

Testimony
By
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Chair, Advisory Neighborhood Commission 6B
Commissioner, ANC 6B09
Testimony on behalf of ANC 6B
Before the
DC Department of General Services
Public Hearing on Proposed Surplus of
Eastern Branch Building (261 17th Street SE)
Tuesday, September 16, 2014
6:30 pm

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Good evening. My name is Brian Flahaven, and I serve as chair of Advisory Neighborhood Commission 6B. My single member district, 6B09, lies in Hill East and includes the Eastern Branch Building.

I'm here today to share ANC 6B's comments on the proposed surplus and planned Request for Offers for the Eastern Branch Building, the city-owned former Boys and Girls Club building located at 261 17th Street SE. I'm testifying on behalf of ANC 6B, which approved my testimony X-X during its September 9, 2014 meeting with a quorum present.

We appreciate your department's commitment to re-activating the Eastern Branch Building and for reaching out to our commission and the community for input on the surplus and RFO process. Earlier this year, ANC 6B held three community meetings to get input from nearby residents and others about the building's proposed surplus and RFO. The commission used the feedback received at these meetings to develop formal comments on the proposed RFO, which we approved and submitted to DGS in May.

ANC 6B believes that the city should pursue responses that include a community or neighborhood-serving use in the building. Many Hill East residents grew up with the Eastern Branch Boys and Girls Club and have fond memories of activities in the building. When it was open, it was a community gathering space and the only recreational facility in the immediate area.

Ideally, strong responses to the RFO will provide flexible space in the building for community and neighborhood events and activities. Such a space could exist in a portion of the building, such as the first floor, and be rented or leased out to multiple groups and used for multiple purposes.

ANC 6B recommends that the RFO clearly state that the community would like to see one or more of the following community or neighborhood uses in a successful response:

- Daycare

- Adult daycare/senior services
- Recreational uses such as dance or fitness classes
- Community meeting/event space

While this list is certainly not meant to exclude other potential community uses, responses that include one or more of these uses should be given greater weight or points by DGS in the evaluation process.

With no city funding available for the building at this time, we recognize that responses to the RFO will likely include some non-community use or uses that will make the project financially attractive to potential developers and/or organizations. ANC 6B and the community would prefer this non-community use be housing. We envision housing on the top floors of the building with community use(s) on the first floor. The community has expressed interest in housing for families and/or senior housing, though we recognize that the non-community use will have to generate enough revenue to sustain and support any community use(s) in the building.

Our support for housing as the building's non-community use does not mean we would not consider responses with other non-community use ideas. However, we feel that responses that include housing should be given greater weight or points by DGS in the evaluation process. We did hear clear feedback that the community does not support a school use for the site.

In addition to input on potential uses, the commission urged DGS to address a number other issues related to the RFO in our May letter. I'd like to briefly highlight four of these issues tonight.

First, there is no funding for this project in the Mayor's FY15 budget proposal. We strongly urge the Mayor, Council and DGS to pursue any city funding necessary to make this project viable. In 2007, the city purchased the Eastern Branch Building with the intent of keeping it as a neighborhood-serving resource. As this new RFO process moves forward, the city should also be willing to partner with the developer and/or organization ultimately selected to fund necessary building repairs and to make sure that community use(s) in the building are supported.

Second, when the building was open, the Eastern Branch Boys & Girls Club was the only recreational facility in southeast Hill East. The neighborhood is in desperate need of additional recreational spaces – fields, gyms, open rooms, etc. While we hope that DGS receives RFO responses that envision recreational use for a portion of the building, we understand that the current building is not ideal for large scale recreational use. Other facilities in the neighborhood, including Payne Elementary School and Eastern High School and the largely unused RFK parking lots, are better suited to provide large scale recreational uses if they were open to the community. ANC 6B urges the Mayor, Council, DGS and other city agencies to invest in these facilities so that they can be open and active recreational facilities on nights and weekends.

Third, successful responses to the RFO should detail how proposed uses will impact the surrounding neighborhood. Nearby residents are particularly concerned about parking, since the site currently does not include parking spaces, and potential noise from new uses. The RFO should specifically ask developers and organizations to provide detailed plans to mitigate parking, noise and any other concerns that could negatively impact nearby neighbors.

And fourth, once the RFO period has closed and DGS has identified viable responses, we expect that the community, through ANC 6B, will have an opportunity to weigh in on the responses. We are more than willing to work with your department to find venues, dates and times where the community can view presentations by the respondents and ask questions about their proposals.

Again, thank you for holding this hearing. We also want to thank and recognize the valuable work done by members of Ward 6 Councilmember Tommy Wells' Eastern Branch Task Force. We used their 2009 report and recommendations as a starting point for our community discussions.

We look forward to working with you as the RFO process unfolds. I'd be happy to answer any questions.