
Government of the District of Columbia



DC Department of Public Works

Testimony of
Christopher Geldart
Acting Director

**Public Roundtable: “PR23-127 – the Department of
Public Works Christopher Geldart Confirmation
Resolution of 2019”**

Committee on Transportation and the Environment

Councilmember Mary M. Cheh, Chairperson

John A. Wilson Building
Room 412
1350 Pennsylvania Avenue, NW
Washington, DC 20004
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**TESTIMONY OF CHRISTOPHER GELDART, ACTING DIRECTOR
DEPARTMENT OF PUBLIC WORKS
PUBLIC ROUNDTABLE:
“PR23-127 – THE DEPARTMENT OF PUBLIC WORKS CHRISTOPHER GELDART
CONFIRMATION RESOLUTION OF 2019”
COMMITTEE ON TRANSPORTATION AND THE ENVIRONMENT
MAY 20, 2019**

Good afternoon, Chairperson Cheh, members of the Council and staff. I am Christopher Geldart, Acting Director of the Department of Public Works (DPW). I am honored to have been nominated by Mayor Muriel Bowser to lead the Department that every resident, commuter, visitor and business relies on to support public health and public safety, your Department of Public Works.

First, I would like to thank Mayor Bowser, City Administrator Rashad Young and Deputy Mayor Lucinda Babers for their ongoing involvement, leadership and support to ensure DPW can deliver high quality services to our customers. I also want to express my sincerest gratitude to DPW employees for extending their warm and hearty welcome since I joined the Department January 28, 2019.

DPW employees play an integral role in protecting the health and safety of those who live in, work, and visit Washington, DC, our home. Our sanitation services contribute to a healthy environment, while our parking management services contribute to traffic and pedestrian safety. Our fleet operations and administrative functions support most all other District agencies’ service delivery.

Background and Leadership Experience

Now, I will present the highlights of my background and career that equip me to serve as the DPW Director.

I grew up in a blue-collar family that embraced hard work and commitment as our norms. In fact, my high regard for DPW employees was borne when, as a young man, I was a part-time worker on the back of a trash truck, long before trucks were equipped with lifts to tip cans into the compactor. I also drove a plow truck in the winter. Yes, I bring first-hand knowledge of the importance of DPW’s services and the challenges DPW employees face when delivering them.

I started my District government service as the Director of the DC Homeland Security and Emergency Management Agency (HSEMA) from 2012-2017, where I coordinated resources of government agencies, regional authorities, public utilities and private sector entities to achieve successful outcomes whether in emergency situations or planned events.

In this role, I led the planning and execution of three presidentially declared disasters and twenty national special security events, including President Obama’s two historic Inaugurations and five State of the Union Addresses.

While with HSEMA, I had the pleasure to partner with DPW to manage major snow storms as well as Hurricane Sandy. I also witnessed how DPW supports District agencies to achieve their service mandates. Our work on major snow storms, hurricanes, and the flooding episodes in Bloomingdale, Eckington and LeDroit Park allowed me to see how deeply committed DPW employees are to District residents, businesses and visitors.

My commitment to government started with my military career. I was active duty in the United States Marine Corps from 1989 to 2001, where I held several leadership positions in the Fleet Marine Force. Leadership, excellence and discipline are cornerstone values of the Marine Corps that I share with DPW employees.

Following my discharge from the Corps, I pursued my interest in emergency management in the private sector as well as state and federal agencies before joining HSEMA.

Vision for DPW

My vision for DPW is informed by my senior-level experience and partnership with DPW, as the former HSEMA director and witnessing the significant impact DPW has on every resident, commuter, visitor and business in the District to support public health and public safety.

I believe my expertise in leadership, customer service, agency administration, large-scale coordination, resource allocation, community engagement, and staff building will support DPW as we continue to build on our hard work and incorporating improvements going forward. DPW's mission-critical operations necessitate swift and comprehensive coordination to deliver on our promise to the District.

