

# THE NORTHWEST CURRENT

## A good partnership

Four years ago, D.C. Public Library officials dismissed the prospect of a public-private partnership at the site of the Tenley-Friendship Neighborhood Library as a way to help subsidize the cost of a new state-of-the-art branch.

An apartment building atop a prominent library would be an ideal use of the site, located on prime real estate across from the Tenleytown Metro station. But library officials never seemed very interested in the idea.

First they said that no developer had come forward with a feasible plan, though they had never publicly requested proposals. Then they had already solicited bids for a firm to design and build four new libraries, including the Tenley facility. The director of capital construction said the system might open itself to a lawsuit or monetary penalties if it changed the terms of the solicitation.

That was back in 2003. In the intervening years, new officials at the D.C. Public Library declared the proposed designs for the four new libraries to be inadequate. They have started the process anew.

This time, the D.C. library's trustees and top administrators need to look seriously at whether they can attract a suitable public-private partnership for the site. We hope that Ward 3 Council member Mary Cheh and Office of Planning director Harriet Tregoning will take active roles in building public support for the idea.

The Tenley site is not alone. Other District libraries are located where private developers may be willing to combine forces to produce a better library at little or no cost to the District's taxpayers.

While we do not want the library system to prolong the process of rebuilding the Tenley library, the long-overdue opening of an interim library means that now it is worth a few extra months to make sure the construction of a permanent facility is done right, particularly at a reduced cost to taxpayers.

Roadside Development has already engaged in preliminary discussions with library authorities and the leadership at nearby Janney Elementary about the idea of a residential project that would straddle the two sides. The building would sit partly atop the new library, with underground parking to serve the school, library and residences.

An open invitation to submit proposals might bring an even better project. The delay in building the new library has brought a second window of opportunity. We must not squander it.