



Readiness, Response, Recovery:
A Discussion with Members of the
D.C. Homeland Security Commission

September 28, 2017

Panelists

Charles Allen, D.C. Councilmember

Kathy Patterson, D.C. Auditor

Brian Baker, Interim Director, Homeland Security and
Emergency Management Agency

Philip McNamara, Homeland Security Commissioner

Susan Reinertson, Homeland Security Commissioner

Rebecca Katz, PhD, MPH, Homeland Security Commissioner

Barbara Childs-Pair, Former Commissioner

John Contestabile, Former Commissioner

A Letter Report by the Office of the District of Columbia Auditor

**D.C. Council Committee on the Judiciary and Public Safety
and
Office of the D.C. Auditor**

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D.C. Homeland Security Commission**

August 30, 2017

The panel met in the John A. Wilson Building, Room 412, 1350 Pennsylvania Avenue, N.W., Washington, D.C., at 9:16 a.m., Councilmember Charles Allen, Chairperson of the D.C. Council Committee on the Judiciary and Public Safety presiding.

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Welcome and opening remarks

Councilmember Allen: Welcome, and good morning, everybody. Thank you for being here, especially, Kathy Patterson, our former colleague and former chairman of this Committee, and now, helping to pull this conversation together in her duties as Auditor.

Part of what we are trying to do is have a conversation with Homeland Security Commission members, both past and present, to help think through a series of recommendations posed from the Auditor's view and from my perspective, and overall for the city, of ways that we can improve the security preparedness for the District.

It is never a question of maybe there is a threat. There is a constant threat as the nation's capital, and we need to have a constant state of vigilance and preparedness.

We're blessed with no shortage of experts, great thinkers and people like yourselves that we can draw on who have a great amount of expertise that we can count on to help formulate our strategies.

My hope is that the Commission has a really valuable input in helping District agencies and our city think about things they hadn't otherwise thought about and helping to create partnerships with HSEMA [D.C.

Homeland Security and Emergency Management Agency.] Helping to think about ways that we as a city are going to be prepared.

There is a host of things that we have to be aware of. Certainly right now [Aug. 30, 2017] our thoughts are in Houston and with the tens of thousands of people being impacted not just for a couple of months, but for an entire generation in the same way that Katrina has had a generational impact on New Orleans.

In recent years we've had an earthquake, we've had our fair share of hurricanes and flooding, and the derecho. Other natural events will test our city and it's important to think through how we can be resilient.

We also have what I hate to call traditional threats, but they are the threats we face, whether we talk about cybersecurity or talk about what we've unfortunately seen in many cities in Europe where we have had attacks from cars or a truck—all threats that are real and are not completely foreign to us.

And a concern that I bring when I wear my Ward 6 hat as well as my chairman's hat to, is our waterfront. We are a city on two rivers, and while we increasingly are rediscovering our waterfront, we also have threats that can be water based.

With the partnership with HSEMA, the agency is starting to lay out a more strategic perspective of their capacity and their responsiveness, including a realistic threat analysis that looks at our waterfront and how we prepare in the event of a water-based threat.

I appreciate everyone taking the time to join us to be a part of this important conversation. I hope that it's going to help me and the Commission think through recommendations of how we move forward. And I really appreciate everyone's service, again both past and present.

We have Brian Baker, who is the Interim Director for the District's Homeland Security and Emergency Management Agency [HSEMA] joining us. We have our current commissioners, Dr. Rebecca Katz, Susan Reinertson, and Phil McNamara. And we have two former commissioners, Barbara Childs-Pair and John Contestabile and then again, our D.C. Auditor, Kathy Patterson. So with that, let me turn it over to Kathy.

Background on the Commission

Auditor Patterson: Thank you, Councilmember. And I want to give a little background and then get into the meat of today's discussion which will focus on the Commission and then the issues.

On September 11, 2001, I was in the chair that Charles now occupies as chair of the Judiciary Committee with oversight for emergency preparedness. In the months after that event, the Council and this Committee worked with Mayor Williams and his team on a number of pieces of legislation.

We wrote and approved the Omnibus Anti-Terrorism Act of 2002 including mitigation strategies, giving the mayor additional emergency powers and creating a local crime of terrorism. We did a second round of legislation in 2006 and the final title of that bill was the "Homeland Security Risk Reduction and Preparedness Amendment Act of 2006," which, among other things, authorized the Homeland Security Commission.

The Commission itself didn't come into being for a while. There was some resistance in the Fenty administration, and there was a proposal to eliminate the Commission on the theory that current government employees were essentially doing everything that the Commission would otherwise have done. I want to read from a report that was done in 2009 by the Office of the D.C. Auditor which looked at the 2006 law and concluded that the Mayor hadn't complied by creating the Commission.

The Council Committee report on that proposal said that the Commission:

“...was designed to be a formal and permanent mechanism that would use the professional expertise of individuals outside the government to help assure the safety of all who live and work in the nation's capital. And its major purpose is to bring forward issues that are new and unrecognized as a failsafe in the event that any future District government is inattentive to security needs.”

