

PARK VIEW UNITED NEIGHBORHOOD COALITION (UNC)

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**2015 Board of
Directors
of the Park View
United
Neighborhood
Coalition**

To: Mayor Muriel Bowser
Executive Office of the Mayor
John A. Wilson Building
1350 Pennsylvania Avenue, NW, Washington, DC 20004

From: The Park View United Neighborhood Coalition (UNC)
Re: Park View Priorities for the FY 2016 Budget
Date: March 19, 2015

President:
Chris Waldmann

Dear Mayor Bowser,

Vice President:
Marcus Hedrick

Thank you for soliciting input from stakeholders as you consider the District's budget for Fiscal Year 2016 (FY2016). The Board of Directors of Park View United Neighborhood Coalition (UNC), a civic association serving over 800 households in Park View and a small portion of Southern Petworth, writes urging you to consider priorities affecting our area. Briefly, these priorities are:

Treasurer:
Janisha Richardson

Secretary:
Sarah Sorscher

At Large:
Mose Montgomery
Roger Peace
Maria Peace
Elanor Starmer

Affordable Housing and Economic Development

1. Finish transforming the Park Morton public housing development into a mixed-income residential complex while preserving the quality and quantity of the neighborhood's affordable housing.

Education

2. Modernize Bruce-Monroe Elementary School at Park View (BMPV)
3. Open a bilingual middle school in South Ward Four
4. Provide full funding to follow "at-risk" students

Services for Seniors

5. Provide funding for the Mary's Center Bernice Fonteneau Senior Wellness Center

Street Improvements

6. Create a streetscape plan for Park View
7. Extend Georgia Ave "Great Streets" streetscaping south of Otis Pl NW and continue to fund small grants to Georgia Avenue businesses through the Great Streets grants program.

We ask that you include these items, described in further detail below, as priorities your budget for FY 2016

UNC Priorities for Park View in FY 2016

Affordable Housing and Economic Development

Agencies: Office of the Deputy Mayor for Planning and Economic Development (DMPED), New Communities Initiative, District of Columbia Housing Authority

1. Park Morton

We ask that you prioritize affordable housing and economic development in Park View by completing the transformation of the Park Morton housing development into a mixed-income residential complex. The Park Morton development is a 174 unit public housing project that has been designated for redevelopment as part of the New Communities Initiative, a government program designed to revitalize distressed subsidized housing, converting such housing into mixed-income communities while ensuring that existing low-income residents are not displaced.

Progress on the Park Morton development has moved slowly. The first phase of the re-development, “the Avenue,” was a large mixed-use apartment building situated on Georgia Avenue near the Park Morton development, with 27 deeply-subsidized “replacement units,” developed by Landex Companies and The Warrenton Group. The relationship with this development team was terminated after construction of the Avenue, and the DC Housing Authority has now selected a new development team, collectively known as the Park View Community Partners.



The Park Morton Housing development currently stands partially empty, fostering crime and blight rather than economic development

While the Park View UNC is pleased that the Park Morton redevelopment project appears to be moving forward, we would like to ask the Mayor to ensure that the project is adequately funded and prioritized in FY2016. The project is particularly urgent now that the DC Housing Authority has begun the process of emptying the Park Morton apartments. At least 27 of the Park Morton units now stand empty and gutted, and one building in the development is now completely boarded up. The partially-emptied facility fosters crime and blight, the exact opposite effect from the economic revitalization intended by the project. The presence of crime at Park Morton was vividly brought home to the community last May, when two victims were injured in a shooting on the Park Morton playground, including a 6-year-old girl.¹ Park View community members are eager to see the

redevelopment project move forward promptly.

¹ Hermann P. Witness describes chaotic playground scene when gunman fired, wounding 6-year-old girl. Washington Post. May 21, 2014. http://www.washingtonpost.com/local/crime/witness-describes-chaotic-playground-scene-when-gunman-fired-wounding-6-year-old-girl/2014/05/21/d6008c4e-e10f-11e3-9743-bb9b59cde7b9_story.html. Accessed March 9, 2015.

