly basis for networking and to present educational programming for the membership which is relevant to designated districts and undesignated historic neighborhoods. The HDC would produce a quarterly e-newsletter, which would be distributed to its members.

HDC does not currently have a website. To enhance communications among members, HDC should explore the possibility of gaining access to such a tool, possibly in partnership with an allied organization or developed on its own. The website would be updated quarterly and would include the organization's e-newsletter.

As mentioned previously, the HDC's advocacy under Scenario 1 would be focused around the City's budget cycle, with infrequent testimony on other special issues as needed. Advocacy issues beyond those related to the City's budget cycle would be vetted and approved by HDC's four-person leadership team, then shared with the membership for sign-on.

Education for the general public would be provided only on a limited basis and primarily via an HDC website, which would fall under the purview of at least one of the organization's lead volunteers. Currently, the HDC periodically coordinates and hosts educational programs for its membership and the general public. Under Scenario 1, HDC would not take on independent events but could partner with other organizations to market workshops and symposia relevant to the District's historic districts.

### **Scenario 2: Formal Coalition of Organizations**

Under Scenario 2, the HDC would substantially reorganize to operate as a coalition of organizations, rather than of individuals and organizations, through a new and more formal structure than that under which the HDC currently functions. This scenario

assumes the cultivation of a broader and deeper pool of volunteers than that currently at the HDC's disposal.

Priorities for the HDC's activities under this scenario would include more active outreach to the general public about the benefits of historic district designation.

The HDC would not seek 501(c)3 status. The HDC would not pursue annual fundraising or donor cultivation under Scenario 2, although project-specific grant funding could be secured and administered in partnership with member organizations.

The HDC would charge a new fee to participate as a member organization of the coalition of organizations.

### ***Leadership, Scenario 2***

Under Scenario 2, the HDC would implement a new system to elect a small board of five to seven directors, including a chairperson and at least three committee leaders, who together would then recruit additional volunteers from among HDC's membership to implement the HDC's programs. The new HDC board of directors would set an annual workplan, budget, and calendar for the coalition of organizations. Committees in this scenario could be formed to implement activities related to advocacy, education, and operations, for example.

Under Scenario 2, the new HDC board of directors would develop and adopt a set of specific protocols to govern the coalition's actions, with input from the HDC's member organizations. At a minimum, these new protocols would establish: (1) how and when the HDC engages in advocacy and takes on new advocacy issues on behalf of the HDC's membership; (2) definitions for membership in the coalition of organizations; and, (3) how the member organizations and board of directors would interact. Member organizations would be asked to formally adopt the HDC protocols to ensure that member organizations understand and accept the Coalition's governance process.

Under Scenario 2, when taking public positions or giving testimony on behalf of the HDC, an HDC representative (likely the chairperson) would speak for the HDC, giving "one voice" to its member organizations.

### ***Audience and Constituency, Scenario 2***

Under Scenario 2, the HDC's newly formalized membership would consist of 501(c)3 organizations and other volunteer-based groups that represent both designated historic districts and undesignated historic neighborhoods. In its operations with the HDC's member organizations, the HDC's board of directors would communicate with and work through certain designated liaisons to each of its member organizations. In this scenario, it is proposed that individual residents of DC would no longer be considered to be members of the reorganized HDC, which would be re-constituted to represent the interests of DC's organized community of nonprofit entities. Under Scenario 2,

representatives of government agencies and commissions would be respected as organizational partners and valued allies to the HDC but would not have an administrative role in developing or implementing the HDC's advocacy positions, educational programs, and organizational activities. Thus, the Coalition's primary constituency would be nonprofit organizations and entities.

Based on strong feedback from the survey and subsequent meetings, each of the three scenarios presented here for the HDC's consideration anticipate that the focus of HDC's advocacy should be to influence – primarily – the Mayor and City Council. Under Scenario 2, member organizations could recommend additional advocacy positions to the appropriate committee of HDC, which would review those special requests and then bring them before the board of directors for consideration. These special issues would be limited to those which impact designated and/or undesignated historic neighborhoods, and the HDC's draft positions could be shared with the member organizations before finalization, depending on the adopted protocols governing advocacy.

