

A conversation with Greater Greater Washington, April 6, 2018

Participants

- David Alpert – Founder and President, Greater Greater Washington (GGWash)
- Sarah Guidi – Managing Director, GGWash
- Alexander Berger – Managing Director, 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 as part of an update on our 2017 grant (<https://www.openphilanthropy.org/focus/us-policy/land-use-reform/greater-greater-washington-housing-and-land-use-reform>). Conversation topics included GGWash's work on the DC Comprehensive Plan and other projects, its blog, and fundraising.

DC Comprehensive Plan

GGWash convened a coalition (which includes developers, affordable housing advocates, and policy organizations) to produce consensus amendments to the DC Comprehensive Plan ("comp plan"), which it proposed to the DC Office of Planning (OP) in June of last year. In January, OP released edits to the Framework Element, the introductory section of the comp plan, which GGWash and its coalition reviewed and proposed feedback on.

GGWash had been advocating for OP to implement three main categories of reforms: 1) allowing additional housing development, 2) promoting affordable housing, and 3) avoiding displacement. OP's new version of the Framework Element of the comp plan includes most of the proposed legal reforms around allowing additional housing development, but not many changes regarding encouraging affordability and avoiding displacement. GGWash and its coalition drafted amendments addressing these latter two issues and attended a council hearing about the new comp plan on March 20th. GGWash also engaged more than 50 residents to speak up in support of these amendments. GGWash also actively lobbied council members about the overall comp plan and its proposed amendments during the couple of months prior to the hearing.

David Whitehead has also been organizing Advisory Neighborhood Commissioners (ANCs) in conjunction with GGWash's comp plan work.

GGWash thinks the council will likely wait to proceed with markup until after the June primary.

Near-term comp plan projects

GGWash has been discussing two potential projects related to the comp plan with some other organizations and advocacy groups:

1. GGWash and others have argued that the comp plan does not put forward a concrete plan for dealing with future population growth (DC is projected to have 300,000 additional residents by 2045). It might be beneficial to advocate for the OP to explicitly address this issue. GGWash has considered doing public engagement around planning for population growth, e.g., via an interactive online planning tool and in-person workshops.
2. GGWash has advocated for the idea that wealthier areas of DC ought to build their "fair share" of new housing. This proposal is somewhat difficult politically because it singles out a particular area of the city. It's also not clear how much enthusiasm there will be for this from residents of other parts of the city. One of GGWash's proposed comp plan amendments calls for the city to produce a fair housing and anti-segregation plan.

GGWash would like to work on at least one of these projects and is currently trying to determine which is more feasible. David Whitehead would likely spend some time on these projects. GGWash would also aim to partner with other organizations with relevant capacities and skills. It would likely need to fundraise for these projects.

Other projects

GGWash has been working on a more formal process for deciding what to work on based on its readers' priorities. It has been including thumbs up/thumbs down buttons on its blog posts to get feedback from readers on whether they would like to see GGWash do advocacy around that issue. If engagement on a post is positive, GGWash might move forward on the issue with, e.g., a petition.

So far, historic preservation is the issue that has moved furthest via this process. There has been significant organizing both for and against the upcoming nomination of two potential districts as historic. GGWash thinks the current nomination process is somewhat biased in favor of designating districts as historic, and it has been working with some residents of these districts to think through potential legislative reforms that could shift the decision process to be more balanced.

GGWash plans to do some work around a proposed affordable housing bill in Silver Spring. GGWash also did some organizing around a project to allow greater density in Reston.

Blog

GGWash has raised preliminary funding to launch a pilot fellowship with two fellows to produce analyses of some issues GGWash wants to prioritize.

GGWash's readership dipped following its website redesign but has started to go back up. GGWash's site gets about 140,000 visits per month, about half of which are new visitors.

Fundraising

GGWash is working on developing more sustainable revenue sources.

GGWash expects its revenue from readers this year to be around \$35,000. GGWash has around 500 individual donors. It only does one call for donations per year.

GGWash's overall level of funding from foundations is about the same. GGWash got \$20,000 from a local foundation last year.

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