

## WARD 1

### GRAHAM PUSHES FOR DUAL USE OF BRUCE SCHOOL

Speaking at a Dec. 19 hearing about the disposition of four unused public schools, including Ward 1's Bruce School, Councilmember Jim Graham (Ward 1 - D) said that he would support leasing the facility to a charter school so long as community access to the school is maintained.



The unused Bruce School has been a nuisance to neighbors for years.

"Clearly charter schools must be given first preference for public buildings, and Ward 1 charter schools could really benefit [from being able to use the facility] ... but I am glad to see that preference would be given to schools willing to co-locate, because the neighborhood would also like to have access and use of this building," he said.

The Bruce School building, located at 770 Kenyon St. NW, is a 33,000 square foot building originally constructed in 1898. A resolution introduced into the DC Council by the mayor would declare the building, along with three other public schools buildings, surplus property, allowing the District to sell or lease it to private organizations. A statute requires the District to give preference to charter schools during disposition.

"DC has seen a growing demand for public charter schools ... the need for properties to house them has increased dramatically," testified Deborah Gist, the District's State Education Officer. Several charter schools have already declared an interest in relocating to the site,

said Graham.

Carol Mitten, director of the Office of Property Management, stated that the District intends to lease the buildings to charter schools willing to share the facilities with other users, such as community centers or even regular public schools. "The administration encourages public charter schools to submit applications for long term leases of these facilities ... and preference will be given to schools that submit proposals that allow for co-location," said Mitten.

Residents living in Columbia Heights near the school have been critical of the building's long vacancy, and of the convoluted process of its disposition. ANC1A10 Commissioner Lenwood Johnson, whose single member district includes the school, is disappointed that the process has not emphasized community needs and input. "I don't see the need for disposing of public property just because it is surplus. There is certainly a need for this building in the community," stated Johnson. "I am wishing out loud that this building would be turned into a library - we only have one library serving all of Ward 1."

During its December meeting, ANC1A passed a resolution urging a moratorium of action on the disposition of the school until a town hall meeting could be held to gather input from the community. Johnson has already tried to unsuccessfully organize two such meetings. He cancelled both when he failed to secure commitments from public officials to attend.

Several advocacy groups, led by non-profit Empower DC, have been working to pass a moratorium on the disposition of public property. "Our goal is basically lease over sale," said Empower DC organizer Parisa Norouzi at the hearing. "It is not just these four schools, but other public buildings, like the Gayles and Randall homeless shelters, that should not be sold to the highest bidder." Empower DC presented over 2,000 postcard-petitions in support of such a moratorium to council members. Councilmember Carol Schwartz (At-Large, R) recently introduced a bill that would institute such a moratorium until the process could be reformed.

After the Dec. 19 hearing, Committee on Government Operations Chair Vincent Orange said that he expected that his committee would forward the school dispositions bills to the economic development committee. The bill has to pass both committees before it can receive a full vote in the council.

Johnson says that he still plans to host a town hall meeting to discuss proposed

plans for the Bruce School building in January. "Now that the issue is a political football," he says, "it is very difficult to know what is going on with this property disposition."

### RENT CONTROL SCRUTINY BRINGS NEW TENANT PROTECTIONS

A series of recent District council hearings and public meetings have spotlighted the failure of rent control laws in Ward 1. As a result, the council has passed temporary legislation clarifying a portion of a law suspected to have been used for de-facto illegal evictions and is considering permanent legislation to strengthen controls over rapid rent escalation when occupants change. In addition, the District's Department of Consumer and Regulatory Affairs, has created the position of "Tenant Advocate."

"I hope that this will be a new day," said Ward 1 Councilmember Jim Graham, Chair of the Committee on Consumer and Regulator Affairs at a Dec. 24 hearing. "Because from 1999 to 2005, all the cards were stacked against renters in this city."

At the hearing, residents from several apartment buildings, including 1840 and 1846 Vernon St. NW in Adams Morgan, described an apparent scheme to pressure them to leave their apartments by citing the need to make emergency repairs that would make their apartments habitable. According to DC housing code, landlords can require tenants to vacate an apartment for such repairs. Under the law, however, the tenants have the right to return to the apartment at the same rent after repairs are completed. In these cases, however, tenants testified that they were pressured or even tricked into waiving those rights.

The District's Inspector General also released a report that examined the rent control filings of large apartment buildings in each ward. According to the report, the rents charged in many of these units were not affordable to even moderate-income families. In Ward 1's Park Plaza apartment building, for example, rent charged on 109 of the apartment units was over \$1,000 per month, a sum considered unaffordable to moderate income households according to the DC Fiscal Policy Institute. The report also found that for 30 of the Park Plaza units, the actual rent charged was above the rent-ceiling, the legal limit in rent-controlled apartments.

