



Choose 3 or more concerts
\$32.50 a ticket + a whole lot of exclusive benefits



SUBSCRIPTION SERIES
 FOR MUSIC LOVERS UNDER 35

Read today's paper. | Follow us. | Send us a tip. | View our photos.

SEARCH

Development corporation assures of progress

Executive director Kofi Boateng described the past few months' progress as the start of a new understanding between the WHLDC and the University. "They've been supportive, collaborative, and forthcoming," Boateng said.

By Jillian Kumagai
 Spectator Senior Staff Writer
 Published October 26, 2012

For an organization charged with distributing millions of dollars, the West Harlem Local Development Corporation has not had the most public of presences. But at a public meeting Thursday, the group reassured 250 Harlemites that it is more than functional, collaborating with Columbia and local organizations and ready to fulfill its charter.

The WHLDC received criticism last year for not releasing information about its board or where it distributed funds, as well as for its lack of a website or an office. Then, it hired an executive director in April, made a fanfare in June of giving \$750,000 to fund summer jobs for kids, and now is developing a series of business focus groups for locals.

"It may have taken a little bit longer," WHLDC president Donald Notice said, "but we wanted to make sure we had a sound program before the money went out the door."

Columbia administrators and local leaders of West Harlem signed a \$76 million community benefits agreement in May 2009 as a concession for construction in [Manhattanville](#). The agreement authorized an intermediary, the WHLDC, to disburse the funds through community programs for housing, employment, and education.

So far, the group has received \$6.55 million from Columbia, which is held in the Fund for the City of New York, a third-party fiscal sponsor. About \$1.8 million has been spent on projects such as providing local young people with summer internships, and \$700,000 has been spent on personnel, legal, and office services.

In addition, the WHLDC assisted in opening the Teachers College Community School last month, an objective that is specifically outlined in the CBA. In December, it will accept grant applications from local nonprofits.

WHLDC executive director Kofi Boateng described the past few months' progress as the start of a new understanding between the WHLDC and the University.

"They've been supportive, collaborative, and forthcoming," Boateng said. "It's a healthy relationship. We're changing the tenor of the relationship from a conflicting one to a cooperating one."

Columbia has also begun fulfilling its CBA promise of \$20 million "in-kind contributions," which include access to University services and facilities. Ted Gershon, associate vice president of community based initiatives, said at the meeting that the WHLDC has requested assistance in producing a business plan to look at industries in Harlem where economic investment in most needed.

"We'll hold stakeholder meetings where you'll sit with us and have a conversation," Gershon said. "This will be a more intimate operation. We'll talk to you about what kind of priorities we need to embrace."

Despite administrators' reassurances, many in attendance at the three-hour meeting remained pessimistic about Columbia's commitment to providing jobs.

- Share
- Print
- Email
- Facebook
- Twitter
- Google+

- Tags
- News, Jillian Kumagai, Community Benefits Agreement, Manhattanville, West Harlem Development Corporation

Recent News

Local Democrats win re-election bids
 November 7 2012

Obama Victory Party
 November 7 2012

At Rangel's watch party, vibrant support for Obama
 November 7 2012

1,200 students, alums sign "Save the Arts Initiative" petition
 November 6 2012

Election Night: A Twitter roundup
 November 7 2012

For administrators who talk, Obama may have edge on higher ed policy
 November 1 2012



Learn More

EMORY GOIZUETA BUSINESS SCHOOL

Aissatou Bey Grecia, a senior manager at one of Manhattanville's primary contractors, McKissack and McKissack, said that while the projects employs many minority- and women-owned firms, "the challenge is with the local."

Manhattanville construction requires workers to be unionized, which makes it difficult for local residents without a high school diploma or GED to find employment. Many audience members called for the WHLDC to lead construction training programs.

K. Samuels, Pharmaceutical Sciences '73 and coordinating member of the Friends of Macomb's Bridge Branch Library, received applause when she told Grecia that she wasn't "telling the truth when you say jobs, jobs, jobs." Samuels said that she sent two men, one African-American and one Caucasian, to Riverbank State Park last month for a jobs fair, but that only the Caucasian received callbacks for construction work at Manhattanville.

"Our people are trying to go to work and Columbia is saying there are jobs, but I don't know where they are," she said.

Samuels criticized the WHLDC's board of directors for comprising mostly Community Board 9 members and representatives of elected officials and not including enough people outside of local government.

For others, the meeting was an encouraging sign of progress. Many asked Boateng about specific topics mentioned in the CBA, ranging from the provision of scholarships to maintenance of West Harlem Piers Park.

Julius Tajiddin, who said he has been following the progress of the CBA for seven years, told Boateng that he was "pretty proud to see people come out like this," despite being opposed to the expansion in its early days.

"I'm optimistic because of the turnout of these people even if they weren't here in the early fights," Tajiddin said. "And now that it's getting ready to launch, and all these people are here, it's very gratifying. If people are educated and know how the CBA came about, they'll know they have an investment in this."

jillian.kumagai@columbiaspectator.com

Correction: An earlier version of this story reported that the corporation had spent \$700,000 on personnel services. In fact, that amount has been spent on personnel, legal, and office services. Spectator regrets the error.

Print Email Facebook Twitter Google+

COMMENTS

Comments will be moderated in accordance with our comment policy

0 comments



Leave a message...

Discussion ▾

Community

No one has commented yet.

ALSO ON COLUMBIA SPECTATOR

Culturally Jewish, positive for all 61 comments

Students react to Obama's electoral victory
5 comments

**Most of anonymous \$25M gift to fund
Business School's Manhattanville buildings**
1 comment

Military Education 43 comments

**Brownstone Committee: too Greek for
comfort** 29 comments

RECOMMENDED FOR YOU

What's this?

6 Unconventional Uses for your Dishwasher
Reviewed

11 Tips to Keep Your Refrigerator Costs Low
Reviewed

Samsung DV457EVGSGR/AA Dryer Review
Reviewed

**So Long, Stainless: Whirlpool Introduces a
New Finish For Premium Kitchens** Reviewed

**For Cleaner Clothes, Break These 7 Bad
Habits** Reviewed

[News](#) | [Opinion](#) | [A&E](#) | [Sports](#) | [Alumni](#) | [The Eye](#) | [CampusAve Classifieds](#) | [Job Board](#)
[Copyright 2012 Spectator Publishing Company](#) | [Advertise](#) | [Subscribe](#) | [Terms](#)