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Business Times

Public-private partners may dispel Adams Morgan parking nightmare

Business Notebook

Bernard Dagenais

Anyone who's tried to find a place to park in a hurry on a hot night in Adams Morgan has felt the frustration that plagues the otherwise popular neighborhood.

Relief is in sight.

Developer Michael Gewirz is predicting July 4 will be the groundbreaking for a 200,000-square-foot building with 350 parking spaces and 64 condominium apartments. A 30-foot-wide walkway will connect the lot, on Champlain Street between 18th and Belmont streets NW, to heavily trafficked 18th Street.

The administration of Mayor Sharon Pratt Kelly bought the site with a garage in mind and sought proposals from private developers. A team led by Mr. Gewirz's Potomac Investment Properties won the job.

Potomac will own the property for 40 years, after which it reverts to the District. The company will buy a nearby 18th Street lot from the city and eventually construct a three-story 15,000-square-foot building with stores on the first floor and condominiums on the two floors above.

If it is successful, the $11 million project will be an example of how a public-private partnership can benefit a community and still make a profit.

"What I'm hoping it will establish is the opportunity for some other business that hadn't thought to come here because of parking," Mr. Gewirz said.

Adams Morgan, a lively mix of ethnic shops, restaurants and bars, is busy at any time of day but more so at night. While 18 stores left in a seven-month period in 1997, many of the empty spaces are being filled with new tenants.

"Adams Morgan is the third most important revenue-producing area in the city after Georgetown and downtown," Mr. Gewirz said. He believes the new garage will solve the parking problem.

It's been 11 years since Pat Patrick, president of the Adams Morgan Business and Professional Association, started working on getting a garage. Four years ago, he led a drive that collected 2,500 signatures from business owners and residents in favor of the new garage.

He liked the plan better in its early days when the idea was to build 540 spaces, arguing that such a structure would solve future as well as current needs. But Mr. Gewirz doesn't believe the area needs so many spaces, and the city settled the issue by putting a 350-space limit on the garage.

The multilevel government in the District also has taken its toll on the project, delaying it for three years as the Zoning Commission, the D.C. Council, the federally created control board and the National Capital Planning Commission all had their say. It faces a final public hearing before the Department of Housing and Community Development, although opponents' concerns about the project early on appear to no longer be a threat.

But there will be pain before the gain. When the construction begins this summer, Adams Morgan will have to do without 116 spaces in an open-air lot that will become the construction site.

The city and Mr. Patrick's group will be working to provide additional parking spaces and possibly will run shuttles to help patrons ge
borhood.

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