The Commission is a value-add, adding on to the good work by those in the District of Columbia government.

Ensuring the Commission is effective

Auditor Patterson: One goal of the conversation today is ask is there anything to revisit that would make this Commission more effective. And then we will get into some of the issues that you, who are current commissioners, can take up going forward. This is not intended to replace a meeting of the Commission where you will do the serious work going forward, but is a marker in time of where are we with the Commission

So the first thing I'd like to ask is: what do you think has been accomplished thus far? There have been a couple of reports issued. What do you think has worked well?

Ms. Childs-Pair: With the first annual report in 2013, we took a look at cybersecurity. The way that we did this was to look at the number of issues within the Homeland Security spectrum. We held discussions with the director at that particular time, Chris [Geldart], and asked, “What is the first thing that we should focus on?”

So cybersecurity was the agenda item for that particular year or year and a half and looking at the District's vulnerabilities and assessing the needs. We did a lot of tours, received a lot of briefings, did a lot of interviews.

A major accomplishment—one of the recommendations we made was to hire a chief information technology security officer and that has been implemented. We looked at employees and how they look at threats and how to ensure that you educate them and ensuring that the message is out there about what you can do to protect yourself.

And I can say since I've been at HSEMA [from 1973-2007, last three years as director] I've seen a lot of those come out. Guidance like, “don't open this email” or “here are some steps you can take to ensure that you protect yourself from cybersecurity.” That's one of the major accomplishments from that particular time. I'll let Dr. Katz talk about the public health piece.

Dr. Katz: Following the cybersecurity report, the Commission decided to take on pandemic preparedness, which was when I was asked to join. I hope that the work that we did on pandemic

preparedness speaks to the usefulness of the Commission, which is that we were able to independently interview different parts of the government, outside entities, including the hospital systems.

And the goal was to, I don't want to say validate, but to triangulate the information that we were getting from different agencies, from outside entities to identify where there were some significant gaps in communication. A question I have, though, is what comes out of that?

You know, we can write a report but then we don't implement. But I think that at least that experience proved to me the significant value in being able to come in as an independent group to be able to at least identify some of what we thought were significant gaps.

The Commission's focus

Auditor Patterson: Other thoughts on that? John?

Mr. Contestabile: This speaks to the focus of the Commission. Is the Commission more outside focused or more inside focused, and they're not mutually exclusive. You could focus on both. By that I mean outside focused in the sense of environmental scanning as to what issues we ought to be considering and caring about versus inside in terms of implementation and gaps between agencies.

The Commission has a pretty broad mandate. You could conceivably do both. The thing I think we struggled with when we were on the Commission, aside from just getting it established, which took a fair amount of time at the front end, was then how to make use of relatively limited resources. And so we were very careful to try not to bite off more than we could chew.

But this tension between thinking globally and looking externally versus looking more internally and agency-specific and gaps between agencies, there's some tension there. And I don't know that we have the answer. We just tried to strike the best balance we could.

Auditor Patterson: Now that I'm not a councilmember anymore, I can say, maybe that's a Council function to do the follow-up! Once you've put that report on the shelf, it's the Council's role to take it off and do something with it.

Mr. Contestabile: When we first requested to meet with agencies, there was some reluctance because it was like "who is this Homeland Security Commission and what do they want with us?"

But I think at least when we were on the Commission, we were able to assure them that we didn't really "have a dog in the fight," and we were trying to do a straight-up analysis of what is currently happening. And it actually gave them a platform or a venue to express some of the things that had perhaps been eating them as well, in terms of gaps and shortfalls.

I think we were pretty successful. I think it's really important to not have an adversarial relationship with the agencies and to do the best to try to maintain a collegial one.

Commission recommendations and accountability

Mr. McNamara: Thank you, Ms. Patterson and Councilmember Allen. I'm the newbie at the table. I was nominated by the Mayor in, I guess, June and confirmed by the Council in July. So I sit here having

read a lot about the Commission, having undergone my confirmation hearing, but haven't yet attended my first Commission meeting.

But to answer your question of what worked well, what struck me, and I think this is probably a testament to the Commission members who helped author that 2015 report on pandemic preparedness—and I remember reading it back in May—was that it was actually chock-full of real, actionable recommendations.

And I think all of us have been in or around government long enough to know that you have these blue ribbon panels. And they come up with all of these, grandiose ideas and then it goes in some three-ring binder and sits on a shelf.

Congratulations to all of those around the table who were involved in the 2015 report on pandemic planning because it really is a roadmap: “we recommend you do this next...we recommend you do this next.” And those were real actionable things. To your point, that was done in 2015. I don't know if anyone has ever really looked at it to ask, have the agencies done this?

So I thank you for organizing today's discussion, both of you, and I am eager to get to work. I'm going to be probably in a listening mode this morning, but I'm excited to be here.

Councilmember Allen: Just a quick follow-up question to what I've heard some of you say so far. Do you believe it is the role of the Commission—so when a pandemic report is put together that outlines thoughtful strategic steps to take—do you believe it's the role of the Commission to then be in an evaluative role to come back a year or two later, and say, okay, did you do any of those things?

