



McMillan Park Reservoir, which closed decades ago, will undergo massive renovations to create recreational and open space for residents.



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directly linked to the health and vitality of the surrounding neighborhoods. If the community takes a turn for the worse, it affects enrollment, and unlike most companies, relocation is not an option for a university. Reciprocally, university philosophies and expansion plans can dramatically affect the residents of nearby communities.

Some universities understand the complexity of “town and gown” issues and are becoming catalysts for cooperation and redevelopment in their communities. The Howard University LeDroit Park Neighborhood Initiative in Washington, D.C. is one example of what can be achieved when “town and gown” unite.

The Town - LeDroit Park
LeDroit Park, developed in 1873, was one of Washington, D.C.’s first suburban residential communities. Initially an all white community with a fence separating it from African-American Howard Town, LeDroit Park became a predominantly African-American community by the end of World War I. Throughout the racial transition, LeDroit Park maintained its middle-class character and became home to many prominent African-Americans, including the poet Paul Lawrence

Dunbar, Congressman Oscar DePriest, suffragist and educator Mary Church Terrell, and jazz great Duke Ellington.

Of late, however, the area had not kept pace with the economic growth of other District areas. LeDroit Park had endured decades of blight, inadequate government services, deteriorated infrastructure, drugs and crime, overall decline, and general disinvestment by the community, local government, and Howard University.

The Gown - Howard University
In the early 1970s, Howard University (Howard), a 133-year old preeminent African-American university, began discussing plans for hospital expansion. In order to accommodate this expansion, Howard began purchasing properties in contiguous city blocks, as real estate became available. Once purchased, Howard boarded up the existing structures (most of which were row houses), and over 25 years, eventually acquired 45 properties adjacent to the hospital.

Tempted by these neglected structures, homeless people and local drug dealers moved into these



abandoned properties. The properties remained unused and boarded, though plans for their institutional use appeared in the university's campus plan. Citizens, increasingly concerned about the growing deterioration of their community and the prospect of rampant institutionalization of their residential neighborhood, sought and obtained local and national historic district designation for the area.

They wanted to stop the leveling of houses, celebrate the lives of the illustrious African-American residents who formerly lived there, and restore the area to its former grandeur as a handsome residential neighborhood. Over the years, residents met with many Howard representatives to voice their concerns, since Howard was the owner of the largest number of vacant properties in the community.

In 1990, newly hired Dr. Hassan Minor, then special assistant to the president, listened closely when the community told him and others that Howard University was "elitist," insensitive, an undesirable neighbor, and a poor steward of its properties. Dr. Minor decided to restore university-neighborhood relations and pledged that his efforts would focus on bringing about tangible change because the past had brought too many promises and too few results.

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Maybelle Taylor Bennett,...
...became its director.*

Dr. Minor restructured the university's community relations functions and established a Community Association Office that provided the much-needed public accessibility, information, and assistance to the community. He assembled a staff complete with the planning, international relations, youth programming, and fund-raising skills to provide the services and technical assistance needed to respond effectively to community challenges. The Howard University Community Association was opened in 1996, and Maybelle Taylor Bennett,

The face of LeDroit Park continues to change since its beginning as a suburban neighborhood over 100 years ago.

