Summary of OAG's DC 2050 Recommendations

Introduction

What is a Comprehensive Plan?

Comprehensive Plans (CPs) are land use plans. They lay out goals, recommendations, and policies, and guide local officials in making decisions about how land in a city should be used. In the District, the CP has the weight of law, and all zoning decisions must not be inconsistent with the CP. CPs are implemented through zoning laws, which regulate how real estate can be developed and used in specific areas.

CPs may also suggest priorities on topics related to land use, such as economic development, transportation, or environmental protection, but their ability to influence these issues is limited to what can be achieved through land use and zoning regulations.

What is DC 2050?

The Office of Planning (OP) is the agency responsible for developing the District's CP. OP's mission is to guide "where and how we build new housing, grow job opportunities, connect neighborhoods, preserve our rich history, and invest in amenities." In spring 2025, OP began the process of drafting a new CP, called "DC 2050," to replace the current 20-year-old plan. DC 2050 aims to "align land use policies and investments to make the District more equitable, affordable and resilient" over the next two decades. OP has asked for feedback from District residents, businesses, and government agencies to inform development of the new plan.

What is OAG's Role in DC 2050?

The Office of the Attorney General (OAG) has provided recommendations to OP as part of the DC 2050 effort. The CP rewrite is a once-in-a-generation opportunity for both the District government and residents to shape the future of land use in the District. OAG believes that, by working collaboratively with all stakeholders, OP will be able to craft a plan that ensures the District's prosperity, health, and sustainability.

OAG's recommendations here provide constructive approaches to modernizing the CP's format. These are informed by OAG's participation in the District's land use process, including intervention in Zoning Commission cases, its research into other jurisdictions, and best practices identified by the American Planning Association. OAG believes that simplifying the current CP's format and clarifying its priorities will make the new plan more accessible and predictable to District stakeholders and better-positioned to achieve its goals for equitable and affordable growth. After OP publishes the draft CP, OAG will consider further comments on its policy direction.

DC 2050 Timeline from OP

Phase 1: Define Our Vision (March - August 2025)

Learn about DC 2050 and how we got here by exploring the project website, attending an engagement event, or taking the DC 2050 Vision Survey.

Explore new ways to guide future land use, discuss the District's land use needs and opportunities, and share your priorities on key topics at a series of workshops.

Review OP's Phase 1 engagement report.

Phase 2: Explore Possible Futures (September 2025 - May 2026)

Learn about our place types approach to land use policy.

Explore DC's current conditions through project resources.

Share your preferences on the different options we have to accommodate growth.

Phase 3: Create Our Plan (June 2026 - June 2027)

OP will use your input to draft DC 2050.

Review the DC 2050 draft plan and share your feedback at pop-up events, during OP's office hours, or online.

Review OP's engagement report on feedback received about the public review draft and how OP will address the feedback.

Phase 4: Legislative Approval (July 2027 - February 2028)

DC Council will consider approval of DC 2050.

Phase 5: Make DC 2050 a Reality (2028 - Future)

After Council adopts the plan with Congressional approval, District agencies, the private sector, and the community take action and make investments to achieve its goals and priorities.

OAG's Districtwide Planning Recommendations

The current CP features 13 Districtwide Elements addressing citywide topics, such as Land Use or Housing. OAG suggests simplifying and reorganizing this framework.

1) Adopt a simple interlinked organizational structure.

Figure 1: OAG's proposed Districtwide Element structure.

Three overarching goals establish an overall strategy:

- **Prosperity:** The District remains economically vibrant and financially stable.
- **Sustainability:** Protect the environment and public health.
- **Equity:** All District residents share in the District's growth and enjoy access to its resources and opportunities.

Five cross-cutting thematic topics guide specific subject areas:

- **Housing & Community:** Develop and grow the District's communities in a holistic manner that provides high-quality and accessible housing, amenities, and opportunities to all residents.
- **Connectivity & Networks:** Connect District residents and visitors to resources and opportunities through efficient and sustainable transportation, utility, and communications networks.
- **Economic Vitality:** Recognize the District's existing economic bases of tourism, culture, education, and government, while ensuring that its economy remains dynamic and provides diverse and innovative economic opportunities for its residents and businesses.
- **Environment & Public Health:** Provide a resilient, sustainable, and healthy environment for all District residents.
- **Land Use:** Ensure the District's land use patterns and policies support the vision of the District as an equitable, sustainable, and prosperous city for all of its residents, businesses, institutions, and visitors.

Additionally, 31 **policy objectives** advance the thematic topics, and 128 **implementation actions** give specific ways to achieve the plan's goals.

2) Focus the Land Use Topic on zoning guidance.

Because zoning decisions must not be inconsistent with the CP, the CP should provide clear guidance to avoid legal ambiguity that fosters distrust among stakeholders and spurs legal challenges.

