

Howard University Campus Plan Task Force

MEETING HIGHLIGHTS

21 July 2010

Attendees

Sylvia Robinson, Exec. Director, Emergence Community Arts Collective (ECAC)
Georgia Avenue Development Task Force
Danielle Ricks, LeDroit Park Civic Association
Tony Norman, Pleasant Plains Civic Association , Chair, ANC 1B Design Committee,
Georgia Avenue Development Task Force
Daniel Van Pelt, Gorove Slade Transportation Planners and Engineers
Emily Dalphy, Gorove Slade Transportation Planners and Engineers
Brandon Harris, President Howard University Student Association
Brad Grant, Director Howard University School of Architecture, ANC 1B Design
Committee
Diane Branch, Howard University Associate Vice President for Real Estate and Asset
Management
Maybelle Taylor Bennett, Director, Howard University Community Association

Meeting Highlights

The meeting began with an introduction of the transportation planners and the meeting participants as they entered the meeting.

Purpose of the Meeting

The purpose of the meeting was to present the highlights of the Transportation Existing Conditions Assessment draft report, gain stakeholder input and answer questions about the transportation analysis and planning. Daniel Pelt, explained that right now, Howard University, American University and Georgetown University are all working on campus plans. One difference in the way that campus plans are handled in the District of Columbia that makes them different from other jurisdictions is that they are tied to zoning approvals here, where they are not in other locales.

Scope of Transportation Planning Assignment and Completed Work

Daniel Pelt explained that Gorove Slade has been retained to: analyze existing transportation conditions; identify concerns and opportunities; inform the master campus planning process; and develop recommendations. To date, they have completed the field reconnaissance, technical and planning analysis and reported out the existing conditions they have observed.

Key Transportation Planning Issues

Pedestrians

- Georgia Avenue as it is used today feels more like a conduit for taking traffic through the campus than it does a connector that unites the east and west components of the campus. More east-west circulation needs to take place that is well-lit, safe and tree-lined.
- The large block of land that the Banneker Recreation site occupies does not allow for any east-west street connections all the way from Barry to Euclid and from Georgia to Sherman Avenues.
- As the University contemplates expansion to the west, enhanced pedestrian connections are needed across Georgia Avenue.
- Traffic needs to be slowed down along the Georgia Avenue corridor, while transit service needs to be sped up and made more reliable.
- * There is a need to integrate the roadway into the University and the community.
- * The Great Streets recommendations need to be factored into the campus plan.
- Georgia Avenue, along this stretch, should feel more like a University boulevard with a “Howard” presence than a speedway.
- On the campus, there is conflict between on street parking and pedestrian movements. Historically there have been several efforts to privatize interior streets within the campus to create a more pedestrian-friendly setting. These efforts have failed due to community opposition and the desire to maintain and open campus to the public.
- Heaviest pedestrian volumes occur at Barry Place and Georgia Avenue.

Bicycles

- There is very little bicycle activity on campus, because there is no accommodation for them (e.g. bike racks), no bicycle lanes along the stretch of Georgia Avenue that runs through the campus, vehicle speeds along Georgia are intimidating, and there is difficulty topography.
- Bike shops for repairs, bike rentals, and bike storage are needed. The closest “Smart Bike” facility is located at 7th and “T” Streets, N.W. These would be a good community-campus use, could be located in “Tech Plaza,” and could provide student jobs as bicycle mechanics.
- DDOT is currently looking for bike “stations” on university campuses.
- There is an increasing trend toward bicycle popularity among students.

Shuttles

- There are four shuttle routes that run daily: Metro station; Law School; Divinity School; and off-campus housing. Members of the community are not allowed to ride the

shuttle for a host of reasons, including increased liability for the University, safety and cost. Most universities restrict the use of the shuttles to their own students, faculty and staff.

- Howard University's shuttle should have a distinct color and branding. Right now the brand on the shuttle is that of the transportation service being used, and not Howard University's.
- The stop at 6th and Fairmont is the busiest stop. Overall, there were 1,000,000 riders on the shuttle in 2009.
- The shuttle service is essential to reducing traffic and parking demands in the community.
- The shuttle service could be improved with more efficient routing options, better route information, shelters and seating, and "Nextbus" technology features.
- The Mackey Building is used by students as a bus shelter, especially during the evening hours, and creates security concerns for the users of the building.

