

A Reimagined Hine

Development Teams Vie For One of Capitol Hill's Most Important Redevelopment Projects in Decades

The Seven Penn Partners Plan



BY DAVID GARBER

It's a Tuesday morning and 7th Street's Peregrine Espresso is buzzing. Every table is occupied by glowing iBooks, cornucopial Timbuktu messenger bags spilling Blackberrys, moleskin notebooks, and resumes across maplewood tables, and the young khaki-and-flip-flops crowd sipping self-steeped emerald teas and café Americanos.

Capitol Hill residents Ryan and Jill Jensen opened Peregrine last summer in the space previously occupied by Murky Coffee. Speaking to their decision to locate at 7th and Pennsylvania, Ryan talks like it was the obvious choice. "We owe a lot of our success to the fact that residents of the neighborhood have been coming to this space for good coffee for a long time. But more generally, we like the presence of really great, local businesses. There are a lot of owners who live on the Hill and who are trying to fill retail needs that people have

actually expressed the desire to have within walking distance."

Life within walking distance is a strong value of Hill life. Pennsylvania Avenue and the Eastern Market metro plaza split the area's two primary retail districts: South of Penn is Barrack's Row, the city's newest restaurant mecca and home to new wildly-successful businesses like Matchbox, Cava, Hill's Kitchen, and Molly Malone's. When scattered amidst frame stores, bike shops, pet supply boutiques, and even a 7-11, it's a district that embodies the convenient urbanism that so many in the minivan generation and beyond have embraced.

Across Penn to the north is the more established 7th Street, where Adolf Cluss' Eastern Market is being primed for its end-of-month grand re-opening. This is the spine of an area lauded as

one of the nation's ten "Best Neighborhoods" by the American Planning Association in 2007 and the epicenter of the weekend flea market where stroller-pushing masses flood tents selling rusty porch stars, Persian rugs, and frameable Sunkist advertisements from 1940s Good Housekeeping magazines. 7th Street is alive, but it is all very one-sided.

Right at the heart of all this life is Hine Junior High, whose hulking four stories of brutalist concrete and brick is hemmed in by chain link and swatches of never-used lawn. It's the block killer that never managed to kill the block. Closed at the end of the 2008 school year as part of the Fenty administration's still-active push to restore efficiency to the city's school system, its presence doesn't bring the same yin-yang contrast as when braided preteens double-dutched across from latte-sipping



Left: The DSF-Menkiti Plan
Right: The National Leadership Campus

patrons at Murky. But to many it is still an eyesore, and its prominent plot across from the underwhelming Eastern Market Metro plaza and amidst one of the most pedestrian-affirming districts in the region deserves much more.

Developer Presentations

Exactly what that more will be is being decided now, and on June 10 the neighborhood crowded into Tyler Elementary where four development and design teams presented their visions for the site. On paper, the four proposals appear very similar: promises of energized streets as a direct result of the hundreds of new residences, offices, and retailers; the reconnection of C Street between 7th and 8th; and a more natural transition between the Barrack's Row and Eastern Market retail districts. But Capitol Hill is a neighborhood that takes special pride in the details, and each development group brought with it a

distinct sense of style and experience.

Seven Penn Partners, led by Bozzuto Development, presented first. With colorful renderings showing rowhouse-like structures along 8th Street, classical edifices on Pennsylvania, and a more modern building with metallic accents along 7th, there was clearly attention paid to fitting in with aspects of the existing urban fabric, but without quite understanding the context. The Capabilities slide in their presentation showed well-constructed, but not particularly inspired, buildings. The logos of retailers like Sweet Green, Georgetown Cupcake, and BGR – The Burger Joint flashed across the screen, enticing the audience with successful local eateries that have expressed interest in the team's concept.

