



advertisement

Do I have time for an MBA?
Which MBA program is right for me?
Does accreditation matter?

THE LOYOLA MBA

<http://www.baltimoresun.com/news/local/bal-te.md.durham05aug05,0,2690522.story>

From the Baltimore Sun

Sun follow-up

Grant sought to clear block

City officials say a block near the old American Brewery would be better razed; a handful of residents disagree

By Eric Siegel
Sun reporter

August 5, 2006



One of the most decayed blocks in the deteriorated area around East Baltimore's long-vacant American Brewery appears destined for demolition in the not-too-distant future.

If the razing of the 1800 block of N. Durham St., where 40 of the 45 properties are vacant, occurs as planned, it would be the largest demolition project around the brewery in several years.

The block sits in a roughly 20-square-block area that was the subject of a two-part series in The Sun in June, "A Neighborhood Abandoned." Nearly half of the properties in the area are vacant buildings and barren lots.

The city's housing department has applied for a \$500,000 state grant to augment about \$800,000 of its own money to acquire and tear down properties on the North Durham Street block. Demolition is tentatively scheduled to begin in November 2007.

City officials say that razing the block would create a cleared site that would be far more attractive to developers than a block of mostly vacant houses. They also say it would enhance the desirability not only of the brewery property - which was awarded to a developer last fall - but also of two vacant school buildings nearby.

"Right now, this is part of a long-term land-banking strategy and part of a strategy to eliminate blight," said Robin Zimble, director of the housing agency's strategic planning, policy and programs.

She describes the block as "low-hanging fruit" ripe for demolition because of the poor condition of the properties and the high number of vacancies, which reduce the cost of buying buildings and relocating residents.

The city's proposal is applauded by the head of a neighborhood group, who lives a block away and has pushed for years to have the block torn down.

"We're happy. It's well overdue," said Doris Minor-Terrell, president of the Rutland Lafayette Community

Association, named for two streets in the area.

The city has in the past torn down other deteriorated blocks in the area, only to see them remain vacant lots. Still, officials are convinced that continuing to tear down blocks such as this one is the best way to improve the appearance of the neighborhood by reducing blight and preparing sites for new housing if the market in the area improves.

But the pastor of the Temple of God church at the north end of the street and the church building's owner would prefer the block be renovated for low-income renters and homeowners.

"We don't want to see the block go," said the Rev. Daniel Culbreth, who heads the tiny, 15-member congregation. "I think the block can be brought back."

There are one homeowner and three renters on the block, in addition to the church, and many of the properties have been vacant for as long as 20 years, according to interviews and documents.

As in other blocks in the area, boards are missing from the second-floor windows of many of the abandoned buildings in the 1800 block of N. Durham St. and their front steps are broken and crumbling. But there is little of the litter and discarded furniture that mar other blocks. Culbreth says church members regularly clean up the street.

The city's budget for the project calls for about \$600,000 in city money to acquire the properties and relocate the church and residents. An additional \$200,000 in city funds plus the \$500,000 in state money are earmarked for the demolition.

The city expects that it will eventually recover \$375,000 of its costs through the sale of the land.

A handful of the rowhouses are owned by the city and its housing authority. The rest would be acquired through tax-sale foreclosures and "quick take" condemnation that allows the city to buy and demolish properties on which more than 70 percent of the houses have been abandoned.

The state money that the city is seeking comes from the Community Legacy Program, which provides money for revitalization projects to governments and nonprofit community development corporations in areas experiencing decline and disinvestment.

The program, under the Maryland Department of Housing and Community Department, has a budget of \$6.5 million, an increase of \$1.5 million over last year, according to Elise Butler, assistant housing secretary for the division of neighborhood revitalization.

This year, the program has received applications for 123 projects asking for a total of \$26 million in funds, she said.

"It's a highly competitive program," Butler said. "It's rare we're able to fully fund a request."

Zimble acknowledges the city might not receive all the money it is requesting. It could make up whatever difference occurs with city funds or apply for more money next year.

A year ago, for example, the city received \$200,000 of a \$500,000 request to assemble properties in Poppleton in West Baltimore. It is applying for an additional \$300,000 in Community Legacy funds for that project this year.

In the application for the Community Legacy grant for the 1800 block of N. Durham St., city officials note the block is "located in close proximity to other major investment and potential assets."

The grant application mentions the city-owned American Brewery complex, which has been vacant since 1973. Last November, the city selected a group led by prominent developer Struever Bros., Eccles & Rouse to turn the

historic 19th-century building into the Baltimore headquarters of Humanim, a nonprofit social services organization.

Also mentioned in the grant application are two former school buildings at 1701 and 2000 E. North Ave. that had been converted into low-income apartments but were closed several years ago and have been vacant since.

Zimbler said she hopes that the demolition of the 1800 block of N. Durham St. "will increase the marketability" of the two buildings.

Also in its application, the city says the Rutland Lafayette Community Association has asked for the past five years that the block be demolished.

"In fact, it's been about 12 years," said Minor-Terrell, the association's president, who lives on Rutland Avenue in a house that once belonged to her parents.

"It will hopefully have some impact on the drug trafficking that goes on there," she said.

Minor-Terrell says she worries that after the houses are demolished, nothing will be done with the land. That's what happened a few blocks away to the 1800 block of N. Castle St., which was torn down about six years ago and is now vacant.

As an alternative, she suggests that residents on the east side of her block be allowed to extend their property lines after the houses are demolished, creating off-street parking or larger backyards. Still, she says, she and others can live with the plan to demolish the houses and hold on to the land for future redevelopment.

"If that's all we can get, then, yes, we can accept it," she said.

On North Durham Street, some of the few remaining stakeholders are less accepting of the city's plan.

Alice Williams, a 58-year-old food services worker who rents a rowhouse next to the church for \$400 a month, says, "I don't think they should tear it down. They should revitalize it. There are so many blocks they're not doing anything with now."

Williams adds that she doesn't mind living on a block with so few people.

"It's fine with me," says Williams, who lives with two grown sons. "I don't have no nosy neighbors getting into my business. I don't have no fights to worry about."

Temple Gibson, who owns the church building, says he would like to see the houses renovated and kept affordable. "Every person can't afford to pay \$500 or \$600 a month for rent," he said.

Culbreth, the church's pastor, says he bought a house across from the church for \$5,000 and is putting \$5,000 worth of renovations into it. He says he'd like to do more such renovations by setting up a nonprofit development corporation that could raise money, but he acknowledges that his house was unusual because it needed relatively little work.

"I don't expect the rest of the houses to be like that," he said. "Most of them are in bad shape."

Minor-Terrell, in fact, says most are too far gone to renovate: "I don't see these structures as ones people can live in."

eric.siegel@baltsun.com

To see the complete Neighborhood Abandoned series, go to baltimoresun.com/neighborhood

Copyright © 2007, [The Baltimore Sun](http://TheBaltimoreSun.com) / [Get Sun home delivery](http://GetSun.com)

> [Get news on your mobile device at www.baltimoresun.com](http://www.baltimoresun.com)