



# COALITION FOR SMARTER GROWTH

---

July 8, 2009

Councilmember Kwame Brown, Chair  
Committee on Economic Development &  
Councilmember Mary Cheh, Chair  
Committee on Government Operations and the Environment  
John A. Wilson Building  
1350 Pennsylvania Avenue, NW, Suite 317  
Washington, D.C. 20004

RE: PR18-0314: Request that a public right-of-way is retained for new street connecting to Benning Road viaduct behind property for Minnesota Avenue-Benning Phase 2 Redevelopment Disposition

Dear Committee members:

We support the redevelopment of the northwest corner of Minnesota Avenue and Benning Road NE. This redevelopment can help implement the community vision for Downtown Ward 7 articulated in the 2008 Deanwood Strategic Development Plan and the Minnesota Avenue Great Streets Plan. I served on the steering committees for both of these community planning efforts.

We request that the Minnesota-Benning disposition approval resolution be amended to respect current community plans and reserve a public right-of-way or street easement behind the property so that a future street connection can be constructed with the Benning Road viaduct (see Attachment 1 from DDOT & DCOP plans). Donatelli Development's proposal submitted for the solicitation did not include this right-of-way.

The resolution states that the "Council finds that the property is no longer required for public purposes." I submit that a future street right-of-way is a public purpose that is still needed. One way of accomplishing this is to amend the resolution, removing the following lots & squares: Lot 806, Parcels 176/83, 176/78. Alternatively, a sufficient road easement could be a condition of the disposition. Also, a public right-of-way could be subdivided from the rear of the property. The resolution also includes disposing of the public alley. Again, I recommend not disposing of the alley unless the city retains a street right-of-way at the rear of the property.

The Minnesota Avenue NE Great Streets plan traffic analysis found that this new street connection will greatly benefit the function of the highly congested and accident-prone intersection of Minnesota and Benning. Rather than foreclosing the future option for the public purpose of building a street connection, we ask that the city ensure the disposition approval provides for sufficient public right-of-way to construct the new street connection in the future.

In looking at the larger opportunities for holistic community enhancement and improved livability, the Great Streets projects and Deanwood Plan identified necessary related improvements (related meaning projects which are outside the Minnesota Avenue right-of-way limits) that support the success of Minnesota Avenue in function and economic development. These projects should be implemented

through coherent, and consistent government coordination on adjacent parcels at every opportunity - especially when the city is in control of physical assets.

## **Background**

The intersection of Minnesota Avenue NE and Benning Road NE is at the heart of downtown Ward 7. The intersection faces many challenges from high traffic congestion. The intersection consistently has the highest number of pedestrian accidents in the city, and ranks near the top of the list for number of vehicle accidents. A key recommendation from recent DDOT and DCOP plans to improve traffic and pedestrian safety at the Minnesota-Benning intersection is the creation of a new intersection with access roads off the Benning Road viaduct behind the property. The new streets would connect to the street used for the Metro parking entrance to the north and Dix Street to the south. This proposed new intersection and street connections would reduce congestion, improve traffic flow and improve safety at the busy Minnesota Avenue-Benning Road intersection. The intersection would also enhance access for motorists, walkers and bicyclists to the area – Downtown Ward 7 and the Minnesota Avenue Metro station.

Over the last few years, the city assembled the development property by acquiring parcels from private property owners used by a number of small businesses, a church, a dance studio and homeowners. The parcels were assembled by the D.C. government as part of a larger government center plan to build a DOES building in the first phase and a D.C. Human Services building as part of a second phase, along with some mixed use private development (see Attachment 2). At some point, the city decided to not pursue the D.C. Human Services facilities use and instead solicit proposals for a private mixed use development for the entire phase 2 site. The development area also contains a public alley (see Attachment 3). Retaining the public purpose and benefit of a future street connection helps justify the original city action to acquire private property for public use and also close a public alley.

Given the importance of this proposed intersection and street connection for the public purpose of safety and revitalization efforts, we request that the District retain ownership to a public right-of-way. Foregoing the possibility of this future public improvement would be shortsighted and undermine the government's efforts to invest in economic development and public safety for this emerging regional center. By crafting a disposition agreement that provides for the public right-of-way, this development project can move forward and offer the full benefits of this investment to the community.

Thank you for consideration.

