

Friday, November 9, 2007

Benning Road project in hunt for city agent

Washington Business Journal - by [Prabha Natarajan](#) Staff Reporter



Rendering

Will they come? As part of a \$30 million mixed-use project in Ward 7, developers have planned an office building they hope will be snapped up by a D.C. government agency.

A developer plans to construct an office building a block from the Benning Road Metro station in Ward 7 in hopes of luring a D.C. government agency there.

District-based DBT Development Group LLC and Paramount Title & Escrow LLC are planning a mixed-use project called Benning Station, which will be on a 1.3-acre lot they have assembled at 4414 Benning Road NE.

In addition to a proposed 131,000 square feet of office space, the plan calls for 16,000 square feet of retail and a separate 60,000-square-foot residential building.

The developer has rights for the project under the current zoning designation and does not need approval from the city.

The nearly \$30 million project is part of a larger vision to create Benning Town Center by redeveloping the area surrounding the Metro station, which is at the corner of Benning Road NE and East Capitol Street.

DBT Development Group is assembling more parcels in the area now, but would need to build some momentum with its office building before any larger development took place.

The potential to sign on a city agency is greater now than in the past.

"There's demand from the D.C. government and nonprofits who are priced out of downtown," said David Tolson, principal at DBT Development Group. "The demand is there, but the supply is not there for spaces east of the river."

The lot, formerly home to a small commercial building and the restaurant Chef's Table, will not be developed until there is a lease signed.

To make that a reality, the development team already has met several times with city officials, including Neil Albert, the deputy mayor for planning and economic development.

Ben Soto, the president of Paramount Title, has close ties to the mayor. He was Adrian Fenty's campaign treasurer and Fenty's nominee for the D.C. Sports & Entertainment Commission.

"The city is dedicated to spurring economic growth in neighborhoods," Soto said. "They are excited and optimistic about our project and want to play a role."

The D.C. Office of Planning, in its comprehensive plan for the city, picked the Benning Road corridor, including DBT Development Group's site, as an area in need of an economic boost.

Soto, a real estate attorney, will take a 20 percent stake in the Benning Station development.

"You close a lot of deals, and then you are inspired to be part of the economic revitalization," he said.

Benning Station is expected to bring a sit-down restaurant and amenities such as a bank and drugstore to the neighborhood.

The developer has hired Bonstra Haresign Architects to design the project. The site plan and schematics are complete, and the rest of the work will be done once the developer is closer to start of construction.

The plan is to build in two phases. The first would be the office and retail portions, and the second the residential part. Tolson said he wants to give the residential market a chance to recover.