Under Scenario 2, the HDC would help provide information about historic district designation (perhaps by linking to information available through the DC Historic Preservation Office) and the benefits of designation, as well as HDC policy positions, to the general public and its member organizations via an HDC website. The HDC website would be updated regularly. In addition, to help inform the general public, the HDC would promote its advocacy positions and public messages in the media and on its website. The HDC also would develop, with partner organizations, a set of educational programs presenting topics relevant to historic districts in DC.

### ***Activities and Programs, Scenario 2***

Under Scenario 2, the HDC would convene its member organizations on a quarterly basis for networking and to present educational programming relevant to designated historic districts and undesignated historic neighborhoods. These quarterly convenings would be open to HDC member organizations and their guests. The HDC would produce a quarterly e-newsletter, which would be distributed to its member organizations and posted on the HDC website.

Advocacy under Scenario 2 would be focused around the City's budget cycle, with opportunity for testimony on other issues. Advocacy issues beyond those related to the budget cycle would be vetted by the appropriate committee and approved by the HDC's new board of directors.

Education for the general public would be provided via an HDC website and media outreach, which would fall under the purview of (at least) one of the organization's lead volunteers. The HDC website does not currently exist and must be developed. Importantly, under Scenario 2, the HDC would actively pursue partnerships with other organizations and agencies to jointly develop, market, and host educational programs relevant to historic districts.

### **Scenario 3: Standing Committee of a Citywide Nonprofit Organization**

Under Scenario 3, the HDC would be reorganized to operate as a standing committee under the wing of an established citywide 501(c)3 organization, which has not been identified. The host organization must have a significant interest in historic preservation but does not need to be one of the DC's non-profits dedicated primarily to historic preservation. The host organization would agree to provide administrative support to the HDC and would ensure that the HDC maintains a reasonable degree of independence to meet the coalition's mission.

This scenario establishes a new structure for the HDC's existing activities within the host organization's own activities, and the HDC's priorities would be jointly developed between HDC and the host organization.

The HDC would not seek independent 501(c)3 status, but would function as part of an existing 501(c)3 organization. In addition, Scenario 3 would anticipate that the HDC would help raise funds for the HDC's activities and programs as an arm of the host organization. Sources of funds could include grants, as well as individual and corporate donations.

Member organizations would be expected to contribute financially to the operation of the HDC through fees donated to the host organization.

#### ***Leadership, Scenario 3***

Under Scenario 3, the HDC would be led by a committee chair and three co-chairs, who would work together with the host organization to set an annual workplan, budget, and calendar for the Coalition – as a standing committee of the host organization. Activities and programs would be implemented by committee members working with interested volunteers.

Under Scenario 3, the HDC's chair, three co-chairs, and the host organization would develop a set of protocols to govern the Coalition's actions. At a minimum, these new protocols would establish: (1) how and when the HDC engages in advocacy and takes on new advocacy issues, under the umbrella of the host organization; (2) definitions for membership; and, (3) how the standing committee, its member organizations, and the host organization would interact. Member organizations would be asked to formally adopt these protocols to ensure that members understand the process and are accurately represented by HDC.

In taking public positions or giving testimony, under Scenario 3, an HDC representative (likely the committee chair) would speak for the HDC, giving "one voice" to member organizations. Public positions would be consistent with the host organization's positions as well.

### ***Audience and Constituency, Scenario 3***

Like Scenario 2, the HDC's membership under Scenario 3 would include 501(c)3 organizations and other volunteer organizations that represent both designated and undesignated historic neighborhoods. The HDC's primary constituency would be nonprofit organizations. In communications with its member organizations, the HDC would contact designated liaisons of each of its member organizations. In this scenario, individuals and representatives of various government agencies and commissions would be able to participate in HDC programs, just as they participate in any other programs of the host organization. The HDC's potential volunteer base would include the host organization's volunteers and distribution list.

Based on strong feedback from the survey and subsequent meetings, all of the scenarios show that the focus of HDC's advocacy should be to influence – primarily – the Mayor and City Council. Under Scenario 3, the HDC's member organizations could recommend additional advocacy positions to the committee, which would review them and vet them via the host organization. These special issues would impact historic neighborhoods (designated and/or undesignated), and draft positions could be shared with the HDC membership before finalization, depending on the adopted protocols governing advocacy.

Under Scenario 3, the HDC would provide information about historic district designation and policy positions to the general public via the host organization's website. In addition, the host organization would promote HDC's advocacy positions and public messages in the media and on the website, to help inform the general public. Finally, the HDC would develop, with the host organization and partners, educational programs around topics relevant to historic districts in DC.