3) Adopt a simplified FLUM.

The Future Land Use Map (FLUM) designates recommended future uses (e.g. moderate density residential, medium density commercial, local public facilities) across the District, guiding future zoning changes and informing OP's area-specific planning efforts. Today's city development often blends residential, commercial, institutional, and other uses into shared places. Although OP is proposing to reorganize the current FLUM categories into Place Types (e.g., moderate-scale residential neighborhoods, urban centers, and institutional), the FLUM should be further simplified and clarified to reflect this mixed-use world. OAG's specific suggestions include:

- Using a simplified system of 9 bands to replace the current 59 FLUM categories. These are compatible with OP's proposed Place Types model because they provide additional density detail while retaining the core functions of the place types.

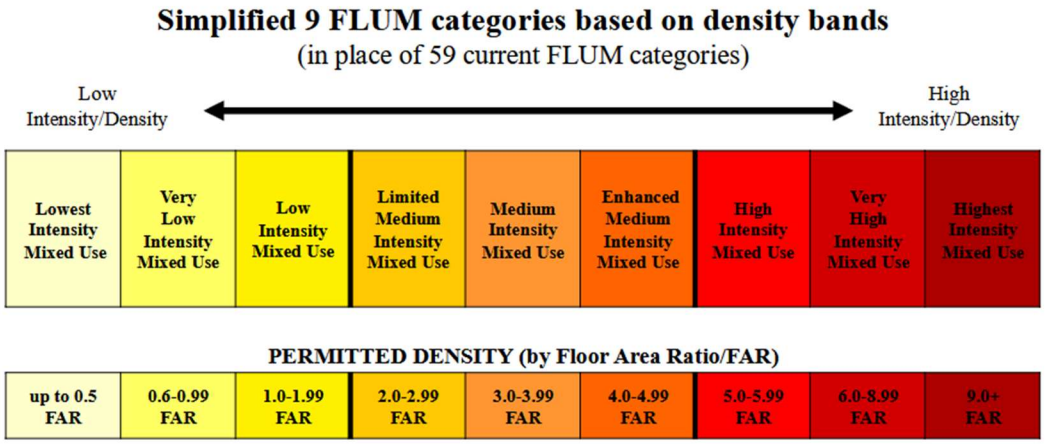

Figure 2: OAG's proposed simplified FLUM categories.

- Recategorize FLUM categories that do not provide zoning guidance, such as Institutional, Local Public Facilities, and Parks, Recreation, and Open Space.
- Integrate Production, Distribution and Repair (PDR) categories into mixed uses where appropriate. There is less industrial land in the District, and changes in technology have helped mitigate noise, odor, and other concerns.

4) Foster effective communication.

Incorporate the best practices from other recent CPs by using visuals to display data. Use a streamlined, easily navigable, web-based format that complements the CP's organization and allows residents to interact with it in more meaningful ways.

OAG's Localized Planning Recommendations

OAG's proposals for the geographic elements seek to reorganize and consolidate the current CP's Area Elements and Generalized Policy Map (GPM). The GPM categorizes how different parts of the District may change in the near future.

At present, there are a multitude of planning studies and Small Area Plans related to the individual Wards and sub-areas of those Wards. Many of these plans are over a decade old and do not reflect current neighborhood conditions or trends. This outdated guidance frequently conflicts with more recent CP amendments.

In some places, OAG has drafted new language for objectives and actions, primarily addressing industrial land and uses in Ward 5. While this language is new, it still reflects concepts and guidance in the current CP. OAG has also sought to connect its proposed Districtwide objectives and actions to those at the Ward level through a series of references to the related objectives and actions. In doing so, OAG hopes to clarify how the two parts of the plan reinforce one another.

OAG proposes the following for localized planning:

1) Use Wards as the geographic basis.

The current CP uses ten identified Planning Areas, such as Mid-City or Upper Northeast, as the geographic basis for its Area Elements, which focus on issues that are unique to particular parts of the District. A change to Ward Elements would make the CP's geographic elements more intuitive for residents because they are a source of identity and provide a familiar means of spatial orientation.

2) Ensure Ward Elements provide detailed localized guidance.

In order to streamline the CP's guidance, and reduce redundant information, consolidate the GPM's guidance into Ward Planning Focus Areas (PFAs) centered on key locations expected to drive planning and development within the Ward.

OAG's proposed objectives and actions largely incorporate the current CP's language but reorganize it to more clearly respond to each PFA's identified issues. This results in guidance that is both more geographically specific and less repetitive. OAG has also broken down longer policies into individual components and reorganized them around common themes such as housing or transportation. For each objective and action, OAG has included references to the corresponding current CP sections.

3) Follow the Districtwide organizational structure.

Each PFA includes policy objectives and implementation actions.

4) Foster effective communication.

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