

Restructuring DC's Housing Paradigm: A Restorative Policy Blueprint

The Challenge

The District of Columbia faces a severe housing crisis driven by historical segregation, the loss of naturally occurring affordable housing, and a critical shortage of deeply affordable units. Previous attempts to address this have been polarized between an unrealistic 72,000 -unit municipal-only target and a market-driven 12,000-unit target that weakens tenant protections.

The Solution: A Synthesized 45,000 -Unit Framework

This framework offers a balanced, progressive housing strategy. It protects tenant rights, speeds up development through code modernization, and establishes community -controlled housing funded by progressive land and luxury taxes.

The 45,000 -Unit Prospectus

Pillars of Innovation

- **Architectural Reform:** Authorizing single-stair residential layouts up to six stories and streamlining downtown office-to-residential conversions.
- **Balanced Safety:** Enacting swift judicial mediation for non-payment court backlogs alongside absolute eviction exemptions for domestic abuse and human trafficking survivors.
- **Bureaucratic Decoupling:** Instituting the Department of Buildings (DOB) online Instant Permit Program for minor accessibility upgrades and repairs.
- **Community Labor:** Creating the DCHA 'Capital Corps' to hire public housing residents directly at prevailing union wages for mold remediation and emergency maintenance.

Progressive Funding & Reinvestment Model

- **Split-Rate Land Value Tax (LVT):** Levying a higher tax rate on land values than on physical improvements to curb real estate speculation and incentivize dense construction.
- **Progressive Mansion Tax:** Implementing a 1% surcharge on luxury residential estates

valued above \$2.5 million, targeting the wealthiest 2% of properties.

- **Direct Reinvestment Pipeline:** Allocating Mansion Tax and LVT revenues to fund a Universal Right to Counsel for tenants earning up to 400% of the federal poverty line and offering direct bridge financing for Tenant Opportunity to Purchase Act (TOPA) Limited Equity Cooperatives (LECs).

Pillar I: Single - Stair Architectural Reform

- **The Policy:** Authorize single-stair residential designs up to six stories with a maximum of four units per floor, using the International Existing Building Code (IEBC) for office conversions.
- **The Operational Funding:** Mansion Tax revenues will fund the \$568,000 DOB training and regulatory code -writing mandate, bypassing the CFO's budget deficit objection.
- **The Impact:** Frees up 7% to 10% of interior floor space, making housing production on small, narrow infill lots financially viable. By explicitly extending this reform to adaptive reuse projects, mid-rise office buildings can be retrofitted using existing stair cores, reducing conversion costs by 20% to 30% and accelerating downtown revitalization.

Pillar II: Balanced Eviction Due Process

- **The Policy:** Shorten pre-filing notice to 10 days and mandate a court hearing within 20 days for verified violent crime cases, decided by a judge using a preponderance of evidence standard.
 - **The Protection:** Explicitly exempts survivors of domestic violence and human trafficking from eviction under VAWA. It mandates lease bifurcation to evict only the perpetrator, protecting vulnerable tenants while ensuring community safety.
 - **The Non-Payment Backlog Solution:** Clears the 12-to-16-month Landlord-Tenant Court backlog through a pre-court diversion program, a strict 30-day ERAP processing mandate, and prioritized court dates for non-corporate housing providers owning four or fewer units. It maintains protective orders with tenant safeguards, allowing registry adjustments for verified code violations.
 - **The Safeguard:** Outfitted with the Legal Parity Initiative, providing a Universal Right to Counsel for all renters under 400% of the federal poverty line to prevent bad-faith, "allegation-only" evictions.
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Pillar III: DOB Instant Permits & Capital Corps

- **The Policy (Instant Permits):** Transition to an online permit system for minor repairs, residential solar installations up to 15 kW, and accessibility improvements. This helps long-term homeowners maintain their properties and age in place without bureaucratic delays.
- **The Policy (Capital Corps):** Employ public housing residents directly as force account labor to resolve DCHA's maintenance backlog. Corps members receive technical training and are paid prevailing union wages under Davis-Bacon standards for mold remediation and repairs.
- **The Strategic Resolution:** Direct employment bypasses the \$250,000 council contract approval bottleneck, accelerating repairs while ensuring strict municipal oversight.

Pillar IV: Progressive Financing

- **The Tax Reforms:** Implement a split-rate Land Value Tax that taxes land at a higher rate than structures to curb speculation. Introduce a 1% Mansion Tax surcharge on properties valued above \$2.5 million, targeting only the wealthiest 2% of estates.
- **The Reinvestment:** This progressive funding model generates dedicated municipal revenue. It directly funds the Office of the Tenant Advocate, stabilizes the Housing Production Trust Fund, provides \$20 million annually for Limited Equity Cooperatives (LECs), and provides universal legal counsel for tenants earning up to 400% of the federal poverty line.