



# The Thomas Connection

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Building Bridges, Finding Solutions

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*The Newsletter of Ward 5 Councilmember Harry "Tommy" Thomas, Jr.*

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## **THOMAS INTRODUCES MEASURES TO SUPPORT SMALL BUSINESSES**

At the Council's May 3 legislative session, Councilmember Thomas introduced two bills to assist the small business community—the Streetscape Corridor Taxation Relief Act of 2011 and the Brewery Manufacturer's Tasting Permit Amendment Emergency Act of 2011. The bills are part of Councilmember Thomas' strategy to promote and support small businesses in Ward 5 and across the District. "While large national chains provide our city with much-needed retail, we must continue to cultivate and nurture our small businesses and when appropriate, use the legislative process to create a supportive environment."

The Streetscape Corridor Taxation Relief Act of 2011 bill would amend the DC Code to allow commercial property owners substantially impacted by streetscape construction to have penalties and interest for delayed real property tax payments waived. To qualify, commercial property owners must 1) demonstrate that the streetscape project resulted in a substantial loss of revenue that created an inability to pay taxes in a timely manner; and 2) that the property was not classified as a Class 4 blighted property by the Office of Tax and Revenue or the Department of Consumer and Regulatory Affairs. Ward 1 Councilmember Jim Graham and Ward 4 Councilmember Muriel Bowser were co-introducers of the bill, which has been referred to the Committee on Finance and Revenue.

"Ever since the streetscape project began on 12<sup>th</sup> Street in Ward 5, I have received calls from business owners about the loss of parking, and in turn, the loss of revenue due to the lengthy construction schedule," said Councilmember Thomas. "In my role as Chair of the Committee on Economic Development, I've heard similar concerns from business and commercial property owners throughout the city."

The Brewery Manufacturer's Tasting Permit Amendment Emergency Act of 2011 amends the DC Code to allow beer tastings on the premises of craft breweries. The bill, which was introduced along with Ward 1 Councilmember Jim Graham and Ward 2 Councilmember Jack Evans, was unanimously approved. A hearing was held on the bill on March 31, 2011 where relevant stakeholders testified in support of the measure.

Passage of the bill enables DC Brau, a new Ward 5 business located on Bladensburg Road, NE, to offer beer tastings at its premises. DC Brau is the first craft brewery operating in the District in more than 60 years. The DC Code, as originally enacted, allowed alcohol tastings at grocery stores and other retail establishments, but was silent on craft breweries.

"The craft brewery industry is a burgeoning one. Supporting the growth of small craft breweries like DC Brau will help spur economic development and increase visitor traffic," said Councilmember Thomas. "I am also thrilled that DC Brau chose to locate in Ward 5, adding a new and exciting dimension to our local business community."



*Councilmember Thomas introduced two bills at the May 3, 2011 legislative session to assist small businesses.*

## COUNCILMEMBER'S UPCOMING EVENTS

<b>Friday, July 1</b>	<b>Starts and Strikes Baseball Tournament (through July 3)</b>
<b>Monday, August 22</b>	<b>Back-to-School Day</b>
<b>Saturday, August 27</b>	<b>Harry Thomas, Sr. Day</b>

## THOMAS CHALLENGES BILL TO REDUCE PENSIONS OF FIRST RESPONDERS

Councilmember Thomas held a press conference on May 25, 2011 to declare his opposition to B19-77, the "Pension Protection and Sustainability Amendment Act of 2011." He was joined by At-Large Councilmembers Michael Brown and Vincent Orange, DC Fraternal Order of Police Chairman Kris Baumann, DC Firefighters Association President Ed Smith, and Washington Teachers' Union Vice President Candi Peterson.

Although a pension funding crisis does not exist—the pension fund currently has 113 percent of the assets needed to meet its obligations—B19-77 would change how pension benefits are calculated for police officers, fire fighters, and teachers, resulting in lower pension benefits for these public servants. The bill also would eliminate cost-of-living adjustments (COLAs) to pensions until a retiree reaches full retirement age as defined by the Social Security Administration. Police officers and firefighters can currently retire after 30 years of service, regardless of age, and receive annual COLAs.

"This bill is having the unintended consequence of affecting the retention of our first responders," said Councilmember Thomas. Capping pension COLAs would also affect the District's competitiveness with surrounding jurisdictions.

"I fully support maintaining the current methods used to calculate the pension benefits of our police officers, fire fighters, and teachers," said Councilmember Thomas. "I oppose B19-77 and will work with like-minded colleagues to ensure this bill does not become law."



Councilmember Thomas held a press conference on May 25, 2011 to oppose B19-77, which would reduce the pension benefits of fire fighters, teachers, and police officers.

## WARD 5 CBES BRIEFED ON MARRIOTT HOTEL CONSTRUCTION OPPORTUNITIES

On May 9, 2011, Councilmember Thomas and Hensel Phelps, the general contractor for the Marriott convention center hotel, held a briefing session at the Woodridge Library with Ward 5 Certified Business Enterprises (CBEs) regarding construction opportunities for the hotel project and two others—construction of a wellness center at the Armed Forces Retirement Home and a house of worship for the First Baptist Church in Landover, Maryland. "Supporting the CBE community by sponsoring networking opportunities like this helps transform economic development into community development," said Councilmember Thomas. "At the end of the day, it is about job creation that benefits District residents and District-based businesses."



On May 9, 2011, Ward 5 CBEs were briefed on convention center hotel construction opportunities.

## SUMMER OFFICE HOURS IN THE WARD ARE LAUNCHED

Being accessible to residents is important to Councilmember Thomas, which is why he has instituted summer office hours in the Ward. On May 27, 2011, Councilmember Thomas held office hours from 11 am to 1 pm at MGM Roast Beef, located at 905 Brentwood Road, NE. More than a dozen residents stopped by to directly share their issues and concerns with the Councilmember.



Councilmember Thomas held office hours at MGM Roast Beef on May 27, 2011.

## FOR MORE INFORMATION, CONTACT:

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