



COUNCIL OF THE DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA

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ZACHARY PARKER
COUNCILMEMBER, WARD 5

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Transportation and the Environment

February 28, 2024

The Honorable Muriel Bowser
Mayor of the District of Columbia
John A. Wilson Building
1350 Pennsylvania Avenue NW, Suite 300
Washington, DC 20004

Dear Mayor Bowser:

It is my privilege to submit recommendations on behalf of Ward 5 residents and businesses as you prepare to transmit your proposed Fiscal Year 2025 Budget and Financial Plan to the Council of the District of Columbia. My recommendations are based on my engagement with residents since assuming office last year as well as direct consultation with Ward 5 civic leaders, Advisory Neighborhood Commissioners, and neighbors through a virtual budget request form, and a Ward 5 Budget Engagement Forum that I held on February 2, 2024. As I expect this to be a year in which the District continues to face a tight financial environment, I propose ways to increase revenue and reduce costs along with proposals for new spending or budget enhancements. On behalf of Ward 5's more than 90,000 residents, I respectfully request your assistance in funding these priorities.

Support Ward 5's public schools, libraries, and recreation centers and invest in youth programs and childcare providers. Having spent my career in education, the needs of District and Ward 5 youth are always top of mind. To lift children out of poverty, invest in their futures, provide them with the educational and recreational opportunities they deserve, I recommend the following investments:

- ✓ **Reduce child poverty and childcare costs by investing \$60-75 million in a District Child Tax Credit.** Last year, I introduced the District Child Tax Credit Amendment Act, and I am thrilled that the Tax Revision Commission is in the process of endorsing an even more generous version of this proposal that would provide a fully refundable credit of \$1,000 for every child ages 17 and under. This fully refundable credit would be available to most D.C. families and phased out gradually at higher incomes. If passed, the Child Tax Credit will reach nearly 125,000 District youth under the age of 18 while reducing child poverty rates by more than 10%. To fund this proposal, I am advocating that the District move forward with several other proposals advanced by the Tax Revision Commission that exclusively benefit the District's wealthiest residents, including; (1) taxing electric vehicles at the same rate as other cars and trucks (\$20

million in additional revenue); (2) limiting the income tax exemption for municipal bond interest to bonds issued by the District (\$15 million in additional revenue); and (3) increasing the income tax floor on itemized deductions to at least 7.5% of adjusted gross income (at least \$26 million in additional revenue).

- ✓ **Fund small-capital projects at Ward 5 schools to address critical facility needs and maintain existing funding for capital projects at the Langdon Recreation Center, Crummell School, Theodore Hagens Cultural Center, and Harry Thomas Recreation Center (among others).** Ward 5’s school-based capital needs include fully renovating Langdon Elementary’s cafeteria; repairing the roof and insulating HVAC pipes at Luke C Moore High School; replacing and sealing the roof at Wheatley Education Campus, especially on the west side of the building; and renovating the annex at McKinley High School for use as an engineering lab.
- ✓ **Maintain funding for a D.C. Public Library (DCPL) branch library in the Edgewood and Eckington neighborhoods.** I recently questioned Director Reyes-Gavilan about why construction for a new Ward 5 library is delayed despite funding being fully available. I recommend that DCPL, the Department of General Services (DGS), and the Deputy Mayor for Planning and Economic Development (DMPED) work together to accelerate efforts to identify a location for this facility to fill current service gaps along southern Ward 5.
- ✓ **Address deficiencies at Ward 5 DPR facilities. Maintenance and upkeep of Ward 5’s recreation centers are paramount.** My office regularly fields complaints about the condition of Turkey Thicket Recreation and North Michigan Park Recreation Center, especially. I recommend that DGS expand its preventative maintenance campaign to DPR facilities and play spaces for children. Additionally, neighbors in Edgewood continue to express concern over the availability of the Edgewood Recreation Center for neighborhood youth. Routinely, citywide sports teams and groups monopolize recreation space that could otherwise provide Ward 5 youth positive recreational outlets. What’s more, I recommend you expand community-facing programming at Edgewood Recreation Center and New York Avenue Recreation Center. Finally, I recommend you use DPR’s Ready2Play Equity Framework to address funding needs at Ward 5 facilities, such as Bunker Hill Park, Dunbar Aquatic Center, Joe Cole Recreation Center, Keene Field, New York Avenue Recreation Center, and Noyes Park.
- ✓ **Dedicate \$558,000 to school improvement efforts.** Last year, I introduced the School Improvement Amendment Act of 2023 with Chairman Mendelson meant to accelerate student learning at the District’s lowest performing schools through targeted outreach and support from the Office of the State Superintendent for Education (OSSE). The legislation aligns with Superintendent Grant’s strategic vision and would bring the District in alignment with states across the country providing ongoing, targeted support to schools.
- ✓ **Continue to invest in the Early Childhood Educator Pay Equity Fund.** Nearly 4,000 early childhood educators, most of whom are Black and brown women, have received supplemental wage increases since the launch of the District’s Pay Equity Fund in 2022. I recommend that the District continue to invest in this program to strengthen early childhood teacher pay and to ensure that the program is structured to support employee

