



**Government of the District of Columbia
ADVISORY NEIGHBORHOOD COMMISSION 3/4G**

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**ANC 3/4G Testimony Before the
Committee on Government Operations and Facilities
Performance Oversight Hearing on the
Office of Advisory Neighborhood Commissions
January 20, 2022**

Chairperson White and members of the Committee on Government Operations and Facilities, I am Randy Speck, Chair of ANC 3/4G, and I want to thank you for the opportunity to testify about the performance of the Office of Advisory Neighborhood Commissions (OANC). Our Commission was unable to formally consider this testimony at a public meeting before the hearing, so I am testifying only on my own behalf. However, all of the other Commissioners — Lisa Gore (ANC 3/4G01), John Higgins (ANC 3/4G02), Michael Zeldin (ANC 3/4G04), Connie Chang (ANC 3/4G05), Peter Gosselin (ANC 3/4G06), and Charles Cadwell (ANC 3/4G07) — have authorized me to say that they join in my statement.

Six of our seven commissioners were elected to the Commission only within the last year. Each of them immediately recognized the crucial need for an effective and efficient way to communicate with and hear from their constituents.¹ They were astonished that no direct commissioner-to-constituent communication system currently exists for commissioners. Indeed, the OANC has been unable even to provide us with a list of our constituents with useful contact information — e.g., emails or phone numbers. Commissioners Chang and Zeldin set up a table near the Chevy Chase Farmers Market for hours over successive Saturdays through last Fall to collect names and email addresses as shoppers passed by. This is an inefficient means of gaining access to the 15,000 residents in our ANC.

We have called this fundamental requirement for community engagement to the Committee's attention repeatedly since 2019.² We are grateful that the Council responded by authorizing funding in FY 2020 to remedy this glaring deficiency. Unfortunately, the OANC still has not contracted to provide the necessary communications software, and the money remains unspent. We urgently need the OANC to provide this essential tool so that commissioners can effectively serve their constituents.

¹ Similarly, many issues before our Commission require coordination across ANCs. Recent examples include adding protected bike lanes to Connecticut Ave and the creation of the city-wide Pre-K school on Military Road.

² See, e.g., ANC 3/4G Testimony Before the Committee on Facilities and Procurement Budget Hearing on the Office of Advisory Neighborhood Commissions, March 27, 2019; ANC 3/4G Testimony Before the Committee on Facilities and Procurement Performance Oversight Hearing on the Office of Advisory Neighborhood Commissions, January 30, 2020; ANC 3/4G Testimony Before the Committee on Government Operations and Facilities Performance Oversight Hearing on the Office of Advisory Neighborhood Commissions, February 9, 2021.

As I have testified in the past, an integral part of any commissioner's job is to engage with constituents, the broader neighborhood community, and with other ANCs on a broad array of issues. That entails communications in both directions — from commissioners to provide important information and from constituents to let commissioners know their reactions, concerns, and priorities. We have used social media, neighborhood listservs, *ad hoc* email lists, and door-to-door flyers in our effort to get the word out about our Commission's activities or upcoming events, but they reach only a small part of the community, and there are invariably some constituents who say they never heard about a controversial topic. Perhaps more importantly, without an effective communications software, it is particularly difficult to create a dialogue with constituents so that they can offer ideas and contribute to developing solutions. We have tried online surveys, and they are certainly useful, but we need a mechanism that is truly interactive and permits real time feedback. As we have noted to the Committee and the OANC, software that would satisfy both of these requirements exists and has proven effective in other cities (e.g., [CitizenLab](#)).

In the last year, we have had several specific instances when we would have made use of the kind of software that we have requested had it been available.

- The Commission is working closely with the Office of Planning (OP) to develop the [Chevy Chase Small Area Plan](#). We have helped to promote OP's community engagement, but we have also initiated a number of our own [information exchange sessions](#) on relevant topics to assist residents as participants in the process. We needed an effective communications software

to get the word out about these events and to get the community's input on what additional information they need, but it was not available. As the Small Area Plan proceeds, we need an effective way to gather reactions from a broad group of residents and businesses — not just from those few dozen who attend our public meetings.

- When we considered a proposal that would affect all of Lafayette Elementary School's current and prospective pre-Kindergarten students, we needed a communications tool that could be tailored to that group of residents. Tight time deadlines exacerbated the communications difficulties. We drew on other groups' networks to get input from the affected cohort, but we had no useful tools to assist us.
- The Department of Transportation proposed, and the Mayor has now approved, a plan to eliminate the reversible lanes on Connecticut Avenue and to install protective bike lanes in both directions. Our Commission held several meetings regarding these plans and passed a resolution, but the Mayor's announcement triggered a passionate reaction — and some new ideas — from both proponents and opponents that we could have solicited earlier in the process had we had the right tools at our disposal.
- We are currently considering the Maret School's proposal to develop a sports field on what has been five acres of open space owned by a private nonprofit entity, the Episcopal Center for Children, in a residential neighborhood. The Commission is working to find common ground among the disparate views,

and a modern communications software would enable us to advise the community of the facts and gather suggested approaches for resolving concerns within the compressed schedule imposed by the Board of Zoning Adjustments hearing schedule. We don't have that capability now.

These are only a few of the recent instances when our Commission has been handicapped by OANC's failure to provide the communications software assistance that the Council funded in FY 2020. We understand that the changes in OANC leadership may have had some impact on the timing for acquiring this resource, but our needs have only become more acute. The interim Executive Director has been in place since October 5, 2021, and we immediately called to her attention the commissioners' August 5, 2021 letter emphasizing the priority that we place on getting this software. We understand that the interim Executive Director may now be close to a decision, which we applaud. We urge the Council to require the interim Executive Director to contract with a software company that can meet these and our other related communications needs, which cannot wait until a permanent Executive Director is selected. Further delay will negatively impact our ability to serve our community.

Of course, it merits mentioning that whomever is selected to be the permanent Executive Director must recognize the imperative of modernizing our communications system and have the technical skill to make sure it is implemented properly.

Thank you.