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**Testimony - DC Council Committee on Government Operations
DC Archives [Secretary of the District of Columbia]
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My name is Evelyn Mittman Wrin and I have comments related to the need for the processing of the building permit collection at the DC Archives for those building permits issued starting in 1950. Without the processing, the collection is effectively inaccessible and the records cannot be digitized. Within this unprocessed collection lies a vital part of the record of the development of D.C., the city's buildings, and the people who built Washington. This information is of constant interest to homeowners, researchers and the DC Historic Preservation Office (HPO).

When I testified in 2016 before the Committee of the Whole, I raised the problem of two different systems for public access to building permits. For permits through 1949, one can research records directly in the Washingtoniana Room at MLK Library [and now in the temporary location]. However, for permits from 1950 on, one must go to DCRA and fill out a request that DCRA sends to the DC Archives for a response, a cumbersome, time-consuming and uncertain procedure. Subsequent to that hearing, Rebecca Katz, Public Records Administrator, reached out to HPO and they began to look at what would be required to capture and digitize this wealth of information in the files at the DC Archives. These discussions included Brian Kraft, the consultant who digitized the building permits through 1949 under contract with HPO and developed the widely-used Building Permit Database.

In testimony last year I commended Ms. Katz for her responsiveness, cooperation, and continuing efforts in support of this project and I am pleased to do so again this year. However, a significant problem has been encountered, which is the lack of skilled persons to process the collection of building permits from 1950 onward to prepare them for digitization. I understand that the processing is currently dependent on volunteers, which is not a reliable, certain and efficient way to handle this project. Until the collection is processed, no data from 1950 onward can be entered into the Building Permit Database and the collection remains effectively inaccessible. I would mention further that data from those permits are also to be integrated into HistoryQuestDC, which would allow that data to be available online.

It is suggested that the preferred and most efficient way to handle this would be a contract for the specific task of processing the collection of building permits. This work is a basic function of the Archives and a task that cannot be effectively accomplished using only volunteers. Without a contract for the specific purpose of processing the collection, the unprocessed collection will continue to be inaccessible to the homeowners, researchers, Historic Preservation Office and others who need to have the records truly available.

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Again, I would like to thank Ms. Katz for her efforts and responsiveness in her role as Administrator of Public Records, for her support of this digitization project, as well as for the many accomplishments made by the Office of Public Records during FY2017.

Thank you for this opportunity to comment.

Evelyn Mittman Wrin