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WILL FRANKLIN SCHOOL BE WASHINGTON'S NEXT HIGH SCHOOL?

How can the historic Franklin School building be returned to educational use, meeting the needs of 21st century students and putting Washington's public schools back where they once were, in the vanguard of American education? Such was the subject of a community forum sponsored by the Coalition for Franklin School and held last night at the Goethe-Institut.

An open enrollment high school for global education and leadership was one answer proposed for the vacant Franklin School. Sally Schwartz argued that the nation's capital needs a high school for students interested in international relations, diplomacy, and the global economy and that Franklin School is the ideal location. Franklin School at 13th and K streets is near the embassies, international organizations, and the international community and is well served by Metro lines, Schwartz said.

The Community Forum was sponsored by Coalition for Franklin School, which organized in November 2009 to promote the return of the 140-year-old, National Historic Landmark building to educational and cultural uses.

Joseph L. Browne, chair of the Coalition agrees that an open-enrollment high school makes sense for Franklin. School Without Walls in Foggy Bottom has to turn away half of its applicants every year because of lack of space. It is clear that there is a growing demand for that kind of specialized program for high school students from all over the city.

Other presenters also emphasized that Franklin School could respond to educational needs not currently being met.

Mary Shaffner, Executive Director of the Yu Ying Public Charter School now located in Brookland, described the proposal that the Yu Ying Chinese Immersion School presented to the District government in January. Shaffner said that the young couples that apply to her school want a central location for the school, and that they live in the District, and want to stay in the District.

Cary Silverman of the Federation of Citizens Associations presented data showing the unfilled core needs of Washington employers and how adult education programs could provide thousands of residents with skills that will move them into higher-paying and more fulfilling career paths. Franklins location is perfect for a future downtown community college campus, vocational training, GED preparation, and literacy programs. Silverman said. As many of the speakers did, Silverman remarked that Franklin is a magnificent building, the kind of setting that inspires achievement.

Dr. David Salter, a prominent medical educator, suggested a new educational institution for Franklin School. "The Franklin School building represents an unusual opportunity to create an independent multifunctional institution that will help guide educational change

in Washington through divisions of Education Research, Teacher Education, Digital Education, Online Modules, Penal Reform. Salter said that Franklins history as a laboratory school that pioneered many of the citys new educational programs was an ideal location for a new educational center that grapples daily with the toughest issues facing education reform in the city."

Several members of the audience questioned the cost of renovating the Franklin building. Browne reported that a 2002 study estimated the cost for preparing the building for school use would be \$22 million. That would look like a bargain, he said, if the city sold or leased Franklin now and then in ten years had to buy land downtown and construct a new building in response to the increase in downtown residents that is sure to continue. Silverman also pointed out that the District government has awarded generous public subsidies to private development projects. The city will contribute on the front end to renovate the building for educational use or on the back end through tax breaks to private developers. Participants suggested that that the citys short-term interest in generating money from public property like Franklin without thought to the benefits of the long-term revenues generated through education is short-sighted.

The meeting ended with a reminder from Evelyn Wrinn, of the Committee of 100, who said that the proposals submitted to the Deputy Mayor in January cannot go forward until the Mayor declares the building surplus property and the City Council approves, a process that would require public hearings.

Though its exterior was restored in 1990-92, the Franklin building was vacant for a decade, then illegally leased by former mayor Anthony Williams to a boutique hotel developer. Then it was pressed into service as a homeless shelter, which Mayor Adrian Fenty closed in 2008. In September 2009, the Deputy Mayor for Economic Development issued a Request for Proposals calling for private for-profit, commercial proposals for developing the building. The city received three proposals in January, one for a charter school, one for a hotel/restaurant, and one from the Coalition suggesting a variety of possible educational uses.

Franklin School is the work of Adolf Cluss, the Districts signature nineteenth-century architect, whose Eastern Market and Sumner School are among the Districts most cherished public buildings. Opened in 1869, Franklin pioneered new programs for District schools, including a teacher education school (housed at Franklin for forty years), Washingtons first public high school classes, and successful adult education programs.

For more information about the Community Forum at the Goethe-Institut, see:
<http://www.goethe.de/ins/us/was/ver/en5687365v.htm>