**DRAFT MINUTES FOR THE NEW COLUMBIA STATEHOOD COMMISSION MEETING**

April 29, 2016 at 3:30pm

John A. Wilson Building, 1350 Pennsylvania Avenue NW, room G9

**Members of the Commission**

* Mayor Muriel Bowser
* Council Chairman Phil Mendelson
* Senator Paul Strauss
* Senator Michael D. Brown
* Representative Franklin Garcia
* Mayor Muriel Bowser opened the meeting at 3:45pm confirming that all members of the New Columbia Statehood Commission were present. Without objection, the Mayor added an additional agenda item to allow for a 15 minute public comment period to begin the meeting. She outlined the agenda for the New Columbia Statehood Commission meeting as follows:
  + 15 minute public comment period
  + Approval of the April 21, 2016 New Columbia Statehood Commission meeting minutes
  + Approval of the Rules for Public Engagement and Input
  + Approval of the dates for Public Engagement
* During the public comment period, David Schwartzman of the DC Statehood Green Party stated that this initiative is long overdue. He also shared his concerns about the process for drafting a new state constitution where by those drafting the new constitution would not be elected members of a constitutional convention as happened in 1987 when Washington, DC last drafted a state constitution. He stated that the choice should be to either to go with the process outlined in the *New Columbia Admissions Act* which has the co-sponsorship of 131 members in the U.S. House of Representatives and 21 U.S. Senators or have a Constitutional Convention after the November 6 election with elected delegates. He argued that we should make it a bottom-up process, as it was with the 1982 Convention.
* Another attendee expressed the importance of getting support from Maryland and Virginia to achieve statehood.
* A third person asked what affect this new approach would have on the current bill in Congress, the New Columbia Admission Act, and if we expect this new process to get more support.
* Jesse Lovell, Secretary of the DC Statehood Commission, noted that we have very strong support from public officials in Maryland and Virginia, support from former Governor O’Malley, and many regional Members of Congress have co-sponsored the New Columbia Admission Act. He stated that this has been a long-running effort and that outreach is paying off.
* The last question posed during the public comment period inquired about the reasoning for drafting a new Constitution when the one in 1982 was the result of a Constitutional Convention and received a vote from Washington, DC residents. The commenter also recounted that the 1987 Constitution was not the result of a Constitutional Convention nor subject to vote from DC residents.
* Mayor Bowser noted that there were five public comments for the record and that Commission members will address them.
* Moving on to the next agenda item, Mayor Bowser made a correction to the April 21, 2016 New Columbia Statehood Commission meeting minutes. The Mayor stated that on page three, the first bullet should say that Chairman Mendelson, not Senator Brown, made the recommendation that the duties of the Rules and Boundaries Working Group be incorporated into the work of the New Columbia Statehood Commission. The commission members unanimously agreed to the minutes as corrected from the April 21 meeting.
* Mayor Bowser moved to the next agenda item: to approve the rules for public engagement and input on a revised Constitution. The Mayor asked Beverly Perry, her Senior Advisor, to present recommendations of the Legal Advisory Committee.
* Beverly Perry presented the rules and procedures for public engagement to ensure that there is ample opportunity for residents to provide input into the development of the new state constitution. Ms. Perry first listed the principles that will guide the Commission’s drafting of the constitution. Those principles establish that the constitution should:

1. Promote stability by maintaining Washington, DC’s basic current governing structure;
2. Build upon the work of statehood efforts in the 1980s but simplify and modernize the constitution;
3. Establish the structuresnecessary for good government;
4. Empower the legislature and executive to govern in the interests of the people who elect them;
5. Produce orderly and responsible governance;
6. Reflect the values of Washington, DC residents; and
7. Demonstrate that Washington, DC merits congressional admission as a state.

Ms. Perry explained that hearings will be held so that individuals and organizations have the opportunity to testify. Public testimony will follow the process used by the DC Council, allowing 3 minutes of testimony for individuals and 5 minutes for organizations and 3 written pages for individuals and 5 pages for organizations. Unlike in 1982, we will have opportunities for the public to provide comments and feedback via the www.statehood.dc.gov website. Testimony on the website will be given the same credence as live testimony. The state constitution will be released on May 6, 2016 and there will be a simultaneous filing before the Council in the event the Council would like to conduct its own hearings. Ms. Perry stated that there will be a town hall meeting about the advisory referendum in every ward and some dates for those meetings have already been proposed. There will also be a Constitutional Convention on June 17-18, 2016. Ms. Perry reviewed the working groups that were announced by the Commission last week. They included:

1. All 8 Wards Working Group
2. Advocacy Working Group
3. Communications Working Group
4. All Americans for DC Statehood Working Group, and
5. Cleveland and Philadelphia Conventions Working Group.

