

# CIMP-ifying Barracks Row

Marines' Proposed Expansion Draws Praise, Criticism in Southeast

BY HUNTER L. GORINSON

The United States Marine Corps is feeling the pinch on Barracks Row. Hamstrung by ever-increasing numbers of personnel, mounting security concerns, and a dearth of buildable land left in their federal portfolio, the military brass in charge of the historic Marine Barracks Washington (MBW) is seeking an unlikely development partner to make sure they can continue their mission into the far future: the Capitol Hill community.

This past January, the USMC introduced the public to the Community Integrated Master Plan (CIMP), which, in their words, outlines “a coordinated planning process to create a win-win” series of building projects – developed in coordination with community stakeholders with the cost divided between the federal government and private developers.

If that sounds unique, that’s because it is. The Marines’ pitch not only calls for an unprecedented amount of collaboration between the armed services and private interests, but could also have widespread ramifications – for better or worse – on the whole of Near Southeast.

## Stepping up Security

The impetus behind the Marines’ need to expand is the current state of “Building 20” – the corps’ principal barracks at Eighth and I streets SE, directly across from their 209-year-old, secure MBW campus. Building 20 is far from an ideal fit for the corps. The 250-some Marines in residence are confined to rooms a third smaller than the current military standard, while the building itself is rife with structural deficiencies.

Moreover, it no longer conforms to the Department of Defense’s current Antiterrorism/

Force Protection guidelines. Per DoD regulations, modern military facilities require an 82-foot setback from traffic; Building 20’s setback is

a mere 25. This has given the Marines a sense of urgency and willingness to negotiate in their talks with community organizations and repre-

sentatives.

“The Marines are trying something new, and they’ve got the right community to try it in ... It is clear to me that they are in an exploratory stage. All I know is that the barracks has to be moved,” said Delegate Eleanor Holmes Norton in remarks at the first CIMP open house at Eastern Market.

## High Expectations ...

Despite its “master plan” moniker, the CIMP is less of an ironclad development scheme and more of an open-ended concept. To help refine it, the CIMP team is engaged in ongoing discussions with District reps and local groups, including the local advisory neighborhood commissions, developers and the Capitol Hill and Capitol Riverfront business improvement districts (BIDs), to name but a few. They’re also collecting comments from the community itself via a series of workshops scheduled to run through August. Most local residents, it would seem, appreciate the transparency with which the corps is drafting its plans.

“They certainly did not have to reach out to the community ... Compare this with what’s going on Fort Belvoir, where all the surrounding communities had something imposed on them by the base [expansion],” said Marcel LaFollette of the Eastern Market Metro Community Association. “This is a good kind of arrangement.”

Good arrangement, indeed. Among the CIMP’s chief tenets is the need for space that will be open to not only service members, but the general public as well. Already the CIMP team has thrown out ideas that include daycare, retail, a fire station and even a hotel that would be developed in tandem with a new barracks, housing for military families and a Marine Barracks



The Marine Barracks Washington's tentative schedule for the refinement of their Community Integrated Master Plan (CIMP) initiative. Photo by Andrew Lightman.

Washington museum. In all, they're projecting upwards of 170,000 square feet of new development – all within a 10- to 15-minute walk of the Eighth Street barracks.

Bruce Jackson, MBW's community planning and liaison manager and the public face of the CIMP initiative, says his team has received a largely positive response to the proposal so far.

"We haven't had any negative feedback whatsoever. There's been a little skepticism from the [Capitol Riverfront] BID ... but we want to work together," he said. "We're going to have to give a little, they're going to have to give a little and meet in the middle."

#### ...and Worst Case Scenarios

The root of that skepticism lies in the fact that, while everyone can agree that Building 20 needs to be replaced by a secure facility, no one is quite sure that they want more security in an area that the District has spent the past decade touting as the residential and tourism hub of tomorrow: the Capitol Riverfront.

"With any project of this magnitude that has federal security issues, I'm going to enter into any dialogue very cautiously. I am acutely aware of what setbacks for security do to create dead zones in any neighborhood," said Capitol Riverfront BID President Michael Stevens.

Rather than building anew, said Stevens, the Marines should inventory their existing space – possibly at the existing, nearby Marine Barracks Annex – as it already conforms to security standards. That sentiment is shared by Capital Hill Restoration Society Zoning Committee Chair Gary Peterson, who feels that any amplified military presence in between Eastern Market and Nationals Park could have unintended consequences.

"Having space for families and dependents, that's the part that really worries me ... With security [being heightened these] days, it doesn't make much sense to take people that are dispersed throughout the metropolitan area, as best

I can tell, and concentrate them together, so that they become a target," he said.

#### Potential Sites

Whether or not the reality of another bollard-encased military campus comes to pass, the fact remains that viable site first has to be located and procured by the Marines. While the CIMP's own website identifies the Tyler Elementary baseball diamond and the Potomac Gardens public housing complex as locations of interest, sources involved in the negotiations say that the project team is eyeballing "a number" of vacant lots throughout the Hill, including a Seventh Street parking lot between M and L streets SE and the Exxon station at 11th and M streets SE.

And with so many open questions surrounding the CIMP, only one thing is for certain – Near Southeast will be busy over the next 24 months. During that time, a litany of building projects are due to break ground or move into a new phase, including the Capper/Carrollburg Hope VI housing redevelopment, the 11th Street Bridge project, the CSX rail expansion, an extension of Anacostia Bicycle Trail and the completion of the Lower Eighth Street visioning process.

Furthermore, officials at the Navy Yard just announced their intent to expand their complex by some 700,000 square feet – a venture completely independent of the CIMP.

Is all of this achievable in one of Washington's most heavily trafficked communities?

"I think all things are possible. It's just a question of having it make sense," said John Manley, a 21-year resident of 10th Street SE. "Some of it's good, some of it's bad, and some of it's a mixed blessing."

*For more information on the Marine Barracks Washington's CIMP initiative, visit: <http://sedistrictcimp.com>. ★*

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