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November 14, 2014

The Honorable Vincent C. Gray  
Mayor, District of Columbia  
1350 Pennsylvania Avenue NW, Suite 316  
Washington, DC 20004

VIA E-MAIL: eom@dc.org

RE: DC General Family Shelter Replacement Plan

Dear Mayor Gray:

We are writing to share comments on the DC General Family Shelter Replacement Plan released by your Administration on October 14, 2014. Advisory Neighborhood Commission (ANC) 6B voted 7-0 to approve these comments at a properly noticed meeting on Wednesday, November 12, 2014 with a quorum present.

First, we applaud your Administration for drafting and releasing a plan to close the temporary emergency family homeless shelter at DC General. As our commission has stated many times, we view housing so many incredibly needy families in such deteriorating and deplorable conditions, including hundreds of children, as an outrage and embarrassment to our city and as completely counterproductive to the ultimate goal of ending homelessness. ANC 6B strongly supports the closing of the DC General shelter and the identification of better, more humane housing alternatives for homeless families.

We also generally agree with your strategy of replacing the large DC General shelter with a number of small (40-50 unit) or medium (60-100 unit) size community-based shelter facilities. As stated in your report, "best practices show that families can thrive and be more successful when shelter is provided in smaller, community-based, shelter programs." In addition to being an aging, deteriorating building, DC General is relatively isolated from the surrounding neighborhood, separated by multiple surface parking lots, the DC Jail and the heavily-trafficked 19<sup>th</sup> Street SE. Though politically difficult, locating new smaller scale shelters within neighborhoods is the right strategy for the city to pursue.

While we generally agree with your overall strategy, we do have a number of significant concerns about the following aspects of the plan:

**Open-Ended Solicitation for Offers**

The plan notes that the DC Department of General Services has issued a Solicitation for Offers (SFO) seeking privately owned facilities that can be leased by the city for use as shelters. However, the SFO is a “rolling solicitation,” one that does not include a deadline. Given the urgent need to close DC General and the aggressive timeline outlined in the report, we think that an open-ended solicitation is a mistake. A deadline would ensure that the city receives and evaluates responses in a timely fashion. DGS could always issue a second SFO if there is not a sufficient response to the first SFO.

**No Closing Date Identified**

While the plan states that the DC General shelter could close in the fall of 2015 at the earliest, it does not include a specific closing date. ANC 6B believes that identifying a specific closing date for the shelter will push city officials to take action and provide the funding necessary to achieve the goals of your plan. Without a specific closing date, we fear that city officials will ignore this report and settle for the unacceptable status quo.

**No Specific Shelter Locations Identified**

The plan does not identify any potential locations for the 5-6 smaller scale replacement shelters. While we understand that responses to the SFO will determine most of these locations, we were surprised that the report did not include at least one or two potential locations for shelter. We understand that the Department of General Services and the Department of Human Services have been reviewing the inventory of city-owned properties to identify potential replacement shelter facilities. One or two of the potential locations identified in this review could have been listed in the plan. Again, the lack of any shelter locations adds to a sense that the plan lacks urgency.

**Lack of Shelter Capacity**

The current capacity at the DC General shelter is 288 units. The plan calls for a one-to-one replacement of these units through the identification of five or six 50-60 unit shelters. However, as many homeless advocates have noted, the city needs shelter capacity beyond the 288 units at DC General. During the 2013-2014 hypothermia season, DC General was at capacity and the city placed a large number of homeless families in hotels. We suggest that the city consider exceeding the one-to-one replacement of shelter units in its identification of new shelter locations.

**Support Services at New Shelters**

The plan does not provide any information on the staffing and support services that will be provided at the new small/mid-sized shelters. Many homeless families are in critical need of a variety of social services, with clinical case management services a priority. What services will

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be available in all of the shelters? Who will provide these services? Providing housing alone will not meet the many social service needs of this vulnerable population.

**Recent Increase in Families Being Housed at DC General**

If the goal is to reduce the number of families living at DC General, then your Administration's recent decision to move 60 more families into the shelter is perplexing at best. We were told that the purpose of your initiative to house 500 families in 100 days was to gradually reduce capacity at DC General so the city could eventually close the shelter. Instead, it appears that the initiative freed up space at DC General so that more families could be moved from hotels into the deteriorating building.

Additionally, the decision to move additional families to DC General was made before the onset of hypothermia season when the shelter typically reaches capacity. This means that DC General will be at or above capacity again this winter.

Despite these significant concerns, ANC 6B believes your plan is a starting point and a step in the right direction towards the ultimate goal of closing the DC General Shelter. We urge you to address our concerns and to keep us updated on the plan's progress. We also urge you to work closely with Mayor-elect Bowser during the transition to ensure that the implementation of this plan and the closure of the DC General Shelter remains a top priority for the city.

Finally, we want to reiterate our openness to including one of the new, smaller-scale shelter facilities as part of the Reservation 13/Hill East Development.

Thank you for your consideration of our comments.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'B. Flahaven', with a large, stylized flourish at the end.

Brian Flahaven  
Chair

cc: The Honorable Yvette Alexander, Councilmember, Ward 7  
The Honorable Muriel Bowser, Councilmember, Ward 4  
The Honorable Tommy Wells, Councilmember, Ward 6  
Eboni-Rose Thompson, Chair, ANC 7F  
Beatriz "BB" Otero, Deputy Mayor for Health and Human Services  
Deborah Carroll, Interim Director, Department of Human Services  
Brian Hanlon, Director, Department of General Services