### ***Activities and Programs, Scenario 3***

Under Scenario 3, the HDC would convene its membership on a quarterly basis for networking and to present programming relevant to designated historic districts and undesignated historic neighborhoods. These convenings would be open to HDC member organizations, members of the host organization, and their guests. The HDC would develop content on a quarterly basis, which would be distributed via the host organization's regular communications, including the website.

As mentioned previously, advocacy under Scenario 3 would be focused around the City's budget cycle, with opportunity for testimony on other special issues. Advocacy issues beyond the budget cycle would be vetted by the committee and approved by the host organization.

Education for the general public would be provided via the host organization's website and media outreach. Scenario 3 assumes that the host organization would have a standing website and one would not need to be developed. Under Scenario 3, the HDC would actively develop and market, with the host organization, educational programs relevant to historic districts. In some cases, this may mean creating content for relevant programs developed primarily by the host organization.

## V. RECOMMENDATIONS

### Feedback from the Mini-Retreat

On October 2, 2010, the National Trust presented the scenarios detailed in Section IV for discussion by representatives of HDC member groups and DC government agencies. The leadership of the HDC participated in the October retreat. The following are highlights from the compiled comments:

- Scenario 2 may be ideal but HDC currently does not have the organizational resources to operate in this way.
- Scenario 3 generated a great deal of discussion, and many participants observed that the host organization might be a citywide non-profit not dedicated solely to historic preservation.
- More organizational structure and capacity, and a system for developing and promoting leadership within the HDC, is desired by many members.
- Members stressed that inclusivity and accessibility are important, and some worried that formalizing membership or charging dues may make the organization too insular.

### Recommendations

1. The National Trust recommends that the HDC transition to and operate under the Scenario 1 model for six months. This window of time would allow the HDC to continue to operate as it evaluates its structure for the future. The four HDC leaders should be selected via the following process:
  - Current HDC leaders request nominations from members via email. Nominations should include contact information and a short paragraph about the candidate's suitability, given the following criteria.
  - Criteria for selection should include: (a) available time to commit to the 6-month transition period; (b) ability to work well with diverse individuals and partner organizations; and, (c) experience leading an organization, particularly through a period of transition.
  - Nominations are vetted by current HDC leaders, with input from a representative of the DC HPO (or DC HPRB) and representatives from three member organizations.
  - Current HDC leaders make the final decision. At least one of the four leaders should be one of the two current leaders of HDC.

2. The National Trust recommends that the HDC use the next six months to fully explore Scenario 3, by interviewing potential host organizations and vetting their interest in hosting the HDC. The DC Preservation League is a prime candidate to serve as the HDC's host organization. In addition, Cultural Tourism DC and the Humanities Council of Washington DC were two organizations that HDC's members felt had a broad reach into DC neighborhoods and missions that are compatible with historic preservation. Although some of the independence of the HDC may be sacrificed, the National Trust recommends that Scenario 3 has the strong advantages of (a) administrative staff and established infrastructure; (b) a ready-made partner to help HDC expand its advocacy, special events, and other educational programs; and, (c) established fundraising capacity.
3. The National Trust recommends that the HDC should begin to assemble the on-line content necessary for a new web presence for the HDC. However, the National Trust recommends against establishing a new HDC website until the HDC's transition is complete. On-line content may (and should) be developed in anticipation of posting to a host organization's website, if Scenario 3 is pursued, or to an independent HDC website, if Scenario 1 or 2 is adopted.

## Appendix A

### DC Historic Districts Coalition Confidential Survey

For over a decade, the Historic Districts Coalition has addressed historic preservation issues at the neighborhood level through networking, information sharing, presenting collective positions before city agencies and the District of Columbia Council, and educational outreach. This work has been carried out by a small number of volunteers. In December 2009, the Coalition and the Southern Field Office of the National Trust for Historic Preservation agreed to work together to help the Coalition assess its performance to date and prepare for its future. This systematic assessment will include an examination of both future Coalition activities and organizational structure. The confidential survey that follows is the first step in an anticipated year-long process that will help achieve the Coalition's goals.

We need your thoughtful responses as part of the Coalition's assessment. We encourage you to work electronically, using as much space as needed for your comments.

