Controversial Development Projects Continue in the News; Too Close to Resolution, but McMillan Far from Resolved

By William G. Schultz

As Washingtonians head into the dog days of late July and August, three high-profile real-estate development projects—all subjects of extensive coverage by the InTowner—have received either green lights from various boards and commissions, been sued by opposition groups, or remain mired in court actions that neither city officials nor the developers involved can quite seem to figure out.

In no particular order, the development projects are: PN Hoffman’s residential building at the corner of 18th Street and Columbia Road, NW—a/k/a SunTrust Plaza; a proposed high-rise medical building on Michigan Avenue; and, finally, the ongoing McMillan Park development controversy, which has become something of an albatross for the D.C. Zoning Commission, the city’s Office of Planning, and D.C. Mayor Muriel Bowser whose groundbreaking of the site in late June has been revved up with a free, open to the public party at Miss Pixie’s Furnishings & Whatnot on Friday, the 4th, between 6 and 8 pm. We are told that “tasty bites” will be provided from just two doors south by Barcelona Wine Bar and live New Orleans jazz by laissez foure. So that they can plan for how much of those “tasty bites” will be needed, it will be essential that persons attending register for free tickets at eventbrite.com; watch for when it appears on the calendar for August 4th.

What one can look forward to is participation by old and new retailers along with the popular restaurants and art galleries as well as the neighborhood’s music venues and community centers. Among the highlights on Saturday will be Studio Theatre’s multi-floor “Taste of Studio” open house featuring food and beverage tastings, art installations, musical & theatrical performances, behind-the-scenes tours, and a flea market.

And, on both days, be sure to take in the African-American Civil War Museum’s outdoor exhibit at the 10th Street and Vermont Avenue memorial plaza directly across from the museum and also Whitman-Walker Heath’s pop-up food festival at Lot at the Liz, the arts-splashed space at the corner of 14th and R Streets.

Of course, it will be the vast numbers of vendors and restaurants throughout the area on both days that will be providing a shoppers and foodies unwinding array of delights. A few examples: On 14th Street, Miss Pixie’s Furnishings & Whatnot will be offering 20% off everything in the store; Cork Wine Bar’s Cork Market will be featuring a lemonade stand and 30% off select wines.— and in the bar, a 1 to 5 pm happy hour in the 1800 block of U Street. Prospect Restaurant will be taking 10% off the tab providing the magic words “Dog Days” are mentioned to the server; three blocks east, Nellie’s Sports Bar will be offering $4 Stoli drinks, $5 hats, and $6 burgers.) And back on 14th, just north of T Street, (on Saturday only) City Paws Animal Hospital’s photo booth will be open between 12 noon and 4 pm along with offering “pet and people goodie bags”. In addition, the Humane Rescue Alliance will be on hand.

Barbershops and Barbering in the District; DCRA Regulations Govern the Profession

By Larry Ray

What man does not need a haircut, beard trimmed, mustache groomed monthly? What is the difference between a $13 cut and a $35 styled cut? Maybe, the barbershop. Except now one can pay $45 for razor cut plus free beer.

Scott tells The InTowner, “One of the first things I do when I visit Rehoboth Beach is to go to the barbershop. There, I get caught up on all the news.”

Leslie remembers, “Oh yes, my dad’s barbershop was a community center. His cronies would spend half of the day there yakking; coffee was always brewing.”

Barbers of the Middle Ages not only practiced shaving, haircutting, and hairdressing, they also dressed wounds and performed surgical operations. They were called barber-surgeons. They identified themselves by the poles displaying red and white or red, white and blue stripes — the red representing blood, the white for bandages, and blue for the veins.

When, in France in 1743 and England in 1745, barber-surgeons were no longer permitted to perform surgery and were barred from performing surgery.

18th Annual Mid-City Dog Days 14th and U Streets Sale Event Set for Weekend of August 5th and 6th

By P.L. Wolff

Mark your calendars and get ready for a weekend of local shopping, eating, sipping, shopping, and people-watching, filled with special offers and promotions being offered by over 100 businesses during what is DC’s largest ever sidewalk sale, from P Street to Florida Avenue on 14th and along U between 7th and 17th Streets.

The weekend event will be getting revved up with a free, open to the public party at Miss Pixie’s Furnishings & Whatnot on Friday, the 4th, between 6 and 8 pm. We are told that “tasty bites” will be provided from just two doors south by Barcelona Wine Bar and live New Orleans jazz by laissez foure. So that they can plan for how much of those “tasty bites” will be needed, it will be essential that persons attending register for free tickets at eventbrite.com; watch for when it appears on the calendar for August 4th.

