



# The District's Dime

Going Beyond the Budget Book

The DC Fiscal Policy Institute blog  
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## Holding New Communities Accountable To the Community

By Jessica Fulton

Making the District an affordable place to live is perhaps our city's biggest public policy challenge, and a key to our future. The New Communities Initiative, an effort to transform four DC neighborhoods with large public housing complexes into vibrant mixed-income communities, has the potential to be a critical way to preserve affordable housing in a rapidly gentrifying city.

Yet the eight-year old initiative has moved very slowly and has raised concerns in the affected communities – Northwest One, Park Morton, Lincoln Heights and Barry Farm. There are ways to make the initiative more transparent and responsive, and DCFPI Outreach Director Jessica Fulton presented several of these recommendations in testimony to the DC Council today. A copy of her full testimony can be found [here](#).

Recently revealed information on New Communities – a great improvement in transparency around the initiative – shows that New Communities has not been true to its key commitments: building first before tearing any housing down, offering one-for-one replacement of low-cost housing, mixed income development, and the opportunity to stay while the community was transforming.

The Office of the Deputy Mayor for Planning and Economic Development has the opportunity in the coming fiscal year to reassure residents that it maintains commitment to New Communities.

DCFPI's recommendations include:

- **Increase transparency.** Recently, the Deputy Mayor rolled out a [website](#) to keep stakeholders up-to-date on New Communities projects. Moving forward, the mayor's office should build on this by improving direct communication with stakeholders, to keep them aware of updates and setbacks in the development process.
- **Revisit New Communities Initiative master plans.** New Communities projects at Barry Farm, and Lincoln Heights/Richardson Dwellings are facing more challenges than Northwest One, suggesting that the District may need to make a larger investment in either rehabilitating or redeveloping housing in these communities.
- **Consider the implications of delayed redevelopment.** New Communities sites were selected for redevelopment because they represent some of the most distressed public housing in the District. DC should consider improving the dilapidated public housing stock on a faster timeline if the full New Communities redevelopment plans remain uncertain.

The Gray Administration has made considerable progress in increasing transparency of New Communities in the past year. Yet this increased transparency has led to many more questions about the viability of the New Communities plan. By using the next fiscal year to continue to make progress in planning and using those plans to guide further actions, the Deputy Mayor's office can bring more success to the project.