In addition, we urge you to fully commit to the promise of non-displacement for existing residents. Park Morton is a refuge of affordable housing in a neighborhood that is quickly becoming unaffordable for all but the wealthiest families. The residents currently living in Park Morton are members of our community who have been promised the right to stay. Nevertheless, the first phase of redevelopment, “the Avenue,” did not result in full access to replacement units for Park Morton residents. This was in part because residents were initially required to meet certain requirements before they could occupy the new units (including a requirement that residents be employed). In addition, there were too few units large enough to accommodate families. In the end, only 8 former Park Morton residents were able to secure one of the 27 “replacement” units on the Ave, meaning that 19 low-income residents were effectively displaced from our community. This level of displacement is unacceptable, and we urge you to work with DMPED to ensure that any future replacement units are actually suitable and accessible for current Park Morton residents.

Finally, we are concerned that DC Housing Authority (DCHA) is not providing adequate resources to maintain the existing units in the Park Morton development during this transitional period. It has come to our attention that residents have been living with serious maintenance issues, and we have received reports that repairs are not being carried out in a timely and complete manner. This gives the appearance that DCHA has been choosing to defer maintenance on units that will eventually be demolished. This, combined with the push to gut and board up vacant units, creates the impression that DCHA is deliberately avoiding maintenance in order to force residents out so that units can be closed. This state of affairs unacceptable. DCHA must fully fund maintenance and upkeep to ensure that residents can live in dignity and comfort during this transitional period.

The Park Morton redevelopment project has also been identified as a priority by our local area Advisory Neighborhood Commission, ANC 1A, which early last year urged the DC government to reaffirm its commitment to redeveloping the site and expedite the process.²

² Advisory Neighborhood Commission 1A. Resolution Urging the District of Columbia to Reaffirm Their Commitment to Redevelop Park Morton (Lots Located in Squares 2029 and 3040) and to Expedite the Competitive Selection Process for a New Developer. February 12, 2014. <http://anc1a.org/Resolutions/2014/Park%20Morton%20Resolution.pdf>. Accessed March 16, 2015.

Education

Agencies: Deputy Mayor for Education and DC Public Schools

2. Bruce-Monroe Elementary School at Park View (BMPV) Modernization



Phase II of the Park View School modernization was removed from the capital budget by Mayor Gray.

The Park View School building was constructed in 1916 and is listed on the National Register of Historic Places.³ The building became the permanent home of Bruce-Monroe Elementary school in 2010 after the Bruce-Monroe Elementary school building was demolished and initial plans to rebuild that building were not completed.

The Park View school building was partially modernized in 2012, and phase II of the modernization was slated for 2016. However, last year (under the Gray administration) the school's modernization was removed entirely from the five-year capital budget. The community was shocked by this decision, which came without warning and was not justified in a transparent way.

While the Park View community remains grateful for the excellent and very necessary work done to the building during Phase I of the modernization, the project is only partway done. Several urgent needs remain, including 1) the cafeteria, which is too small to accommodate the school's growing student population and lacks reliable heating and cooling, 2) access to the rear of the building, where students must squeeze past delivery trucks to traverse a narrow alley on their way to and from recess, and 3) additional offices and small teaching spaces to provide targeted small-group instruction for students with specialized needs (these students have at times had to receive instruction in hallways and storage rooms due to lack of space).

DGS has estimated that these urgent needs could be met with a budget of 10 million dollars. The Park View UNC urges you to restore this funding to its original place in the FY2016 budget.

Like Park Morton, the Park View school modernization has also been identified as a priority for the area by ANC 1A, which has passed two resolutions urging progress with the school's modernization effort since 2011.^{4,5}

³ National Park Service. National Register of Historic Places Program: Park View School. Listed 05/01/2013. <http://www.nps.gov/nr/feature/places/13000213.htm>. Accessed March 9, 2015.

