

## Howard University Campus Plan Task Force

### MEETING HIGHLIGHTS

28 July 2011

#### Attendees

Ms. Kelli Shewmaker, Assistant to Commissioner John Salatti, ANC 5C04  
Mr. Timothy Jones, ANC 4C08  
Mr. Eric Fidler, Secretary, LeDroit Park Civic Association, Chair ANC 1B  
Transportation Committee  
Dr. Tina Brower-Thomas, LeDroit Park Resident, Howard University Adjunct  
Professor of Chemical Engineering  
Mr. Tony Norman, ANC 1B10, Chair ANC 1B Design Review Committee  
Ms. Maxine Brown-Roberts, D.C. Office of Planning  
Mr. Derrek Lucien Niec-Williams, Brailsford and Dunlavey Facility Planners  
Mr. Troy Stovall, Howard University Chief Operations Officer and Senior Vice  
President  
Dr. Hassan Minor Howard University Chief Strategy Officer and Senior Vice  
President  
Mr. Michael Harris, Co-Chair University-wide Campus Master Plan Steering  
Committee  
Ms. Maybelle Taylor Bennett, Director, Howard University Community Association,  
Co-Chair University-wide Campus Master Plan Steering Committee

#### Meeting Highlights

This was the fourth of the meetings scheduled for late June and the month of July to discuss issues that the University's neighbors raised regarding the campus master plan. The meeting focused on the progress of the Howard Town Center and the University's plans for the properties that are proposed to be taken off-line as student residences.

#### Current Outlying Student Housing Coming Off-Line

Following introductions, Troy Stovall, the University's Chief Operations Officer and Senior Vice President described the University's approach to the adaptive reuse of Drew, Slowe and Carver Halls, while indicating that Meridian Hall would be treated differently. For Drew, Slowe and Carver, he said that while no precise plans exist yet, internal conversations so far had revolved around their likely use as workforce or graduate housing with some limited administrative use.

Historically, SVP Stovall reminded the group that many HBCU faculty lived very near the universities where they taught. This was certainly true with Howard, and was dramatized in the film *The Great Debaters*. The University, he explained, wants to recreate this same kind of environment, which makes for a stronger living-learning

community where faculty gets to develop closer relationships with the students, and where student academic performance can be enhanced as a result.

Maxine Brown-Roberts reminded the group that these facilities are located in residential zone districts (Drew, in R-5-B and Slowe and Carver in R-4), hence the extent to which administrative uses can be included in them would be greatly constrained. She did, however, indicate that the University needs to think early on about what transitional uses might be installed in the dormitories before they are vacated by students so that the neighborhoods in which they are located do not have to be concerned about having vacant buildings in their midst. Dr. Minor indicated that there may be an opportunity to use them as swing space which will be in short supply as the University implements its plan.

### **Howard Town Center (HTC)**

Troy Stovall informed the group that the University was still in negotiations with Ron Cohen regarding the HTC, and that the biggest hurdle is that of financing. Banks do not believe that this area is able to absorb 425 units of housing at this location and are not willing to finance them. He remarked that being the first development out of the box would be the most difficult deal to make along these lines, and he noted that even the Progression Place development, which is under construction, is phasing their project. Their own development, perched, as it is right above the metro station, is being phased with the office structure going up first and the 100± residential units being developed later. He acknowledged the proposed 250 units of housing that JBG expects to develop on the WMATA parcels along Florida Avenue between Eighth and Ninth Streets, and wished them luck in getting that accomplished.

SVP Stovall explained that the University wants to energize this segment of Georgia Avenue, and thus really wants to see both towers of the HTC developed at the same time. The developer is being told by the banks that funding for only one phase is most likely at this point in time. The problems with developing only one phase are several. First, one could end up with only one tower built for many years. Second, there is the question of how you build the parking, which must be located beneath the whole development, when only one tower is built. *( Author's Note: In December, Tim Kessler mentioned a third issue having to do with the preference of the prospective grocer to have both towers built simultaneously, and their reticence to move in when only one tower is constructed.)*

SVP Stovall told the group that the University is entering a 99 year lease with the developer, and that Mr. Cohen is doing well in getting the retail tenants lined up. He has letters of interest (LOIs) and has received deposits indicating the firm intentions of the retailers to become a part of this project. It is the number of residential units that are financeable which remains the problem. SVP Stovall hopes to have an agreement negotiated by August 31<sup>st</sup>.

