

Foundations & Perspectives

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Freedom Turns 150

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The Many Hats of the AOC from A to Z



Photo by: Dewitt Roseborough

Preserving L'Enfant's vision for the City of Washington (left) is a critical responsibility of AOC's Michael Turnbull (pictured above, far right).

The AOC plays a leadership role in decisions from the policing of Capitol Hill; to national standards of historic preservation; to supporting development of industry standards in fire safety, capital project management and security infrastructure.

AOC's involvement falls into three broad categories: boards and groups within Capitol Hill that are statutorily required (mandated by law), off-Capitol Hill boards required by statute, and professional organizations that play a significant role in shaping the standards and methods used in executing AOC's mission.

"Participating and serving with these groups is important for us. It broadens our circles, introducing new ideas and connecting us to new communities of practice. We can then bring back those ideas to the AOC to make us better," said Architect of the Capitol Stephen T. Ayers. "Many AOC employees may not realize the high esteem people outside the AOC hold us; people outside the AOC really listen to what we have to say. We are recognized national leaders in navigating difficult projects and in historic preservation."

From the Advisory Council on Historic Preservation to the Zoning Commission — the Architect of the Capitol, both individually and organizationally, has many roles that extend well beyond what most might expect.

Statutory Roles on Capitol Hill

The Architect of the Capitol serves as Acting Director of the U.S. Botanic Garden and the National Garden under the Joint Committee on the Library. The Architect also serves as a member of the Capitol Police Board and the Congressional Accessibility Services Board, as well as an ex officio member of the United States Capitol Preservation Commission.

Among these boards — those on Capitol Hill and statutorily required — the United States Capitol Police (USCP) Board consumes the most attention of the Architect of the Capitol. The Capitol Police Board was established as the oversight authority for USCP administration, operations and regulations. The AOC has served as part of the Capitol Police Board since 1873 along with the Senate and House Sergeants at Arms (SAA).

“The Architect of the Capitol plays an important role on the Capitol Police Board because he provides consistency of tenure and brings a long view to the security planning of the Capitol campus,” said AOC Office of Security Programs Director Ken Eads. The Architect has a long-term view because he serves a 10-year term, while the SAA are nominated every two years with each new Congress.

Today, the role of the AOC on the Capitol Police Board is focused not just on aesthetics and preservation — making sure that security enhancements fit into the historic fabric — but also working collaboratively with the other voting board members on all aspects of the oversight of the USCP, from their long-term vision to near-term challenges, such as the budget sequester.

Statutory Roles Beyond Capitol Hill

The Architect of the Capitol is also a member of the District of Columbia Zoning Commission (ZC), National Building Museum, Advisory Council on Historic Preservation, National Capital Memorial Commission, Art Advisory Committee to the Washington Metropolitan Area Transit Authority, and the National Institute for Conservation of Cultural Property.

The ZC is an independent, quasi-judicial body created by the Zoning Act of 1920 and upon which the AOC has served since its inception. The ZC is charged with preparing, adopting and amending the Zoning Regulations and Zoning Map consistent with the Comprehensive Plan for the National Capital area.

Three members of the ZC are residents of the District of Columbia appointed by the Mayor and confirmed by the D.C. City Council. The fourth ZC member is the Director of the National Park Service (or his/her representative). The fifth representative of the ZC is the Architect of the Capitol (or his representative).

“Each commission member contributes a different view point to the commission. While we [AOC] bring a federal perspective to the commission, we all want what is best for the city — we want D.C. to be beautiful,

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successful and a vibrant place to live,” said Assistant Architect of the Capitol Michael Turnbull, AOC’s representative to the ZC. “The outreach to the community and being part of the overall city is critically important to the AOC and we have a great sense of pride in D.C. as a city and as the seat of our government.”

The Architect of the Capitol brings a historical and long-term view for future city planning that includes preserving the vision of the city founders including Pierre L’Enfant, George Washington and Thomas Jefferson.

Adds Turnbull, “It is all a balancing act. I look out for D.C. by looking back on the history of the city and looking at future growth from an impact perspective. The city has some great architects working on some exciting projects with inspired designs. We try to find a happy medium to balance history, growth, security, and a sustainable, livable community.”

Turnbull rotates with other members of the Zoning Commission in sitting on the District of Columbia Board of Zoning Adjustment, another five member zoning body that

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Photo by: Dewitt Roseborough

Ked Eads (far left) serves as AOC liaison to the Capitol Police Board.

hears cases related to variances, special exceptions and appeals of administrative decisions.

Another high-visibility board upon which the AOC serves a critical role is the Advisory Council on Historic Preservation (ACHP). According to the ACHP, its mission is to “promote the preservation, enhancement, and sustainable use of our nation’s diverse historic resources, and advises the President and the Congress on national historic preservation policy.”

