



District of Columbia Government  
Advisory Neighborhood Commission 6A  
Box 75115  
Washington, DC 20013



January 23, 2006

Mayor Adrian Fenty  
John A. Wilson Building  
1350 Pennsylvania Avenue, NW  
Washington, DC 20004

Re: Improving Citizen Access to DCRA Public Records

Dear Mayor Fenty,

At a regularly scheduled and properly noticed meeting on January 11, 2007, our Commission voted 7-0-0 ( with 5 Commissioners required for a quorum) to request that the Mayor's office undertake an initiative to modernize the Department of Consumer and Regulator Affairs record keeping so that Commissions and individual citizen can more easily access public records.

Currently, we have a limited 60 day window to appeal Zoning Administrator decisions. Often the window of appeal closes before the ANCs are aware of a Zoning Administrator decision. For example, there currently is no system for reporting the issuance of Certificates of Occupancy (C of O). An ANC or a citizen requires prior knowledge that a C of O was issued in order to request copies of the application and the granted C of O. We believe that several C of O in our community were issued in error but could not be contested as the appeal window had closed.

In order to make DCRA records more transparent and accessible to the public, ANC 6A requests that the following initiatives be researched and implemented.

1. A web-enabled publicly searchable database (much like the property assessment database) for issued C of Os that allows searching by address, Ward and ANC.
2. A web-enabled publicly searchable database (much like the property assessment database) for building permits that contains the applications and scanned copies of the building plans that allows searching by address, Ward and ANC. Currently, DCRA sends out bi-monthly lists of issued building permits that is very helpful, but it is often impossible to catch Zoning Administrator errors without viewing the plans. It is a very time consuming process to pull plans and many errors aren't discovered in the 60 day windows because of the burden of finding this information.

Because the current system is not transparent, developers are able to exploit it to build illegal structures and occupy them with nonconforming uses. Both of these suggestions would allow the public to access publicly available documents in a manner that promoted transparency and good governance.

On behalf of the Commission,

Joseph Fengler  
Chair, Advisory Neighborhood Commission 6A