



Northwood News

Published Bi-Monthly by the Northwood-Four Corners Civic Association

February 1997

President's Message

by Mike Diegel

Several people in the last couple of months have asked me what it's like being president. My reply has been (with a smile) that so far, it's been fine; no one has called me at home yelling at me.

It's been relatively quiet, issue-wise, which probably explains why my phone hasn't rung very often. But behind the scenes, there's a lot happening that's not widely known. And now is the time we should be formulating our positions on these issues.

For instance, proposals for dealing with an ever-more-crowded Beltway are under study. We could face a widening of the Beltway, or even the prospect of light rail over the Northwest Branch. A proposal to build a new type of housing in Silver Spring could lead to an additional influx of students from outside the county entering the Blair cluster. And cut-through traffic remains an issue.

Officials tend to pay more attention to county residents when they've been involved early in the study and decision-making process. For better or worse, there's often a resentment of those viewed as Johnnies-come-lately who raise a ruckus once a decision has been reached.

So it's to our advantage to have our voice heard as soon as possible if we want to influence county and state officials. To do that, we need you. Our meetings are your opportunity to help us formulate our neighborhood's position on a host of issues. So bundle up Feb. 12 and come on out. We'll turn the heat on early so the Rec Center is cozy and welcoming.

Association Meeting

Wed. February 12

7:30 P.M.

North Four Corners

Recreation Center

In This Issue:

Light Rail Transit

**WSSC pipe
renovation update**

Trees in Winter

Master Plan Passed

Land Use Issues

IS THERE A TROLLEY OR MONORAIL IN OUR FUTURE?

By Charles G. Pritchard

In Northwood-Four Corners we live close to the Beltway, Route 29 and University Blvd and are affected by the increases of heavy traffic and gridlock on these routes. We also pay taxes to support county and state transportation policy. At a December 1996 public workshop, planners of the Maryland-National Capital Park and Planning Commission (MNCPPC), the Montgomery County Public Works and Transportation Department, the State Highway Administration (SHA) and the Maryland Department of Transportation (MDOT) presented three alternatives in a projected program to reduce traffic gridlock on the Capital Beltway. We should consider these alternatives carefully since they will affect our community in many ways. The alternatives are listed in order of cost and impact on our community and environment.

1. A Beltway circumferential light rail transit (LRT) system primarily outside the Beltway, including express bus service connections to Metrorail and MARC. The circumferential LRT will ultimately join with a similar system in Virginia [Cost: \$2.5 - \$4 billion and potentially major environmental impact].

2. High Occupancy Vehicle (HOV) options, including concurrent flow lanes in each direction during morning and evening peak periods; barrier-separated permanent lanes; or single occupant toll fees and dedicated bus lanes [Cost: \$750 million—\$2 billion and moderate environmental impact].

3. A Transportation System/Demand Management system (TSM/TDM) that combines a number of highway improvements with better bus service, internodal connections, park-and-ride lots, flexible work hours and transit subsidies [Cost: \$500,000-\$5

million and minor environmental impact].

Circumferential Light Rail Transit (LRT)

If adopted as planned, this alternative will include a monorail or trolley off-Beltway segment from the Grosvenor Red Line Metro Station via Rock Creek Park, Knolls Avenue, University Boulevard, Kensington, Wheaton to the intersection of University Boulevard and Arcola Avenue. From here, the route will continue east along Northwood Terrace between Kemp Mill and Forest Knolls across the Northwest Branch Stream Valley to pass apparently between Dumont Oaks and Burnt Mills at White Oak. From there, the LRT route will pass through the former U.S. Navy facility at White Oak, across the Paint Branch, through the Beltsville USDA facility across Indian Creek to the Greenbelt Green Line Metro station. A possible expansion of this route will extend to Montgomery Mall and northern Virginia.

Arguments For Beltway LRT

At the workshop, planners stated that an elevated monorail will be used instead of a street level trolley because of the negative effect of trolley construction on adjoining communities and on the four environmentally sensitive stream-valley parks that must be traversed. Planners also made these points:

1. Monorail employs 20 to 30 foot high pylons installed at close intervals along a right-of-way. Suspended from the pylons are passenger cars which are boarded from platforms at the same height.