Please return your completed survey by March 31, 2010 to the National Trust via SFO@nthp.org or by mail to National Trust for Historic Preservation, Southern Field Office, 1785 Massachusetts Ave., NW, Washington, DC 20036. If you have questions about the survey, please call 202-588-6107.

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#### PART I: INFORMATION ABOUT THE RESPONDENT

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1. Please indicate your status as a respondent to this confidential survey:
  - I am responding on behalf of an organization that is in a historic district or is neighborhood based.
  - I am responding as an individual resident of a designated historic district (please skip to Part II).
  - I am responding as an individual resident of a neighborhood that is seeking, or is considering seeking, formal designation as a historic district (please skip to Part II).
  - Other (e.g., property owner, agency staff, commission member, member of a preservation-related group, etc.):
2. Organization name:
3. Organization mission statement (If your organization has a mission statement, please write it here. If not, briefly describe your organization's purpose.):
4. Geographic area covered by your organization:

5. Has your non-profit organization been granted 501(c)3 status by the IRS?  
 Yes  
 No
6. Your organization is administered by (please check those that apply and supply appropriate number):  
 Full-time staff # \_\_\_\_\_  
 Part-time staff # \_\_\_\_\_  
 Volunteers # \_\_\_\_\_  
 Board members # \_\_\_\_\_
7. In which of the following preservation-related activities is your organization involved? (Please check all that apply.):
- Advocacy (e.g., identifying and bringing historic preservation issues of concern to public officials)
- Archeology (e.g., supporting or carrying out archeological research)
- Design review (e.g., reviewing proposed construction of new, or alteration/demolition of existing, structures and providing comments to city officials)
- Architectural and neighborhood history (e.g., researching the history of structures and neighborhoods)
- Consulting (e.g., advising property owners regarding proposed construction of new structures or alteration/demolition of existing structures)
- Community revitalization (e.g., working with residential or commercial property owners, non-profits, and/or city agencies to restore structures or community facilities, or promote economic development)
- Education and outreach (e.g., presenting information about history, architecture, or historic preservation to residents, community groups, schools, or others)
- Heritage tourism (e.g., working with non-profits or city agencies to establish or promote a location or locations as destinations for tourists interested in history)
- Historic landscapes (e.g., researching or actively undertaking the restoration of parks, reservations, or other parcels)
- Housing (e.g., engaging in the planning or financing of residential housing, either multi-family or single-family)

Museum stewardship (e.g., operating, or assisting in the operation, of a museum)

National Register nominations (e.g., sponsoring or contributing information to applications for specific properties to the National Register of Historic Places)

Delivering testimony (e.g., preparing written statements and/or appearing in person to testify at hearings by government entities)

Real estate (e.g., owning, developing, or assisting others to own or develop real estate)

Section 106 review (e.g., participating, or helping others to participate, in the process of considering impacts of certain federal activities on cultural resources pursuant to the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966)

Other:

8. What are the most effective ways for the Historic Districts Coalition to communicate with you or your organization about historic preservation matters? (Please rank your answers, with #1 as the most effective.)

- \_\_\_\_\_ e-mail
- \_\_\_\_\_ telephone
- \_\_\_\_\_ list serv
- \_\_\_\_\_ regular mail
- \_\_\_\_\_ fax
- \_\_\_\_\_ meetings

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**PART II: HISTORIC DISTRICT / NEIGHBORHOOD OBSTACLES AND OPPORTUNITIES**

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**1. Obstacles to Historic Preservation in DC**

**Please identify the top three obstacles to the preservation of historic districts and neighborhoods in the District of Columbia. That is, what factors stand in the way of historic preservation in DC? (Please be as specific as possible and rank your answers, with #1 as the greatest obstacle.)**

#1: \_\_\_\_\_

#2: \_\_\_\_\_

#3: \_\_\_\_\_

## 2. Opportunities for Historic Preservation in DC

Please identify the top three preservation-related opportunities for historic districts and neighborhoods in the District of Columbia. That is, what favorable circumstances could help advance historic preservation in DC? (Please be as specific as possible and rank your answers, with #1 as the greatest opportunity.)

