

# Council alters procurement process to aid UDC projects

By IAN THOMS  
Current Staff Writer

The D.C. Council recently gave the University of the District of Columbia independent control of its maintenance and construction contracts, allowing the school to bypass the city's complex and burdensome procurement process and expedite a long-awaited modernization of the Van Ness campus.

The university's president, Allen Sessoms, said he could not overstate the importance of this legislation, which the council passed unanimously earlier this month. Now that the school can enter into contracts with construction companies, rather than waiting for the District to do so on its behalf, Sessoms expects projects to proceed at a much quicker pace than they have in the past.

"A while back, they were trying to get the university's laboratories refurbished, but the city never got the contract. They were waiting nine years for something that should have taken nine months," said Sessoms. "The bureaucracy is a fiasco."

D.C. Council Chairman Vincent Gray, who introduced the legislation, said projects often languished under the previous process because of "inconsistent priorities among the university and relevant District agencies."

He said the university's students suffered as a result. "These delays have increased overall costs and obstructed the benefit of safe, modern facilities for students of the District's only public university," Gray said during the council's Dec. 15 deliberation.

Sessoms said the university's projects simply weren't a priority for the city's procurement officials.

"Dealing with the District is very difficult when you're not the biggest fish," he said.

In an interview, Gray blamed the poor condition of the campus, in part, on the previous contracting methods. "In a university setting, things have to be done and done

more quickly," he said. "You look at the condition of the campus, and some of it is a function of having the money and some is a function of the procurement process and not being able to get things done."

But now Sessoms and Gray expect the university will be able to proceed with its ambitious modernization plans, which include multiple building renovations and construction of a new student center, among other projects.

"All this would have been enormously difficult if not impossible without this level of autonomy," said Sessoms. "The university is starting to look like a real place, feel like a real place. The whole thing is evolving."

By gaining control over its contracts, Sessoms said, the university moves one step closer to full autonomy. "Before I arrived, I started insisting that the university needed autonomy," he said.

In deliberation prior to the council vote, Gray assured members that the university has proved it can handle the increased independence.

"Before we got this, we had to demonstrate to the council that we could do this in a way that would be responsible and effective," said university spokesperson Alan Etter.

Gray also pointed out that the new rules to govern the university's procurement were modeled after procedures adopted by the D.C. Public Library system.

"The D.C. Public Library has a similar independent procurement authority and frankly, it has done extremely well, so this is not unprecedented," said Gray.

The council first gave the university the opportunity to control its contracting in September, pending the adoption of rules to govern the procurement process.

Gray said that because the rules were adopted this month on an emergency basis, the council will need to vote again to make them permanent, which will afford members an opportunity to alter them if necessary.

# GWU asks board to designate six landmarks

By ELIZABETH WIENER  
Current Staff Writer

Plans to create a historic district and to landmark individual buildings on the George Washington University campus are finally kicking into gear.

On Jan. 28, the Historic Preservation Review Board will consider landmark nominations for six individual buildings on the Foggy Bottom campus — five of them now being used for student housing or classes. The board will consider carving out a new historic district on the campus later in the year.

Both proposals are part of a 20-year campus plan, first presented in 2006, designed to concentrate growth in the center of the campus and assure surrounding residents that the university will preserve some historic structures and streetscapes, rather than knocking them down to create new academic and dormitory space.

The overall plan — dubbed "build up, not out" — envisions putting denser new development primarily in the core of the campus and away from residential areas, while preserving many of the remaining Victorian row houses, early-20th-century apartment buildings and other historic structures, particularly to the west and south.

It's taken a few years to get the preservation proposals ready for review, and university officials offer the following explanation:

When the D.C. Zoning Commission approved the overall campus plan in 2007, the decision required the university to finalize its preservation plan "within 60 days of resolution of legal appeals," according to Alicia O'Neil, the university's senior associate vice president for operations.

And almost inevitably, the campus plan was caught up in the legal strife that has surrounded town-gown relations in Foggy Bottom for decades. The Foggy Bottom Association appealed aspects of the plan, and the D.C. Court of Appeals issued a rul-



Bill Petros/The Current

**The university is seeking landmark status for the Keystone apartments and five other buildings.**

ing last September, upholding most of the plan and remanding only one question (concerning enrollment numbers) back to the Zoning Commission.

With the appeals court ruling in hand, the university moved ahead to submit nominations for six individual buildings, as well as background information on the proposed historic district, to the city Historic Preservation Office in November, O'Neil said.

First up for review will be the six individual landmark nominations, prepared by preservation consultant EHT Traceries for the university. They include five early-20th-century apartment buildings, which have been incorporated into the campus to serve as residence halls or academic buildings:

- the Flager apartment building, now known as Madison Hall, at 736 2nd St., a classical revival structure constructed in 1926 by noted apartment developer A. Joseph Howar;
  - the 1931 Keystone apartments, now called H.B. Burns Memorial Building, at 2150 Pennsylvania Ave., which were the creation of developer David A. Baer and architect Robert O. Scholz, one of
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## The week ahead

### Wednesday, Jan. 6

The D.C. State Board of Education will hold a public hearing on the Student Code of Conduct. The meeting will begin at 6 p.m. in the board's chambers at One Judiciary Square, 441 4th St. NW. To testify, contact Beverley Wheeler at 202-741-0884 or [beverley.wheeler@dc.gov](mailto:beverley.wheeler@dc.gov).

### Saturday, Jan. 9

The D.C. Public Charter School Board, the D.C. Association of Chartered Public Schools and Friends of Choice in Urban Schools (FOCUS) will host a recruitment expo for parents and teachers interested in charter schools. The event will be held from noon to 4 p.m. at the Washington Convention Center, 801 Mount Vernon Place NW.

### Wednesday, Jan. 13

The D.C. State Board of Education will hold a public hearing on the English Language Proficiency standards. The meeting will begin at 6 p.m. in the board's chambers at One Judiciary Square, 441 4th St. NW. To testify, contact Beverley Wheeler at 202-741-0884 or [beverley.wheeler@dc.gov](mailto:beverley.wheeler@dc.gov).

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