

PUBLIC HEARING ON
**“WASHINGTON PARKS & PEOPLE EQUITABLE REAL
PROPERTY TAX RELIEF ACT OF 2017,” Bill 22-368**

**Before the
Committee on Finance and Revenue
Council of the District of Columbia**

The Honorable Jack Evans, Chairman

**October 20, 2017, 10:00 a.m.
Room 120, John A. Wilson Building**



**Testimony of
Wharton H. Berger
Executive Director of Economic Development Finance
Office of the Chief Financial Officer**

**Jeffrey S. DeWitt
Chief Financial Officer
Government of the District of Columbia**

Good morning, Chairman Evans and Members of the Committee on Finance and Revenue. My name is Wharton H. Berger, Executive Director of the Office of Economic Development Finance for the Office of the Chief Financial Officer (OCFO). I am pleased to testify for the OCFO on Bill 22-368, the Washington Parks and People Equitable Real Property Tax Relief Act of 2017.

This Bill calls for a tax exemption for Washington Parks and People's (WPP) real property in Columbia Heights called Columbia Heights Green, located on Sherman Avenue between Park Road and Lamont Street, Northwest. The exemption is conditioned on continued ownership of the property by WPP, and its use as a park, community garden or playground. The property cannot be used for commercial purposes. The Bill also forgives real property taxes, special assessments, District of Columbia liens, as well as penalties and interest, assessed against this property from 1998 through the month following the effective date of the Bill.

WPP is a nonprofit organization whose mission involves the cultivation of park-based community garden spaces across the District of Columbia. According to WPP, the Columbia Heights Green property serves several community initiatives including employment of D.C. residents, job training, and life skills programming for people experiencing homelessness and other challenges. The Columbia Heights Green property also provides local public school and youth center partners with access to the garden green space.

At the outset of WPP's ownership, the property was vacant and rubble-covered. WPP purchased the Columbia Heights property in 2009 and it is now the garden green space supported by volunteers and funded from an investment of \$250,000.

An analysis of WPP's audited financial statements shows WPP is capable of paying its current year tax burden. However, the OCFO finds that the payment of real property taxes, penalties, and interest for prior years would create a financial hardship and have a negative impact on the operations of WPP. The forgiveness for past taxes included in the proposed legislation is necessary for WPP to continue operations.

While the fiscal impact statement has not yet been issued, the cost of this legislation during the four year financial plan period is expected to be \$27,936.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify. This concludes my testimony and I am happy to answer any questions you have at this time.