Next up was the DSF Group/Mentiki Group team. Their renderings showed a collection of red-brick structures articulated into multiple bays, but with a standard roofline throughout. A Kimpton

Hotel was shown anchoring the corner of 7th and Pennsylvania, and Busboys and Poets, a relocated Yes! Organic Market, and a new restaurant/market concept by Brabo chef Robert Wiedmaier rounded out the list of established local chains and concepts interested in taking space on the ground floor. Along 7th Street, the buildings are set back to accommodate a linear flea market, and a public square is situated on the southern end of C Street.

Third in line was the mystery presenter: the National Leadership Campus, whose presentation boards showed no renderings or plans aside from a very conceptual map displaying an assemblage of blobs in place of buildings. Their vision was of a campus to accommodate sundry non-profit organizations and their employees who cannot otherwise afford to locate on the Hill. It's always dangerous to come to a development proposals community meeting without a clear design, but the team's down-to-



The Stanton Development & Eastbanc Plan

earth style won over those in the audience who were looking for an alternative. Decidedly outside that category was former Ward 6 Councilwoman Sharon Ambrose, who is now a Member-at-Large of the Capitol Hill Town Square task force which is in the process of reimagining the square between Barracks Row and Eastern Market along Pennsylvania Avenue. “I thought the non-profit group was a non-starter,” Ambrose began. “It is a real waste of economic development for the city.” Positive aspects of the concept were its open-to-the-public campus setting and its design partner: Elizabeth Plater-Zyberk, co-founder of the New Urbanism movement.

Last to present was the Stanton Development & Eastbanc team. It was clear that Stanton Development came to the table with the most experience delivering successfully designed and programmed projects on Capitol Hill: the Ellen Wilson redevelopment adjacent to the SE/SW Freeway, a number of buildings on 7th Street, including the one Peregrine is in (“I’m biased because he’s our landlord, but I know I can trust Stanton to bring in interesting retailers in interesting buildings,” noted Jensen), while Eastbanc has done similar contextual development within the historic context of Georgetown. The team’s architectural partners are wife-husband team Amy Weinstein and Phil Esocoff, who promised architecture that fits in, and that “in a hundred years, people will want to preserve rather than tear down and replace.” The Stanton Eastbanc team was the only one to specifically mention green building, and told the audience it would strive for a LEED (Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design) Platinum rating, the building standard’s highest. The elevations they presented showed similar massing and scale as the others, but split the facades into smaller sections to give the feel of a collection of smaller buildings – one of which

pays homage to the central tower of the old Wal-lach School, the Cluss-designed school that preceded Hine on the site.

Community Input

The Hine Junior High redevelopment is one of the most obvious reflections of a growing and changing Capitol Hill. The process is under the magnifying glass of ANC 6B, whose chairman David Garrison is excited about the project as long as it fits the precise context it is within and meets the local residents’ needs. The Eastern Market Metro Community Association, the Capitol Hill Restoration Society, and thousands of residents and visitors are keen on seeing this site developed into something special. Some local residents whose main concerns are with the increased density along 8th Street and the sense of open space in and around the project have formed the group Eyes on Hine for this specific project. Steve Sweeney, a resident of 8th Street, spoke up for the group. “To us, historic character is more than just historical appearance in a visual sense. Historic character is also affected by increasing mass, scale, and density.”

Ward 6 Councilman Tommy Wells has long publicized his love for walkability and sustainably-designed neighborhoods. “My concern is to be sure we have a development that really reflects and supports what’s great about the area, a human-scale design, with amenities that people can walk to.” Wells was quick to point out that the public comment period was extended to July 10 to give the community a month from the time of the developer presentations to submit their ideas and concerns. “The project isn’t being fast tracked, but it is on track. Speed does not mean locking the community out of the decision-making process.”