Graham pointed to a specific provision that allows owners to increase the rent ceiling in their buildings to any "similar apartment" as being one of the key mechanisms elevating rents above affordable lev-

els in rent-controlled apartments. "This one clause has allowed rent-ceilings to literally double over 1,000 percent in some cases in the last five years," said Graham. The councilmember noted, however, that even if the council passed the legislation that he had introduced to amend the provision, many of the Ward 1 rent-controlled units would already have become effectively unaffordable.

- by Gabriel Pacyniak

### DEVELOPMENT PROJECT TO REPLACE AUTO REPAIR SHOP AND COMCAST SATELLITE FARM

What used to be the Petrovitch auto repair shop -- abandoned in recent years and one of 14th street's last vestiges of the bygone "auto row" -- will soon be transformed into a nine-story mixed-use development including approximately 170 residential condominiums, street-level retail, and below-grade parking. The construction will take place at 14th St, NW between Florida Ave and Belmont St. The project also involved nine months of negotiations with Comcast to remove a satellite farm and antenna tower from the corner of 14th ST and Florida Ave.

"View 14" as it is to be called, is a joint venture between a local developer "Level 2" and Centrum Properties of Chicago IL. The project was recently approved in its application for "Planned Unit Development" at a Dec 5th hearing before the zoning commission. The Planned Unit Development (PUD) is a process in which developers apply for additional density in exchange for negotiating a public benefits package.

The public benefits package in this case is comprised of a small number (6-7) of on-site affordable housing according to David Franco of Level 2. The real contribution however comes in a million dollar donation to the Sankofa Tenant Association which will "Provide the funding necessary for them to acquire the Crest Hill Apartments half a block away from our project." Franco adds, "That is a 48-unit, low income building which is managed by Jubilee Housing; the Crest Hill Apartments risk losing its affordability unless the tenants are able to purchase the building."

Earnest Springs, President of the Meridian Hill Neighborhood association said that local community groups felt satisfied with the outcome. Of the Crest Hill deal he says, "Their proposal has given hope to the folks there, that at least a permanent part of the neighborhood will per-

sist beyond all the development . . . They themselves are pleased with this which is more important because those people have lived here a very long time. I'm totally please with what Level 2 Development has done on behalf of the community and most importantly - they have raised the bar on new developers who now might make similar contributions."

In addition to the contribution to the Crest Hill, the benefits package includes a financial contribution of \$20,000 to the Boys and Girls Club on nearby 14th ST; a \$10,000 contribution to the Studio Arts School. Level 2 is also planning a "green roof," the use of local small business contractors, and a "first source agreement" with the department of employment services which targets 51% of new jobs created by the project to be given to District residents.

- by Susan Ruether

## WARD 2

### UPCOMING LOGAN CIRCLE ANC MEETING TO ADDRESS PARKING ISSUE

Neighbors in Logan Circle have been abuzz with the recent controversy over double parking in front of local churches in the area. A number of citizens who primarily live near the Vermont Ave. Baptist Church have been concerned with the "problem of illegal and double-parking by congregants of four churches in our neighborhood on a daily basis which creates a traffic and emergency-situation danger to our residents." Todd Lovinger who is Logan resident and an attorney has been at the forefront of the group pursuing the parking issue.

Though Church-goers have been double parking in front of the Church for many years, the rapidly changing demographics and increase in population - i.e. larger numbers of whiter and wealthier residents moving to the area--have meant that the conflict has taken on particularly emotional tones.

Up until now, however, there has been little resolution to the problem though much media attention has been paid to it in recent months. On January 4th meeting at the Washington Plaza Hotel however, the ANC will put the issue on the agenda. Several representatives from churches in the area are expected to attend.

Charles Reed, Chairman of the says of the meeting "My hopes are very simple -- that we can get an accommodation that meets the essential needs of both of these groups: so church goers can enjoy their church without major parking problems and that the residents can too - residents are blocked in - no one is criticizing the use of public space for parking. The problem is the safety and the inconvenience of people who are blocked in."

"We don't really have any expectations for the meeting as of yet, we'll have to see what comes out of it" said Co-pastor Cornelius Wheeler of the Vermont Avenue Baptist Church.

### VEGETATE LIQUOR LICENSE HEARING POSTPONED

Proximity to Seaton Elementary School has become the defining issue in the ongoing quarrel over liquor license approval for two restaurants protested by nearby Shiloh Baptist Church on the 1500 block of 9th St. NW.

Last month, a hearing held by the Alcoholic Beverage Regulation Administration (ABRA) denied the application of a liquor license for the Queen of Sheba Ethiopian Restaurant on the grounds that establishment intends to operate within 370 feet of the school located at 1503 10th St. NW.

Serving vegetarian cuisine just down the street from Queen of Sheba, Vegetate restaurant was also recently scrutinized by ABRA after one of three measurements found the establishment within 400 feet of the same Elementary school. The measurement caused the November 30th scheduled fact-finding hearing to be postponed in light of the new information.

