

Park Hills Civic Association General Meeting – Summary

Forty-seven (47) neighbors attended the September 26, 2006 meeting of the Park Hills Civic Association held in the Sligo Creek Middle School cafeteria.

I. Review of Civic Association Activities. Alan Bowser reviewed the activities of the civic association since its last meeting in May. He reported the following:

- ❑ The Montgomery County Housing Opportunities Commission voted to approve a county facility for people exiting homelessness at the 527 Dale Drive.
- ❑ The Civic Association held a very successful Park Hills picnic in Sligo Creek Park at the end of August. Over one hundred (100) people attended.
- ❑ Our listserv membership has grown to over 100 subscribers, exceeding our goal for the end of September. Our goal is 200 listserv members from our neighborhood.
- ❑ The Association's executive committee met for the first time on September 15th.
- ❑ The Association has identified over twenty neighbors who have indicated an interest in discussing Purple Line issues on behalf of the neighborhood. Any others interested are welcome and are encouraged to sign up at the back of the room.
- ❑ There are some public safety issues for the neighborhood to consider, e.g., burglaries, robberies, car thefts, automobile break-ins, and downtown pickpocketing.
- ❑ There is interest in establishing a Neighborhood Watch with coverage on every street within the association boundaries.

II. Report on Executive Committee Meeting. Alan Bowser reported that, at its September 15th meeting, the Executive Committee discussed the following issues.

- ❑ Purple Line follow up – group of interested neighbors will meet and seek to achieve a consensus on the Purple Line issues as they affect Park Hills.
- ❑ Revision of Park Hills Civic Association Constitution and By-Laws
 - Sandy Kemper has offered to take the lead on this.
 - Rules Governing Membership (including dues)
- ❑ Civic Association Finances and Establishment of Bank Account
- ❑ Identification of Neighborhood-wide Issues and Special Projects
- ❑ Discussion of Executive Committee Responsibilities
- ❑ Topics for Future Civic Association Meetings

Chris Richardson, Secretary, reviewed the current Constitution and By-Laws (as of 1953) and briefly discussed such topics as the Civic Association's official name, rules for membership, amount of dues, what constitutes a quorum, composition of the Steering Committee, frequency of meetings, and proposed meeting calendar. The Committee agreed that, for now, Civic Association meetings should be held on a quarterly basis during the following months (unless otherwise noted): November (or early December), February, May, and September. The Committee agreed to update and revise the by-laws. The revised Constitution and By-Laws will then be voted on and approved at a future Civic Association meeting.

The Executive Committee discussed rules governing membership in the Civic Association and proposed that residents – not just homeowners – should be allowed full membership, as currently prescribed in the Constitution. The Committee also proposed that each adult member of every dues-paying household should enjoy full membership privileges but that dues should be increased from one dollar to perhaps twelve dollars per year.

Sandra Fair, Treasurer, reported to the Executive Committee on the total funds currently in the Civic Association's treasury. The Committee agreed to research which banks in the metro DC area would offer free or reduced rate banking services for nonprofit organizations, such as civic associations.

Need for Volunteers. Given the number of issues requiring continuous and sustained attention, the Committee agreed that community members should be identified through the listserv, personal reconnaissance and participation at future Civic Association meetings to serve as point people on the following critical issues – likely to become committees in their own right:

- ❑ Parks and Recreation
- ❑ Public Safety (including Emergency Management, Neighborhood Watch, and Pedestrian Safety)
- ❑ Schools and Education
- ❑ Development, Planning & Land Use
- ❑ Old Blair Auditorium
- ❑ Welcoming Committee
- ❑ Liaisons to Other Civic Associations

The Executive Committee welcomed that Jim Preston of Deerfield Avenue has offered to chair our Public Safety Committee and help us establish our neighborhood watch program. Jim, who has been certified as a member of the County's Community Emergency Response Team, will become a member of the Executive Committee.

Additionally, the Executive Committee identified several projects that would merit special action from the Civic Association:

- ❑ "Adopt a Road" (i.e., Sligo Creek Parkway between Wayne and Piney Branch)
- ❑ Establishment of an "official" series of Park Hills walking and bike trails
- ❑ Expand trash can pickup in Sligo Creek Park
- ❑ Augment listserv/website to include utilitarian items of content such as
 - map of Park Hills; (2) contact and web info for government officials;
 - phone numbers for public services

Dues – The Executive Committee proposes that starting at the first meeting in 2007 that annual dues will be \$1 per month or \$12 per year.

Contributions: We welcome additional financial contributions, payable to the Park Hills Civic Association, to support Association activities.

The Executive Committee identified the following topics for future Civic Association meetings:

- a. Silver Spring Transit Center
- b. Sligo Creek Park

Park Hills Executive Committee: Alan Bowser, President, Anne Gavin, Vice President, Chris Richardson, Secretary, Sandra Fair, Treasurer.