⁴ Advisory Neighborhood Commission 1A. Resolution Urging Immediate Final Modernization of the Park View School Building aka Bruce-Monroe Elementary School at Park View. February 12, 2014. <http://anc1a.org/Resolutions/2014/Park%20View%20School%20modernization%20resolution.pdf>. Accessed March 16, 2015.

⁵ Advisory Neighborhood Commission 1A. Resolution Urging Continued School Modernization Efforts. February 9, 2011. http://anc1a.org/ANC%20Resolution_School%20Modernization.pdf. March 16, 2015.

3. A Bilingual Middle School in South Ward Four

The Park View UNC is pleased that you have made a commitment to re-open a stand-alone middle school in South Ward Four on the site of the former MacFarland Elementary. Once opened, this school would serve as a much-needed destination middle school for Park View. We hope that this new middle school will offer a robust bilingual program designed to serve the needs of fluent bilingual Spanish speakers graduating from BMPV, Powell, and other DCPS bilingual programs throughout the city.

Park View currently lacks an in-boundary stand-alone middle school. Students graduating from BMPV have the right to attend the middle school at Columbia Heights Education Campus (CHEC). This option is not suitable for most BMPV graduates because the CHECs bilingual program is targeted at Spanish language beginners, and BMPV students graduate with up to seven years of Spanish classroom experience. In addition, the presence of multiple education campuses in Wards One and Four divides up the middle school student population into small campuses, making it harder to fund robust specialized programming in music, arts, athletics, social studies, and STEM.

Without a strong stand-alone middle school option in Park View, many families remain reluctant to enter DC Public Schools and stay through high school, choosing instead to enter the charter lottery or leave the neighborhood. A strong bilingual middle school option in South Ward Four would be the best chance for all Park View families to remain in the neighborhood and invest in a future with DCPS.

4. Funding to follow “at-risk” students

We are also pleased at the recently-released FY 2016 DCPS operating budget, which includes additional funding that will follow “at-risk” students enrolled in DCPS and charter schools.⁶

More than half of the students at Park View’s local elementary school, BMPV, qualify as “at-risk” under the Council’s funding formula, because they are homeless, in foster care, or low-income. Under legislation passed last year, BMPV should have received an additional allocation of \$2,079 per at-risk student to meet the needs of this particularly vulnerable population. Yet because of the late timing of the new law, Chancellor Henderson asked for and received permission to avoid distributing the funding according to the law’s strict funding formula, choosing instead to follow her own previously-determined priorities.⁷ As a result, according to figures published by DCPS last May, many schools received much less than the amount required by statute. BMPV was one of these “losing” schools, receiving only \$184 of at-risk funding per at-risk student.⁸ By contrast, the elementary school with the most per-student funding, Capitol Hill Montessori, received over \$19,000 dollars in “at-risk” funding per at-risk student.

⁶ Chandler, M. At-risk funds will follow students; chancellor will have say in spending. *Washington Post*. March 4, 2015. <http://dcps.dc.gov/DCPS/Files/downloads/ABOUT%20DCPS/Budget%20-%20Finance/FY16%20documents/FY2016%20Final%20Budget%20Guide.pdf>. Accessed March 17, 2015.

⁷ Chandler M, At-risk funding in the District: a school-by-school breakdown. February 6, 2015. <http://www.washingtonpost.com/news/local/wp/2015/02/06/at-risk-funding-in-the-district-school-by-school/>. Accessed March 9, 2015.

⁸ Our DC Schools. At-Risk Funds. Published February 5, 2015. <http://atriskfunds.ourdcschools.org/>. Accessed March 9, 2015.

The recently-released initial school budget allocations include a much-needed adjustment of funding for BMPV, with approximately 450 thousand dollars designated to serve BMPV’s projected enrollment of 244 at-risk students, or \$1863 of at-risk funding per at-risk student. BMPV’s overall budget has also increased, in part due to continued increases in overall enrollment.⁹

We are pleased that the Chancellor has committed to ensure that at-risk funding follows at-risk students this year. However, we wish to emphasize that transparency and accountability remain essential. We urge you to ensure that this program remains fully funded in the FY2016 budget and that DCPS accounts for spending in a clear and transparent way.