Or is it your expectation that, “we've provided you, the city or the Council that report.” And then it is, in my oversight capacity, the Committee's job to be checking in on these things? What is your perspective on the expectation after that body of work is created?

Dr. Katz: I've actually probably done much less reading about the Commission than you have in the past two months. My impression coming in on this was that with regard to our scope, we were not told that we were supposed to be following up. So at the end of the cyber report, there was a lot of anxiety among the Commission members that we want to be able to follow-up but we didn't have the authority to do so.

So that's my perspective. I think it would be a wonderful use of our time to be able to revisit some of these reports and say, you know, what has been done? But we haven't had that balance.

Mr. Contestabile: I agree with everything you said. I would just point out that this also illustrates the tension between outside and inside because the transparency with which the agencies deal with us might be related to how much they think that we're going to come back after them based on the report.

And it could unfold either way. There are pluses and minuses. The ability to have the authority to go back after the fact would give some muscle perhaps to recommendations, but it may come at the expense in the future of coordination and transparency.

My two cents would be that implementation may be best left to the Council and the Auditor and others.

If you treat the commission reports and recommendations as an audit report and you have, say for example, six recommendations, it's not a difficult thing necessarily—aside from workload and staffing—to include that in your audit cycle with the agencies to say, what have you done about this?

Auditor Patterson: One thing that I could mention here is how a couple of other entities work. The District has an Office of Risk Management. One of the things they are supposed to do, but I think this has been done more in the absence rather than actively doing it, is to catalog all of the recommendations that my office and the Office of the Inspector General makes and keep a running tally of all the things that have been recommended and then what happens with those recommendations.

My office does an annual compliance report of all of our recommendations. There is also a longstanding commission, the Child Fatality Review Committee, which looks at totally separate kinds of issues. And their authorizing legislation says that the Council is supposed to have a hearing on their annual report. It doesn't say what committee, but it just says the Council. The councilmember could do legislation that says and the Office of the Auditor shall report on the recommendations of the Homeland Security Commission.

With regard to the commission's cybersecurity report, we did a report on personally identifiable information this past year and used the recommendation for a CISO [Chief Information Security Officer] and noted that the administration at that point in time had just, I think, finished hiring the chief information security officer, as recommended several years earlier. So there are a couple of ways of looking at compliance.

Ms. Reinertson: I think it's interesting what John said. When I read the Act, I was looking for some metrics. I was looking for a little bit clearer scope because I think it's just so big. When I think about all the issues related to it—I like the reports, but I was wondering myself about the follow-up.

But then once the Commission starts getting mired into the details of a follow-up, then they're not really doing the research and being thought leaders, if you will. And for me, the role of the Commission is to be the thought leaders, to try to find the issues and then recommend on them.

In a risk management framework, then the recommendations could be a mere, "we're willing to not look at that right now because we can't prioritize in that manner." I think that we maybe don't have the time to do the kind of follow-up that we would probably want to do.

Dr. Katz: I also have been so impressed by the depth of expertise of the people on the Commission.

And maybe one thing to consider is using the Commission as a follow-on resource. So if you are going to implement an issue but wanted expert advice, it's a way to come back and say "this is an interesting idea." What are your thoughts on how we approach this?

Mr. Contestabile: Without burdening the Commission with the "follow-up" but yet having them provide some input in the follow-up is maybe the best of both worlds. I was just going to throw out that—how do I say this? Most of the people that are on the Commission I would suspect have plenty to do in their day jobs. And the reason they do this is because they want to give back and make a contribution.

And so whatever you can do to make sure that the recommendations are addressed, and that doesn't necessarily mean they were all implemented, but they were at least thoughtfully considered and someone has said "we can't because..." Whatever you can do to ensure these reports have some impact and are considered is the best thing for the Commission members.

Ms. Childs-Pair: There is a lot of thought that has gone into what we've done in the past, and if you give the Commission the authority that if they decide to implement something to really take it from beginning to end and have the agencies understand that the recommendation should be implemented,

and this is for the benefit of the city. So we give them the authority to be able to have some power to enact the recommendation if you all agree that this recommendation should be implemented.

Auditor Patterson: How would you see that working?

Ms. Childs-Pair: Well, if we take the pandemic and we take the plans, the procedures, the sharing of information, the coming to a training, the coming to an exercise—how do you take that and say it's not only health that is a part of this, now you need to take that to the other agencies and say that they have a role in this too. Who has that authority and how do you ensure that they're given that power to implement it? Because oftentimes, everyone is busy.

Yes, I hear you. You know, you have an exercise. You have training and all. We're doing plans. We don't have time to keep up with this procedure or that plan or just make sure that they reinvest, allowing them to implement it.

Auditor Patterson: Brian, what do you think about that as an operating agency director right now?

Director Baker: Well, let me first, thank you, Councilmember and Auditor, and especially the commissioners past and present. I certainly appreciate the time and expertise that you all bring and your commitment to our overall Homeland Security mission and the safety of the District. I'd like to share a little bit about how we have used the Commission and to follow-up on Barbara's point and other points that were made.

