

THE FOGGY BOTTOM CURRENT

Sustainability projects win seed funding

By **KATIE PEARCE**
Current Staff Writer


Seven cutting-edge sustainability projects, including urban agriculture programs at the University of the District of Columbia and an outdoor classroom at Hardy Middle School, are splitting \$2.35 million through a city-run grant competition.

The “Sustainable DC Innovation Challenge” is an internal competition among D.C. government agencies, doling out funds to test forward-thinking environmental initiatives on city property. Twelve such projects were funded last year, and they’re now in various phases of implementation, according to Brendan Shane, chief of policy and sustainability for the D.C. Department of the Environment.

Mayor Vincent Gray recently announced the 2014 winners, which will increase access to healthy locally grown foods, reduce stormwater runoff, and promote educational and job-skills programs, among other goals.

This year the University of the District of Columbia won more than
See **Grants**/Page 16

A NEW CHAPTER



Brian Kapur/The Current

Work began Monday to raze the Brutalist Third Church of Christ, Scientist, building at 16th and I streets NW. After a long preservation battle, developers got the OK to replace the structure with an office building that will include church space.

Council panel reviews recent EMS problems

■ **Public safety:** Testimony focuses on two January deaths

By **KATIE PEARCE**
Current Staff Writer

As controversy and finger-pointing continues over the recent death of Medic Cecil Mills Jr., a D.C. Council hearing this week scrutinized the protocols and culture of the District’s emergency response system.

The oversight comes at a fraught time for the D.C. Fire and Emergency Medical Services Department, with the future of Fire Chief

Kenneth Ellerbe emerging as a key issue for the mayoral election — and while an investigation looks into another death last month.

A day after chairing the oversight hearing, Ward 6 Council member and mayoral candidate Tommy Wells called for the resignation of both Ellerbe and Paul Quander, the deputy mayor for public safety.

In a letter to Mayor Vincent Gray, Wells said he was “stunned to learn” from Monday’s hearing that no plans exist to address “systemic mismanagement” in the District’s emergency response system.

The public safety hearing examined
See **EMS**/Page 7

State Department planning sparks OSS landmark bid

■ **Preservation:** ANC backs pending landmark request

By **KAT LUCERO**
Current Staff Writer

Possible changes to the U.S. State Department’s Potomac Annex complex have sparked a push to give the site historical protections as the former headquarters of the nation’s first intelligence agency.

The Foggy Bottom/West End advisory neighborhood commission last Wednesday joined the effort to get national landmark status for the complex at 2430 E St., a portion of the Old Naval Observatory campus and former home of the Office of Strategic Services. The complex is already a locally recognized landmark, but the listing is based on its earlier history as a public health laboratory and does not extend to its later occupants.

The Office of Strategic Services — the predecessor to the Central Intelligence Agency — used part of the 11.8-acre site overlooking the Potomac River during World War II. A few years ago, the bulk of the campus — including the old obser-



Courtesy of D.C. Preservation League
The south building is one of the former OSS structures.

vatory building, which is already on the National Register of Historic Places — was vacated by the Navy and is now slated to accommodate new facilities for the State Department, whose headquarters sits just across 23rd Street. The agency is now working on a master plan for the site that would let it consolidate all regional offices there.

The property includes three fed-
See **Complex**/Page 16

Council hopeful Settles seeks jobs trust fund

By **GRAHAM VYSE**
Current Staff Writer

When John Settles explains his vision for job creation in D.C., he ends up talking quite a bit about laundry.

That’s because helping to create a commercial laundry facility in the District is one of several goals the at-large D.C. Council candidate has for the “Jobs Trust Fund” he’s pitching to reduce unemployment in the city’s poorest wards.

Settles, a candidate in the Democratic primary on April 1, envisions this new fund as an independent entity providing financial support for remedial education programs, job training and direct investment in



Courtesy of Settles Campaign
Democrat John Settles is running for an at-large D.C. Council seat.

start-up businesses that hire D.C. residents — especially from wards 5, 6, 7 and 8. He thinks a laundry start-up could be a strong early prior-

ity due to high demand from hospitals and restaurants for cleaning services. But he also wants to invest in solar panel providers, fresh produce merchants and a company that recycles ink and toner cartridges.

“By establishing businesses that employ our residents who need jobs to provide goods and services to local consumers and businesses, we are not only helping families and individuals achieve self-sufficiency, we are also laying out a plan for the future economic success of the entire District,” Settles said in a Feb. 18 news release.

The candidate also said his fund would indirectly address homelessness, housing affordability and pub-
See **Settles**/Page 5

NEWS

School system will offer grants to help student satisfaction
— Page 2

EVENTS

Studio Theatre wades into ‘Water by the Spoonful’
— Page 21



NEWS

Mayoral candidates square off at forum in Dupont Circle
— Page 3

INDEX

Calendar/18	Opinion/8
Classifieds/29	Police Report/6
District Digest/4	Real Estate/15
Exhibits/19	School Dispatches/13
Foggy Bottom News/11	Service Directory/26
In Your Neighborhood/10	Theater/21

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NORTHWEST REAL ESTATE

GRANTS: Funding supports sustainable initiatives

From Page 1

\$900,000 for three separate but related programs that “move from the beginning to the end of the urban agriculture process, and help develop skills and training for people along the way,” said Shane.

One of the programs will create neighborhood-scale “aquaponics” systems, which allow for the combination of raising fish and growing plants. When paired with a small greenhouse, each facility is expected to create 500 pounds of fish and 5,000 pounds of produce annually, according to a news release from the city. Dwane Jones, director of the school’s Center for Sustainable Development, said the effort will likely raise tilapia and grow edible native plants.