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Metro Money Madness

When on July 10th we first read in the Washington Post that Metro, “strapped for cash,” was looking at a proposal to raise needed money by selling naming rights for stations, our immediate reaction was, “OMG!” — followed by dark thoughts of corporate interests looking for ways to offset the braces being put on their desire to sully our streetscapes with electronic billboards.

The idea is that high usage stations could have their designations, one might say, enhanced by the sale of naming rights to some business enterprise that would be happy to pay upwards of $1 million annually — think Federal Triangle could now be shown on the maps, pylons and signage as Federal Triangle-Trump International Hotel (or just Trump for short). After all, why not get top dollar for the station exit that’s just across the street?

Why not? Well, forgetting that the inclusion of the name Trump on any DC signage is too gross to contemplate, the name of any private business enterprise should never be added to public buildings or taxpayer-owned facilities like a public transit system. Yes, it’s true that sports arenas that receive tax breaks or get partially financed through government bonds regularly hear the names of corporations that pay big bucks, like the Verizon Center. As of now, though, the station that feeds sports and concert-goers into that arena is still designated as Gallery Place-Chinatown — as it should be.

Adding an extra name to a station’s designation should only be done to help identify adjacent or nearby public places or neighborhoods like Woodley Park-Zoo/Adams Morgan — and not Woodley Park-Marriott Wardman Park Hotel just because the hotel is right there. So, with all these thoughts about this cockamamie idea running through our head, the day following the July 13th Metro board meeting we got hold of the Board’s chairman, Ward 2 Councilmember Jack Evans, and pointedly asked him if he supports the idea. His response was a succinct “No,” even though he did go along with authorizing Metro staff to go out into the community to ascertain whether there might be public acceptance for doing this and also to study what other transit systems may or may not have been doing in this regard, including to study what kind of revenue could realistically be anticipated and to come back with a comprehensive report that will clearly provide what will be needed to make an informed final determination.

And it will be important for all citizens, not just Metro riders, to weigh in with their views — which we urge will be as is ours. In that regard, we say to Metro’s management that it will be absolutely imperative that their outreach be far beyond just having people hanging out in the stations to get rider opinions; they need to schedule well-publicized public ward-based meetings.

Noting the stark reality that Metro needs an additional $500 million annually to keep the system going (and not to allow a repeat of its crumbling infrastructure), Evans told us, in effect, that no stone should be left unturned, and that when the financial situation might again require yet another fare increase there should be no way that anyone will be able to say that the powers that he didn’t look for every possible revenue source.

We agree. For example, among other Board actions was a decision to make changes in the way Metro will charge for access to its parking garages & lots. While this will only raise an additional $8 million a year in new revenue, a mere drop in that $500 million bucket, it does show that the Board is indeed intent on leaving no stone unturned.

But, as Evans told us, he and other members of the Board recognize the absolute need for an annual stream of dedicated funding and he, especially, has been pushing for a plan that would have all three jurisdictions enact an additional penny sales tax for the sole purpose of paying into keeping Metro viable and once again the lifeblood of the local economy.

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While the District’s representatives support this plan, xEvans said that Maryland’s are ambivalent and Virginia’s are opposed. And we surely have no expectation that our leaders like Evans, along with the region’s several business and civic leaders, keep up the pressure — especially in Virginia where business seems to be king (which for this may be a good thing!).
The Exploratory Committee, the event’s sponsor, is seeking to form a Business Improvement District (BID), the goal of which will be the beautification and promotion of the neighborhood’s business attractiveness. As stated by Pixie Windsor, owner of Miss Pixie’s and one of the chief organizers of the event for the last several years, “Bringing the community together to support local retailers and small businesses in my neighborhood is just about my favorite thing.”

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McMILLAN
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December 2016, was the next day with a Court of Appeals Ruling that brought the entire McMillan project to a screeching halt.

At a somewhat byzantine hearing on July 29, the Zoning Commission, under the direction of Chairman Anthony Hood, wound its way through the five specific remarks on the McMillan project handed down by the DC Court of Appeals.

Of particular note, said Hood, were the court's questions surrounding justification for the height and density of a proposed medical office building on the site that developers Vision McMillan Partners (VMP) insist is critical “to the success of the rest of the project — including mixed-income housing units and public park space with amenities such as historical exhibits about the abandoned sand filtration units, a marker of late 19th century engineering once critical to the city's supply of potable water.

But McMillan neighbors and opposition groups have insisted that the proposed medical building would violate the city's Comprehensive Plan, which designates the site for only medium- or moderate-density development. Groups such as Friends of McMillan Park (FOMP) — which filed in DC Superior Court the original lawsuit to stop the project — also contend that the VMP development will destroy historic site lines, does not address fully quality of life impacts such as traffic and parking, and has been marred by malfeasance and corruption, including illegally awarded contracts, suppression of public opinion via city-financed public relations campaigns, and attempts to hide highly relevant documents and expert testimony that prove other options for finally opening McMillan Park to public enjoyment do exist.