retention by maintaining eligibility for more experienced educators. In addition, OSSE should take additional steps to ensure receipt of pay equity funds does not cause early childhood educators to face benefits cliffs elsewhere.

- ✓ **Expand food access and nutritional programing at participating public and public charter schools.** I recommend dedicating \$8 million to the Universal Free School Meals Amendment Act of 2023, a relatively modest investment for the direct impact the legislation will have on student hunger in the District. Additionally, I recommend enhancing the FreshFarm FoodPrints program that serves Ward 5 schools such as Burroughs and Langley Elementary Schools.
- ✓ **Ensure that uniform per-student funding follows students who transfer mid-year.** An inherent bias in the District’s school funding system is that some schools have little financial incentive to retain students after count day because the per-student funding they received is not jeopardized if their students leave mid-year to attend a by-right DCPS school. To address this concern, I recommend that the DME establish a process for adjusting upward by-right DCPS schools that have an uptick in enrollment and considering a budgetary penalty for any local education agency that ends the year with fewer than 5% of students than it started in two consecutive years.

Invest holistically in public safety as the District’s most pressing priority. Through our shared efforts, we have made progress in addressing violent crime—as a result, violent crime is trending downward in Ward 5 as it is citywide—but there is a need to deepen our investments in our public safety apparatus and expand our focus on violence prevention. Therefore, I recommend targeted investments in the following areas:

- ✓ **Fully fund the District’s public safety laws.** I continue to work with my colleagues to pass legislation to help combat the unacceptable levels of violence the District experienced in 2023—including the Secure DC Omnibus Amendment Act of 2024. Previously, the Council passed the Comprehensive Police and Justice Reform Amendment Act of 2022 and the Second Chance Amendment Act of 2021. To continue driving down violent crime, I recommend you fully fund these laws as well as accelerate your office’s development of a comprehensive whole-of-government public safety strategy.
- ✓ **Fund additional fixed and temporary cameras for the Metropolitan Police Department (MPD).** I appreciate the CCTV cameras deployed to Ward 5’s Third, Fourth, and Fifth Districts. Neighbors continue to request cameras at intersections plagued with drug dealing or gun violence as they see the cameras as a tool to improve case closure rates and improve real-time MPD response. Therefore, I recommend \$1 million for additional CCTV cameras to aid in bolstering MPD’s real-time response.
- ✓ **Increase Office of Unified Communications (OUC) 911 call taker and dispatcher salaries.** I was dismayed to learn through a recent OUC performance oversight hearing that District’s 911 call takers only make approximately \$49,000 a year while dispatchers make slightly more at roughly \$70,000. By better compensating the individuals who fill these critical roles, we can make better progress filling longstanding vacancies that have negatively impacted the agency and, ultimately, District residents. Therefore, I

recommend that you work with the union and gradually increase OUC base salaries by 20-30%.