The ACHP was formed following the passage of the National Historic Preservation Act in 1966. The ACHP is the only entity with the legal responsibility to encourage federal agencies to factor historic preservation into federal project requirements.

The president of the United States appoints four members of the general public and four historic preservation experts, including the chairman and vice chairman. The secretaries of the Interior and Agriculture and the Architect of the Capitol are permanent members of ACHP. In addition, the president designates seven federal agency heads to terms on ACHP and ex-officio representatives of national preservation organizations.

According to ACHP, “each year, the federal government is involved with many projects that affect historic properties. For example, the Federal Highway Administration works with states on road improvements, the Department of Housing and Urban Development grants funds to cities to rebuild communities, and the General Services Administration builds and leases federal office space.”

Adds Ayers, “The AOC has long been viewed as an expert in historic preservation work, and when the ACHP was formed, this expertise was recognized by the White House. In addition, the Architect adds long-term continuity to the ACHP, while many other agencies are brought on and off the council depending upon their need to focus attention on their preservation programs.”

“We get into some very controversial issues at the council that have a number of constituencies and challenges, balancing growth and historic preservation. This includes work such as Pawtucket Dam and Cape Wind [both in Massachusetts],” said Ayers. “These decisions have far reaching effects on development and preservation on culturally important lands.”



Photo Courtesy of: CII

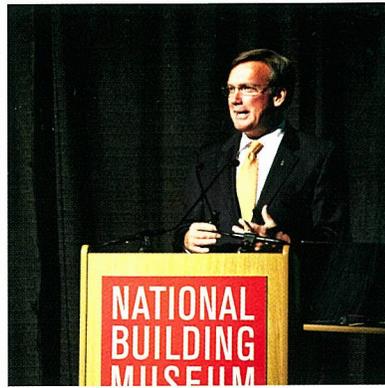


Photo Courtesy of: AAF

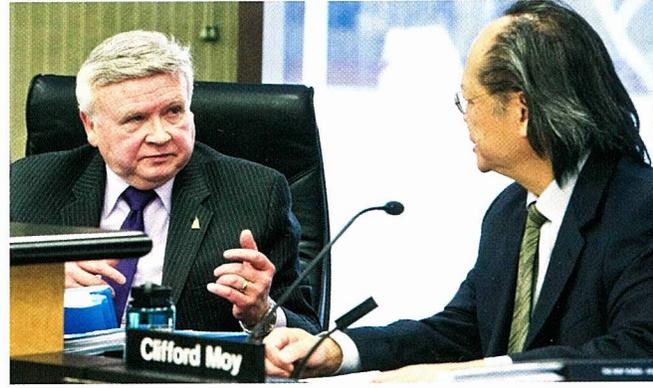


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Leadership beyond Capitol Hill

Beyond the boards and roles required by statute, the Architect is a member of the American Institute of Architects (AIA); Construction Users Roundtable (CURT); Construction Industry Institute (CII); Construction Management Association of America (CMAA); International Facility Management Association (IFMA); International Association of Museum Facility Administrators (IAMFA); National Institute of Building Sciences (NIBS); National Historic Trust for Historic Preservation; and the George Washington Chapter of Lambda Alpha International.

While the AOC plays an active role in many of these organizations, one organization the AOC has specific leadership function is the Construction Industry Institute (CII). CII is a group of more than 100 owners (private and public sector), engineering and construction contractors, and suppliers who work together to find ways to improve the cost effectiveness of capital projects.

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Anna Franz, Director of AOC Planning and Project Management (PPM), currently serves as Vice Chair of CII and next year will become the first woman to chair the organization in its 30-year history.

“One of the main reasons we participate in CII is that it is a true knowledge and research driven organization,” said Franz. “Their research guidance into best practices for capital projects provides real benefit to us, allowing us to listen to what others are doing and ask questions so we can apply those lessons to current capital projects we are working on for AOC customers.”

The CII funded research program with more than 30 leading U.S. universities involved is unique in the engineering and construction

Brendon Robinson serves on an CII panel (left), Stephen Ayers addresses the American Architectural Foundation (center), Michael Turnbull discussing issues at a DC Zoning Board meeting (right).

industry. The research results lead to best practices for the entire industry to share and implement to improve project success.

Examples of the research that CII conducts include improving the cost effectiveness of the capital facility project life cycle, from pre-project planning through completion and commissioning. In addition, AOC employees help CII conduct this research including PPM employees Robert Mitrocsak and Brendan Robinson. One example of this research is Robinson’s recent participation in developing an industry-leading report on risk assessment in capital projects.

“Working with these outside groups is all about improving the AOC so we can serve Congress and taxpayers more effectively and efficiently, while at the same time achieving our mission and enhancing our reputation for excellence,” said Franz.

— By Matt Guilfoyle