



November 23, 2015

***An Open Letter to Park Morton and Bruce Monroe Community Residents and Stakeholders***

Dear District Residents,

As the District moves forward on the redevelopment of Park Morton, a 174-unit public housing community in the Georgia Avenue corridor, our goal is to create a community where every Park Morton resident has an opportunity to live and thrive. Park Morton will be redeveloped through the New Communities Initiative, a District effort launched in 2005 to redevelop aging public housing properties into vibrant mixed-income communities.

**BACKGROUND**

When Park Morton was included in the New Communities Initiative by Council action in 2008, the District made a promise to residents to invest in and strengthen their community. The project was awarded in 2010 but little progress was made, and it was resolicited and reawarded in 2014 to the current development team of The Community Builders/Dantes Partners. A primary reason for the City's decision to resolicit was to jumpstart the project as current conditions for Park Morton residents – aging structures with plumbing and other systemic issues, as well as a poor physical layout and design that supports criminal and drug activity - continue to deteriorate.

**BRUCE MONROE SITE SELECTION**

The development plan includes the Bruce Monroe site as a key component of the redevelopment of Park Morton in order to achieve a founding principle of New Communities - "Build First". Build First requires a substantial off-site parcel within the neighborhood to begin the redevelopment, allowing for the on-site housing portion to be redeveloped in phases, and minimizing the displacement of residents outside their neighborhood. The Bruce Monroe site was home to the old Bruce Monroe School, which DCPS closed in 2008 due to under-enrollment. The city worked with the community in 2009 to devise an interim use for the site, and committed funding for improvements and amenities. The improvements, however, were always intended to be temporary while the city developed a plan for the site, and DCPS never contemplated returning a school to the site.

The Office of the Deputy Mayor for Planning and Economic Development ("DMPED") looked at many possibilities for Build First options, including reviewing all of the sites proposed by each developer who responded to the District of Columbia Housing Authority's ("DCHA") original 2014 solicitation, reviewing sites proposed by landowners themselves, and sites proposed by community groups. In addition, a review of the corridor was performed to determine if we missed any viable parcels. These potential sites included government owned parcels in Wards 1 and 4, and ten privately owned parcels, most of which were along the Georgia Avenue corridor. We looked for sites that were in the neighborhood and would yield enough replacement public housing units (60+ family-sized units) to allow us to implement "Build First." The Bruce Monroe site was viewed as the best option to facilitate the Build First concept and move the Park Morton project forward for the following reasons:

- **No Displacement.** Allows for replacement of all public housing units without having to move Park Morton residents out of the neighborhood.
- **Accelerates Redevelopment.** Facilitates Park Morton redevelopment on the fastest timeline, as it is a single site versus multiple sites that would need to be purchased and developed over time.
- **Site Ownership Already.** DC government owned site, therefore no need to acquire other sites.
- **Cost Effective.** Government owned site where the value can be used to subsidize affordability, a District priority for use of public parcels.

BRIAN T. KENNER  
DEPUTY MAYOR

In addition to evaluating the Bruce Monroe site as the best option for Build First, we also know continued park and recreation use on the Bruce Monroe site is a priority for the community. As such, we are supportive of a plan only if it includes park and recreational space returning to the site. The current proposal preserves half of the site as a park, which would allow all of the site's current uses including courts, playground, garden, to be brought back to the site. In addition, the proposal provides for some amount of park space to be open and operational for most of the construction period and for the permanent park space to be brought back to the site first. This plan will maximize the public and community value of the site by creating significant affordable housing capacity and improving on existing park space at the same time.

#### **FUTURE FOR PARK MORTON REDEVELOPMENT**

Another key tenet of the New Communities Initiative is to develop formerly public housing into mixed-income communities. At full development, the Park Morton site and Bruce Monroe site will be valuable additions to the Georgia Avenue corridor, containing some 500 units of mixed-income housing across both sites. The developments also offer us an opportunity to meet other neighborhood needs for park and green space at both sites, and provide new opportunities for community amenities and much needed neighborhood-serving retail.

#### **COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT/NEXT STEPS**

Mayor Bowser and I had the opportunity to meet with several residents at community meetings on November 4<sup>th</sup>, 2015 and November 16<sup>th</sup>, 2015 where we discussed the Bruce Monroe site and Park Morton. As we move forward with future community meetings (posted at <http://www.dcnewcommunities.org>), we want to make sure that the community is part of the planning conversation and that we are communicating our progress in an open and transparent manner.

The Park Morton project is at the beginning of a robust community planning process which includes regular public meetings as well as planning and design workshops in December and January. Furthermore, the project will include review by the local ANCs, a Planned Unit Development process through the Zoning Commission, and land disposition process through the DC Council likely in 2016.

Park Morton will be the first full-scale public housing redevelopment *in the country* that is completed without displacing low-income residents from their home neighborhood. We are excited to have this opportunity for the this neighborhood, and the District, to lead the nation in the fair and equitable treatment of our underserved and overlooked communities. We encourage you to join us in discussing how we can all succeed in making it happen together. Together, we can achieve a successful outcome for the residents of Park Morton, continue the revitalization of Georgia Avenue, and create more pathways to the middle class.

Sincerely,



Brian T. Kenner  
Deputy Mayor of Planning and Economic Development

Cc: Brianne Nadeau, Ward 1 Councilmember  
Angie Rodgers, Director of New Communities Initiative, DMPED