- ✓ **Invest in the Ward 5 Pathways Program.** The Pathways Program is a transitional employment program that aims to decrease participants' involvement in the criminal justice system and improve their employment, education, and training outcomes. We know that economic opportunity is directly connected to the likelihood of a person becoming justice-involved. Given the Pathways Program's success, I recommend investing \$250K for a Ward 5 Pathways Program with three cohorts for Ward 5 at risk and second chance young adult residents.
- ✓ **Fund requirements codified pursuant to the School Safety Enhancement Act of 2023.** I introduced the School Safety Enhancement Act of 2023 last year in response to incident reports and capacity constraints I heard from Ward 5 school communities. A portion of that bill creating a School Safety Enhancement Committee was adopted by the Council last budget cycle, and under the leadership of Deputy Mayor for Education Paul Kihn has produced recommendations for DC's school communities. To ensure these recommendations are promptly acted upon and costs are not passed on to schools, I recommend that you devote \$5 million for enhancements in school safety staffing and coordination while making available the necessary agency-level guidance and support.
- ✓ **Expand and improve the efficacy of the District's Safe Passage program.** The number of juveniles who are at risk of committing or being victimized by crime requires us to expand coverage of the Safe Passage Program, a critical tool to prevent violence involving students as they travel to and from school. Currently, much of Ward 5 does not have coverage under the Safe Passage Program despite longstanding issues at chronic hotspots—including the Fort Totten Metro Station. Therefore, I recommend a gradual expansion of the Safe Passage program, targeting Ward 5, 7, and 8, by increasing funding by \$1 million/year. I also recommend improving the value of this program through more frequent school leader convenings and data and information sharing at the school level. This is a key recommendation I expect will soon receive the formal endorsement of the School Safety Enhancement Committee that with the help of my council colleagues I established last budget cycle.
- ✓ **Support Community Trust-Building on North Capitol Street.** My office has been facilitating a multi-stakeholder group of neighbors to address long-standing issues of substance abuse, lack-of-trust in government service providers, and disinvestment along North Capitol, specifically between Florida and New York Avenues. Building off of your Safe Commercial Corridor Hub Pilots, please put \$1M in the budget to fund a community-led pilot for a North Capitol Trust Builders day center and coordination hub to provide an indoor space for socialization and consistent engagement around healthier choices while connecting and coordinating community leaders to DHS, DBH, and the many community organizations that operate in this corridor.

Deepen support for Ward 5 businesses and commercial corridors. While the District is in the midst of a robust campaign to support the economic future of Downtown D.C., businesses and commercial corridors that are critical to Ward 5 cannot simply be left to fend for themselves. I recommend the following investments to ensure that the District's comeback plan is inclusive and equitable:

- ✓ **Establish a Rhode Island Ave (RIA) NE Reimagination Project to spur new business development along the corridor.** Despite RIA’s designation as a retail priority area and DC Squared’s valiant efforts to support area businesses, the corridor deserves more investment. As the District considers significant investments to ensure the future vitality of downtown, so too should we consider opportunities to invest in this critical neighborhood corridor. As Deputy Mayor Albert recently attested to at our last Mayor-Council breakfast, business and retail districts built within neighborhoods and which contain a diverse mix of housing, retail, and recreational opportunities (for example Ward 5’s Union Market District) fared better during the pandemic and continue to weather financial pressures facing DC better than the downtown corridor. There is an opportunity to invest in the activation, branding, and placemaking of the RIA corridor in using similar strategies being proposed in the District’s downtown recovery plans.
- ✓ **Invest \$250-\$350K in a Ward 5 business center to provide local businesses and entrepreneurs with technical assistance and grant application support.** Last year, I introduced the Ward 5 Small Business Development Center Establishment Act of 2023 in recognition of the findings of the Disparity Study commissioned by DMPED about the District’s contracting and procurement processes. As this legislation works its way through the Council’s Committee on Business and Economic Development, I recommend you dedicate funding so we can support Ward 5 businesses and entrepreneurs.
- ✓ **Fund micro grants for individuals interested in local trade professions to spur business development.** I applaud your focus on expanding the District’s Career and Technical Education (CTE) offerings with the development of the CTE Advanced Technical Center in Ward 5’s Eckington community for high school students. To build on this work, I recommend developing micro grants in cosmetology, barbering, and similar fields that can serve as scholarships for individuals seeking new professional paths post high school. Dudley Beauty College, a District business in operation for more than 25 years, says they regularly have to turn interested applicants away who cannot afford the cost of tuition.