Sincerely,

Cheryl Cort  
Policy Director

Cc: Hon. Kwame Brown, Chairman, Committee on Economic Development  
Hon. Mary Cheh, Chairperson, Committee on Government Operations and the Environment  
Hon. Jim Graham, Committee on Public Works and Transportation  
Hon. Yvette Alexander, Councilmember, Ward 7  
Hon. Vincent Gray, Chairman, District of Columbia Council

Attachments

# Attachment 1 – Benning Road viaduct new street connection drawings

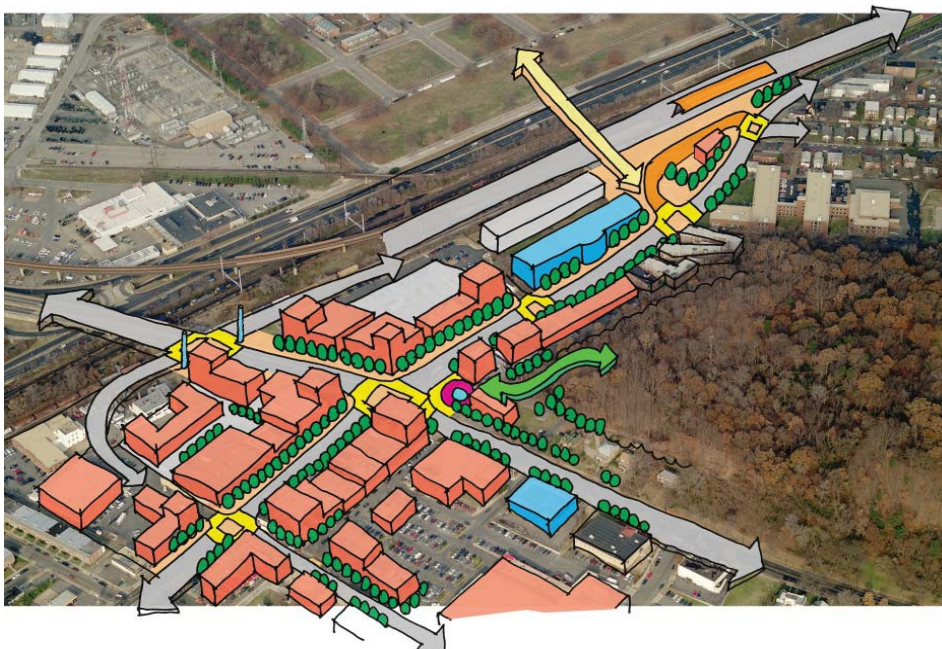
Above from the



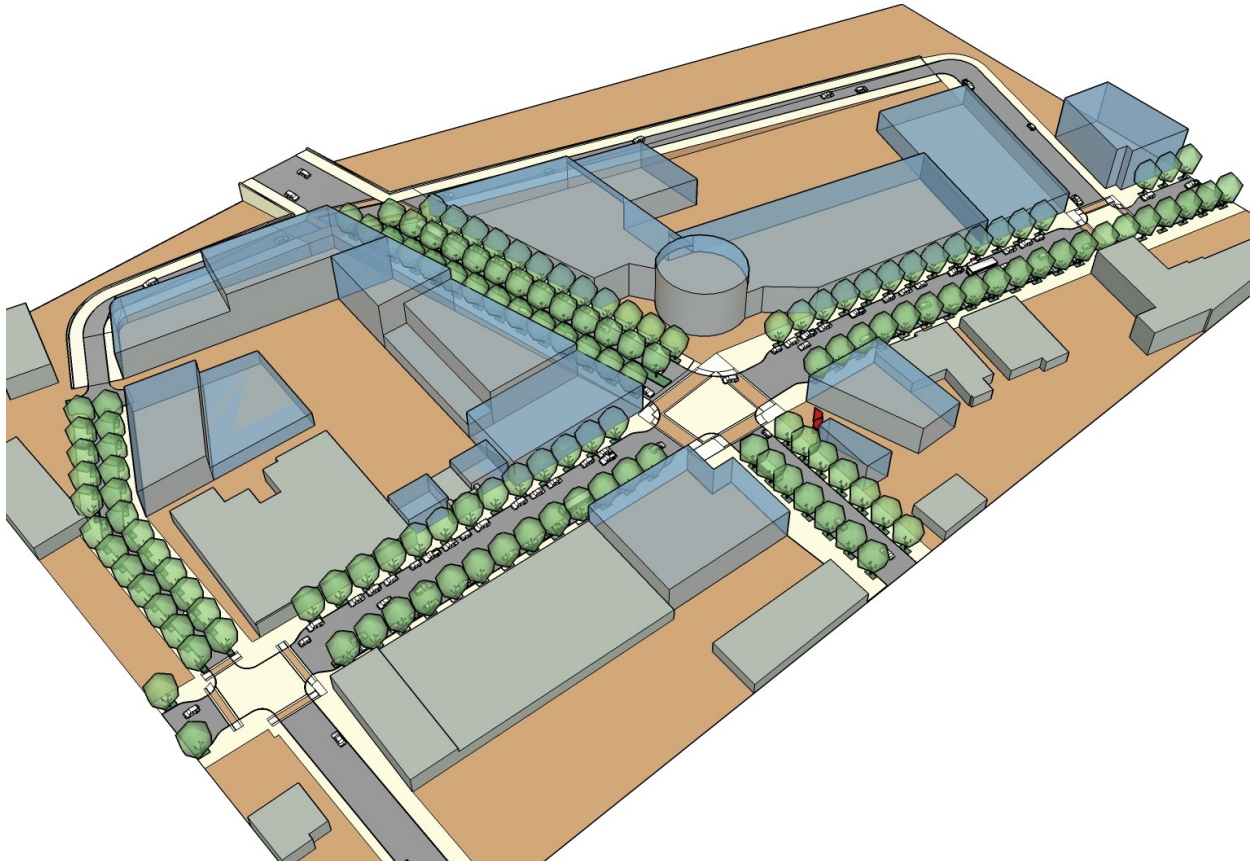
## Related Projects Benning Road Viaduct Reconstruction

