

# COMMUNITY FORUM



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## Urban Government Center project needs community input

### Urban Government Center advisory panel

Guest columnists

The Urban Government Center advisory panel has attempted to negotiate a community benefits agreement with Upper Paristown Preservation Trust to offset the impact of UPPT's proposed redevelopment of the subject property since 2021. The development is slated to include luxury apartments, houses, an office building, a parking garage and a boutique hotel. UPPT provided a cost estimate of about \$249 million, which includes the \$1 that UPPT would pay Metro to purchase the property.

Tax increment financing would provide a partial offset of the development cost as well. Because of these public subsidies, the panel was tasked by Metro's executive branch to represent the adjacent neighborhoods in these negotiations. Because we were unsuccessful in negotiating adequate measures to mitigate these impacts, we were unable to sign the Community Benefits Agreement. Despite our committee's investment of years of time attempting to negotiate benefits to our neighborhoods, Metro has accepted a new committee — appointed by UPPT involving members of the development team — as a valid substitute for the grassroots efforts with which Metro tasked us.

The advisory panel wants to see the next chapter for the Urban Government Center: The vacant building is a scourge upon all of the adjacent neighborhoods, especially those closest to it. During this process we have tried to negotiate with the developer, and our asks of additional affordable housing on UPPT's proposed development and an acre or more of green space open to the public, both of which are stated priorities of the administration, have been met with refusal. And now, Louisville Metro's Department of Economic Development has decided that instead of stating that a deal could not be reached between the parties, they have quietly and in the eleventh hour amended the parties, which now include members of the development team instead of the surrounding communities.

### Developers won't heed community needs

In opportunities for public comments, the biggest ask from the community was for public green space. While the most recent version of the CBA has agreed to a half-acre park, the specifics around it have been left vague. The panel requested at least a one-acre park,



The Urban Government Center building Jan. 31, 2023. MICHAEL CLEVINGER AND SCOTT UTTERBACK/COURIER JOURNAL

and the developer did not respond to our counter. Another issue the panel had with the proposed development is the creation of new office space when our downtown is full of empty offices, and when we are actively using tax dollars to bring workers back into the Central Business District.

Additionally, 54 units of 50-80% AMI housing in a 460-plus unit development is a good start, but is insufficient to our community need in 2024. Finally, the development of luxury condominiums and the hotel has the potential to change the surrounding housing market in a way that would push out existing neighbors in the name of private profits, without a meaningful way to support them.

Most importantly, perhaps, Metro is proposing to give UPPT not only about 11 acres of prime real estate on Barret Ave for \$1, but also twenty years of tax increment financing to offset some of the cost of a commercial and luxury housing project. This is an ethical

issue because the arrangement privatizes profit and socializes loss. Tax increment revenue goes neither to the state for redistribution nor to Metro for local expenditures. This panel views the current plan as extractive and problematic for the surrounding community.

We consider it important that we not allow this administration to misrepresent our years of volunteer work by claiming that a community benefits agreement was agreed upon. The developer was not willing to consider meaningful community benefits that would either enhance the quality of life for the neighbors or alleviate any of the difficulties that the project is likely to create.

*Frank Ford, Paristown Pointe neighborhood; Amy Luckett, Original Highlands neighborhood; Doug Magee, Phoenix Hill neighborhood; Rebecca Minnick, Germantown neighborhood; Randall Webber, Smoketown neighborhood*