Streamline District services to assist vulnerable residents. Too often, District services fall short of what vulnerable communities like our seniors, LGBTQIA+, and tenants need to prosper. While we must fight on many fronts to ensure that those needs are adequately addressed, I am highlighting a few recommendations that will help move the needle:

- ✓ **Fund laws and programs targeting senior nutrition.** Feeding America’s State of Senior Hunger Report published last year continues to show that the District leads the country in the number of seniors facing food insecurity. I trust you agree that this is unacceptable. Therefore, I recommend that you fund the No Senior Hungry Omnibus Amendment Act of 2022 and the Senior Nutrition, Health, and Well-Being Equity Act of 2022.
- ✓ **Improve property tax relief (Schedule H) for lower-income homeowners and renters.** The District provides a refundable income tax credit to residents whose property tax liability exceeds a certain percentage of their income—a policy intended to protect households with lower incomes from financial stress or displacement cause by property taxes. A recent study by the Office of Revenue Analysis shows that this policy predominantly benefits renters under the age of 35 with incomes between \$25,000 and

\$51,000 as well as homeowners over the age of 65 living on fixed income such as social security benefits or pensions.¹ Schedule H should be improved by increasing the maximum credit available to protect residents with rapidly appreciating properties and by expanding eligibility for relief.

- ✓ **Conduct a study of co-living and inter-generational housing.** The District continues to face housing costs that place extraordinary burdens on our residents, particularly seniors who live on a fixed income. We need to expand the options available to seniors across the District and especially in Ward 5, which is why I am recommending that the Department of Housing and Community Development and the Department of Aging and Community Living be tasked with studying existing affordable, senior intergenerational housing and co-living models, identifying potential incentives for successful co-living arrangements, and developing recommendations for a pilot program to test such incentives in the District.
- ✓ **Fund Emergency Rental Assistance Program (ERAP) and the Housing Purchase Assistance Program (HPAP) at levels commensurate with need.** In each of the last two fiscal years, programs critical to preventing the displacement of renters and expanding homeownership opportunities have run out of money because demand far outstrips the funding levels of these programs. Accordingly, I am recommending significant increases to the budgets for both programs.
- ✓ **Devote \$250K to preserve Black LGBTQIA+ history and spur business development during World Pride.** As the District plans to host World Pride in 2025, it is important that the District leverages the entire LGBTQIA+ community. That is why I recommend you fund the Black LGBTQ History Preservation Establishment Amendment Act of 2024, which I introduced last year and seeks to document and share the rich history of Black queer Washingtonians in time for World Pride. Additionally, I recommend you permit short-term leases for businesses who may be able to help activate the District’s downtown corridor for World Pride who may not have a long-term interest in occupying retail space.
- ✓ **Maintain LGBTQIA+ services and support.** I recommend that you continue to commit \$200,000 annually to assist in subsidizing the annual costs to maintain the District LGBTQIA+ Community Center and funding 20 additional LRSP vouchers for LGBTQIA+ youth and seniors at \$450,000. Additionally, I recommend you increase funding by \$600,000 for the Office of Victim Services and Justice Grants (OVSJG) to expand services to address the increase in domestic violence in the LGBTQIA+ community.
- ✓ **Establish and fund a senior level environment justice position at the Department of Energy and the Environment (DOEE).** Although DOEE has taken steps towards centering equity in the work, the agency could benefit from a senior level position that is focused on coordinating efforts across the agency and the District government to advance environmental justice. The position—which should report directly to the Director—

¹ Daniel Muhammad, DC's Homeowner and Renter Property Tax Credit Program: Who Benefits, Nov. 27, 2023, <https://ora-cfo.dc.gov/blog/dcs-homeowner-and-renter-property-tax-credit-program-who-benefits>.

would ensure that the needs of overburdened communities in Wards 5, 7, and 8 are raised at the highest level of the agency and would empower DOEE to engage with other agencies who have a role to play in addressing and preventing environmental harms.

- ✓ **Make bulk pickup, composting, and other specialized services provided by the Department of Public Works (DPW) available to District residents in residences with four or more units.** The District has a legacy of only providing certain services to residents with three or fewer units. While placing the burden of regular trash and recycling pickup for larger multi-family units on private property owners makes sense, the same is not true for DPW’s specialized services, which should be available to all residents regardless of what kind of home they inhabit. For that reason, I recommend funding the expansion of bulk pickup, composting, and similar DPW services to serve all residents.

