

Panel Approves Radio One's Planned Move To District; [FINAL Edition]

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Radio One Inc. has reached a tentative agreement with a key District panel to relocate its headquarters from Prince George's County to the Shaw neighborhood, near Howard University, in hopes of creating a business and entertainment center in a blighted urban area.

The deal, which includes Radio One as the anchor tenant in a 76,000-square-foot office building, was preliminarily approved last night by the National Capital Revitalization Corp., a quasi-independent organization created to spur economic development in the District.

Radio One, which moved from the District to Lanham in 1997, has agreed to move into an \$83 million office, residential and retail complex on Seventh Street NW, between S and T streets. The 69-station urban radio group was started by company chairwoman Catherine L. Hughes out of a trailer in the District nearly 25 years ago. Radio One has 205 local employees and reported broadcast revenue of \$319.8 million last year.

"It is a great homecoming," said Hughes's son, Radio One chief executive Alfred C. Liggins III. "It is like coming full circle. My mom started her broadcast career at Howard University. That neighborhood is populated primarily by our listener base."

The project must still secure financing and obtain the city government's approval. It also requires the approval of the Washington Metropolitan Area Transit Authority, which owns a sliver of land on the site and operates the Shaw-Howard University Metro stop there.

The project, called Broadcast Center One, envisions a 300,000-square-foot development surrounding the Shaw-Howard University Metro stop, and it could bring the kind of redevelopment to Shaw that Discovery Communications Inc. brought to Silver Spring, according to its proponents. Radio One's offices will be near the Metro, with its radio studios on the ground floor enclosed in large windows, allowing the public to peek in on the company's radio personalities. A Jumbotron on the side of the building will show TV One programming, said the project's lead developer, Chip Ellis of District-based Ellis Enterprises. North of the office buildings, he and his partners propose building 202 condos, 21,000 square feet of retail space and underground parking.

TV One LLC, the cable network aimed at a black audience and backed by Radio One, could also eventually move its offices to the development from Silver Spring, according to NCRC and developers. But that move has not been approved by TV One's board, Liggins said.

The project "is a great opportunity to jump-start economic development in Shaw and LeDroit Park. Radio One is the catalyst," said Anthony Freeman, president and chief executive of NCRC.

Chris Bender, a spokesman for the D.C. Office of Planning and Economic Development, said the project "will give people a reason to come to that space -- to shop and eat and live. We are trying to make it a destination beyond just a hip, upscale office space. We want to create a town center."

The site chosen by Radio One is a vacant lot on a once-thriving commercial corridor that suffered years of urban decline but is starting to revive. Near Seventh and S streets is a long-shuttered Wonder Bread factory, once used to make Twinkies, where D.C. developer Douglas Jemal plans to build mid-priced housing units. Trammell Crow Co. is also planning to build apartments and retail buildings on a nearby parking lot across from Howard University.

Ellis began working with Liggins to find a new headquarters for Radio One three years ago. Other partners in the project are Fairfax-based West Group Properties and Jarvis Company LLC, headed by relatives of former D.C. Council member Charlene Drew Jarvis. Radio One is also an investor in the project. NCRC, which has agreed to contribute the 27,000-square-foot parcel of land it owns on the block, will also retain an undisclosed investment stake.

The developers, collectively called Broadcast Center Partners LLC, are acquiring 23,000 square feet of additional land from seven owners around the NCRC site. Four small businesses will be displaced.

Liggins and Broadcast Center Partners have worked closely with D.C. Council member Jim Graham, who represents Shaw and is chairman of Metro's real estate committee. Yesterday, Graham said he supports the project, though he usually declines to support non-competitive agreements. NCRC's agreement to negotiate with Radio One and Broadcast Center Partners prevents the organization from considering other bids. Metro is still negotiating its participation in the development.

"The key for this non-competitive agreement is that Radio One is going to locate its headquarters in the District," Graham said. "That is the alpha and omega of this deal. I am so impressed and thrilled at the notion."

Kwasi Holman, president of the Prince George's County Economic Development Corp., said the county had "made every effort to provide them with competitive space and a competitive deal," and still held out hope the company will stay in Lanham.

The deal, which has been batted around since at least last July, has also involved extensive negotiations with Shaw's Manna Community Development Corp. and local advisory neighborhood commissioners to help ensure that lower-income residents remain in the area and to prevent small-business owners from being priced out of the market. A housing boom in Shaw has caused rents and housing prices to increase in recent years.

Among a series of concessions, Radio One and the developers agreed to put \$786,000 into a community fund for the neighborhood in the next 15 years, and the radio company will provide an additional \$250,000 in scholarships for students living in Shaw to attend Howard University's business or communications schools.

Staff writer Debbi Wilgoren contributed to this report.

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