2. Being elevated, monorail passes over grade-separation interchanges, intersections and automobile traffic, thereby providing faster service than trolleys or buses.

3. Monorail produces less petroleum-based air and ground water pollution.

4. Construction of monorail is more community and environmentally friendly.

5. Demographic studies show that most of the employed and residential population of the county will remain in the southern area bordering the Beltway out to the year 2020.

6. An LRT would provide needed east-west transportation between work and home.

7. It would also counter "urban sprawl" which constantly reduces green areas and agriculture in the county because of excessive housing and residential development.

8. LRT may be needed as a backup for the HOV and/or TSM/TDM options.

Arguments Against the Beltway LRT

A number of residents of Kemp Mill, Forest Knolls, Northwood, Quaint Acres and Dumont Oaks opposed the Beltway LRT either as a monorail or surface trolley as planned because it includes the Grosvenor-Greenbelt Transitway. Some of their arguments were as follows:

1. It will require construction of a transit station at the intersection of University Blvd and Arcola, increasing local traffic and parking problems.

2. While the LRT will move passengers from Greenbelt to Grosvenor rapidly, transit stations are far apart and the system does not provide local service; passengers must reach the transit station by feeder bus, on foot or by bicycle.

3. Monorails are noisier than modern trolleys and the narrow distance between Northwood Terrace and Loxford Drive will not allow for sound barriers which may negatively impact property values in the area.

4. A trolley or monorail will not provide for heavy haulage or service industry operations, so automobiles, trucks and delivery vans will still need

Continued on page 8

Neighborhood Crime Watch

Crimes Reported Since the December Northwood News

DATE:	LOCATION (by block):	CRIME:
12/06/96	00 BLK UNIVERSITY AT LORAIN	SELLING DRUGS
12/21/96	1100 BLK CADDINGTON	RESID BURGLARY (UNKNOWN)
12/23/96	1100 BLK CADDINGTON	RESID BURGLARY (CAMERA GEAR)
12/03/96	900 BLK UNIVERSITY	USING DRUG
12/09/96	500 BLK DENNIS	REC PROP OTHER(89 HOND ACCO)
12/12/96	900 BLK CADDINGTON	AUTO BURG, MENS LEATHER COAT
12/01/96	10400 BLK EASTWOOD	BLDG THEFT MITRE SAW (DELTA)
12/05/96	100 BLK UNIVERSITY	AUTO THEFT (83 OLDS DELT)
12/16/96	10100 BLK BRUNETT	AUTO THEFT (95 HOND ACCO)
12/30/96	100 BLK UNIVERSITY	ROBBERY HANDGUN, POSED AS CUSTOMER (CASH)
12/22/96	9900 BLK LORAIN	AUTO BURG (TOOLS)

List of Public Officials

Montgomery County Council - 100 Maryland Ave. Rockville, MD 20850 Comments line (301-217-7999) (letters addressed to the Council President or County Council are brought to the attention of all members)

Montgomery County Executive Douglas M. Duncan - 101 Monroe St. Rockville, MD 20850 (301-217-2500)

Montgomery County Council: (Individual Offices 217-7907)

Marilyn Praisner, President (217-7968);

Derick Berlage (217-7967); Nancy Dacek (217-7891); Gail Ewing (217-7906); William Hanna Jr. (217-7960); Betty Ann Krahnke (217-6617); Isiah Leggett (217-7955); Neal Potter (217-7966); Michael Subin (217-7828).

Maryland-National Capitol Park and Planning Commission: William H. Hussmann, Chairman, 8787 Georgia Ave. Silver Spring, MD 20910 (495-4605)

Graham J. Norton, Director, M.C. Public Works & Transportation Dept, 101 Monroe St. Rockville, MD 20850 (217-2170)

David Winstead, MD Secretary of Transportation, Neil Pedersen, Director, Office of Planning & Prelim. Engineering (410-333-1110)

Ms. R.S. Rajan, Project Mgr. Project Planning Div., Mail Stop C-301 (410-545-8514), SHA, MDOT, 707 N. Calvert St., Baltimore, MD 21202; Susan J. Binder, Division Administrator, Federal Highway Administration, The Rotunda, Suite 220, Baltimore, MD 21202 (410-962-0077).

