

## Armory Neighborhood Residents Reject Condominiums!

Contributed by By EDITORIAL BOARD Florida Sentinel-Bulletin  
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One of our editorial staff writers had the opportunity to meet several North Hyde Park residents returning from a recent public hearing on proposals to sell and redevelop the venerable Fort Homer Hesterly Armory, located at 522 N. Howard Avenue, in West Tampa. Though excited about upcoming revitalization, residents expressed alarm over the number of developers who planned to build condominiums, a hotel and other so-called "high density" housing projects on current armory property. Indeed, two of the presented projects proposed to tear the historic structure down, completely.

The City of Tampa and the Armory Board/Department of Military Affairs (AB/DMA) of the State of Florida have appointed a committee to review proposals and to oversee public hearings for the 6 final proposals to redevelop Fort Homer Hesterly Armory and surrounding property, a 65-year-old facility that was once home to a National Guard unit, that moved to Pinellas County, 2 years ago. According to those in attendance, questions asked by committee members were both hard-hitting and fair for all concerned. Given the politics of such a sensitive and massive redevelopment, we salute the professionalism and commitment of the committee and its sponsors.

Nevertheless, North Hyde Park residents reminded us that Fort Homer Hesterly is located in a community, which is part of the West Tampa community, in general. As such, neighborhood homeowners and other residents believe their concerns and wishes should be given greater consideration when committee members review the proposals. Indeed, according to residents, only one of the development groups has reached out to them and has appeared to have listened to the wishes of North Hyde Park residents.

The Armory Partners Group was identified as having been most responsive to North Hyde Park residents' queries and concerns. Residents had very clearly indicated to the Partners Group as well as to City Council on several occasions that area homeowners were against the building of condominiums or other high density housing in their neighborhood. It seemed, the Partners Group was the only group to take them seriously.

Therefore, in our opinion, only one of the proposals meets the City of Tampa's and the Armory Board's criteria for "redeveloping economic opportunities in West Tampa while maintaining the community's neighborhood and enhancing the area's nationally-significant historic resources." Clearly, the Armory Partners Group (DeBartolo Development, LLC, Newkirk Ventures, Inc., Tampa Digital Studios, Inc., and West Tampa Partners, LLC) maintains the community's quality of life as requested by current residents. Furthermore, the Partners Group proposal calls for renovating the Armory and building space for artists to engage in creative arts, low rise rental housing and rental space for small businesses. Moreover, the Partners Group has involved African Americans in its project planning in order to ensure that Black people in West Tampa share in the economic returns and opportunities of the project.

No doubt, all of the 6 armory presenters have placed their best efforts on the table. But the Partners Group project proposal seems to be a meal wherein we all can eat. That's how we see it ... straight as an arrow.