III. Maryland Transit Administration Briefing on the Bi-County Transitway a.k.a. Purple Line.

MTA Project Manager, Mike Madden and his team – Dave Esch, Architect, and Joe Romanowski, Engineer – briefed the Association of plans for the proposed Bi-County Transitway, a.k.a. the Purple Line, a mass transit line that would link Bethesda with New Carrollton.

What is the Bi-County Transitway? The Bi-County Transitway will provide a high-capacity public transportation link between Bethesda and New Carrollton. This 14-mile corridor extends from the western limits of the Metrorail Red Line in Bethesda to the New Carrollton Metrorail Station. The project would provide a direct connection between the Metrorail Red, Green and Orange Lines. Also under consideration is whether to develop the project in phases, and if so, how.

Presently, MTA is considering three alternative routes, or “alignments,” through East Silver Spring: Wayne Avenue, Sligo Avenue, and a route between Silver Spring and Thayer Avenues. The proposed line would go through East Silver Spring from the downtown Transit Center to a proposed station at Flower Avenue and Piney Branch Road, then to University Blvd, and on to College Park and New Carrollton.

The proposed route can be viewed at

<http://www.bi-countytransitway.com/AboutTheProject.php?pageId=3>

Why do we need the Bi-County Transitway? According to the MTA--

- Creating an east-west public transportation link between Montgomery and Prince George’s County will address employment and population growth.
- Population in both Montgomery and Prince George’s Counties is expected to increase by almost 25 percent by 2025.
- Employment is expected to increase by 20 percent in Prince George’s County and 33 percent in Montgomery County.
- An east-west public transportation link will connect the work force to jobs and foster transit oriented development, where appropriate.

The Bi-County Transitway will encourage economic development by:

- Supporting the revitalization that many areas are experiencing,
- Complementing the over \$400 million in renovations and new construction that are being invested in Silver Spring, and,
- Connecting major economic centers and key activity areas.

Project goals for the Bi-County Transitway are listed below:

- Optimize public investment by providing, at a reasonable cost, efficient, safe and reliable transit service
- Improve regional mobility by increasing the speed, reliability by increasing the speed, reliability and access to transit services in Montgomery and Prince George's Counties
- Improve system connectivity and increase transit usage by providing an essential link to the Metrorail radial lines, as well as to other rail and bus services in Montgomery and Prince George's Counties
- Support economic development and revitalization through improved connections to central business districts and activity centers
- Support regional clean air quality goals with a cost effective transit alternative.

Mode of transport for the Bi-County Transitway will be one of the following options:

- Bus Rapid Transit (BRT) - a bus system that can be used on its own guideway, in HOV lanes, or on city streets. BRT vehicles are larger than standard buses, have more doors, and run on their own dedicated lines. Examples of BRT being used in high-density urban areas include Pittsburgh and Seattle
- Light Right Transit (LRT) - an electric railway system characterized by its ability to operate single cars or short trains along rights-of-way at ground level, on aerial structures, and in tunnels. Light Rail can also operate in the street mixed with vehicular traffic or in the median of a roadway. Examples of LRT being used in high-density urban areas include San Diego and Portland, Oregon.
- "Do nothing" - utilize existing transit systems.
- Worth noting - two additional transit modes, heavy rail (Metrorail) and monorail, were considered during the "Scoping Process" but were eliminated due to prohibitive costs.

Method for determining which of the three proposed Silver Spring alignments will be used for the Bi-County Transitway:

- Data gathering - in the coming months MTA will gather key data, particularly traffic volume, to help make the final determination.
- Community focus groups – the entire 14-mile corridor has been divided into eight community focus groups, small working groups that can engage in a discussion of the project details. These focus groups are comprised of representatives from community associations, major businesses, and Montgomery and Prince George's County agencies and are the most effective vehicles, if you will, for residents in the affected communities to communicate their concerns and desires with MTA.
- Timing of decision - the State of Maryland is scheduled to announce its decision about its preferred route in Silver Spring 2007.

Various members of the Park Hills community had the following questions for MTA about the Bi-County Transitway:

Q: What is the overview of the timing for this entire project?

A: A basic timeline for the Bi-County Transitway project can be found at the following web link:

<http://www.bi-countytransitway.com/PDFs/English/nov2005schedule.pdf>

Spring 2007 is the expected date for the completion of a Draft Environmental Impact Study (DEIS) and is also the end period for the submission of public testimony.

Q: Could Light Rail Transit operate on Wayne Avenue in mixed-use, high-density traffic?

A: Theoretically, yes – however, due to the steepness of grade, LRT would not be the likely mode of transport should Wayne Avenue become the Silver Spring alignment for the Purple Line.

Q: Why is Colesville Road “off the table” for consideration as the main route for the Silver Spring alignment?

A: Colesville Road is too far out of the way relative to the transit stations planned for Piney Branch at Flower and Langley Crossroads (New Hampshire at University Boulevard).

Q: What is the precedent for installing a Light Rail Transit through established residential neighborhoods?

A: No doubt, it’s a challenge! Portland, Oregon, is one example of LRT being implemented in an established residential neighborhood.

Q: What happened to property values in Portland, Oregon, where LRT was installed?