#1: \_\_\_\_\_

#2: \_\_\_\_\_

#3: \_\_\_\_\_

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## PART III: EXPERIENCE WITH THE DC HISTORIC DISTRICTS COALITION

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*Please refer to the accompanying document describing the origins and evolving mission of the Historic Districts Coalition. Check the answer that best describes your experience.*

1. How long have you or your organization been involved with HDC?
  - Less than 1 year
  - Approximately two years
  - 3 to 5 years
  - More than 5 years
  
2. What HDC activities have you or your organization participated in within the last three years? (Please check all that apply.)
  - Quarterly meetings
  - Email exchange
  - Educational programs
  - Testimony at DC Council hearings
  - Meeting with government agencies
  - Networking and information sharing
  - Advocating with the DC Council or Administration members
  - Writing letters to newspapers and/or on-line media
  
3. What HDC activities are most useful to you or your organization? (Please rank your answers, with #1 as the most useful.)
  - \_\_\_\_\_ Quarterly meetings
  - \_\_\_\_\_ Email exchange
  - \_\_\_\_\_ Educational programs
  - \_\_\_\_\_ Testimony at DC Council hearings
  - \_\_\_\_\_ Meeting with government agencies
  - \_\_\_\_\_ Networking and information sharing

- \_\_\_\_\_ Advocating with the DC Council or Administration members
- \_\_\_\_\_ Writing letters to newspapers and/or on-line media

4. During the last year, were you or members of your organization asked to volunteer for specific HDC activities?
- Yes
  - No
- Please comment:
5. During the last year, approximately how much time did you, or (collectively) members of your organization, volunteer for HDC activities?
- None
  - Less than 1 hour per month
  - 1 to 3 hours per month
  - 6 to 10 hours per month
6. For what HDC activities did you or members of your organization volunteer during the last year? (Please check all that apply.)
- Conferring with HDC members about “best practices” or similar issues
  - Participating in discussion to formulate HDC public positions
  - Preparing testimony for DC Council hearings
  - Talking with individual DC Council members about preservation issues
  - Crafting HDC’s public relations statements
  - Writing letters to the editor or articles to promote historic preservation in DC
  - Writing rebuttals to unfavorable newspaper articles or on-line postings
  - Helping to set up before or clean up after HDC meetings
  - Contributing refreshments at HDC meetings
- Other:
7. Would you or members of your organization volunteer for future HDC activities, if asked?
- Yes
  - No
- If yes, what activities would be most interesting? Please comment:

***Please check the response that most closely describes your or your organization’s view regarding the following statements about the HDC.***

8. HDC’s mission is clearly communicated:
- Agree
  - Sometimes agree
  - Disagree
  - Don’t know
9. HDC’s leadership is effective:
- Agree
  - Sometimes agree
  - Disagree
  - Don’t know
10. HDC effectively engages in preservation advocacy:
- Agree
  - Sometimes agree
  - Disagree
  - Don’t know

11. HDC has adequate human resources to do its work effectively:  
 Agree     Sometimes agree     Disagree     Don't know
12. HDC has adequate financial resources to do its work effectively:  
 Agree     Sometimes agree     Disagree     Don't know
13. HDC has adequate technical resources (e.g., email, website, list serv, blog, etc.) to do its work effectively:  
 Agree     Sometimes agree     Disagree     Don't know
14. To what extent is it important for the HDC to be seen as representing individuals of diverse racial or ethnic groups?  
 Very important                       Important                       Not important
15. To what extent is it important for the HDC to be seen as representing individuals of diverse socio-economic statuses?  
 Very important                       Important                       Not important
16. To what extent is it important for the HDC to be seen as "geographically diverse" by representing historic districts and neighborhoods throughout DC?  
 Very important                       Important                       Not important
17. To what extent is it important for the HDC to be seen as representing the formally designated historic districts in DC?  
 Very important                       Important                       Not important
18. To what extent is it important for the HDC to be seen as representing non-designated neighborhoods that are potentially eligible for formal designation as historic districts?  
 Very important                       Important                       Not important
19. To what extent is it important for the HDC to be seen as representing professional preservationists, architects, and planners?  
 Very important                       Important                       Not important
20. Has the HDC been involved in issues you consider controversial?  
 Yes                       No

If yes, which issue or issues:

Do you think it was appropriate for the HDC to be involved in these controversial issues?