Services for Seniors

Agency: DC Office on Aging

5. Funding for Mary’s Center’s Bernice Fonteneau Senior Wellness Center

The Bernice Fonteneau Senior Wellness Center is a Mary’s Center Facility located on Georgia Avenue and Newton Place. The center provides vital services to Park View seniors, including a popular lunch program that aims to ensure that all seniors, regardless of income, have access to nutritious meals. However, due to funding cuts, Mary’s Center has had to stop enrollment for this popular program, and is also having to scale back in other areas.

Mary’s Center helps make it possible for Park View seniors to “age in place,” living independently and comfortably on a fixed income even as their needs increase with age. This is not only saves money overall by preventing seniors from having to move into resource-intensive assisted living facilities, but it also ensures continuity and stability for the neighborhood, as seniors are typically long-term residents with knowledge of the neighborhood’s history and strong social ties to the community.

Programming at Mary’s Center should be fully funded, and its budget should be increased so that it can expand its important services to more of Park View’s senior residents.

Street Improvements

Agencies: DC Department of Transportation

6. A Streetscape Plan for Park View

Park View is one of the remaining neighborhoods in the city that currently lacks a “streetscape” plan from the Department of Transportation to guide long-term urban planning. Such a plan could address a number of issues with streets and sidewalks, including:

⁹ District of Columbia Public Schools. Budget: Bruce-Monroe Elementary at park View. March 16, 2015. <http://dcps.dc.gov/DCPS/Files/downloads/ABOUT%20DCPS/Budget%20-%20Finance/FY16%20documents/Final%20School%20Allocations-FY16/DCPS-BRUCEMONROE-Allocation-FY16.pdf>. Accessed March 17, 2015.

- Safety features on Otis Place and Warder Street near the Park View park and school, where children regularly cross the streets and accidents and near-misses are a common occurrence.
- Sidewalk improvements, including widening sidewalks that are too narrow for wheelchairs and strollers, and new tree boxes for shade.
- Improvements to traffic flow by adding or removing traffic lanes, bike lanes, and parking.
- Improvements to public utilities and other elements of the streetscape; such as uniform, attractive lighting consistent with the character of the neighborhood and an increased number of public trash receptacles.

7. Great Streets Georgia Avenue Project

Additionally, we appreciate the streetscaping improvements made along Georgia Avenue near the Georgia Ave-Petworth Metro Station and extending south to Otis Place NW as a part of the Great Streets Program Middle Georgia Avenue project. These improvements, which included, trees, sidewalk resurfacing, and new bike racks, have substantially improved the beauty appeal and utility of sidewalks in the neighborhood. In addition, the construction of the CVS pharmacy at the corner of Georgia Avenue and New Hampshire was a major improvement that contributed substantially to the economic development of Park View. However, this program, which has now ended, did not extend far enough south to benefit portions of southern Park View Petworth that are also in need of economic development. We urge you to and should be extended create a new Great Streets project that will extend south along Georgia Avenue. from Otis Place Newton Pl. NW to Florida Ave, connecting the Georgia Avenue and U Street Commercial Corridors..

Finally, we urge you to continue funding the small businesses along Georgia Avenue with Great Streets business improvement grant money. Grants in the amount of \$85,000 are being offered to businesses currently as they allow small, locally-owned businesses to stay competitive and improve the exterior and interior of real estate along Georgia Avenue, which has a positive impact on the look and marketability of all businesses in the area. We would like this funding to continue.

These changes have the potential to positively impact the safety, walkability, convenience, economic viability, and visual appeal of Park View, making the neighborhood more livable for all.

We hope that you will consider the above priorities for Park View as you plan your 2016 budget.

Sincerely,

Christopher Waldmann, President
Park View United Neighborhood Coalition