**NEW COLUMBIA STATEHOOD COMMISSION**

DRAFT Meeting Minutes

May 6, 2016 at 2:00 pm

President Lincoln’s Cottage

140 Rock Creek Church Road, NW

**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 2:27 pm. She recognized the presence of a quorum, citing that the final commission member would be arriving shortly.
* Mayor Bowser asked if there were corrections, comments, or revisions to the minutes from the last meeting held on April 29, 2016. The Commission members did not have comments or changes. The Mayor asked for approval of the minutes. The minutes were approved without revision.
* The Mayor asked commission members to review the agenda. She outlined the agenda items as follows:
  + Approval of minutes from April 29, 2016 New Columbia Statehood Commission meeting
  + Thank and recognize members of Legal Advisory Committee
  + Public comment period
  + New Columbia Statehood Commission vote on the release of the draft constitution.
* Without objection, the Mayor added an additional agenda item to allow for questions from the audience about the draft constitution.
* At the last Commission meeting, the discussion focused largely on working groups that would support the New Columbia Statehood Commission. Mayor Bowser reminded attendees that the DC Council passed legislation to establish the New Columbia Statehood Commission, tasked with promoting statehood for DC. It is comprised of the Mayor, Council Chairman, two Senators, and our Representative. On April 21st, the Commission approved a plan to send legislation to the DC Council to put the question of DC statehood on the November ballot. Included in the plan is a legal advisory committee to advise the Commission and help draft a constitution. Mayor Bowser thanked and recognized the members of the Legal Advisory Committee and staff including:
  + Jon Bouker, Partner, Arent Fox
  + Spencer Overton, Professor, George Washington University Law School
  + Richard Shore, Partner, Gilbert LLP
  + Shelley Broderick, Dean, University of the District of Columbia David A. Clarke School of Law
  + Viet Dinh, Co-Chair, Professor, Georgetown University Law Center
  + Fred Cooke, Co-Chair, Rubin, Winston, Diercks, Harris & Cooke, LLP
  + Gary Thompson, Partner, Reed Smith
  + Michael McGinley, Counsel, Bancroft PLLC