Invest in road safety and recreational trails across Ward 5. Safer roads continue to be a top priority for Ward 5 neighbors as evidenced by the fact that they have filed more traffic safety inputs than the residents of any other Ward. Those demands reflect real needs. Ward 5 was the site of twelve traffic fatalities in 2023 (more than any other ward) and over one thousand crashes that resulted in an injury (second only to Ward 7 and four times the number of injury crashes experienced in Ward 3). To address this public health crisis, I am recommending the following investments:

- ✓ **Establish a neighborhood corridor transformation team at the District Department of Transportation (DDOT).** In response to Council efforts to fund safety projects in recent years, DDOT has complained that it lacks staff resources to design and implement quick-build corridor projects such as road diets, neighborhood bikeways, and one-way conversions. Yet if DDOT fails to find ways to scale and speed up delivery of these projects, the District will never reach its safety, equity, and climate goals. For these reasons, I am requesting recurring funds for three FTEs who can focus on improving mobility with a focus on corridor-length interventions to improve safety and mobility in predominantly residential neighborhoods.
- ✓ **Accelerate the implementation of bus priority on Rhode Island Avenue and begin the design and planning process for a major capital improvement project.** Rhode Island Avenue is an extremely unsafe corridor that runs through the heart of Ward 5. Despite being identified as a “high injury network” corridor in DDOT’s 2022 Vision Zero report, Rhode Island Avenue is one of the only such corridors not to be the subject of a major capital project.² I am therefore requesting that such a project be funded and that DDOT accelerate the implementation of bus priority on the corridor using its quick-build approach that can bring about mobility and safety improvements in the near term while a longer-term solution is studied.
- ✓ **Expand bikeshare options near UDC’s Lamond-Riggs Campus.** In 2021, DDOT announced that the agency planned to install a bikeshare station on the northwest corner of South Dakota Avenue and Galloway Street NE. My understanding is that the agency

² DDOT should also continue to fund the design and construction of projects on other high injury network corridors in Ward 5, including North Capitol Street, Bladensburg Road, and New York Avenue. The designs for these projects should maximize mobility and safety.

has been having issues coming to an agreement with the property owner on that side of the street regarding placement of the station. With UDC's plan to grow campus enrollment to 3,000 students with over 100 faculty, I stand ready to help get this station installed as soon as possible.

✓ **Close critical gaps in Ward 5's mobility priority and trail network by advancing the following projects:**

- **Improve safe passage between the communities separated by New York Avenue—especially on Brentwood Road and Montana Avenue.** New York Avenue and the rail tracks adjacent to it have the effect of dividing Ward 5 in two. East of Florida Avenue, there are only three corridors on which residents can travel between communities. While DDOT is exploring improvements to Bladensburg Road, insufficient attention is being paid to Brentwood Road and Montana Avenue—two exceedingly dangerous corridors that have been the site of numerous fatal and major injury crashes. Montana Avenue can and should be improved in conjunction with the New York Avenue safety project; Brentwood Road should be prioritized for corridor-long treatments to reduce vehicle speeds and improve multimodal access.
- **Design a trail connection between the Metropolitan Branch Trail (MBT) at Fort Totten and the future Prince George's County Connector.** In 2023, the Maryland-National Capital Park and Planning Commission secured funding from the U.S. Department of Transportation to develop a shared-use path between the Northwest Branch Trail of the Anacostia Riverwalk Trail in Chillum to Avondale Community Park, which borders Eastern Avenue in the District. To complement this project, DDOT should begin planning its own trail connection to the Metropolitan Branch Trail along Eastern Avenue and Gallatin Street N.E.
- **Design a trail connection between the planned Arboretum bridge and the Carver Langston community.** DDOT is close to commencing construction on the Arboretum bridge, which will connect the National Arboretum in Ward 5 to Kenilworth Park in Ward 7. While this infrastructure will open up more green space to communities on both sides of the river, access on the Ward 5 side will be limited to Arboretum hours, which are only 8 am to 5pm. DDOT should accelerate efforts to design a trail to connect the bridge directly to Ward 5 communities.
- **Accelerate the design of the protected bike lane project on Taylor Street N.E.** While the District has made strides to connect many parts of the city to a protected and connected bike lane network, many parts of Ward 5 are being left behind. I stand with neighbors who are advocating for the Taylor Street N.E. project to move forward expeditiously so that more Ward 5 residents can enjoy safe, environmentally friendly, and active trips by bike and scooter.
- **Connect the Fort Lincoln and Gateway communities to the Anacostia Riverwalk Trail.** The forthcoming replacement of the New York Avenue Bridge presents a critical opportunity to connect the Fort Lincoln and Gateway communities to the Anacostia Riverwalk Trail and the recreational amenities

adjacent to it. I am therefore requesting that the scope of any replacement of the New York Avenue Bridge include a trail crossing that serves local residents.

