

vice president for BGCGW. “It is not the same type of violence we see around Jelleff.”

While it may not be true for all four of the locations, Columbia Heights can count on a neighborhood clubhouse, says BGCGW. The site will be a mixed-use development, possibly containing retail, residential spaces, or a nonprofit organization, depending on proposals that BGCGW will receive from developers says Gunn. “We are waiting to see what the market comes back with in respect to that.”

Gunn notes that BGCGW is committed to incorporating community input in the process. “One of the things we will talk about is the fact that we want to work with members of the community to establish what type of uses, what type of things could be appropriate for that particular site.”

About the possibility of the site moving, Gunn says that nothing has been determined, but adds “2500 14th Street is a plot of land we own, so that is the plot we are focused on.”

But there is the possibility that the location of the club could change based on the developer and the proposal selected. “It is conceivable someone might come in with some type of a property swap,” says Gunn. “However our board’s commitment is on that location.”

What happens during construction, asks Graham? “I think there is great concern about what happens if there is redevelopment and what happens to those programs during the construction phase,” he says.

“We are seeking a situation that would avoid a discontinuation of services,” says Gunn.

“Our focus, and our intent, is to continue to serve the children of that community throughout the development process.”

But Graham says that he is committed to doing all that he can to providing alternatives to redevelopment.

“I have obtained for them one million in funding in the past. I am prepared to request supports for additional funding in the future from the DC government so that we can avoid the redevelopment.” However, Graham told DC North that he does not have a sense of what the financial needs of BGCGW are and that

nothing has been presented to him so that he can better assist the organization. “We need to be provided with a detailed analysis of just exactly what these financial concerns are.”

In the coming weeks, BGCGW will seek development proposals for the redevelopment of Clubhouse 10. This process is open to private entities, public agencies and community groups who would like to participate. Proposals will be evaluated based on vision for the properties, experience with similar projects and within the community, demonstrated ability to complete the project and the financial terms.

Jair Lynch Companies has been hired to help in this process, says Molly Boyle, BGCGW vice president of communications. “They are very active in that community in terms of real estate issues,” she notes.

BGCGW plans to announce a community meeting regarding Clubhouse 10. For more information contact Kerrin Torres, BGCGW communications specialist, 301-562-2012 or [ktorres@bgcgw.org](mailto:ktorres@bgcgw.org). ■

## 2 Ward Two News

BY NATASHA ABBAS

### Howard Theatre Area Rehabilitation Plans Begin to Move Forward

In a promising, though overdue, initiative, the city has recently taken measures to move forward on the long-awaited rehabilitation of the historic Howard Theatre area in Shaw.

The Howard Theatre opened in 1910 and served as a showcase for African-American artists for more than 70 years and is considered one of the most important cultural landmarks in America for African Americans.

Located at 620 T St. NW, the theater itself has been closed since the 1980s and has long been considered a historic site in vital need of saving.

Plans for its restoration and the area surrounding it have sparked the involvement of many residents who have long called for its historical significance to be upheld.

The preliminary concept design for the Howard Theatre area infrastructure rehabilitation project was presented at a well-attended public meeting Dec. 18 at the DC Housing Finance agency on Florida Avenue NW.

The Howard Theatre area streetscape project is being administered by the District Department of Transportation and includes several blocks of Seventh Street NW. At the meeting, DDOT project engineers addressed both existing conditions and proposed modifications for the Ellington Plaza at Florida Avenue and T Street NW, as well as seeking input on transportation concerns at the T Street corridor.

Currently, proposed improvements include the reconstruction of T Street between Seventh Street & Florida Avenue, reconstruction of the alley along the Howard Theatre between S and T streets, curb and sidewalk replacements, reconstruction of wheelchair ramps to meet ADA guidelines and the addition of a centralized parking meter system.

Rachel Dickerson of the DC Commission on the Arts and Humanities was also in attendance at the meeting and fielded numerous concerns regarding the artwork that DCCA has commissioned to adorn the Ellington Plaza.

