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September 17, 2013

The Honorable Anthony Williams
Chairman
D.C. Tax Revision Commission
Suite W750
1101 Fourth Street, SW
Washington, DC 20024

Dear Mr. Williams,

I am writing to request that the Tax Revision Commission include a strong recommendation in its final report that the District of Columbia government should collect and compile tax collection data at levels of aggregation that are meaningful to neighborhood planning and development efforts. This data should be made available to public and semi-public economic development organizations in order to improve data-driven decision making, especially with respect to programs and subsidies.

The District of Columbia Government historically analyses macroeconomic health and progress at the state-wide level. While informative to many development policy decisions, it is arguable that this level of analysis is most useful when there are large swaths of the city that are plainly underperforming: throw a development project anywhere and a success can noticeably bump up the aggregate statistics. As the District matures and “emerging” neighborhoods graduate to “established” status, the usefulness of state-wide analysis diminishes. The District Government’s development policy will need to become more nuanced, weighing the marginal economic and social returns of investing in one prospering place or another.

Because of the current state-wide approach, data critical to neighborhood development strategies is unavailable at meaningful levels of aggregation, including census block, ZIP code, and BID boundary:

- Retail sales tax revenues
- Corporate tax revenues
- Property tax revenues
- Number of business establishments/licenses
- Number of jobs / level of employment supported (note: unemployment level of residents is reported at the ward level by DOES, but job locations are not)

For some neighborhood development organizations, this data is already sorely needed. The Staff, Board and volunteers of the Georgetown BID are spending many hours each month thinking about how transportation systems impact the vitality of our businesses, the

quality of life of our neighbors, and Georgetown's contribution to the District's economic goals. We do not have the data to know where we should be targeting our limited BID tax dollars to promote retailers and restaurants, or where to best invest in retention and recruitment, or where we will benefit most from transportation improvements. Likewise, Downtown is rapidly approaching full build out, and the Downtown BID's strategic perspective is pivoting from one of large scale development of surface parking lots to balancing office, retail, and residential utilization to maximize economic and social goods. Adams Morgan is placing a huge amount of effort to understanding the dynamic interaction between the retail and nighttime economies. The residents and businesses along 14th and U Street corridors are seeking to translate a period of explosive growth into a sustainable ecosystem.

Unfortunately, data to underpin the neighborhood-level analysis is not available to both the District Government and the many stakeholders within Washington. For example, the District's principal financial data report, the approximately 200 page Comprehensive Annual Financial Report, does not have a single table or figure that presents data aggregated by a geography smaller than the entire city. Neither is neighborhood economic data found within the District's Five Year Economic Development Plan, despite a stated strategy of promoting neighborhoods as development nodes.

Contributing to the sustained health of the District's economy is a prime mission of the Georgetown BID. This mission would be made immeasurably easier if the District were to make available tax collection data aggregated at the census block, ZIP code, or BID boundary level. We urge the TRC to make this a strong recommendation in its final report.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Joe Sternlieb", with a large, stylized flourish extending to the right.

Joseph Sternlieb
CEO
Georgetown BID

JS/jh

cc: Gerry Widdicombe