December 29, 2016

Honorable Muriel Bowser  
Mayor of the District of Columbia  
John A. Wilson Building  
1350 Pennsylvania Avenue, NW  
Washington, DC 20004

Honorable Phil Mendelson  
Chairman of the District of Columbia City Council  
John A. Wilson Building  
1350 Pennsylvania Avenue, NW  
Washington, DC 20004

Dear Mayor Bowser and Chairman Mendelson,

Consistent with the ANC1B Resolution On Delay Of The Grimke School And Adjacent Public Property Redevelopment of November 3, 2016, we strongly urge the Administration and Council to move the Grimke School redevelopment forward with the runner-up development team, Community Three and Torti Gallas, without issuing another RFP and BAFO process.

ANC 1B and the community worked extensively with DMPED and prospective developers to craft a proposal that would address all of these issues. Unfortunately after nearly two years of RFP, numerous meetings, evaluation of BAFOs, Council action to surplus and dispose of the property, and awarding the deal - the awardee, Roadside and DLR Group/Sorg backed out of the deal citing that it is no longer viable for their business.

It is worth noting that ANC 1B has been a partner in this development, pushing for transparency and completion, for many years. ANC 1B held two public information sessions and three public meetings in 2014 in response to the Grimke RFP and from those meetings it was decided that the following major points should be included in the winning proposal:

- Defined use of the space for arts, culture, and creative uses per the DUKE Plan.
- Increased daytime use that will bring new visitors to our neighborhood.
- Opportunity to leverage commercial corridor space for daytime professional jobs and daytime patronage of restaurants and shops.
- Recognition of the historic nature of the site and the significance of its location in the greater neighborhood.

The Roadside and DLR Group/Sorg proposal incorporated these points in a unique way, bringing new creative arts organizations to the area. Step Afrika!, City Dance, and Imagination Stage all provided the arts use directed by the DUKE plan, while also increased daytime use through their employees and artists. Weekend use would have been increased through performances and classes for the community, adding to a vibrant and beautiful building greeting people entering the neighborhood. This proposal also included a front-facing location for the African American Civil War Museum, which would have allowed the museum to reach a larger audience and be more visible in the community.

All together, these uses recognize the significance of the Grimke School in the history of our neighborhood, the value of a civic plaza of the combined AACW Museum and the AACW Memorial, and the important role it has to play in our future.

Consistent with the Resolution, we strongly urge the Administration and Council to take two actions in two critical areas:

Grimke Redevelopment:
- Accelerate moving Grimke redevelopment forward without issuing another RFP.
- Engage BAFO runner-up Community Three to modify their proposal to include performing arts space for Step Afrika!, City Dance, and Imagination Stage, similar to what was proposed in the previous award.
- Complete remediation of outstanding environmental issues.
- Consider options for the non-profit tenants to utilize space in the other redeveloped parcels near the Grimke School if it is not possible to fit them in the historic Grimke School itself.
- Consider use of 912 U Street as a professional office building which will bring daytime activity and reduce noise complaints with housing on U Street Corridor.

Public Property Process:
- Assess whether to require greater financial commitment and imposing strict timelines for developers participating in the redevelopment of public properties are feasible and likely to prevent developers involved in the redevelopment of public properties to walk away as occurred with the Grimke project.
- Provide DMPED the tools to enforce and assess penalties for non-performance on public land deals.

Advisory Neighborhood Commission 1B serves the communities of Columbia Heights, LeDroit Park, Pleasant Plains, Shaw, U Street, Howard University, and lower Georgia Avenue.
ANC 1B also supports changing the micro-unit residential building proposed at 912 U Street to professional office space. Our community and businesses need more daytime density so that restaurants can be food-focused and shops can be busy every day, not just weekends. ANC 1B has a strong history of supporting affordable, inclusionary housing, whether by our ZPD Committee pushing developers to include more and better IZ units than required, or our Economic Development Committee holding the District accountable for making the proposed Ward 1 homeless shelter a home that works for the families it will be serving. We believe a small-footprint micro-unit residential building on a commercial corridor does not serve the needs of our community and that better solutions for family-size housing may be found within our more residential neighborhoods.

We must not further the negative impact on economic development of the U Street corridor by restarting at step zero. We must also learn and improve our public property redevelopment process by learning from these events and requiring greater commitment from proposed developers.

ON BEHALF OF THE COMMISSION.

Regards,

James A. Turner
Chair ANC 1B,
Commissioner 1B09

LaKisha Brown
Secretary ANC 1B,
Commissioner 1B04

Robb Hudson
ANC 1B Public Policy & Government Affairs Advocate,
Commissioner 1B11

attachment: ANC 1B Resolution On Delay Of The Grimke School And Adjacent Public Property Redevelopment

c: The Honorable Brianne Nadeau, Ward One
The Honorable David Grosso, At-Large
The Honorable Anita Bonds, At-Large
The Honorable Robert White, At-Large
The Honorable Elissa Silverman, At-Large
Brian Kenner, Deputy Mayor for Economic Development
Sarosh Olpadwala, Director Real Estate