Yes                       No

Please comment:

21. Have there been major issues during the last 3 years in which the HDC was not involved but you feel it should have been?  
 Yes                       No

If yes, what issue or issues? Please comment:

***Please check the response which best describes your or your organization's level of satisfaction with the following:***

22. Current HDC activities, generally:

Very satisfied                       Satisfied     Dissatisfied                       Very dissatisfied  
 Not sure

23. Current HDC level of advocacy:

Very satisfied                       Satisfied     Dissatisfied                       Very dissatisfied  
 Not sure

24. Information and services provided to HDC participants:

Very satisfied                       Satisfied     Dissatisfied                       Very dissatisfied  
 Not sure

25. Your participation in HDC overall:

Very satisfied                       Satisfied     Dissatisfied                       Very dissatisfied  
 Not sure

26. Please identify the top three activities that you feel are critical to the success of the Historic Districts Coalition, as it currently exists. (Please rank your answers, with #1 as the most critical.)

#1. \_\_\_\_\_

#2. \_\_\_\_\_

#3. \_\_\_\_\_

27. What existing HDC activities should be improved? (Please comment, using as much space as needed.):

28. What suggestions can you offer to increase the capacity of the HDC to be active in the community and accomplish its mission? (Please comment, using as much space as needed.):

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#### **PART IV: FUTURE DIRECTIONS FOR THE DC HISTORIC DISTRICTS COALITION**

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***For each of the following statements, please check the response which best describes your or your organization's views regarding the HDC's potential future directions.***

1. HDC should continue to serve as an informal alliance of grass-roots groups and individual residents dedicated to the preservation of designated historic districts and of non-designated neighborhoods interested in protecting their historic resources. HDC should provide information and educational outreach, offer opportunities to network, and advocate for preservation.  
 Strongly agree  Agree  Disagree  Strongly disagree  Don't know
  
2. HDC should grow to serve as a formal "umbrella" organization to represent grass-roots groups and individual residents dedicated to the preservation of designated historic districts and of non-designated neighborhoods interested in protecting their historic resources. HDC should establish a forum for exchange of information, facilitate regular opportunities to network, provide targeted technical assistance, and advocate for preservation.  
 Strongly agree  Agree  Disagree  Strongly disagree  Don't know
  
3. HDC should serve as a preservation "watchdog" to advocate with DC elected officials, agencies, and commissions for stronger protection for designated historic districts and for non-designated neighborhoods interested in protecting their historic resources.  
 Strongly agree  Agree  Disagree  Strongly disagree  Don't know
  
4. HDC should focus on ongoing educational programs that promote and strengthen historic districts and neighborhood preservation, generally.  
 Strongly agree  Agree  Disagree  Strongly disagree  Don't know
  
5. HDC should focus on identifying emerging issues in historic districts and developing strategies to address those issues.  
 Strongly agree  Agree  Disagree  Strongly disagree  Don't know
  
6. HDC should substantially increase its public visibility and media outreach.  
 Strongly agree  Agree  Disagree  Strongly disagree  Don't know
  
7. HDC annually should elect a board of directors and officers.  
 Strongly agree  Agree  Disagree  Strongly disagree  Don't know
  
8. HDC should establish a formal membership.  
 Strongly agree  Agree  Disagree  Strongly disagree  Don't know

9. HDC should raise funds to hire professional staff.  
 Strongly agree  Agree  Disagree  Strongly disagree  Don't know

*Please comment on the future direction of the Historic Districts Coalition. Use as much space as needed:*

Thank you for taking the time to complete this survey. Please return your completed survey by March 31, 2010 to the National Trust for Historic Preservation via [SFO@nthp.org](mailto:SFO@nthp.org).

## *Appendix B*

### Historic Districts Coalition Meeting Agenda

July 15, 2010

6:30PM-8:30PM

**Facilitated by:** Rob Nieweg and Nell Ziehl, Southern Field Office, National Trust for Historic Preservation

**Objective:** Get more information and input about the future direction and structure of HDC from its members and leaders.

**Deliverable:** A short report that incorporates findings from the survey and the July 15 meeting, to serve as a basis for a facilitated planning meeting in the fall. The report will include preliminary recommendations from SFO.

#### HDC MISSION STATEMENT

The Coalition's mission is to advocate for strengthened historic preservation practices; serve as an information exchange; promote networking between and among individual historic districts and other groups and organizations; mentor new and would-be historic districts, and develop and present educational opportunities.

#### AGENDA

- Welcome and introductions
- Synopsis of the Survey Results
- **Discussion: What activities and programs should HDC do to meet its mission?**
- **Discussion: How should HDC be structured and operate to implement its activities?**
- Summary
- Adjourn