The measurement will be contested by Vegetate however. According to co-owner Jennifer Redd, the single measurement that found the establishment within 400 feet of the school was by way of an alley and an unused garage in the back of the property, traveling across the street and through a baseball field not "connected" to the school. She notes that neither of the two door-to-door measurements found Vegetate in violation of the ABRA regulation.

The chances of overturning the measurement may be slim. When asked whether there is a precedent for successful contention of such measurements, Jeff Coudriet, Director of Operations at ABRA responded, "Not that I can think of... not in the six years I've been in the position."

Vegetate will have the opportunity to try however, at the fact-finding hearing now rescheduled for January. According to Coudriet, the Alcoholic Beverage Commission (ABC) board could rule right away at the hearing or postpone the decision further though he acknowledges that "Everyone in this case is sensitive to the timeframe because the establishment has already been open without the license... the board will want to rule as quickly as possible so that the parties will have certainty either way."

For some, the delay is problematic. Alex Padro, Executive Director of Shaw Main Streets and the ANC Commissioner for the area remarks, "The further delay to Vegetate's eventual protest hearing could have a deleterious effect on other restaurants hoping to open in the area." He notes that several "ABC establish-

ments" are interested in coming to the area adjacent to Shiloh Church and notes that independent measurements in regard to the Seaton Elementary School will be key for businesses interested in the restaurant class liquor license.

"Shiloh being allowed to drag out [the hearing process] as long as possible has a negative impact on people who in some cases have already put their life savings in their business." Padro noted.

For now, it is a waiting game. "We are optimistic" says Redd of proceeding with the upcoming hearing. "Now we just wait for the next thing to come up," she laughs.

Calls to Shiloh Baptist Church for comment were not returned.

- by Susan Ruether

## WARD 4

### ANC4A SPLIT ON SINGLE SALE BAN

Owners of three businesses attended ANC 4A's December 6 meeting to seek support in renewal of their Class B liquor licenses. The Commission supported the renewal of China Hut's license mainly because Commissioner Jourdinia Brown, whose Single Member District encompasses China Hut, says the business has followed a voluntary agreement with the community to keep its premises clean and not sell single sale alcohol beverages.

Commissioner Brown and Commissioner Stephen Whatley have secured pledges from all the liquor stores from Silver Spring to Fern Street not to sell singles, often in exchange for not protesting the liquor license renewals.

With a 4-4 vote, the Commission did not pass a motion supporting the license renewal of Piasa Market on Underwood Street. Members of the Brightwood Community Association (BCA) were present and submitted a letter opposing the renewal saying that Piasa has done a poor job of addressing the large quantities of empty bottles and public urination around the establishment, charges which Piasa's owner denied.

Several Commissioners joined with BCA in the position that the ANC should oppose the license renewal of Piasa and other neighborhood stores until they enter into voluntary agreements not to sell singles.

A Piasa Market customer, Tony Robinson, who works with the Urban League on substance abuse issues, told the Commission that a single sale ban does not address the real issue of alcoholism. "[The ban] is a band-aid on an open wound. All it's doing is picking on the merchant."

A motion to oppose the renewal of Missouri Avenue Market failed when five Commissioners voted against it, and three in support. The owner of the Market - which is across the street from a school-

said in response to residents' concerns he has installed a security camera, removed alcohol advertising from outside the building, and purchased a high-powered light to brighten the area. Not everyone was impressed by his efforts.

"You can have a whore house in a mansion, but it's still a whore house," said Kamili Anderson with BCA, who is opposed to "businesses that sell liquor for walk-out-the-door, street consumption as if they were selling sodas to kids coming home from school." The Association submitted a letter to the Alcoholic Beverage Regulation Administration (ABRA) opposing Missouri's renewal.

After a single sale ban went into effect in Mount Pleasant in 2001, the ANC has questioned the impact of the ban after it heard reports that people are selling single containers of alcohol from the trunks of their cars. The ANC has asked ABRA to study the effectiveness of single sale bans on reducing crime, trash, and substance abuse.

ABRA is not in the position to do a study because they are not sociologists, says ABRA spokesperson Jeff Coudriet. A comprehensive study, including whether the ban displaces alcohol-related problems to areas without the ban, would be valuable, says Coudriet, who would support working with the Department of Health on such a study.

Ward 4 Councilman Adrian Fenty, whose legislation to enact a Ward 4 single sale ban has been blocked by DC Superior Court on procedural grounds, has not taken a position in support of a comprehensive study.



Ward 4 Councilman Adrian Fenty swearing in ANC 4C07 Shanel Anthony.

### NEW 4C07 ADVISORY NEIGHBORHOOD COMMISSIONER

Smiling proudly, Shanel Anthony's mother and father attended ANC 4C's December 13 meeting to witness their son's swearing in as the Advisory Neighborhood Commissioner for Single Member District (SMD) 4C07. A health care worker who was born and raised in DC, Commissioner Anthony wants to be a "pillar"