

# Maximizing the benefits from GDS project

## VIEWPOINT

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Georgetown Day School has now submitted its proposal to the Zoning Commission to bring its lower and middle school grades to a shared campus with its high school in Tenleytown and to secure rights to develop a mixed-use project on Wisconsin Avenue.

The advisory neighborhood commission serving Tenleytown has worked with Georgetown Day School over the issues surrounding the evolving proposal for months and will continue to do so for months to come, as will the Office of Planning and the Zoning Commission.

The challenge will be to enable GDS to achieve its goals while delivering overall benefits for the community and not unduly burdening nearby neighbors. Sorting that out will be challenging, but solvable. And the result can and should be a substantial improvement over the current dead space on Wisconsin Avenue.

But the project is bigger than Tenleytown, and there may be benefits that can be accrued by other neighborhoods and the city generally.

Consider one possibility.

Georgetown Day School will be departing from its lower school building off MacArthur Boulevard and placing it on the market. In the meantime, the Lab School occupies the nearby old Hardy Elementary School at Foxhall Road and Q Street NW and has hoped to take permanent or long-term control of it to justify significant investment in modernizing it. Many in the Palisades and Foxhall Village neighborhoods have opposed the Lab School on this and sought to have the old Hardy returned to the D.C. Public Schools inventory and reopened as a neighborhood elementary school.

Might the GDS move offer an opportunity?

What if the Lab School took over the Georgetown Day campus off MacArthur and D.C. Public Schools took back and reopened the old Hardy? The result for the Palisades and Foxhall Village communities would be to alleviate crowding at Key Elementary and to return a walkable elementary school alternative to the families in the southern part of the Key boundary. The

result for the city could be to increase capacity to serve populations very much in need, relying on the outstanding, homegrown Lab School resource.

It is worth considering some of the alternatives for the GDS lower school site.

On the one hand, it could come back to life as a school serving a population of equal or greater size than the current GDS population. Likely result: Status quo or worse traffic. The Lab School by contrast serves a far smaller population. Result: Reduced traffic.

On the other hand, the site could be sold to a residential developer who no doubt could create a beautiful new set of homes there. Likely result: More families and more demand for the already overcrowded Key.

Clearly, pulling off a complex set of transactions like the chain proposed — GDS MacArthur Boulevard campus to the Lab School, old Hardy back to D.C. Public Schools — would take planning, creativity and collaboration. And nobody should expect GDS or the Lab School to embrace an idea that is adverse to their financial interest. If something like this were to be done, it would be necessary to come up with ways to make it attractive to all parties, which could require some conditional support from the city. But it is at least possible that the potential benefits would outweigh whatever costs there were to the city to make such a set of transactions workable.

Perhaps a first step could be for the city to secure an appraisal of the GDS MacArthur Boulevard site. Such an appraisal, while unlikely to be the first or the last such valuation, could at least frame the beginning of a conversation with the potential parties.

The critical point for now is, with the Office of Planning becoming fully engaged on the project during the Zoning Commission review process, this is an appropriate time to explore opportunities arising from the overall GDS project. The city should be looking at the GDS move with a broad lens and thinking about how it can be used to maximize benefits (and minimize hardships) for Tenleytown, but also at how it can result in maximal benefits for Palisades, Foxhall Village and the city as a whole.

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