Transit

- The campus is well connected by public transit, with the Shaw-Howard metro-rail station south of campus and multiple bus stops adjacent to campus. Future University shuttle connections should potentially include a shuttle route that goes up to the Petworth metro station as well.
- There should be one special "campus" stop on Georgia Avenue that is fitted with amenities like: a shelter with seating; a bus map; special landscaping treatments, etc. This, then, can become the transit "front door" of the University. WMATA would need to approve this, and the University might want to check out how Business Improvement Districts use the shelters within their boundaries to their benefit.
- The integration of Heritage Trail information in bus shelters should be considered.
- Georgia Avenue is slated to become one of the District's rapid transit corridors which are intended to connect neighborhoods and metro stations.
- As the city plans to install streetcar lines along Georgia Avenue, these will need to be incorporated into future transit sections of the campus master plan.

Parking

- Gorove Slade will be working with U3 consultants, who are developing the real estate strategy, to develop recommendations for parking and utilization rates for the campus plan.
- The District is trying to force a total reduction in the number of parking spaces in the city. In this context, there is a need to look at the entire University's parking system, identify the principles that will guide it, and determine where it should be reduced, enhanced and/or structured.

- Currently, the University has 2,201 parking spaces on the central campus, and 1,698 devoted to hospital use.
- There is no dedicated visitor parking.
- Parking occupancy varies from lot to lot, with northern lots filling most quickly.
- Efficiency in the use of parking spaces can be improved through changes in parking policy and enforcement changes.
- Tony Norman indicated that the University will need to be more rigorous in discouraging faculty, staff, students and visitors from parking in the surrounding community. Daniel Van Pelt noted that as the University moves toward becoming a more residential campus, the need for commuter parking is diminished, while the need for residential parking may increase.
- Currently, the streets surrounding the campus have residential parking permit regulations that are applicable, which limits parking for non-residents. Most of the non-residential streets are metered.
- Parking internal to the campus conflicts with pedestrians.
- Lack of parking increases traffic with people who circle the block looking for space.
- Historically, community members welcomed the provision of off-street parking for University students, faculty and staff, because they did not want to have them compete for spaces on the street in front of their homes. Now many see the surface parking lots as blighting elements in their community.
- The University is concerned about the cost of structured parking, but there is the potential for developing shared parking opportunities with nearby entertainment venues and retail uses (e.g. the Howard Theater and Howard Town Center) .
- Many University staff drive to the University from Prince George's and Montgomery Counties.
- Parking policies and practices need to be studied comprehensively in connection with the financial aspects of redeveloping sites.

Vehicular Traffic

- Florida and Georgia Avenues carry the largest volumes of traffic, with Georgia Avenue being the primary arrival corridor to campus. Georgia Avenue's traffic is coordinated to accommodate through traffic.
- Widely dispersed parking facilities also disperses the traffic that leads to those facilities.
- Congestion mainly occurs behind stopped buses or turning vehicles.

- Intersections operate at acceptable levels of service for vehicular delay. There was a question about when traffic counts were taken, and whether or not they were taken when school was in full session. In fact, traffic counts were taken during the last week of March and the first two weeks of April, 2009. This occurred after spring break (March 14-22) and before the final day of classes (April 23rd).
- Along Georgia Avenue, vehicular speeds intimidate pedestrians, and commuter traffic conflicts with local traffic.

Safety

- Where there is one accident per million at a given intersection, there is cause for concern.
- With this accident rate as a threshold, the most dangerous intersection in the area is at Georgia Avenue and Barry Place. The least dangerous is at Georgia Avenue and “W” Street. However, also interesting is the fact that while the intersection at Georgia and Florida has one of the worse levels of service for vehicular delay, it is also one of the safest intersections.

Expectations of the City

Given the District’s focus on reducing vehicular traffic, there will be an emphasis in the campus plan review process on having the University show what it is doing or plans to do in managing its transportation, traffic and parking demands. They will look for a Transportation Demand Management Plan of a TDM, which may include, but not be limited to:

- an increase in the cost of parking for students, faculty and staff;
- a reduction in the barriers to walking and biking;
- improved shuttle services and increased ridership;
- installation of bike parking on campus, bike mechanics, etc.
- the facilitation of ride-sharing programs;
- provision of a metro-check benefit;
- hiring or appointing a TDM coordinator
- increased educational efforts for the campus community to encourage greater use of public transit, and alternate means of transportation; and
- a program sponsored by the University to pay for emergency taxi service for those who take transit to work but have emergencies and need transportation.

After pedestrian safety, parking management is the most important transportation and traffic issue on campus.

Not only is the city focused on reducing dependence on vehicular traffic, but the entire US is now moving from being a vehicular-centered society to a more multi-modal society.

The meeting adjourned at 8:55 p.m.