In response to a call for proposals, the DCCA selected Bethesda-based artist Zachary Oxman’s design for a sculpture titled ENCORE.

The sculpture is a stainless steel figure of Duke Ellington playing the piano, with the keys of the piano floating upwards into a giant treble clef. The foundation of the sculpture is to be made of poured concrete; other materials will include black granite veneer and reinforced poured concrete.

There were concerns voiced by community members at the meeting regarding whether the statue and the artist appropriately reflect the heritage of the neighborhood. Community members remarked that the Howard Theatre has historically been a space that supported and promoted the Af-

rican-American arts community and that that heritage should be reflected in the public art surrounding the theater. But community members argue that by selecting an artist without a connection to Shaw, that heritage is being slighted.

Community members argued that the city did not target African-American artists or artists with a connection to Shaw in their call for submissions for the artwork. Meeting attendees also questioned whether the city’s outreach had gone beyond web-based communication.

“We should not have a cyber-government,” said Darlene Dancy of Friends of Historic Howard Theatre. “Not everyone is online.”

This then raised questions about other components of the Howard Theatre renovation and whether enough value was being placed on accurately representing the heritage of the neighborhood and incorporating community input.

“We need to incorporate people who have an authentic link to the community,” Thomas View of the Howard Theatre Preservation Project said to DC North. “A lot of times there is this fear that you are going to slow the process down, but I think you will actually make it better.”

Representatives from the Great Streets Initiative in the Office of the Deputy Mayor, another partner on the project, say that there were 105 responses to the open competitive call, which was released both locally and nationally in early 2007.

About concerns regarding the process, Derrick Lanardo Woody, coordinator of the Great Streets Initiative, told DC North, “It is just that – a ‘process’ that evolves and improves with meaningful and constructive input.”

Six panelists narrowed down entries based on artistic merit, cultural significance and durability, described Woody. “As many of the panelists were very aware of the myriad of concerns about the area’s heritage and who is conveying that heritage, there was a substantial conversation about the artists’ locations (seeking a DC-based artist whose work was appropriate) and the artists’ ethnic heritages, where possible to discern, though not an easy task. In the end, the panelists, as a

group, chose an artist based on artistic merit, cultural appropriateness and overall professional experience and presentation,” says Woody.

Woody also notes, “This is still the beginning of the process so and the District continues to welcome input from more stakeholders and other interested parties.”

A draft of the preliminary design will be submitted this month, and public meetings will be held from March to May when a final design will be submitted. A bid for the project will be advertised in October and the construction is anticipated to begin March of 2009.

*For more information or to give input on the design, contact Dawit Muluneh at DDOT, Dawit.Muluneh@dc.gov*

*To learn more about the Howard Theatre Preservation Project visit, www.howardtheatrepreservation.com.*

### Queen of Sheba Restaurant Succeeds in Two Year Effort to Secure Liquor License

If it's tough to make it in the restaurant business, it's that much tougher when operating without a liquor license.

For Queen of Sheba Restaurant in Shaw, their much-publicized battle to secure a liquor license came to an end last month. After two years of operating without a liquor license, the Alcoholic Beverage Control Board granted them a license Dec. 12.

The opposition to Queen of Sheba's license came months before they even opened their doors in February 2006. Through it all, the main opponent has been Shiloh Baptist Church, which is located across the street and operates a child development center next door to the 46-seat Ethiopian restaurant.

The protest was based on the grounds that the establishment operates within 400 feet of the Seaton Elementary School located at 1503 10th St. NW. Formerly there had been a law that prohibited the granting of liquor licenses to establishments that were located within 400 feet of a school or day care center, but the law was amended last year.

Queen of Sheba is judged to be approximately 370 feet from the school.

Critics of Shiloh's opposition have continually pointed out that there is a liquor store and a Giant supermarket

which both sell alcohol within one block of Shiloh Baptist Church.