Director Geldart, who sat in this role before me, was the first director to have a full Homeland Security Commission. Initially we didn't exactly know how to use the Commission, how to use this great expertise. One of the things that we considered was the Commission as a tool—a tool for us to examine the entire Homeland Security enterprise that doesn't exist in one agency. That is one of the complications when you are looking at Homeland Security. We have the name, “the Homeland Security and Emergency Management Agency,” but we don't hold the majority of the capabilities to respond to anything. The preparedness aspects don't all fall into one agency.

What this Commission allowed us to do in the first two reports that we focused on, was look at areas that are cross cutting and areas that my agency has actually very little authority over, but yet represent major concerns for us and for the District as a whole.

The Commission has allowed us to examine an issue with a level of expertise, and with individuals who have the District in mind and who are not looking to expose any real threats or risks, but help us lay a roadmap on how we can improve and where some of our gaps might be.

As we normally assess gaps, we have various stringent metrics that come out of either DHS or FEMA that we have to fit our normal assessment processes in.

Through any way that the Commission wants to design, they can look at a particular area and go whatever direction they feel is the most beneficial.

To Barbara's point, I'm the authority, but as the Commission looks at some of these areas, it is sometimes complicated because we are calling up other agency directors saying, “Can we see this? Tell us about this.” And there is reluctance for other agencies, and sometimes there's even reluctance on my part, to be willing to sit down and talk, and to share all the information.

Then there's also the question of, after the report gets produced, what does that mean? Is it my responsibility as the Director of HSEMA to implement this? Is it another agency's? Is it something that the Council is going to come back and ask me what I've done, just like in an audit?

There's that gray area, what do these reports mean? They're extremely informative. They're helpful to me. But what do they mean? And I think that has been a complicated area.

Going forward, I would like to continue to use the Commission to look at those important areas. Because we have expertise on the Commission that is amazing, and I feel very fortunate that we have that. But Commissioners need to feel like their time is valued, because it does take a lot of time and energy, drafting the reports.

For the two reports that were done there were hundreds of hours put in when it comes down to interviews, staff time, putting drafts together, getting it in front of the Commission members.

In order for them to feel like their work is valued and for me to be able to actually keep a full body of commissioners—which has been a challenge—it is important to make sure that they feel that the time and energy that they're putting in is actually useful and is something that we, as the District as a whole, are using to make necessary changes.

Identifying emerging issues

Mr. Contestabile: Brian, you said a couple things I want to come back to. While the Commission could do a lot of things, I think probably what it is best positioned to do is think about what the D.C. government ought to be focusing on; the emerging issues.

I think this differs from an audit function in the sense that when you do an audit—and I used to supervise the audits at Maryland DOT—you have to have a standard, there's some enabling legislation that said an agency will do this. And the audit is focused on are they doing that? There is likely not a mandate or requirement that an agency look ahead to emerging issues.

Also, let me add before I move on, that day-to-day responsibilities consume most of our operating agencies.

So what the Commission has the opportunity to do is to step back and say “what's emerging? What are going to be the future problems we ought to be facing?”

What are some things we ought to be focusing on and bring forward some recommendations that are practical yet looking at things that agencies may not have the authority to do? Like the CISO (Chief Information Security Officer) position, that didn't exist? And yet all roads seemed to point to that being a good idea.

There was no audit standard for that, necessarily. But that, I think, is how the Commission can perhaps serve you best. To say what are the emerging issues that ought to be looked at? What are they now?

But I also am keen on this point of some sort of follow-up. And I don't think it falls on HSEMA necessarily because you're asking a peer agency to have another peer agency do something and that never goes well...

Director Baker: It makes you a very popular director...

Mr. Contestabile: Yes. It makes you a very (un)popular director, right? So that is why I think it does lie, in my view, with the Council or some sort of oversight body or a budget committee or something that has some teeth to say you need to take some action on this matter. You need to find the money to fund this position or whatever. And I think that authority lies outside of the Commission and it lies outside of HSEMA.

I agree with you that we would like to see some mechanism in place to make sure that what is being recommended is acted upon in some way. But I don't know that it necessarily lies with the Commission, per se.

Councilmember Allen: I have a follow-up question which is where you've seen this work well, if it has, or certainly highlight if it hasn't.

I agree with you, John, that the Commission can help lead on emerging issues, and help highlight things that people haven't been able to take that step back in order to consider, and then lay out a set of recommendations.

As I look at it from a Council perspective, I can certainly have a great conversation with Brian in a hearing or any of the Commission members and say, okay, "So we've got this great report, and here's x, y, z recommendations." But as a legislative body, we're bifurcated in terms of our issues.

So we have a fantastic report and recommendations on how we should be preparing for a pandemic, but I don't oversee the health committee. We could have a great set of recommendations on cybersecurity and there's elements of that I could touch on, but OCTO doesn't sit in my committee.

So in what ways have you seen successful examples of where you've been able to raise that level of attention for that committee chair or that committee staff to be able to say, "I've have this body of work and how can you even start incorporating it within your committee work?"