Offset spending increases by fairly taxing wealth, cutting wasteful District programs, and increasing the efficiency of the District's existing spending. I am mindful that revenue projections are likely to remain flat at a time when many government costs are increasing. In addition to the funding mechanisms outlined above in conjunction with my proposal for a District Child Tax Credit, I also recommend the following:

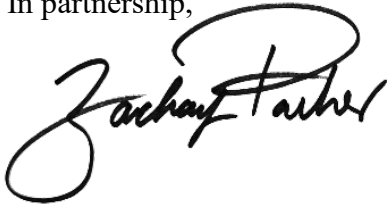
- ✓ **Establish a separate capital gains tax to more fairly tax the income of the wealthiest District residents.** The District continues to be a city of haves and have nots. In a budget year in which significant cuts are possible to our social safety net as well as critical public investments like our teachers, affordable housing, and public safety, we have an obligation to explore new ways to fund those expenses. I believe that one of the most equitable ways to do so would be to establish a standalone local capital gains tax—a form of wealth creation that is available to a small segment of the District's population and that is tax by the federal government at a lower rate than other income. Depending on how this tax is structured, it could raise over \$100 million annually.
- ✓ **End the District's sports betting contract that was awarded without undergoing competitive bidding process and that has underperformed every year since its inception.** The District's sports betting contract is set to expire this summer. This \$215 million non-competitive contract was awarded in 2019 and has underperformed every year since. Accordingly, I recommend that the Office of Lottery and Gaming let this contract expire, open up a new contract for competitive bidding, and ensure that District taxpayers enjoy the revenue that should be expected from permitting sports betting.
- ✓ **Eliminate wasteful Department of For Hire Vehicle programs that do not provide substantial benefits to District taxpayers.** The District's Department of For Hire Vehicles runs several transportation programs of questionable value, including DC Neighborhood Connect, Transport DC, and DC SchoolConnect. While the intent behind some of these programs is commendable, dedicated funding for single passenger vehicle services that are poorly advertised rather than using those resources to invest more in a unified public transportation system is inefficient. Where a community has special needs, District agencies should partner with WMATA to find solutions via Metro Access or adjustments to MetroBus service.
- ✓ **Pause agency fleet purchases and conduct a government-wide audit of vehicle needs.** To close its budget gap, one of the initiatives WMATA undertook was to conduct an audit of its non-revenue vehicle fleet to determine whether fleet investments are actually necessary. That audit paved the way for WMATA to reduce its fleet by 10% overall in FY 2023 and FY2024. Numerous agencies across the District have significant annual capital expenses for fleet replacement, yet there appears to be little demonstration of the need for these significant investments—including whether access to a vehicle is necessary for the work being performed.
- ✓ **Require performance improvement plans for the bottom ten percent of employees at agencies that are not meeting expectations.** While the vast majority of District employees are hardworking, dedicated public servants, there are always opportunities to

improve performance in any large organization. Regardless of whether budgets are fat or lean, I support efforts by District agencies to ensure that District taxpayers are getting value for money. Especially where agency performance is substandard, we should seek better results from low performing employees and make changes if their performance does not improve.

- ✓ **Modify HSEMA requirements for special events to cut down on festival, parade, and open-streets programming costs, much of which goes to overtime for MPD and DPW employees.** As the District looks to activate public spaces—including in conjunction with the Downtown Action Plan—one area for cost savings are the onerous and in some cases unnecessary requirements that HSEMA places on event planners. Investing in more street barriers like those deployed by the Adams Morgan Partnership BID and by D.C. United at Audi Field could significantly reduce the cost of placemaking street activations. Where possible, street closures could also be made permanent so that money does not need to be wasted placing and removing barriers on a regular basis.

Thank you for considering these recommendations. I look forward to our work together to deliver on these and other priorities for Ward 5 and District residents.

In partnership,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Zachary Parker". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large, looping initial "Z".

Councilmember Zachary Parker