In sharing his frustration regarding McMillan Park development, Zoning Commission Vice Chair Robert Miller expressed some degree of the other commissioners' shared frustration, perhaps cut to the chase when he stated, “This project has been approved many times in this configuration. . . . This project is supported by the elected representatives of the people.

Great open space has grown through the process, Miller said, and he insisted that the developer has designed step-downs and setbacks to increase the overall visual appeal of the project. “There has been a balancing that has already occurred,” Miller said. “This is an important mixed-income, mixed-income project that the city has been trying to develop for over 30 years.”

When the commissioners began to deliberate next steps — basically, another hearing, probably in September — Kimberly M. Johnson, a staff attorney for the city's Office of the Attorney General, as a representative of the city in the McMillan case, stated that she wished to make a plea for Chairman Hood to find a hearing room that could be scheduled very quickly — perhaps in July.

“I mean,” she said, “this is a very important case for the District and for the citizens. And as you’ve indicated, this case has been around for a very long time. And so, we were very hopeful that we had come to the end, and to now push it off even longer . . .”

Johnson did not respond to our voice mail message left on her office phone seeking further comment on the matter.

The Mayor's Agent for Historic Preservation will hold their remand hearing on July 14th and the Zoning Commission has scheduled its next hearing for September 14.

Meanwhile, FOMP's Kirby Vining tells The InTowner that the way he sees it is that “the [DC Court of Appeals] is giving the city a chance to justify certain egregious aspects of the project, and the city isn’t doing so.”

Turning our attention from McMillan Park to Meridian Hill about two miles west, Meridian International Center and its developer Westbrook Partners have finally won Historic Preservation Review Board approval of their revised design for a new high-rise luxury apartment building to be erected on the presently unused, lower portion of the White-Meyer grounds facing the edge of the hillside, rather than the...

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17th Street Festival
Saturday, August 26, 2017
12:00-6:00 pm

The 17th Street Festival is now accepting vendor applications. Visit www.17thStreetFestival.org

- Artists
- Entrepreneurs
- Pet Lovers
- Nonprofits

Registration is open now until July 26

Who needs to go anywhere else?

The mission of Historic Dupont Main Streets is to promote, coordinate, and maintain the cultural, economic, and environmental qualities of Dupont Circle to make it an exemplary place to live, work, shop, and play.

www.DupontCircleMainStreets.org
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Meridian and Westbrook had been rebuffed four times by HPRB, but apparently the fifth try was a charm. The building will be reduced by one floor from the top but maintain a central entrance tower deemed in keeping with the Meridian Hill Historic District, and corner balconies included in the previous design iteration will be removed. This was one of several options the developers had to address the main concern about the building’s height, though it was not the preferred option of ANC 1C, which wanted a full floor taken from the building’s midsection.

Meanwhile, the Kalorama Citizens Association and pressure group Adams Morgan for Reasonable Development have filed suit to stop PN Hoffman’s retail and condominium development at the southwest corner of 18th Street and Columbus Road, which will likely result in a smaller public plaza than that maintained by SunTrust Bank for nearly 40 years.

Hoffman and partner Potomac Investment Properties insist that the plaza is now part of their private property, though they have stated a plan to include maintenance of some public space in the triangle on the northeast corner of the intersection, as well as ensuring relocation of the weekend farmers market that occurs on weekends in the current plaza. PN Hoffman did not respond to our requests for comment about the pending lawsuit.

“Associate Editor William G. Schulz, a resident of Dupont Circle since the 1980s, has been a journalist specializing in science and investigative reporting for over 30 years. © 2017 InTowner Publishing Corp. & William G. Schulz. All rights reserved. Reproduction in whole or in part without permission is prohibited, except as provided by 17 U.S.C. §§ 107 & 108 (‘fair use’).”

BARBERSHOPS
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restricted to barbering only they kept these poles as their identification.

When many Americans think about barbers and barbershops, their imaginations may evoke the old Andy Griffith Show’s barber Floyd Lawson. This whimsical, laid-back and absent-minded character set the stage for the barbershop to be a kind of community center where discussing current events played a major role in town issues. This beloved character was based on a real life Mt. Airy, North Carolina, barber.

The oldest continuously operating barbershop in this country is the family-owned George’s Barber Shop in Sangus, Massachusetts. Founded in 1902, its slogan, “We are not the best because we are the oldest. We’re the oldest because we are the BEST!” says it all.

Today, the barbershop business is alive, and well, and transforming. A good example is that of Diego’s one block north of Dupont Circle.

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