A: Property values have gone up, particularly the closer one lives to a transit stop.

Q: What is the distance between Silver Spring’s Metro station and Wayne Avenue at Sligo Creek, where a Purple Line stop is being considered?

A: Approximately one-half mile (rough estimate using distance calculator on MTA transitway map)

Q: Why is Manchester Street not being considered for inclusion in the Bi-County Transitway?

A: Should tunneling be involved for the Wayne Avenue alignment, then the proposed tunnel route would be too far underground in order for Manchester to be a viable choice. Additionally, there would be concerns about the amount of green space taken away from Sligo Creek Park for this particular pathway.

Q: Why is the federal government not considering heavy rail for the Bi-County Transitway?

A: The 1996 Georgetown Branch Major Investment Study found heavy rail to be ten times the cost of the other proposals then being considered. Ultimately, heavy rail was determined not to be cost-effective.

Q: Which Silver Spring alignment would have the *least* impact on Sligo Creek Park?

A: The Wayne Avenue alignment would likely have the least impact – at the Sligo Creek bridge – while the Thayer/Silver Spring alignment would likely have the most.

Q: Will the Draft Environmental Impact Statement (DEIS) include projected traffic increase in mixed-use, high-density roadways?

A: The DEIS will only factor in current traffic counts, which have yet to be collected.

Q: Will the DEIS include an assessment of what will likely happen to re-zoning of the impacted areas?

A: The DEIS will assume *current* zoning restrictions only.

Q: Given that the proposed Wayne Avenue alignment would necessitate widening the road by eight feet, where is the “front yard to be taken away” at the choke point near the top of Wayne Avenue west of Fenton Street?

A: Good question – there would appear to be none.

Q: What would happen to the sidewalks on Wayne Avenue if the road were to be widened for the Purple Line?

A: The area between the sidewalks and the curb is Montgomery County property, generally speaking. Thus, the County would make the decision to remove the sidewalks but also allow homeowners the choice of having a new sidewalk created on their own private property.

Q: Given that the proposed Thayer/Silver Spring alignment would necessitate - in addition to the removal of 200 mature trees - the creation of a “cut and cover” tunnel that would emerge aboveground near East Silver Spring Elementary School, how will MTA and Montgomery County ensure the safety of the schoolchildren, as well as residents, who live nearby?

A: Various forms of technology, including lights, motion detectors, alarms, and remote-monitored cameras, would be utilized on behalf of public safety. MTA understands the seriousness of this issue and would examine this issue with all due diligence.

Q: In order for the Purple Line to be built, if Bethesda residents were to successfully pressure government officials into being excluded from the Bi-County Transitway, would the project move forward anyway?

A: Given that the Bi-County Transitway ultimately reports to the Federal Transit Administration – the final authority on this project – the FTA will only grant approval for a transit route linking Bethesda and New Carrollton. This is an all or nothing proposition. If Bethesda were to “bow out,” it would only be for some initial phase of the project.

Q: What is the deadline for submitting public comments?

A: Spring 2007 is the official deadline for sending in public comments, but in reality, the sooner submitted the more likely they will be considered and incorporated for planning purposes. Comments from individual residents are welcome and encouraged, but statements from community groups and civic associations carry the most weight, in all frankness.

Q: When is the Draft Environmental Impact Statement due to be released?

A: Spring 2007.

Q: If Bus Rapid Transit must obey all traffic laws (e.g., high traffic areas replete with stoplights), then how “rapid” can this transit system really be?

A: Look at the system as a whole and recognize there are stretches, for example from Silver Spring to Bethesda, where the Purple Line would have right-of-way and thus be able to travel at speeds up to 50 miles per hour.

Q: Is MTA considering system enhancements for its existing bus systems?

A: The Environmental Impact Statement will evaluate [1] Transit System Management (TSM) – that is, improvements to make existing bus systems faster and more efficient – in addition to [2] Build Alternatives (BRT or LRT), as well as [3] No-Build Alternatives (transit systems to remain as is).

Q: Is MTA considering a phased approach for TSM whereby traffic safety systems are tested and implemented first before switching later to BRT?

A: No. Mode of transport is an “all or nothing” proposition and the Environmental Impact Statement is the Record of Decision (ROD) for the federal government – it’s either project or no project.

Q: Should LRT be selected as the mode of transport, will there be truncated surfaces to assist the blind and disabled in crossing the road where the rail is at grade?

A: Absolutely. The MTA will necessarily comply with all federal laws pertaining to requirements associated with the Americans with Disabilities Act.

Q: Which has a higher noise impact, BRT or LRT?

A: MTA does not have an immediate answer – noise impacts will be determined later. The answer, too, depends on the exact vehicle type used. Keep in mind that MTA will bring in a noise consultant - per standard operating procedures - to weigh in on the matter. Transitways in residential communities must meet the lowest noise threshold.

The meeting was adjourned at approximately 9:00 p.m.

Respectfully Submitted

Chris Richardson, Secretary
melchris@erols.com