As Acting Director, I am working to inspire the DPW team with this message: One Team, One Fight and together, when we see something, we do something. When we see something in our city that needs to be addressed, the next step is to DO something. DPW employees will be empowered through their training and experience to take the appropriate action to solve problems.

I will lead by example to model excellent customer service. During my tenure at HSEMA, I was asked to lead the Office of Unified Communications (OUC) while a new director was being recruited. As a result, I saw the 24/7 interaction residents have with the Mayor's Call Center/311 and how polite, knowledgeable and concerned employees can calm frazzled callers into well-informed residents.

At the OUC, I observed just how critical DPW services are because they are among the most requested services offered by DC government. I augmented its Call Center staff by hiring almost 100 call takers. As DPW Director, I will advance the plan to create a centralized DPW Call Center so our customers can access the Department more easily.

My management philosophy and expectations are very straight forward – we all must provide the highest quality service possible to every person we encounter. From the parking enforcement officer, to fleet mechanic, sanitation tech, communications specialist and front desk receptionist – all DPW employees share in our commitment to excellence.

At each agency I have led, the quality of our work has been derived from a laser sharp focus on customer service, and a highly trained and motivated workforce. I will ensure our DPW employees are not only trained and certified to collect trash and recyclables, enforce parking regulations, maintain our city’s vehicle fleet, identify ways to reduce waste, remove graffiti, investigate illegal dumping, maintain and landscape public space, and plow our streets, but also focused and more attentive to our customers’ needs.

Our expanding population means there are many new residents who need to know how our services are delivered and what they need to do to fully use these services. I believe in leading by example and look for opportunities to work side by side with employees. That’s why, during my first week, I worked an entire trash collection route on the back of the truck – collecting trash, dumping bins, hearing first-hand about our crews’ experiences during a work day.

I also have been out with our SWEEP inspectors and parking officers and several other front-line employees, both day and night crews, to see the challenges they face when providing municipal services or enforcing the law. As I mentioned earlier in my testimony, I come from a blue-collar family and understand the personal sacrifice involved with labor-intensive work and recognize the deep commitment their hard work often requires.

In the Marine Corps, as in DPW, our mission is best completed when we come together as a team in mutual trust and respect to do the hard work – regardless of one’s rank, level or position. Marines and DPW employees share core values, especially that of “showing up”, to achieve our goals.

By learning how our employees address the challenges associated with delivering services and working with them to overcome them, I will be able to create a firm foundation for positive labor-management relations. I am committed to build on the successes DPW already has achieved by ensuring every employee is respected and supported.

During this time, I also have met with several ANCs, the DC environmental network, Public Works industry representatives, waste management nonprofits, multiple District agency Directors and Business Improvement District Directors to continually learn about how things are done to form a rationale to create a continuous improvement platform for our operations.

Conclusion

DPW is a people-driven operation. In my first week with DPW, I saw their extraordinary dedication during the 2019 Winter Storm Gia when we worked multiple consecutive 12-hour

shifts to restore the District's commercial and residential neighborhoods. We see that dedication every day as DPW employees clean the streets, manage access to curbside parking, and keep our fleet of vehicles and equipment in peak condition.

Make no mistake – our crews rise early to go to work and are often grappling with extreme weather conditions to keep our city clean. For most of our employees, DC is also their home. I observed that they take tremendous pride in ensuring their city always looks good. As I look ahead to what I hope will be many years of continued service, please know that on the top of my mind every day will be making sure our city is a place we can all be proud to call home.

I would again like to thank the Mayor for her tireless support and leadership and thank you, Chairperson Cheh. I look forward to continuing to work with you and the Committee moving forward and sharing DPW's progress with you and our stakeholders in the days ahead. Working together, I believe we will accomplish great things.

I am here to build upon the progress already achieved and do what's necessary to create the even more successful DPW of tomorrow.

This concludes my formal testimony. I am available to answer questions and provide additional background information if needed.