Traffic Report

by Mike Diegel

Now that the construction on Collesville and University is finished, we face some unfinished business dealing with cut-through traffic.

We were able to get turn restrictions onto Southwood and Lorain from southbound Collesville Road under provisions of the law that permit the state to set up restrictions during construction. Those restrictions—no turn on red onto Southwood at any time, and no right turn onto either street during morning rush hour—have been lifted, and the commuters are back.

At the last meeting, the membership agreed to seek the same restrictions on a permanent basis under the county's cut-through traffic laws. This decision is supported by the overwhelming vote in favor when we petitioned the neighborhood some months ago for the state-enacted restrictions.

However, it will be a long process. We wrote to the county DOT to start it. New traffic counts will be required. We attempted to persuade the county to use earlier ones, which aren't that old. However, the county wants to take new counts to see if the new configuration of the Four Corners intersection has had any effect on traffic. That's fair enough; after all, they spent millions in public money to try to get people through there more easily, and would like to know if it was cash well spent.

Probably the most difficult part of the process will be the required public hearing. We anticipate a fair amount of opposition from neighborhoods to the north. So let's start collecting horror stories now. We'll let you know when it's time to unleash them.



We need your help !

We need volunteers to help with the distribution of this newsletter. The duties include counting out the newsletters and dropping them off to the volunteers on the routes who deliver them to each home. This requires only a small amount of time every two months but is essential to our effort to provide you with timely news that effects our neighborhood.

If you can help, please call

Mike Diegel 681-7346



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Northwood News

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Ecology

by Carole Barth

WSSC Sewer Rehabilitation / Bridges Update

Work is continuing on the sewer lines in our stretch of Northwest Branch Park. All three metal superstructures are in place, and WSSC expects the remaining work to be completed by April 1 (almost two months ahead of schedule). Tasks still to be completed include repairs to the line itself (welding, painting), work on the existing concrete piers, and seeding and mulching disturbed areas. As previously mentioned in this column, there are three post-construction issues of concern to the neighborhood: (1) maintaining access across the Northwest Branch tributaries; (2) protecting the park's natural vegetation; and (3) controlling erosion along the trails.

Maintaining Access—At the Association's annual meeting this Fall, Tanya Schmieler from MNCPPC Parks Department gave us the good news that Parks had some money in the budget for bridges, and would be granting our request. She further explained that since it would be some time before the bridges could actually be built, Parks and WSSC had agreed that WSSC's temporary bridges would be left in place to tide us over. On checking with WSSC for this update article, however, I was told a different story. According to the project's design coordinator, WSSC is planning to remove the bridges once construction is complete unless MNCPPC will agree in writing to accept all liability for those bridges. As this newsletter goes to press, a flurry of phone calls is underway to determine the actual status of the bridges. It may simply be a lack of communication; it may be that the two agencies' attorneys are still resolving liability issues; or it may mean the Association will need to push this issue to the forefront again.

Protecting Vegetation—As mentioned in earlier columns, any-

time you open up the canopy in an urban woodland, you increase the risk from invasive exotic plants like honeysuckle and multiflora rose—the “gypsy moths” of the plant kingdom. NFCCA raised this concern early in the construction planning process, and WSSC's contract includes a requirement that WSSC work with Parks to formulate a restoration and reforestation plan. As the end of construction draws near, NFCCA will need to be involved in this next planning phase. This section of the park has a priceless abundance of wildflowers. That is extremely rare in such an urban park, and well worth protecting.

Controlling Erosion—Ordinarily, after projects such as this, Parks requires NFCCA to return construction site access paths to something like their original condition. Understandably, Parks does not want primitive hiking trails turned into wide gravel access roads. In this case, however, the original access trail was already heavily eroded and rutted; it was anything but a stable trail. NFCCA will need to be involved to be sure that this “leave it like you found it” policy is interpreted reasonably.

Lockridge Drive Trees

County Department of Transportation (DOT) workers have planted Marshall seedless green ash trees to replace a little over half of the crabapples they took down. Green ash is a native tree of bottomland forests and prairie stream margins. Fall leaf color is a mellow gold. Ash is used for stream-bank restoration projects because even bare poles will sprout and take root. Some have speculated that green ash played an important part in Lewis and Clark's journey across the Great Plains by providing firewood which kept the explorers alive over the winter. Other trees growing in that area will not burn well unless seasoned, but ash readily burns even when green.

