



*Councilmember Phil Mendelson's*

# At-Large Update

**Councilmember  
Phil Mendelson  
(At-Large)**

March 14, 2008

## Phil's Assessment of Public Safety in the District

Earlier this month councilmembers held a four hour "retreat" to discuss issues before the Council. In preparation, I prepared a general assessment of public safety – my views on how well the various public safety agencies are doing and what major problems they face.

Generally, the Mayor has given a high priority to public safety, perhaps second only to public education. His earliest appointments were in the area of public safety: Cathy Lanier as Chief of Police and Linda Singer as Attorney General. The Mayor provided increased FY 2008 funding in the public safety cluster. Additionally, the Mayor has utilized professional firms in national searches to find an FEMS chief as well as Chief Medical Examiner (the latter not yet being successful).

When Mayor Fenty took office the largest and most troubled public safety agency was the Fire and Emergency Services Department (FEMS). The handling of emergency medical services had been criticized repeatedly, epitomized by the coverage of David Rosenbaum's death. Now this agency has seen great improvement, although much still needs to be done.

Of the 18 agencies under the purview of the Public Safety and Judiciary Committee, only two public safety agencies have suffered significantly during the past 13 months: the Office of the Attorney

General (OAG) and the Office of Unified Communications (OUC). The OAG has lost much of its senior level management (we're on our fourth AG in 17 months and over half the deputy AGs have left), morale has declined, and the current AG is serving in an acting capacity. The position of AG here has the highest turnover rate in the country – by far.

The OUC has lost its focus as a public safety agency: it has acquired several agency call centers including the DMV and shifted non-emergency police calls to 911 in order to free up 311 as the number for the Mayor's non-public safety call center. OUC employee morale, not good 13 months ago, has gotten worse.

Further, in my view it was a mistake for Mayor Fenty to discontinue the position of Deputy Mayor for Public Safety. The challenges in the area of public safety, coupled with a need for constant direction from the highest level of government, require the full time focus of someone at the level of deputy mayor. Without this person, the resolution of many issues is prolonged – e.g., search for a new medical director, facilities relocation for the consolidated forensic lab, and coordination between the agencies.

There is much that needs to be done. But overall, I think progress has been made in the public safety cluster, with the exceptions noted above.

## Constituent Services Corner

The president of a community based organization in Southeast DC that provides job training skills to District residents contacted Councilmember Mendelson's office because she had not received program money from the District government. It got to the point where payroll could not be met.

Mendelson's office contacted the Office of the Chief Financial Officer (OCFO) right away, urging them to cut a check immediately to the organization for the amount due.

The OCFO quickly responded. They had been unaware that they indeed owed the organization back payments. They were able to swiftly process unpaid invoices totaling over \$84,000 and get the payment to the community based organization in time so that payroll was met in the nick of time.

Remember, whether you are one individual or representing an organization of 100, dealing with the District government can be unnerving. Don't hesitate to call Councilmember Mendelson's office – our staff has your back.

## E-Cycling Event Scheduled

**When:** April 26th, 9am-3pm

**Where:** Carter Barron Parking Lot  
16th & Kennedy Sts., NW

**Why:** Because you have paint, batteries, electronics, auto fluids, and other stuff you don't want to just put in the trash! For more: [dpw.dc.gov](http://dpw.dc.gov).



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**[www.dccouncil.us/  
mendelson/index/htm](http://www.dccouncil.us/mendelson/index/htm)**

### Upcoming Hearings of the Judiciary Committee

**Monday, March 17th at 11:00am**

*Hearing Room 123*

**Public Oversight Hearing on:**

The Proposed MPD Evidence Warehouse Lease

**Friday, April 4th at 10:00am**

*Council Chamber*

**Budget Oversight Hearing on the:**

Department of Corrections, Metropolitan Police Department & Forensics Lab, Office of Unified Communications, and Office of the Attorney General

**Tuesday, April 8th at 10:00am**

*Hearing Room 412*

**Budget Oversight Hearing on the:**

Homeland Security & Emergency Management Agency, Office of the Chief Medical Examiner, Fire & Emergency Medical Services, Office of Administrative Hearings

**Tuesday, April 22nd at 10:00am**

*Hearing Room 412*

**Budget Oversight Hearing on the:**

DC National Guard, Corrections Information Council, Commission on Judicial Disabilities & Tenure, Commission on Judicial Nominations, Sentencing & Criminal Code Revision Commission, Office of Police Complaints, Office of Victims Services, Justice Grants Administration, Criminal Justice Coordinating Council

All hearings are held at the John A. Wilson Building  
1350 Pennsylvania Avenue, NW

### **Mendelson Announces Town Halls on Tax Issues**

Councilmember Mendelson recently announced a series of five Town Hall meetings focusing on the District's recently announced tax assessments. The workshops are designed to both educate residents on the tax assessment process as well as help taxpayers utilize the appeal process.

"My colleagues and I on the Council have led the fight to ease the tax burden on residents, but in some areas, taxes are still on the rise, and people still have questions", stated Mendelson. "Taxpayers have the right to appeal – and these Town Halls will help them understand how to navigate that process."

Representatives from the District's Office of Tax and Revenue will join Mendelson at each of the workshops to answer questions. This year's series of workshops marks the sixth consecutive year that Mendelson has held such meetings throughout the District.

"Even though assessments have not increased as much as in years past, property taxes are still of major concern to residents," acknowledged Mendelson. "Not only is knowledge power, but it can also equate to substantial savings. Learning the ins and outs of the assessment and appeals process will ensure that residents don't pay more than their fair share."

According to the District's Office of Tax and Revenue, residential property assessments have slowed in growth compared to recent years, rising about 2.3%. Residents have until April 1, 2008 to begin the appeals process if they feel the proposed 2009 assessment does not reflect the market value of their property.

### Upcoming Town Halls on Taxes

**March 18th—Near Southwest**

MPD 1st District HQ

415 4th Street, SW

6:30-7:45pm

**March 20th—Anacostia/Barry Farms**

Washington Highlands Library

115 Atlantic Street, SW

6:30-7:45pm

**March 22nd—Woodridge/Brentwood**

Woodridge Library

1801 Hamlin Street, NE

11:00am-12:00pm

**March 24th—Marshall Heights/Lilly Ponds**

Marshall Heights Community Development Corp.

3939 Benning Road, NE

6:30-7:45pm

**March 25th—Chevy Chase**

Chevy Chase Community Center

5601 Connecticut Avenue, NW

6:30-7:45pm