

GOVERNMENT OF THE DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA
DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH



Office of the Director

April 11, 2007

Dan Tangherlini, City Administrator
Government of the District of Columbia
Office of the City Administrator
1350 Pennsylvania Avenue, NW, Suite 310
Washington, DC 20004

Re: Wellness Opportunity Zones

Dear Mr. Tangherlini: ^{Dan}

The Mayor's *100 Days and Beyond: 2007 Action Plan for the District of Columbia* outlines the following goal, "Evaluate the costs and benefits of establishing wellness opportunity zones as a way to build healthy neighborhoods." The concept of "wellness opportunity zones" is a new concept in the public health field. The University of Colorado has embraced the "wellness zone" approach whereby they bring student health, recreation and counseling services to their students in one place; nutrition counseling, fitness activities, stress management and various health screenings are all available in the designated "wellness zone." The more relevant definition for the District of Columbia is the one provided by the Consumer Health Foundation in their 2006 report titled *Speaking Up and Speaking Out for Health: A Community Call to Action to Improve Health and Health Care in the Washington, D.C. Metropolitan Region*:

Designate neighborhood Wellness Opportunity Zones where incentives are provided for innovative connections between all public and private policies, programs, and practices affecting health and well-being.

Residents have a vision for healthy communities where there are grocery stores selling fresh fruits and vegetables; clean, safe parks and other places to walk and exercise; affordable housing; reliable public transportation; and businesses that pay employees a living wage. New strategies are needed to ensure that all of our communities reap the benefits of the tremendous growth and development occurring in our region. Local governments should designate neighborhood Wellness Opportunity Zones in areas where residents' health, well-being, and potential are at greatest risk. In these areas, financial and other incentives would be available for projects that seek to improve residents' quality of life and the health of the community. Government policies, regulations, and programs would reinforce these actions.

I met with Margaret K. O'Bryon, President and CEO, of the Consumer Health Foundation to discuss a number of our shared priorities including the development of wellness opportunity zones.

The health benefits of creating such zones are evident at first glance – fitness activity and better nutritional choices *alone* improve health outcomes. Combined with safe recreational hubs, affordable housing and easily accessible public transportation, fitness activity and wise nutritional choices will create healthy communities with vastly different health outcomes for District residents. However, it is apparent that in order to create wellness opportunity zones as defined, the District will also need to mobilize its public safety, housing and development sector and engage private and non-profit entities for assistance.

The Department of Health recognizes the important opportunity to affect the health of our citizenry through creation of wellness opportunity zones and stands ready to assist. We would be happy to provide zip-code based health outcome data to help identify the parts of the city where wellness opportunity zones are most needed from a public health perspective and where they are most likely to make an effect on health outcomes. The Department of Health also stands ready to provide various health screening and counseling services once the wellness opportunity zones are created.

Please feel free to contact me with any questions. I look forward to your guidance.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Gregg A. Paine". The signature is stylized and cursive, with a large initial "G" and "P".

Gregg A. Paine, MD, MPA
Director and Chief Health Officer