What to Expect

As with anything new, there will be trade-offs: new residents will mean longer lines at Peregrine; taller structures will redefine the approaches from Pennsylvania Avenue, 7th, and 8th Streets; and the restoration of L’Enfant’s grid at C Street will alter the way traffic circulates through the neighborhood’s slow-moving streets. But where Hine serves as a Do Not Enter to the area now, new development done well will be the welcome mat; creatively designed facades will activate unused sidewalks; a fountained public piazza will breathe fresh air and provide a new escape. Done well, what comes next will weave together the now fragmented relationship of Barrack’s Row to Eastern Market, and fill a certain visual void. Although these proposals are just the first step in a multi-year development process, they hold promise of a Capitol Hill that is familiar but strengthened. All eyes are on Hine Junior High – no longer because of what it is now, but this time for what it will soon become. The city is expected to make its final development team decision in the next few months, and construction on the project will begin only after a likely two-year process of design, final planning and zoning approvals, and ongoing input from the surrounding community.

“The Hill has always prided itself in being a village in its own unique way,” Ryan from Peregrine noted, smiling as he looked out at the Hine site from a barstool inside his shop. “There’s a certain pride around the idea that ‘this is our place’ – the development needs to serve our community first.”

David G. Garber is a proud resident of fast-reinventing Historic Anacostia and author of the blog And Now, Anacostia. He is a particularly avid fan of walkability, human-scale, and sunny days. ★

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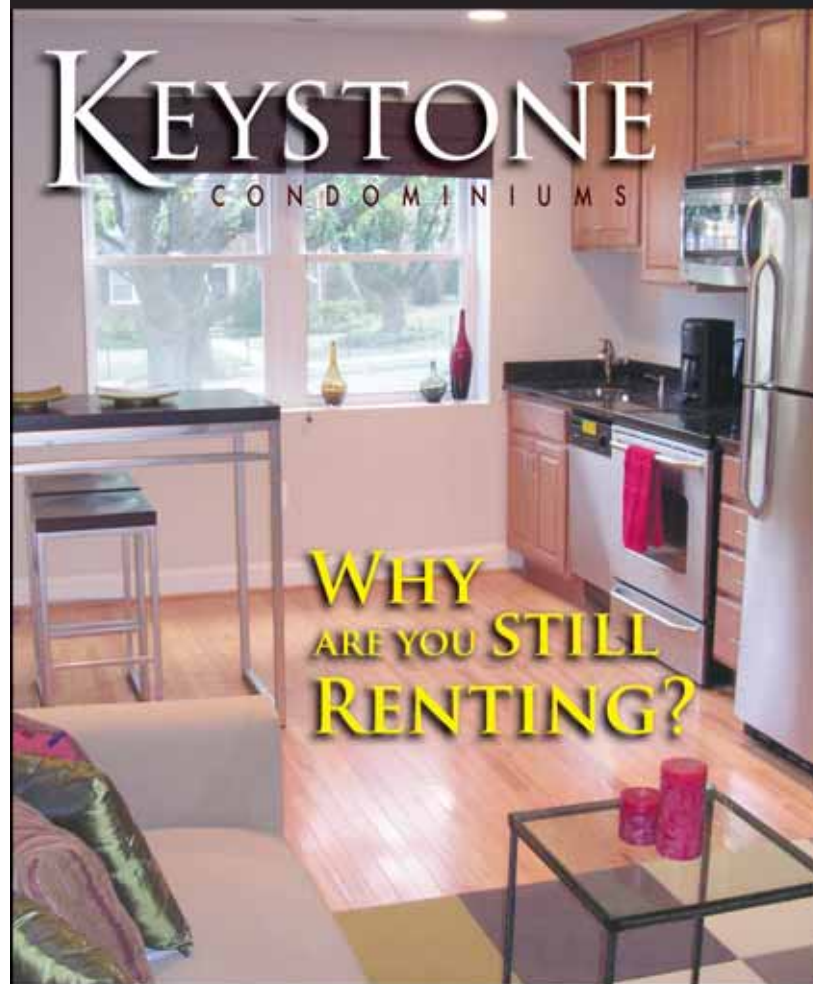


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