- Create new intersection on Benning Road Bridge west of Minnesota Ave to reduce congestion at Minnesota-Benning intersection
- Creates neighborhood gateway
- Provides additional access for potential revitalization

Minnesota Avenue Great Streets Plan: [http://ddot.dc.gov/ddot/frames.asp?doc=/ddot/lib/ddot/majorinitiatives/greatstreets/mn-ave/MinnAve\\_Feb27\\_final.pdf](http://ddot.dc.gov/ddot/frames.asp?doc=/ddot/lib/ddot/majorinitiatives/greatstreets/mn-ave/MinnAve_Feb27_final.pdf), below from the Deanwood Strategic Development Plan: [http://planning.dc.gov/planning/frames.asp?doc=/planning/lib/planning/pdf/guiding\\_deanwoods\\_future\\_57-74.pdf](http://planning.dc.gov/planning/frames.asp?doc=/planning/lib/planning/pdf/guiding_deanwoods_future_57-74.pdf)



**Attachment 1 - continued**



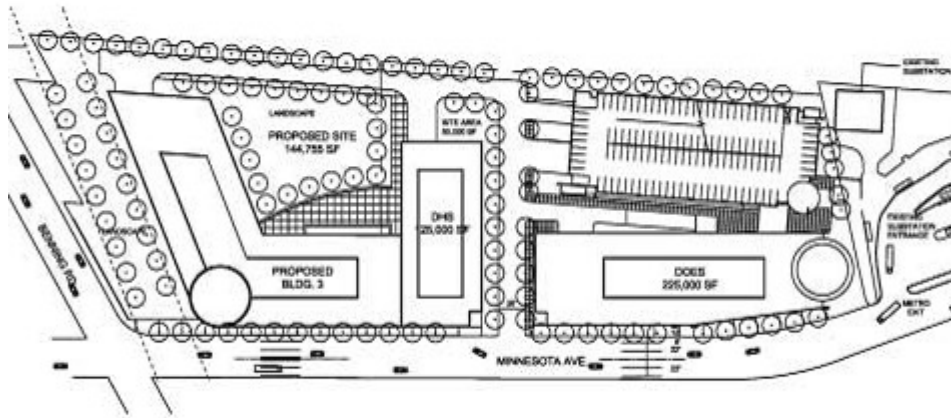
**Minnesota Avenue, NE/SE, from Sheriff Road, NE, to Good Hope Road, SE  
Great Streets Plan**

**Final Recommendations & Conceptual Streetscape Design**

[http://ddot.dc.gov/ddot/frames.asp?doc=/ddot/lib/ddot/majorinitiatives/greatstreets/mn-ave/framework-n-streetscape\\_24.pdf](http://ddot.dc.gov/ddot/frames.asp?doc=/ddot/lib/ddot/majorinitiatives/greatstreets/mn-ave/framework-n-streetscape_24.pdf)

## Transportation Impact Study

District of Columbia Department of Employment Services  
and District of Columbia Human Services Facilities



Prepared by

**PARSONS**

July 2004

**Attachment 3 - Outline of Phase 2 Lots and Parcels - Public alley shown in white through the length of the property.**

Source: [http://www.dcbiz.dc.gov/dmped/frames.asp?doc=/dmped/lib/dmped/minn\\_benn\\_solicitation\\_revised\\_final\\_5.3.08.pdf](http://www.dcbiz.dc.gov/dmped/frames.asp?doc=/dmped/lib/dmped/minn_benn_solicitation_revised_final_5.3.08.pdf)