Collaborating with agencies, committees

Mr. Contestabile: I sat on the Governor's Emergency Management Advisory Committee, the GMAC as it's called, for the State of Maryland for about 15 years. And I'm not going to say that process is perfect either. But, given it was the *Governor's* Emergency Advisory Committee, the chief of staff would follow up on issues with the agencies on the executive branch side.

Maybe that's something to explore, to figure out a way within the Council structure to give the commission findings and recommendations more visibility and follow-up, but also find a way to work with the executive side to implement some things as well. That's just one other option, if you will, that could be pursued.

Ms. Reinertson: Well, what can happen with state legislatures is that they actually bring it to a vote and decide that, you know, the agencies shall do this.

So if you want that top down approach then it's a requirement to get it done and then it's worked into goals and performance and that type of thing. I've seen that happen before.

Ms. Childs-Pair: And I think you should also take a look at the District's Emergency Preparedness Council, the District's Emergency Response System Committees, made up of all the agencies who are

actually implementing some common things for preparedness, readiness, response, and recovery efforts.

Those may be some good tools to take a look at and say, all right, here are the recommendations. You know, set up a process to implement the ones, or all of them, whatever you decide upon, but as a system for tracking, for implementation and for issues if it doesn't work.

Ms. Reinertson: That's a good point, Barbara, because that leads to more of a collaborative approach.

And so if we're thinking that, oh, this should be taken on. Maybe it would be good to go to that group and say this might be so important that we may override that. But it would be a better collaborative approach to go to that type of a body and say, what do you think? Or what are your gaps you're seeing? What should we take on that's been important to you that you've seen repeated? And maybe that's where we find the gaps.

Director Baker: And that's how we have started working in our after- action process. So for our whole corrective action, we bring to the Emergency Preparedness Council [EPC] which is co-chaired by me and the Deputy Mayor [for Public Safety and Justice].

We tried to make the body much more effective. We're asking what are the actual gaps that are out there, and how do we work through that, government- wide? And it's comprised of all the relevant agency directors. We meet every quarter and try to make those meetings much more actionable.

In the past, we have not brought the findings of the Homeland Security Commission [to the EPC]. But actually, that's a very good idea that we can work in, just like we do any of our after-action reports, whether it be exercised-based or real world.

That's also the body that helps oversee where we distribute our grant money. So not only is it, "Do we have an issue?", but we have the resources to address this issue. A primary concern right now is the Homeland Security grants and the money that comes into the District.

And as we rack and stack and look at all the gaps across the District, not just the gaps, but, you know, any of the findings, we can actually put resources to that, which I think creates an opportunity for us to be more actionable.

Auditor Patterson: Does the legislature still sit on the Emergency Preparedness Council?

Director Baker: In our most recent Executive Order, no one from the legislative branch is a member.

Auditor Patterson: I served on the EPC when I was sitting in Charles' chair as the Council's representative. And, Susan, can I come back to something you said? You referred to a legislative approval process and I wasn't sure what you meant.

Ms. Reinertson: I've seen where in a state legislature the members all voted on a report and then said to the agency—it was basically the language that, "you shall implement."

It was that top down approach to approving the report and making sure that it was implemented.

Councilmember Allen: So if a report were to come to us that outlined a set of recommendations, most of my colleagues would probably look to me as chairman of this committee, and they're going to say, okay, well, Councilmember Allen, you're moving this forward.

But if it has also a set of recommendations that impact health, then I would assume the chair of the Committee on Health would say, well, wait a minute. I want to make sure I've had time to review this before I'm comfortable voting for it. In that sense, you get more buy-in because there will be a sense of ownership before any one of us would want to just vote on something.

Ms. Reinertson: And with that in mind, then perhaps the report would need to outline some implementation factors, like what committees would need to act, almost laying out a project management plan.

But definitely you would need buy-in because you would not be the only person that would be able to vote on it. Or, somehow there would have to be that collaboration with your councilmembers to say, okay, if we vote on this, you know what the ramifications of this are, right?

Councilmember Allen: We always know the ramifications of everything...

Ms. Reinertson: It's always fun to vote on something when you are not informed...

Clarifying the Commission's mission

Auditor Patterson: Does any of this take you to a place where you would recommend changing the underlying law creating the Commission?

Mr. Contestabile: Not having looked at it recently, it seems to me it would be more of an action item for the current Commission to take a look in light of this discussion.

Auditor Patterson: The legislative intent behind the Commission was not necessarily to pick an issue a year, but that made a lot of sense when I read the first report. And do you generally agree with focusing on a particular topic and then issuing a report?

Dr. Katz: I think the easy answer is to say yes. But I also think it's probably important to think about the adaptability of a group like this since we're all in a business where things happen. And if something happens, how does this Commission drop everything and address that change?

Mr. Contestabile: The other thing that helped drive the commission focus was the expertise on the Commission.

The first year we had quite a few of what I would consider phenomenal industry experts in cyber. The second cycle with Dr. Katz and other members, it was logical that we had that the expertise to look into pandemic preparedness, which the District is doing.

So, commission member expertise has been one of the things that has helped drive what topics are explored.

