

ANC 3E Report on Council Member Cheh's PPP Task Force Tenley-Friendship Library/Janney School PPP

August 9, 2007

Representatives from various neighborhood groups, ANC 3F and ANC 3E, and DC government agencies met with Council Member Cheh and the Roadside Development representatives on June 4th and on June 18th.

June 4th

The developer described what he thought the benefits of his proposal would be. The DCPL's Head Librarian and a representative from the DCPS facilities office talked about current plans for the library and school under the city's capital budget and the benefits the proposal might provide.

Ginnie Cooper reported that the library is fully funded, slated to house 20,000 square feet on as few floors as possible (preferably 2), and is on schedule to open in the spring of 2010. For the library, the Roadside proposal could allow for a larger amount of the square footage to be on one floor (but could also mean a darker first floor being partially underground) and underground parking. However, there was concern over patron frustration with yet another time delay and with associated costs of a delay.

Jane Morrissey of DCPS Facilities said that Janney School was scheduled for full modernization that would provide an increase of 39,000 square feet, an addition almost as large as the existing school, with a budget of \$25 million, and the feasibility study would take place in 2011 with a construction start in 2013. A partnership might be able to move the timeline for the Janney modernization up. (*Note: This statement was made before Allen Lew became the new head of DCPS School Modernizations and before Michelle Rhee was named Chancellor and should be verified with one or the other before being relied on.)

The full extent of the facilities work and the budget DCPS had planned for Janney School was new information to many, including Roadside representatives who had relied on Janney's principal and SIT to define the school's needs."

There was interest in and some initial support for the proposal, but serious concerns were also expressed. It was clear that a timeline, steps involved and a more detailed financial analysis would be needed for further assessment.

June 18th

This meeting was held to discuss concerns and feedback. Again, there were people who were supportive of exploring the proposal, but others expressed concerns. Again, there were explicit requests for a timeline and steps involved in this type of proposal between a developer, the school system and library system.

Council Member Cheh said that a meeting had occurred on June 14th between various government representatives and that a project manager, Eric Scott, had been assigned from the Deputy Mayor's Office of Planning and Economic Development. Mr. Scott would work with DCPS, DCPL to coordinate the project and meet with the OAG to outline the necessary legal steps and time lines.

Community Feedback

It has been 8 weeks, and the task force still has no information on necessary steps and a timeline. Still, on July 18th, Council Member Cheh asked for community input about the plan from the community and civic groups on the taskforce to give to the government by August 3rd.

Various groups have attempted to provide feedback. Some groups express qualified support. Other groups state that there is insufficient information on which to base support, and they have provided individual comments ranging from intense opposition to support of exploring the concept.

A common theme among supporters of the proposal is that they don't believe the government will do a good job in a timely manner with the library and school projects without having a developer involved. Others stress the value of transit-oriented development and affordable housing at the site, even absent the financial implications of reducing the number of luxury residential units at the site or infrastructure analyses (e.g. traffic study, environmental impact study).

The lack of specific timing, financial, neighborhood impact and procedural information is apparent among those groups expressing inability to assess support. Others have objections to selling off prime school and library property that might be needed for future school populations or future library expansions. Still others object to any delay in the rebuilding of the library.

It's also been unclear how support is being assessed except for some groups who have tried to poll their members and have passed the individual comments along. For example, it is not clear that all, or even most, of the current Janney parents and teachers are familiar with the Roadside plan information. It's difficult to disseminate information and assess support over the summer for a school community.

Tentative assessment:

This proposal started out based on description of what the land sale / future tax revenue could buy for the school and library. It became apparent that Roadside's school addition fell far short of what DCPS says will be needed for the future and also what would be appropriate for the current population. Now, it is becoming clear that a more logical place to start is with the current and future needs of the school population, the needs of the library patrons, and to see how best to accomplish satisfying those needs. And all groups seem to believe that if a mixed-use project is to be contemplated, then a sole source proposal would not necessarily lead to the best method to achieve the overarching goals of a new library and a full school modernization.

It might be possible to produce the appearance of consensus on a proposal when people don't have to contemplate hard choices. Thus far, the absence of a formal proposal has enabled this project to be all things to all people and has set up a set of unrealistic expectations.

What is needed is an assessment of school needs, library needs and an analysis of whether or not all envisioned projects can be accommodated at the site along with residential units as opposed to hopes that anything and everything is possible. A realistic understanding of the physical, fiscal, and temporal constraints governing the redevelopment of this site must be established as well as the community's goals and priorities. In other words, the community needs to understand the likely trade-offs involved in a joint redevelopment project at this location, and the city needs to understand the community's preferences about how they should be made.