The public can sign up online or talk to a staff person to sign up for any working groups in which they would like to take part.

* Mayor Bowser thanked the Legal Advisory Committee for putting together the rules for public engagement and input. She then opened the floor for discussion.
* Senator Michael D. Brown reiterated his support for the plan. He stated that the plan puts DC on offense instead of defense. It will also generate momentum for statehood. As it relates to the New Columbia Statehood Admission Act, Senator Brown said that he did not see anything in this strategy that precludes us from garnering additional cosponsors in the House and Senate or reintroducing similar legislation in the new congress. The only peril that Senator Brown sees is if we get the referendum on the ballot but do not pass it with a large margin. He stated that the marijuana initiative passed with 65% support from voters. If we get 64% on this initiative, people on Capitol Hill who hate DC will say that these people care more about smoking pot than they do about becoming a state. We not only need to pass this, but we need to pass it with a large margin. We should also be aware that the last multi-question ballot initiative took place in Puerto Rico. It didn’t fare well because voters were confused. We need to put money into this endeavor to ensure that make people are informed before going to the polls. Senator Brown argued that it is time to institute the Tennessee Plan and compensate the members of the statehood delegation.
* Senator Strauss stated that he was excited about the public engagement process. He thanked Mayor Bowser for opening the meeting with a public comment section. He also emphasized that we want to build upon what we did in 1982. There are individuals from that time period who are still active in the statehood community and we want to honor their work and build upon it. It is important that this process really engage the public using the modern tools we have. He stated that he liked the idea of hearing from all over the community and people weighing in with 21st century technology. He stated that if, by chance, the DC statehood bill pending before Congress passes, we would become a state before having to go through this process and that that would be a very good problem to have. But in the event it does not pass, we should really recommit ourselves to this struggle. We have a historical election on the horizon. We will have a new president no matter what happens in Congress. He stressed that these are good guidelines and principles.
* Representative Franklin Garcia concurred with the remarks that had been made. He added that it is important for the public to participate in the process. The greater the number of people that participate, the louder the statement will be.
* Mayor Bowser acknowledged Chairman Mendelson for his foresight in legislating the creation of the New Columbia Statehood Commission. She stated that we have received positive feedback from Congresswoman Eleanor Holmes Norton about the process, including modernizing the Constitution. The Mayor stated that having a document that reflects our current structure, which works well for our local government but does not work well for our relationship with Congress, will be helpful. She then put a vote on the table about the process for public engagement. The Commission approved the rules for public engagement and input unanimously.
* Moving on to the next agenda item, Mayor Bowser stated that locations for upcoming statehood events are still being determined. She sought approval on the date to release a draft constitution to the public and start the public comment process on the draft. During the last New Columbia Statehood Commission meeting, the Commission suggested that a filing to the DC Council could be made at the same time which would give the Council the opportunity the begin work on it. If we wait until the constitutional convention, the Council would only have a short window to consider it. Mayor Bowser asked Chairman Mendelson for his input on that process.
* Chairman Mendelson responded by saying that that process would be fine. He stated that the Council would be unlikely to engage on the statehood efforts until they finish their budget work at the end of May or June.
* Mayor Bowser stated that the next Commission meeting would be on Friday, May 6, 2016. On May 9, 2016, there will bea presentation on the statehood advisory referendum to ANC Commissioners citywide. There will be a kickoff meeting for the working groups on May 12, 2016. The public engagement meetings would take place between May 26 and June 8, 2016. Mayor Bowser asked for a motion to approve these suggested dates. The Commission approved the dates unanimously.
* Mayor Bowser reminded the public they could sign up for working groups and review the minutes from previous New Columbia Statehood Commission meetings at statehood.dc.gov. The Commission plans to meet again at May 6, 2016 at the Lincoln Cottage. The Mayor adjourned the meeting at 4:12 pm.