DOT has also marked planting sites for the seven trees NFCCA wants to plant. To do this we will need a permit from the state. We will also need to select varieties, shop

around for a good deal, raise the necessary money, and organize a planting crew. If you'd like to help with any of these tasks, call Carole Ann Barth at 593-7863.

Trees in Winter

Now is a great time to bundle up, take a walk, and appreciate the beauty of trees in winter. Shorn of leaves, flowers, and fruit, the elegant bone structure is revealed. Once the flashy colors of autumn are gone, more subtle qualities of form, texture, and shading predominate. Winter is also a great time to learn how to identify trees without relying on leaf shape. Get to know the trees in wintertime, and you will know them root and branch.

Shape—Think about the general shape each tree takes. Elms and silver maples resemble a vase. White and red oaks are broad and spreading. Birches form tall narrow columns. Hawthorns and Bradford pears are oval; while sweet gums, pin oaks, and willow oaks form a pyramid. Generalizing shapes helps you become familiar with each tree's silhouette. Soon, you'll be able to amaze your friends by identifying trees from a distance.

Now look a little more closely—what shape are the branches? How are they arranged? Each tree has a characteristic growth pattern. Again, naming these patterns makes them easier to see and remember. For example, dogwood branch tips are curved and clustered like a chandelier. Black locust branches are gnarled and twisted like groping fingers. Tulip poplars look like giant tuning forks. Black birches (also called river birches) have whorls of downward pointing branches, making them look like maypoles.

Bark—There is a wonderful variety of bark among the native trees of our area. Sycamores have mottled green and white bark that always reminds me of a giant python. River birches shed bark in great horizontal peels. Beeches have the smoothest, silky-looking silver skin—if you can find any that have not been covered with carved hearts and initials. Silver maples wear their bark

in a shaggy spiral pattern. Dogwood bark looks like little cobblestones. Probably my favorite is the ironwood tree—under a smooth grey skin each tree seems to have rippling muscles even Fabio could envy.

Color—Winter in Washington is more often drippy than snowy. Instead of stark black and white, we have a quieter, richer palette. Dogwood twigs have a soft violet hue. Green ash gets its name from displaying green twig tips in winter. Willows shine yellow. River birch bark is buff or khaki on the outside, and a warm cinnamon where the bark has peeled. Cherries show a rich mahogany color. I find this gentle color display as soothing as the timeless appeal of a shaker basket or a Zen tea set.

So now you know...If you come upon me standing out in the cold, staring up at a tree, you'll know it's not confusion due to hypothermia—I'm just lost in the architecture of root and branch. I hope your wanderings prove equally absorbing.



**County Council
FY98 Capital
Improvements
Program Budget
Hearing Feb. 4, 1997**

The Council's hearings for the FY98 CIP budget which includes the Yeshiva School Site purchase will be on Tuesday, Feb. 4, 1997. Individual citizens are allowed three minutes to give testimony on budget issues. While the acquisition recommendation is expected to pass, our support for it should be expressed to the Council since those opposed to the purchase may also testify at the hearing.

Call the Legislative Information Office at (301) 217-7910 to confirm date, time, and location of the hearing and register your wish to testify. Written comments are also accepted.

Four Corners Master Plan Approved by County Council

by Jim Zepp

On October 29th, the Four Corners Master Plan was approved by the County Council. This culminated nearly four years of work by the Citizens Advisory Committee and Maryland-National Capital Park and Planning Commission staff. The citizens' reward for participating in this effort was that most of their recommendations were accepted, even in many instances where the staff recommendations were at odds with citizens wishes.