Two other nearby businesses had faced similar struggles with obtaining their liquor license. The chic vegetarian restaurant Vegetate at 1414 Ninth St. that opened at approximately the same time as Queen of Sheba also waited months to receive their license. Be Bar at 1318 Ninth St. NW also faced problems obtaining their license. Queen of Sheba is the last of the three to receive a license.

“The owners of Queen of Sheba made a commitment to our community and were not dissuaded by the negative forces that sought to prevent them from making a positive contribution to our community,” says Alex Padro of Shaw Main Streets, a nonprofit working for community driven revitalization of the Seventh and Ninth Street commercial corridors in Shaw.

Despite the church's opposition, for the most part the Shaw community has been very supportive of the restaurant from the start.

“We had really had a lot of support. We have a strong community that comes here for breakfast, lunch and dinner. Some people they come three times daily so they can support us,” says Queen of Sheba's co-owner Embzam Msgina, who owns the restaurant with both his sister and his wife.

About the economic impact of not having their liquor license, Msgina says, “It did affect us.” But they couldn't have made it to this point without the Shaw community, he says, and Msgina told DC North that his business has already improved since receiving the license. “Right now I can see the sales are a little bit different.”

“Businesses like Queen of Sheba are the backbone of commercial revitalization in any neighborhood and especially so in Shaw, which has been seeking a return of small businesses for decades,” says Padro.

“We really appreciate the concerned people who have stood with us and helped us the last two years ... we really appreciate them,” said Msgina. “I would just say thank you for all of the neighborhood that have been concerned about us especially to the Shaw community, and we would like to welcome the community and would like to help, and work together with the community.”

Officials from Shiloh Baptist Church returned calls from DC North but declined to comment.

*For more information about the hours of operation of Queen of Sheba visit, www.queenofshebadc.com or call 202-232-7788.*

*To learn more about Shaw Main Streets www.shawmainstreets.com or call, 202-265-SHAW. ■*

## 4 Ward Four News

BY INGRID DRAKE

### “Hush” Immigration Play Debuts in Ward 4

A father, husband and professor at a Baltimore college, Gorri was behind bars after losing his case against the immigration system. While in detention awaiting release or deportation to a country he had not seen in two decades, he met Hanna, a businesswoman awaiting deportation indefinitely. Their bravery and pain brought US immigration law to life for the 20 audience members who came out to see the play “Hush” on Dec. 16 at the Peoples MEDIA Center on Georgia Avenue.

With a goal to stage and promote untold stories, Balozzi Productions, led by Preston Hall and Mkawasi Mcharo Hall, has been staging the play since

2005. This time, actors Ssanyu Burrell played Hanna and Stephan Collins-Stepney played Gorri.

As the play seeks to highlight “voices from extraordinary alienation,” following the play was a discussion about class, identity and political organizing among the audience members, some who have immigrated to the US from Brazil, the Philippines and Lebanon.

Balozzi Productions, which also offers motivational speaking, actors training, and play production is now moving its offices into the Ward 4-based Peoples MEDIA Center at Alfshawy Café, which is the site of youth media training, cultural events and community computer classes.

Peoples MEDIA Center is located at Alfshawy Café, 4132 Georgia Ave. NW. Balozzi Productions can be found online at balozziproductions.com or at info@balozziproductions.com.

### Advisory Neighborhood Commission 4C News

At its Dec. 11 meeting, the commission heard from Metropolitan Police Department Acting Commander Linda Gilmore Brown and Assistant Chief Diane Grooms that there has been an increase in Police Service Area 404 of burglaries, robberies and stolen cars since October.

The MPD representatives, commissioners and community members also discussed putting more oversight into PSAs 402, 403 and 404 – these PSAs drive the crime numbers in the Fourth District. Discussion centered on officers getting to know their beat



Stephan Collins-Stepney in “Hush.”