In this type of ecosystem, fish provide nutrients to fertilize the plants, while the plants filter water from the fish waste. The process requires no pesticides, antibiotics or hormones.

While aquaponics itself is not new, implementing it on a community scale is — and that’s where an invention of University of the District of Columbia science professor Thomas Kakovitch comes in. Kakovitch patented the “Flo-Vex,” an aeration device that injects oxygen into water without high pressure, heat or moving parts. The first urban aquaponics project testing Kakovitch’s device was installed last year in Southeast D.C., at the ReGeneration House of Praise Church.

The new grant will go toward building at least three more aqua-

ponics demonstration projects in wards 3, 5 and 7, ideally on University of the District of Columbia campuses — including the main one in Van Ness. In addition to helping communities grow their own food, the facilities are also meant to serve as a base for job training for under-skilled D.C. residents.

The aquaponics initiative received \$519,000 through this year’s innovation challenge.

The university also won \$280,000 to launch a “business-incubator kitchen” in Ward 8, to promote education on food and nutrition as well as job training. The program will include a traveling food truck serving healthy fare across the city. Both the kitchen and truck might be combined with the aquaponics systems, Shane said.

Another \$121,500 will go toward a project to build a native plant nursery in Ward 5. All of the above initiatives are connected to the university’s College of Agriculture, Urban Sustainability and Environment Sciences, known as “CAUSES.”

At Hardy Middle School and the Fillmore Arts Center in upper Georgetown, the grant program gives \$330,000 toward building an 11,100-square-foot outdoor classroom to offer “hands-on examples of renewable energy, stormwater management, native-species planting, nutrition and urban agriculture,” according to the mayor’s office.

Built from sustainable materials, the facility should offer a replicable model “that can be integrated into school design citywide,” Shane said, and also help advance the city’s

environmental literacy curriculum. Although informal community gardens and other sustainable spaces already exist at various schools across the District, he said the Hardy site will be the largest and most formal effort to date.

Rounding out the grants this year are:

- \$200,000 to rebuild two neglected D.C. Department of Recreation greenhouses, including the one at Twin Oaks Community Garden at 14th and Taylor streets NW in Ward 4. Nonprofits will get involved to help provide community growing spaces and training opportunities, particularly for youth, according to the mayor’s office.

- \$492,000 toward a “splash park” in Ward 7 that will reuse rainwater for the water feature as well as for irrigation of nearby playing fields.

- \$400,000 for features like rain gardens to reduce stormwater runoff in Oxon Run Park in Ward 8. Currently, polluted runoff flows untreated into the Oxon Run stream.

The grant program is part of the broader “Sustainable DC” initiative, a 20-year action plan to make D.C. “the greenest, healthiest, and most livable city in the nation.” Last year’s inaugural challenge awarded \$4.35 million, including \$600,000 for a feasibility study on green or solar roofs for government buildings.

Shane said D.C. Council decisions led to a tighter budget for this year’s program. From here, each agency must move forward with contracts, construction and implementation, usually pitching in additional money.

COMPLEX: OSS landmark mulled

From Page 1

eral buildings built in the late 19th and early 20th centuries, and a central quadrangle on the west slope of Navy Hill, where the first Naval Observatory was housed. A fourth structure — known as the “North Building” — was razed in the 1960s to accommodate the construction of the E Street Expressway, according to an application from the D.C. Preservation League.

The OSS was dissolved into other departments immediately after the war, but the National Security Act of 1947 resurrected the centralized intelligence gathering activities, forming what is now the CIA. The clandestine agency used the former OSS offices as its original headquarters until it moved in the 1960s to Langley, Va.

“These buildings were the birthplace of the American intelligence and special operations communities and hold a significant place in the history of the United States. They should be preserved and added to the National Register of Historic Places,” said Charles Pinck, president of the OSS Society, a Falls Church-based organization for veterans of the agency and their descendants, such as himself.

Pinck reached out to the preservation league last year after the Washington Business Journal reported that changes were in the works for the campus. The historic protections he’s seeking would make it more difficult for the buildings to be razed or otherwise altered.

The U.S. General Services Administration, which manages federal government property, is seeking

construction contractors for renovation of the E Street campus, often a signal that the State Department is reconsidering a site’s use.

“GSA and the State Department are working on a long-term Master Plan to address the Potomac Annex-Navy Hill campus and the State Department’s office space needs,” General Services spokesperson Dan Cruz wrote in an email to The Current. “GSA and State are currently planning to reuse five of the existing buildings at the Potomac Annex. Work has already begun on the first building, and GSA conducted a competitive procurement to move forward with the next phases of this project.”

The agency’s bid notes, “At this time, Building 2 [the former observatory] will not undergo construction renovation due to its current status on the National Register of Historical Places.”

The OSS was formed in 1942 under President Franklin Roosevelt. Gen. William “Wild Bill” Donovan led the wartime department and employed 13,000 people at its peak in late 1944, according to the CIA’s website.

Fisher Howe, 99, was a special assistant to Donovan, and he’s now one of a few living OSS veterans. In an interview with The Current, How, said he supports the preservation efforts. He remembered the facility as “a very effective place to work.”

Howe said he was sent abroad for most of his time with the OSS, but he later worked at the headquarters, where he met Julia Child — arguably the agency’s most famous agent. How and his wife helped taste recipes for Child’s first cookbook.

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