## **Additional Retail Opportunities**

SVP Stovall alerted the group of the coming Potbelly Sandwich Shop that was coming soon to the Wonder Plaza retail cluster at Bryant Street and Georgia Avenue. He told them of the University's assistance to a local business, Sankofa Café, in locating an outlet for them in the Blackburn Center, and he described the new Bison Card which will allow students to patronize a number of existing local businesses along Georgia Avenue. This card may be used as a debit card, gives students a wider variety of eating establishments from which to select, and supports area merchants as well.

## **HTC Rent-Structure and Combined University and Community Interests**

Dr. Brower-Thomas asked about the rent structure for the HTC units, and SVP Stovall indicated that the rents would be between \$2,200 - \$2,300 per month. Dr. Brower-Thomas noted that area-wide there were rents that spread from \$1,800 to \$2,400 per month; however, HTC's prices were at the higher end of the rent scale. SVP Stovall agreed and said that among the points of negotiation with Mr. Cohen was the potential for the University to have some units set aside for workforce housing and graduate students within the University family who could rent the units at a lower price point.

Eric Fidler asked what would happen to the CVS at Georgia and Florida Avenues, and SVP Stovall said that the University has quite a bit on its plate right now, and has not turned its attention to that question, though a number of conversations have taken place around that site. There have been discussions about a mixed use project there, a hotel and the potential for attracting development partners.

Returning the discussion to the HTC, Kelli Shewmaker asked who would be managing the HTC, and she was informed that Mr. Cohen would retain a management firm to do that. Kelli Shewmaker raised the issue that the HTC would become a hybrid project of sorts in that while on the one hand the University wants the building to be part of the campus, by the same token, it is being managed privately by a separate entity. She noted that when viewed one way, the HTC represents a diversified project; but when viewed in another way, it represents a gentrified project.

Commissioner Jones noted that the University still retains site control even though there is a private developer responsible for the project. SVP Stovall noted that the University is, indeed, trying to retain a certain level of control and is trying to send a message about the new energy that is coming to the area as it extends the University's brand into the community. Dr. Brower-Thomas remarked that the HTC, while part of Howard, is not part of Howard, and asked the question why someone might want to live in the HTC if they were not affiliated with the University instead of somewhere else?

SVP Stovall reiterated the University's interest in creating a sense of place that extends beyond the boundaries of the University. He mentioned the fact that students spend only 25% of their time within the classroom, and that the area around the campus itself should also provide a safe, supportive and exciting place for them to experience while at the same time, they connect with the community. He cited the AARP's identification of the most desirable cities in the country, a majority of which had universities in them. Derrek Niec-Williams added that these universities also had medical schools associated with them as well.

Dr. Minor made the point that over the last thirteen years or so, since the advent of the LeDroit Park Initiative, the University has been gradually adding neighborhood amenities that benefit the University and the surrounding community. He cited the study done as part of the Initiative by Concorde Partners which compared the retail outlets in neighborhoods surrounding other area Universities and the retail outlets in the neighborhood that surround Howard. The study revealed a startling deficit in such uses in the Howard University area.

As a result, the University began to make decisions regarding its own facilities that might add to the thin portfolio of area amenities. These included: relocating its bookstore from the basement of a dormitory on Fourth Street to Georgia Avenue; placing the Community Association in an abandoned 7-11 storefront on Georgia Avenue; locating a Starbucks facility next to the bookstore on Georgia Avenue; gradually upgrading the quality of retail in the Wonder Plaza strip; providing \$200,000 from a HUD-funded grant toward the restoration of the Howard Theater; facilitating the redevelopment of the old Gage School by a private developer into the new condominium development called Parker Flats; and supporting the UNCF relocation from Virginia to the Progression Place site.

Maybelle Bennett also reminded the group that the LeDroit Park Initiative involved the University's creation of homeownership opportunities for low- and moderate-income households both on its own redeveloped properties through its partnership with Fannie Mae, and on adjacent properties through its partnership with HUD and the local CDCs to whom it provided assistance. These opportunities were extended to members of Howard's housekeeping and security staff as well as to other HU staff and faculty and D.C. municipal employees such as teachers, firefighters and police persons.

Dr. Minor envisions the HTC as a means for accelerating and enhancing this portfolio of neighborhood amenities on a much larger scale. SVP Stovall added that Wonder Plaza and possibly the HTC will include business incubator space for use by student entrepreneurs.

Tony Norman said that the community is not against gentrification. It wants the diversity that comes with the added value that revitalization brings. What the community does not want are the negative affects of gentrification, and they want to protect the existing businesses and residents from those affects.