The two issues in the Master Plan that generated substantial discussion by the County Council were the following:

Yeshiva School Site Purchase—Despite the objections of the Yeshiva representatives and the chairman of the County Recreation Advisory Board, Marvin Weinman, the Council's Planning, Housing, and Economic Development (PHED) Committee and finally the entire Council voted to approve this acquisition recommendation in the Master Plan. The Council did add two amendments which allow the Yeshiva Board the opportunity to reconsider placing a school on the property and places a time limit on the County's acquisition process so that the site is not tied up for an extended period. Given that site's six acres are considered too small for a school, which is why the Yeshiva is moving to the up-county area, and the County Parks Department staff have indicated that the acquisition process can be done within the specified time limit, neither amendment should preclude the purchase of this land for the expansion of the adjacent North Four Corners Park.

The next steps in making the acquisition happen are gaining approval for the funds in the County's FY98 Capital Improvements Program (CIP) budget and

the purchase negotiations between the County Parks Department and the Yeshiva School. (See side-bar for County Council budget hearing date.) The County Executive's Office and the Office of Management and Budget have approved the purchase, the Maryland-National Capital Parks and Planning Commission remain supportive of this recommendation, and the County Parks Department have included it in the FY98 budget requests that would go into effect on July 1, 1997. It, therefore, looks very positive that the park expansion could happen as soon as the second half of this year!

Woodmoor Shopping Center—Despite a last minute proposal by the owners that would have converted the houses on Pierce Drive behind the Shopping Center into offices and extended the commercial zoning of their property, the County Council retained the Master Plan recommendation that essentially keeps the existing commercial and residential configuration. It would allow a possible redevelopment of the site but it requires community participation in the design process.



Continued from page 2

to travel along the same route.

5. Only short monorail systems have been installed in Seattle, Washington, and Disney World in Orlando, Florida (although a longer distance monorail is in use in Japan); money should not be spent on a system that has not been tried as an all-weather, high-capacity passenger mover.

6. LRT construction will require constructing high bridges across the Northwest Branch and three other stream valley parks which are vital elements in the Potomac and Anacostia Watersheds.

7. The high taxpayer cost (up to \$4 billion) and negative impact of the LRT make it less desirable than the other alternatives.

8. Plans for a rapid transit rail system along Route I-270 are being developed concurrently. Similar plans for light rail along Route 29 and/or I-95 dropped from the original HOV Study—these plans should be reconsidered.

10 The Four Corners communities are already in the process of absorbing traffic changes created by the jug handles, construction of a new Blair High School and a proposed Route 29 busway.

HOV

Planners appeared to favor the HOV alternative based on its lower cost and impact. HOV is in place on I-270 and is proposed for other traffic stressed routes. However, residents of the Indian Hills and South Four Corners civic associations have joined with other groups in a Rock Creek Coalition to oppose HOV because it will require relocation of sound barriers, lane widening and encroachment on residential housing along the right-of-way. This coalition has also complained that the public has not been sufficiently informed on the alternatives to HOV and called for a moratorium on the Capital Beltway Study until better information is available and made public.

TSM/TDM

A number of attendees, including residents of Wheaton, appeared to favor this option as being the least costly, less damaging to communities and the environment and more flexible. In particular, they emphasized the need for better and more efficient local bus service to provide improved east-west and north-south public transit. They did not approve adding the Grosvenor-Green Belt LRT as a backup to the TSM/TDM proposal.

What You Should Do

The public workshops in December 1996 represented the public participation phase. Planners will spend much of 1997 working out details of these alternatives to reach a final decision in early 1998. There may be other public workshops but they are not legally required. You should stay informed on the progress of the HOV plan by writing to the Office of Planning and Preliminary Engineering, State Highway Administration, MDOT, Box 717, Baltimore MD 21204 and requesting to be put on the mailing list for I-495/95, Capital Beltway, Project No. AW188B11. You can express your opinions on this important issue at the forthcoming civic association meeting and help decide what (if any) association actions are need. If you cannot attend, you can still pass along your opinions to Mike Diegel, our President (681-7346), or Jim Zepp. (681-7863), our Vice President. For technical information contact Charles Pritchard (301-593-1781) You may also wish want to contact public officials and legislators. (See bottom of page 3.)



The Northwood-Four Corners Civic Association Needs Your Help!

Your association is an all volunteer organization. We need volunteers to help with distribution of this newsletter, the planning and organization of association activities, and following up on issues that determine our quality of life. With more help, we can accomplish our tasks without placing too much of a burden on any one person. Please call Mike Diegel 681-7346 if you are willing and able to help.



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