



ADVANCING THE ACHIEVEMENTS OF WOMEN IN COMMERCIAL REAL ESTATE



CREW DC PROGRAMS LUNCHEON: The Future of Pennsylvania Avenue May 12, 2016

Speakers:

Rich Bradley, Senior Advisor, DowntownDC BID
(Moderator)

The Honorable Jack Evans, Councilmember for Ward 2

Robert A. Peck, Hon. AIA, Hon. ASLA, Principal/Co-
Leader, Government Practice Area, Gensler

Sarah Ridgely, Lead Urban Planner, Pennsylvania Avenue
Initiative, National Capital Planning Commission



WASHINGTON, DC – Pennsylvania Avenue should be one of America’s grand boulevards – a vibrant streetscape with a variety of functions. Due to a lack of planning and funding, Pennsylvania Avenue (from the Capitol to the White House) is a lackluster part of town once the federal workforce goes home. The CREW DC Programs Committee assembled a high-octane panel to discuss the Avenue’s potential.

No one entity has overseen development on and around Pennsylvania Avenue since Congress disbanded the Pennsylvania Avenue Development Corporation in 1996. The District of Columbia, National Park Service (NPS) and General Services Administration (GSA) each control different portions of the Avenue – DC: streets, NPS: sidewalks, and GSA: buildings. Jack Evans noted that there is a governance problem between these three agencies that often restricts moving forward with any substantial effectiveness.

There are two large projects that will affect the future of Pennsylvania Avenue. The Trump International Hotel at 11th Street Northwest is slated to open in September 2016. The Trump family is spearheading a \$200 million renovation of the Old Post Office Building (a landmark structure that formerly housed several government agencies) into a luxury venue that should bring many more people to the area throughout the day, evening and weekend. The second project is the long-awaited redevelopment of the FBI Building. Deferred maintenance and technology advancements have made the structure obsolete. However, the building sits on a full city block of prime real estate at 935 Pennsylvania Avenue NW.

Evans brought to light a deal that is on the table that could transform the FBI Building into the next Verizon Center. When the current Verizon Center was completed in 1997, it brought much needed commerce to the Gallery Place / Chinatown neighborhood. Almost 20 years later, Gallery Place is one of the most thriving areas in the District. The Verizon Center is nearing the end of its life cycle. The arena’s owners, Monumental Sports & Entertainment, are considering the next step. The owners received an unsolicited proposal from developers requesting to buy the sports and entertainment arena and transform the structure into a mixed use facility. According to Evans,

Monumental Sports & Entertainment is considering building the next Verizon Center at the site of the current FBI Building.

There was much discussion between the panelists about the future of Freedom Plaza and Pershing Park (near the Willard Hotel.) Both parcels are isolated and under-utilized. Although laws would need to be amended, the panel agreed that food trucks during the lunch hour could bring foot traffic and commerce along the Avenue.

At the end of this lively discussion, Moderator Rich Bradley asked each of the panelists to describe their wish for Pennsylvania Avenue. Bob Peck wants to proceed with relocating the FBI as well as transform Pershing Park and Freedom Plaza. Sarah Ridgely advocates getting rid of the old Pennsylvania Avenue Development Plan. Jack Evans wants the District to gain control of Pennsylvania Avenue's sidewalks from NPS so more activities (like food trucks) can materialize. Evans asserted we need to think outside the "block".