



Stephanie Rawlings-Blake
Mayor

PLANNING COMMISSION

Wilbur E. "Bill" Cunningham, Chairman



Thomas J. Stosur
Director

STAFF REPORT

April 29, 2010

REQUEST: City Council Bill #10-0596/ Sale of Property – 1125 North Calvert Street

For the purpose of authorizing the mayor and City Council of Baltimore to sell, at either public or private sale, all its interest in certain property known as 1125 North Calvert Street (Ward 11, Section 12, Block 498, Lot 10) and no longer needed for public use; and providing for a special effective date.

RECOMMENDATION: Approval

STAFF: Melvin Hicks

PETITIONER: Baltimore Development Corporation on behalf of The Administration

OWNER: Mayor and City Council

SITE/GENERAL AREA

Site Conditions: The property known as 1125 North Calvert Street is improved with a four storey 19th century rowhouse mansion. The parcel is approximately 13,000 square feet and size and is zoned O-R-4.

General Area: The subject property is located in downtown Baltimore in the Mount Vernon Historic district. The property resides on the corner of Biddle and Calvert Streets. Adjacent to the property is a high rise apartment building. The area is primarily characterized by 19th century 3-4 storey rowhouse mansions. The area has a mixture of residential and office uses.

HISTORY

There have been no previous Planning Commission actions pertaining to the subject properties.

CONFORMITY TO PLANS

Ordinance #06-206 established the Mount Vernon Urban Renewal Plan, dated April 26, 2006.

This proposal to sell the subject properties is consistent with the Baltimore City Comprehensive Master Plan LIVE Goal 2, Objective 4: Protect and Enhance the Preservation of Baltimore's Historic Buildings and Neighborhoods.

ANALYSIS

The Inn at Government House, located at 1125 North Calvert Street, has been an iconic building in the rich history of Baltimore. This structure was built in the late 1880's for John S. Gilman, a prominent banker. The Inn was built at a cost of \$40,000. Before its completion, Mr. Gilman died and his widow lived in the newly built home for several years. After the Gilman's, the house was owned by several prominent families. After the Gilman's the Painters lived in the home and William Painter was an inventor who invented the bottle cap. Following the Painter family, the house was owned by a Dr. Futcher, who used the Library as his office. Robert Garrett, grandson of the founder of the B & O Railroad, later purchased the Mansion. Mr. Garrett was an Olympic Athlete and Chairperson of an organization known as the Playground Athletic League, serving the children of Baltimore. The P.A.L. donated the Mansion to the City of Baltimore in 1939, to be used as the Department of Public Recreation. In 1969, the City purchased the two adjoining Federal style townhouses and expanded the office space. This property was used as the headquarters for the Department of Public Works until the early 1980s.

In 1983, Mayor William Donald Schaeffer initialized the restoration of Government House that was completed and open to the public in 1985. Since the completion of the restoration, the inn has served as the Official Guesthouse of the City of Baltimore. The mansion was restored to its original 19th century standards and configured as a historic City-owned and operated inn with 21 rooms. The property consists of an approximately 13,000 square foot parcel and is improved by three structures, including a four-story historic residence and two adjoining Federal-style row houses to the south, with parking for 13 vehicles. Many of the antiques displayed throughout the Mansion and the architectural features were manufactured in Baltimore.

At the request of the Mayor's Office, on October 6, 2008, the Inn at Government House was offered for sale and a Request for Proposal (RFP) released to put the property back on the City's tax roles. Therefore, City Council Bill #10-0596 is the required legislation to dispose of the property for redevelopment purposes. Baltimore Development Corporation (BDC) released a Request for Proposals (RFP) for the purchase, lease, or operation of the facility. Since the advertisement of the property, BDC has received an offer from Mount Vernon Mansion LLC, a partnership of Eddie Brown of Brown Capital Management and developer Martin Azola (the "Developer"). This entity proposes to purchase and redevelop the Inn at Government House as a historic 17-room boutique-style bed and breakfast with ancillary restaurant and event space. Once the bill receives Planning Commission and City Council's approval, BDC will seek Board of Estimate approval of the LDA.

The City's Space Utilization Committee has declared the Inn at Government House as surplus. Therefore, it is staff findings that the subject property is surplus and can be sold. Planning is in support of City Council Bill #10-0596 that authorizes the sale and to allow the City to dispose of the historic Inn at Government House for redevelopment purposes.

Staff has notified Midtown Community Benefits District, Mount Vernon-Belvedere Association, Baltimore Development Corporation, Department of Real Estate, and the City Council Representative of this action.

Thomas J. Stosur,
Director