

A conversation with Greater Greater Washington, March 22, 2017

Participants

- David Alpert – President, Greater Greater Washington (GGWash)
- Sarah Guidi – Managing Director, GGWash
- Alexander Berger – Program Officer, US Policy, Open Philanthropy Project

Note: These notes were compiled by the Open Philanthropy Project and give an overview of the major points made by Mr. Alpert and Ms. Guidi.

Summary

The Open Philanthropy Project spoke with Mr. Alpert and Ms. Guidi of GGWash to get an update on our 2015 grant. Conversation topics included GGWash's recent activities, potential future projects, and budget.

Current activities and projects

Coalition building

GGWash is working on building a coalition that brings advocates for affordable housing and helping vulnerable communities together with housing developers to support a platform of "more housing, more affordable housing." GGWash believes this coalition will be effective in influencing zoning and land use policies in DC. For-profit developers are generally in favor of more housing, and affordable housing developers have also been calling for more housing. A number of groups that advocate for vulnerable populations are pushing for other policy outcomes as well (e.g. a one-to-one replacement policy for subsidized housing). The coalition has agreed to ten principles that can unite these diverse groups.

GGWash plans to continue doing coalition maintenance. David Whitehead has done lot of outreach to various groups in this area.

The coalition has produced a proposal as an amendment to the existing Comprehensive Plan. GGWash plans to submit this during the 60-day window for public proposals for the DC Office of Planning to review and offer recommendations. There will be then a public comment period. The proposal will go before the city council for debate in early 2018.

Outreach to Advisory Neighborhood Commission (ANC) commissioners

GGWash is reaching out to ANC commissioners for support. Five ANCs have signed onto the statement of principles so far, and GGWash would like to have at least one ANC from each ward signed on.

Four or five of GGWash's seven endorsed ANC write-in candidates were elected.

Lawsuits and potential for legal advocacy

There have been a couple of lawsuits overturning approved developments on the

basis of the DC Comprehensive Plan. This situation has brought attention to flaws in the Comprehensive Plan and helped create momentum around reforming it.

GGWash is evaluating whether there is an opportunity to get involved in legal advocacy around these lawsuits, e.g., by filing amicus briefs. Opposing groups have filed lawsuits around nearly every planned unit development in the pipeline (there are currently 14 pending cases).

Affirmatively Furthering Fair Housing (AFFH) rule

GGWash is starting to formulate policy in which the DC Office of Planning could look at neighborhoods or zones, target expensive single-family housing neighborhoods, and have an explicit streamlining process of some kind for developments that include affordable housing. Developers are likely to agree to more affordable housing in areas with high land costs and high opportunities.

The foundation for such a policy could be included in the Comprehensive Plan.

Other smaller projects

GGWash engaged readers to identify a number of vacant properties missing from the city's vacant and blighted property register, and helped support a bill to change the policy around registering vacant properties, which passed.

Blog redesign

GGWash's web traffic decreased somewhat following a redesign of its blog (GGWash believes this will be a temporary drop). The redesign is an improvement. In particular, it allows the best posts to get better traction by staying on the home page longer. The blog runs about four posts a day.

Online organizing

GGWash is building its email list, which has grown by roughly 50% this year. It has used this list for campaign emails (e.g. its campaign to improve the 14th Street bus line; its work around the Comprehensive Plan). The list has been helpful for fundraising and for getting a better picture of GGWash's base of support.

Potential future projects

Going forward, GGWash would like to:

- Finish its work on the Comprehensive Plan.
- Flesh out the AFFH inspired policy and campaign around it.
- Potentially expand its legal advocacy work (this would require additional staffing).
- Continue to expand its ANC work.

Budget and fundraising

GGWash's total budget for 2017 is \$276,000. GGWash's major fundraiser this year will be its reader drive, for which it has some new tools. GGWash aims to raise

\$30,000; so far, it has raised about as much as it had by this time last year.

All Open Philanthropy Project conversations are available at
<http://www.openphilanthropy.org/research/conversations>