**Staff:**

* + Beverly Perry, Senior Advisor
  + Brian Moore, Chief of Staff, Chairman Mendelson
  + Betsy Cavendish, General Counsel
  + Nikolas Nartowicz, Capital City Fellow, Office of Federal and Regional Affairs
  + Rema Wahabzadah, Legislative Counsel, Office of the DC Statehood Delegation
* The Mayor acknowledged an aggressive but necessary timetable was laid out during the last Commission meeting. She turned to Commission members for opening statements.
* Senator Paul Strauss expressed that this is an exciting day in the District of Columbia. The District would soon be the 51st state. He thanked the Legal Advisory Committee for their hard work in preparing the draft Constitution and stated that this is a starting point to engage the public. Senator Strauss stated that our founding fathers used quill pens and in 1982, the drafting of the constitution was done on typewriters. He articulated that we will be taking full advantage of all modern technology to engage the public in a way that has never before been possible. Senator Strauss recognized all the individuals from the original 1982 Constitutional Convention. He stated that we hope to build upon the fine work that they did.
* Senator Michael D. Brown recognized Karen Szulgit and Rachel Bernard, staff for the Statehood Commission. He stated that the Commission has received considerable feedback. Some want autonomy, some want a vote, and some people want retrocession. He argued that this is an opportunity to speak with one loud voice. Statehood is the remedy. Equality is a prerequisite of democracy. Senator Brown said he hopes we can show Capitol Hill that 80-90 percent of voters are in favor of DC statehood. He also expressed that he hopes that the city funds this effort properly.
* Representative Franklin Garcia shared that he was pleased to see such a large turnout at the event. He pointed out that Councilmembers Bonds and Orange were in attendance. He expressed that he was excited about the timeline and process to achieve DC statehood.
* Mayor Bowser stated that President Lincoln’s Cottage is where Lincoln wrote the Emancipation Proclamation. It is a fitting reminder that we are not fully free in DC. She then turned to Beverly Perry, her Senior Advisor, to provide an overview of the draft constitution.
* Beverly Perry asserted that this has been a quick process and started at the beginning of April. She presented the content in the New Statehood Commission booklet which was handed out. The book is divided into three parts: the historic perspective, rules of the public engagement process, and discussion of the draft constitution. Ms. Perry stated that since we are on a tight timetable to get this on the November ballot, we do not have time to elect delegates. Therefore, every resident of Washington, DC is a delegate. The draft constitution consists of a traditional preamble, a Bill of Rights, and eight articles (Legislative, Executive, Judiciary, Budget and Finance, Borrowing, Referendum & Recall, Amending the Constitution, and Transfer of Power to State Government). The Bill of Rights is the same as the Bill of Rights from the 1987 New Columbia Constitution.
* Senator Strauss asked for consideration of a motion to release the Constitution of New Columbia. The Mayor stated that there was a motion to release the document including a historical perspective, public engagement process, and draft constitution. The Commission unanimously voted in support of the release of the constitution for review and consideration. The vote was met with applause.
* Beverly Perry stated that online comments could be submitted during the public engagement process and that the draft constitution is available online. She reiterated that online comments would carry the same weight as if they were given in person. Ms. Perry asked members of the Legal Advisory Committee to join her at the podium to help field questions during the public comment period.
* John Dirandi Stewart, with the Statehood Green Party, asked what kinds of resources would be devoted to this effort to make sure that the public is aware of this initiative.
* Mayor Bowser responded that the goal is to get this on the ballot. One of the committees is geared towards grassroots advocacy and nationwide advocacy. We are also calling on statehood partners to help.
* Chairman Mendelson added that there is also a Commission budget to pay for outreach.
* Julie Cozela, Chair of the Historical Society of Washington, shared that NPR asked the Mayor a good question about the name New Columbia. Fifteen states have the names of rivers that run through them or around them. She questioned if a more suitable name might be linked to a river like Potomac.
* Senator Brown responded that the name was voted on in the 1982 Constitutional Convention and chosen by the people. He wouldn’t object to changing the name.
* The Mayor concurred with Senator Brown. She said that she is not opposed to a discussion about changing the name and bringing that option to the public.
* John Bouker, member of the Legal Advisory Committee, stated that they reviewed the documents from the 1982 Constitutional Convention. There was a robust debate about the name for the new state. Names that were considered at that time were Anacostia, North Potomac, South Potomac, Capitol, and New Columbia. There was overwhelming support for New Columbia.
* Maurice Jackson, Georgetown University Professor and member of the DC Commission on African American Affairs, noted an error in the Statehood Commission booklet. A vote was held during the 1982 Constitutional Convention and ratified by the people of Washington. Mr. Jackson stated that he agreed with the Washington Post article about the process for DC Statehood being flawed. His suggestion was that the Constitution should not be written in two days.
* A fourth person in the audience asked what the process would be for taking over the National Guard once DC is a state.
* Mayor Bowser responded that she already has many of the powers that many Governors do. She wants to make sure that whoever is sitting in this seat, will have the full power of a state.
* Beverly Perry stated that many items would need to be addressed in the Admissions Act and that the National Guard would be one of those items.
* Annise Jenkins with Stand Up for Democracy in DC commented that statehood is the only answer for full rights. For the delegates to the 1982 Constitutional Convention, it took two years for the entire process. Stand Up for Democracy compared the 1982 and 1987 Constitutions. She expressed concern that the Bill of Rights was longer in the 1982 Constitution compared to the Bill of Rights in the 1987 Constitution. She wants to make sure we are not losing any of the rights in the 1982 Constitution.
* Philip Blair asked how the referendum would be constructed and if it was possible to both vote in favor of statehood and the 1982 Constitution rather than the new one?
* The Mayor replied no.
* Beverly Perry responded that the 1982 Constitution was ratified by the people and attached to a bill. The government in 1987 took the position that the bill expired and passed a new constitution that was not ratified by the people. This process is to update that constitution and make it contemporaneous with government now.
* Hector Rodriguez with Latinos for DC Statehood welcomed the name New Columbia because we are born to be free.
* Ann Loikow with DC Statehood-Yes We Can asked why this was modeled off a colonial government.
* Beverly Perry noted that Georgetown Law Professor Viet Dinh, who is on the Legal Advisory Committee, advised that the petition and constitution be compact and not with large scale changes. The decision to keep the government proportional to the size of the Council was based off that advice. If a petition is sent to Congress with a much expanded government, it could be viewed as irresponsible. Ms. Perry stated that the size of the legislature could be re-evaluated and that the Commission was willing to entertain that option.
* Senator Strauss stressed that the main purpose of the constitution is for the District of Columbia to become a state. Once we become a state, the constitution is amendable.
* Travis Swanson, Ward 7 resident, expressed strong objection to the name New Columbia. He stated that we should not be sugarcoating the history of Christopher Columbus. Many cities are starting to reject such actions and that he shouldn’t be given such an honor. He suggested a public referendum to identify a name. Mr. Swanson stated that he would like to see our state named after a person of color, for example, “Sojourner” or “Commonwealth of Douglass” after Frederick Douglass who actually resided in our city.
* Linda Green, resident of Ward 2, thanked the Mayor and Commission members for putting this idea forward and giving us something to look forward to.
* David Schwartzman with the DC Green Statehood Party raised concerns about the size of new legislature and the rationale behind it.
* Beau Sheff, resident of Ward 6, questioned the importance of keeping the right to bear arms article in the Bill of Rights given gun issues that Washington, DC has been facing. He urged Commission to reexamine that provision.
* Betsy Cavendish, General Counsel to Mayor Bowser, shared that this was taken from the 1987 Bill of Rights. It is a starting point and the Commission did not want to start editing, picking, and choosing what would be in the draft Constitution. She stated that this may be one of the first changes made.
* Jeely Akin shared concerns about the size of the legislature, stating that it was 40 delegates in 1982, 25 delegates in 1987, and now 13. More delegates won’t be paid as much and most likely won’t lead to a lifetime job. He suggested that the number be reevaluated.
* Mayor Bowser encouraged attendees to pick up a pamphlet about the next public forum. She said that ANCs will have a similar discussion on Monday, May 9, 2016. Meetings will occur in all Wards and we will prepare for a two-day Constitutional Convention.
* Beverly Perry stated that all public libraries will make the Constitution available.
* Mayor Bowser adjourned the meeting at 3:14 pm.