Councilmember Allen: Do you feel confident that the Commission would have the capacity right now to do that, to be adaptable?

Dr. Katz: To John's earlier point, we all have day jobs, and we're all quite busy. That being said, we've also all volunteered to do this. So we work in slightly different disciplines, but all in a business where we drop everything when there's an event. I think that's also a part of thinking about how we structure what we do and who we are.

If we're going to be asked to be a resource, we'd like to be a resource for more than writing a report that sits on a shelf.

If there was something happening—if there was a pandemic, please call. You know, like we want to help, and I think that's worth trying to figure out, too.

Councilmember Allen: What are some of the other ways that Commission members can feel like the work is respected and that would allow it if we said, “We have got to turn on a dime and we've got to have your help on this,” such that you would say, “Okay, I've got a million things that I'm balancing in the air right now. But let me add one more on because I know it's important, and I know you will do something with it.”

Ms. Childs-Pair: I have no question about if it is said to me, we can't find anybody else, I would do it. And I think we probably all feel that way. If something came up and we needed to drop everything we had on the table, we would do that for the emerging issue, for saving lives. That's for the love of what we do.

And that's why I stayed as long as I did working with Metro, and with their emergency management. And it was extremely time consuming. It was a day and an evening job.

But when this came about, you have a meeting. We need to do this. You don't have to worry about that.

Director Baker: Up until this point, I will say for everyone sitting around the table here I had a hand in asking them to be Commission members—knowing their commitment, knowing that these are individuals that have the professional credentials I also know that they have the personal desire to serve and help the District move forward.

Mr. McNamara: I think it was Kathy who mentioned the legislative intent that was to survey the entire homeland security threat landscape. I mean, we're going to write the next War and Peace if we do that, right? So I think it's been smart to focus on one topic and to go in-depth.

But I do think there does need to be some flexibility and adaptability, right?

I have yet to attend my first meeting, but, I could imagine a scenario where if the collective body said let's study Issue A and then something else emerges, I think there does need to be some flexibility to say, we recognize we were going to study Issue A but we do need a quick side examination. There's a tendency in emergency management/homeland security/public safety to always re-litigate the last war. Now all of a sudden we look and everyone is Monday morning quarterbacking the decision in Houston whether a mandatory evacuation was necessary.

Does that mean that the Commission should spend a few months looking at the District's mass evacuation plans? That was something I raised in my confirmation hearing.

I'm sure Brian and his team, have a great evacuation plan for Inauguration Day, for the 4th of July. But what would happen if they had to evacuate the District today?

I think it's important to study one issue, but we need the flexibility in an ever-changing threat environment to be able to quickly retool and say, hey, let's spend a little bit of time looking at another issue.

Auditor Patterson: The Commission did do something along those lines with the health report. I think that was ready to be published when the Ebola outbreak happened, and now that report includes that issue.

Ms. Reinertson: Brian was saying that you were getting federal Homeland Security money to pay for the training and the exercising and the planning and everything that goes into producing an after-action report that includes corrective actions. One thing I'm interested in would be who was to look at those to find the commonalities.

Look at that to see if there is anything that really shouts out that could be a focus—that would be very important to the entire District and would be a very good tool to tie back to everything that the District is doing on a day-to-day basis.

Director Baker: That was something we did originally. I shared with the Commission our threat vulnerability assessments, and our after-action reports. I try not to weight the scale on what the Commission chooses to work on. It is really their decision. But I do like to supply all that information because that means a fresh set of expertise, a fresh set of eyes. When my team and my peers look at these things, we are dealing with things day-to-day and we have different things that dictate our priorities sometimes.

Ms. Reinertson: As I read this, the intent is to show progress. And oftentimes we have all these corrective actions. And we start another session of planning or training or exercising, and you're supposed to take the corrective actions and start from there, but we don't. But I think we're getting better. But I just think that that would just tie it in great, and we could show progress.

Preparedness lessons learned from Houston and Harvey

Auditor Patterson: I do want to ask a question that relates to what's been going on in Houston. I'd like to read a quote from two FEMA directors, past and present. And both directors said something similar. "Americans tend to get complacent about the possibility of a disaster, but we have a long way to go," current FEMA Director Long said about the nation's overall disaster readiness. Former Director Fugate, now retired, was more blunt. "It sucks, he said." Any thoughts that you might have? Does that apply to the Commission's work for the District?

Ms. Reinertson: Mandatory evacuation, you know, is it a good thing or bad thing? Everybody's quarterbacking about whether Houston should have ordered a mandatory evacuation. Who knows?

Mr. Contestabile: As one who had the pleasure of participating in evacuation planning with Maryland DOT in both the District and for the eastern shore and for Baltimore, one of the real problem areas, with evacuation—you see this more typically on the coast with the holiday rush and the economic considerations of losing a 4th of July or Labor Day weekend. But the critical point that I want to make is transportation needs more lead time than either the timing of the natural hazard will allow or the political decision-making process will allow. And so it is easy to say they should have evacuated in hindsight, but in order to get that many people out of harm's way, they should have started a week earlier. And the storm was not what it was a week ago. It's bothersome for the media to assert that the public should have been evacuated when the storm intensified and the path changed as it did, as quickly as it did.

Nonetheless, that's no excuse for not having a good plan. And what do we do if it happens tomorrow? I know we have evacuation plans, but just having them is not a reason to *not* revisit them in light of today's hazards.

Ms. Reinertson: We think there's a difference between an urban and a rural area. In the urban area, they're expecting everything to be open. And so it is easy to become complacent.

Ms. Childs-Pair: I would agree. And my thoughts in looking at another issue for the Commission is overall recovery efforts.

But in looking at Houston, what are some of the best lessons that are going to be learned? Because when we look at mass evacuation, we have more people down and low during an evacuation. There's no gas. There's no food. Unless you do it a week earlier, and who's going to take the opportunity or the chance? If the storm had turned around and we did a mass evacuation a week before, they would have been just as...

Councilmember Allen: Taking it on the chin then, too.

Ms. Childs-Pair: Exactly. It's a balancing act. It really is when you make that decision. But look at recovery efforts overall and not just for Houston, but overall.

Councilmember Allen: In what ways do you think we can capture this moment in time, where many of us are not directly impacted by what's happening in Houston, but everybody is talking about it, thinking about it.

In what ways do you use the opportunity that a catastrophic event creates to be able to help educate the public? How do you use those opportunities?

Ms. Childs-Pair: Absolutely.

Mr. McNamara: You're absolutely right. And I would just say it's not only the public. If you're looking at what happened right now in Houston, there was that very dramatic rescue of the nursing home. There was the evacuation of a hospital, right? You know, [we could] go to long-term care facilities in D.C., hospitals in D.C. and say, you just saw a hospital have to evacuate in Houston. You just saw hospitals have to evacuate in Sandy. Are you ready to evacuate Washington Hospital Center? I hope they are. You've seen the disaster relief organizations spring into action, and churches are opening their doors.

Go to the faith community in D.C. and say, if we had to shelter people in a church, could you help accommodate us? Those are just some of the ideas.

Director Baker: Absolutely. First of all, we are looking very closely at the current response. I've been working with my partners to see if there are any resources that we are able to send down as well as our expertise.

To the preparedness point, which is extremely important to me and, timing is everything taking advantage of the media and a lot of the people around D.C.

September happens to be National Preparedness Month, so I can do a few quick commercials here. Because already we have set aside time to bombard our residents with our general preparedness message, because complacency is absolutely a thing that happens.

You'll see our ads in the Metro and on busses. Our Ready DC campaign will be rolling out. We have a brand new site.

I will be doing media throughout the month. I feel for everyone on the Texas coast and Louisiana. Having been through many disasters and knowing that that is what we do as a field, it is a challenging time. And I'm not going to give my opinion on the response because I don't do that among peers.

But it is a time that is an opportunity now that the media is looking at it. And I've been asked to talk about our flood plain, our evacuation plans.

And I will use that opportunity because preparedness is something that people don't like to talk about. You know, it's not a subject until you really look at it and you say, oh, if I was in that situation, what would I do? Am I prepared to evacuate today?

Ms. Reinertson: Or to shelter in place.

Mr. Contestabile: I want to return to something Barbara said that echoes what Brian is saying. One question for us to consider was "what issues would you like to see the Commission undertake in the near future?" The current buzzword, aside from cyber, is resilience. And resilience means a lot of things to a lot of different people. Cities are hiring resilience directors now. So I think paying some attention to what does that mean and what does it mean for D.C. would be worthwhile.

But resilience, Barbara said it, is really more focused on the recovery aspects. You've got preparedness, response, and recovery. Resilience focuses more on the preparedness and the recovery pieces. I think finding a way to determine what resilience means for D.C. is a worthwhile effort to consider going forward. Having done some work in this area, it looks at—and this is not to denigrate fire and police, but they are mostly about response—this tends to look at the other issues like, energy, supply chain, transportation. And so a focus on resilience with what does that mean in the recovery phase, might get to some of the issues you're pointing out now—transportation, evacuation, energy. How do you restore power, mutual aid agreements and the like, and then reentry into a zone afterwards in terms of security and credentialing? Those are all subsets of the recovery and resilience focus.

Dr. Katz: And individual behavior as well.

Auditor Patterson: What do you mean by individual?

Dr. Katz: Very simple. If I have a medical condition and I'm thinking about how much medication I need to have on me at all times. And is there an infrastructure in place so I am allowed to have more than three days' supply of medication on me at all times?

Mr. McNamara: Individuals won't leave their house because they don't want to leave their pet. Do we have a plan for pets? I mean, we saw it in, unfortunately, Katrina. We saw it in Sandy. We're seeing it now in Houston. They don't want to leave their pets.

Auditor Patterson: Other thoughts on issues that you'd like to see the Commission take on?

Mr. Contestabile: One other thing regarding cyber is that there are many aspects of cyber. Coming from the transportation community, SCADA (Supervisory Control and Data Acquisition) systems, supervisory control access device systems, are important to consider. They're found in traffic signal systems, and train control systems. They're found in a lot of different sensors and the like.

There's an aspect of cyber that deals with these kinds of SCADA systems that might bear some attention to see how robust they are and how susceptible they might be to hacking because any kind of attack on signal systems or the train system would impede an evacuation, as an example. So that's a nuance within cyber that might bear some looking into.

The other thing I would mention as another nuance within cyber is the insider threat which has to do with individual behavior, but it also has to do with credentialing and access. We talk a lot in cyber about perimeter defense and firewalls and external facing sites and security, but what about the people who access your systems and do they have the proper credentials? Do they have too much access to too many different programs?

The role of social media in crisis communications

Auditor Patterson: Other subjects?

Mr. Contestabile: Social media. You saw in Houston that social media became really important for rescuing people. In most of the places in the country that I've worked we still haven't figured out how to successfully harvest social media information.

The 911 call center of the future is going to have to be able to deal with things like video, text and social media. And we don't have a good technical architecture on how to do that. And we certainly don't have an operational construct of how to do that.

So how does government deal with social media? We can bemoan the fact that it's out there, it's widely used and it's relied on by a lot of people. But it is what it is.

We have to figure out in the emergency management and the homeland security community how to deal with it. And I don't see a lot of good examples of how to do it well.

We've done a pretty good job of pushing information out to the community via our websites but in terms of listening to what social media is saying, I don't think we've done a great job at that. And that's another potential area for the commission to take a look at.

Councilmember Allen: Have you seen any places that even get close?

Mr. Contestabile: I know of a few places but I think it's fledgling at best. Again, there are some technological issues associated with making sense out of the noise on social media. But then even if you could figure that out, what do you do with that information? You know, call centers are almost exclusively wedded to 911 landline calls. That's where they have policies and procedures and technology built around that.

What Houston actually did in terms of monitoring social media and using it to rescue people off the rooftops is actually quite leading edge. They were kind of forced into that, but I think that might be a good lesson learned from the multiple after-action reports that are inevitably going to come from this Houston hurricane experience.

Auditor Patterson: It will be interesting also to know the perspective of the major social media outfits—what does Twitter think? What does Google think? What does Facebook think about this? You see some of these entities today looking at some of the ways to improve their own apps.

Mr. Contestabile: Yes. They have the “find me” and “check in” apps.

Mr. McNamara: You think about it from the Facebook app where you check that you are safe and flip the algorithm to be able to register “I’m in distress.”

Mr. Contestabile: And maybe it's a more formal partnership with them by D.C. to leverage some of those tools. But, you know, George Foresman once said—a voice from the past—that we know how to deal with the private sector in a few different ways. One is as a *victim* and another is as a *vendor*. But we don't know how to deal with them real well as a *partner*. And his perspective has always stuck with me because it remains true today. But maybe this is an area where we could partner with the private sector in some way.

Dr. Katz: I can speak to the global health community—there is a massive movement by the private sector that is standing up and realizing that it’s not just corporate responsibility, but I think there's a movement domestically. Now there's a movement globally, with large corporations standing up and rethinking what their role is and what they could be contributing.

We just had some interesting contributions from In-Q-Tel, from FedEx, from Homeland. And this is on the global health security.

I think if that can shift the conversation for what we're doing in sub-Saharan Africa, it might be an interesting conversation to have at the local level, too.

Auditor Patterson: What questions do you want to ask each other?

Director Baker: How is retirement going?

Ms. Childs-Pair: Loving it.

Dr. Katz: Who else is on the Commission now? Do we have a leader?

Director Baker: I'll talk a little about the future. We do have a quorum now. We are looking at dates to actually have a meeting. We did have a few Commission members resign very recently. I have been working very quickly to fill that.

Councilmember Allen: What do you expect to happen at that next meeting? Do you know what you'd like to see accomplished?

Director Baker: There will be the selection of a chair. A lot of people have done their own research, but we’ll have some education on what the Commission has done in the past.

And then also provide them an opportunity to review our most recent reports, our most recent after-actions, our THIRA [Threat and Hazard Identification and Risk Assessment] but also a chance to have an open conversation and make their determination of how they want to move forward.

Mr. McNamara: Brian and I had the opportunity to attend a twice yearly meeting of Brian's colleagues from the 15 largest urban areas, a group called the BESC. And I got to go as a federal interloper from DHS. And I'll tell you, they always started one day of their meeting with the question, “what keeps you up at night?” The 15 of them would spend 5 to 10 minutes describing their current challenges. I'll tell you, as the federal guy sitting there, I learned so much in that hour long discussion.

I would like to do that even if we spend just a half hour talking about it—have that sort of free flowing discussion amongst the commissioners.

Auditor Patterson: Thank you all for this conversation. And we're taping this and we will transcribe, edit, and publish the discussion as a report.

Councilmember Allen: I know I found this very helpful. I know everybody else has too, but it really is thanks to you for your team leadership.

Auditor Patterson: Thank you all for your service, and the check will be in the mail.

Ms. Childs-Pair: Oh, okay. I've heard that one before!