

## **Park Hills Civic Association General Meeting – Summary**

The Park Hills Civic Association held a General Meeting on **Thursday, February 26, 2009** at the Sligo Creek Elementary School Cafeteria beginning at 7:00 pm.

Summary:

-- At its February meeting, the PHCA welcomed Montgomery Councilmember, Valerie Ervin, who briefed us on the County budget, Purple Line, public safety, the Silver Spring Library, and other issues.

--The PHCA approved an amendment to its bylaws permitting absentee voting in special circumstances.

### **Report from Montgomery County Council Member, Valerie Ervin.**

In a return visit to the Civic Association, Montgomery County Councilmember, Valerie Ervin, spoke of the challenges facing the County during this difficult budget season with a projected \$525 million deficit and 6-8 weeks of difficult decisions before the Council. Council Member Ervin then spoke at length about a number of topics of particular local interest:

#### **- Purple Line**

Ervin provided copies of her January 23<sup>rd</sup> letter to Maryland Transportation Secretary, John Porcari, in which she requested that “the MTA conduct a detailed analysis of the community’s request for a tunnel (from the Silver Spring Metro to Mansfield Road) as part of the locally preferred alternative and preliminary engineering process,” adding that “Considering the scale and impact that this project will have on downtown Silver Spring and its surrounding communities, I believe that a detailed analysis of both options merits consideration. With either option, at-grade or tunnel, I concur with the recommendations made to date that a stop at Dale Drive is not currently justified.” Ervin furthermore recommended that “All alignment options through Silver Spring must include a detailed plan to improve pedestrian safety and bicycle accessibility, account for future automobile growth, address access to existing and new residences, public facilities and private businesses, encourage long-term transit usage and ensure vibrant long-lasting communities.”

Ervin reported that the County Council unanimously voted on January 27 for a Light Rail system over Bus Rapid Transit, with a surface route planned for Wayne Avenue, albeit with a request for an “evaluation of a tunnel option between the Silver Spring Transit Center and the vicinity of Wayne Avenue/Mansfield Road to the same level of detail as has been already completed for the surface option between these points” (see Purple Line Update below for more details). Ervin stated that she keeps in close contact with residents of Park Hills Civic Associations, as well as Seven Oaks-Evanswood Citizens’ Association, and acknowledged that a number of residents on both sides of Wayne Avenue want tunneling to be given serious consideration, particularly if tunnel options are shown to be cost-effective.

- **Public Safety & Transportation**

Ervin attends community meetings every month and understands firsthand that safety is one of the key concerns among her constituents. There has been an uptick in crime, and a lot of activity is taking place at school, in the nighttime hours, and on weekends. Ervin stressed that tight-knit communities – where neighbors form neighborhood watches, engage each other, and monitor comings and goings – are safer ones, statistically speaking. Public safety in downtown Silver Spring is a big concern, and Ervin is doing her best to exert pressure to maintain a contingent of police officers in the downtown area. Unfortunately, public pressure is needed in order to reduce the possibility of officers being redeployed elsewhere around the county.

Ervin announced that she teamed with County Executive Leggett to pass a big Pedestrian Safety initiative - \$4.8 million total with \$1.2 million allocated for 2008. New crosswalks on Dale Drive are in the works, while other traffic-calming measures are being considered. Additionally, Georgia Avenue between Thayer and Spring will be re-evaluated for improvements. The new left-turn signal on Dale at Colesville is an improvement at that intersection, but a right-turn lane is still needed to reduce cars backing up on Dale during peak travel hours. Finally, a big thank you to Don Slater, Jody Calemine and other Park Hills residents who labored diligently to get quite a number of burned-out street lights replaced in our area.

In response to resident concerns about speeding on Dale Drive, Montgomery County Police employ two mobile vans intermittently on Dale – one positioned near Colesville and the other positioned close to Piney Branch. The curvature of the road, unfortunately, makes it impossible for the County to set up speed cameras on Dale.

Ervin reported that there is a proposal to eliminate County Ride-On Bus route 3 – one that operates between the Takoma Park and Silver Spring Metro stations but only during rush hour, primarily via the entire length of Dale Drive. Service is thus limited, with only three morning runs and three evening runs. Again, public pressure will be needed in order to save this route from elimination in the county budget.

- **Old Blair Auditorium**

Ervin reported there will be community meetings taking place this Spring. Essentially, the working plan is to divide the original Old Blair auditorium space into three distinct functions – (1) an arts performance venue (i.e., auditorium); (2) an after-school program space; and (3) a school health center – since an intact auditorium performance space would require 80 parking spaces that are simply not available.

- **New Silver Spring Library**

The 41,000 square-foot, 110-foot building will prominently face Wayne with exposures on Fenton and Bonifant Streets and include 2-3 floors of library space, as well as an arts center, retail development, housing (MPDU, workforce, and commercial) and parking for residents only. A series of meetings were held last July and August plus three design charrettes - to allow for community input - were conducted in September and October. There is some controversy over a proposed pedestrian bridge that would traverse Wayne Avenue and connect the new library with the public parking garage. The County's Master Plan precludes pedestrian bridges (which, Ervin noted, might be in conflict with the Americans with Disabilities Act), while the County Planning

Board is adamantly opposed to one. Those who are concerned about retaining street-level foot traffic in order to stimulate local businesses have also expressed concern about a pedestrian bridge. Proponents, however, include elderly and parents with kids, as well as library groups. Ervin reported there is one more community meeting planned for the new public library.

- **Federal Stimulus Bill**

Ervin was happy to report that \$20 million in Federal Stimulus funds will be targeted to IDEA and Title I programs (Individual with Disabilities Education Act and Improving the Academic Achievement of the Disadvantaged, respectively), thus allowing for full-day Head Start in 21 schools. \$70 million is also anticipated due to the recent publicized “accounting error” by Montgomery County Public Schools.

- **Q&A with Park Hills Residents**

Q: Why is construction at the Silver Spring Transit Center proceeding at such a slow pace?

A: The number of contractor change orders and all the attendant disruption nearly resulted in the contractor being fired. Ervin also acknowledged the added burden imposed - especially on those with mobility problems - by the lengthy detour around the construction site to the Metro station.

Q: Why aren't there more bike lanes on some of the major streets, like Wayne Avenue?

A: Montgomery County is evaluating new bike lanes in the area.

Q: Can you help improve the pedestrian crossings on Dale at both Colesville and Georgia?

A: Most of the pedestrian crossings in Silver Spring are being evaluated by Montgomery County.

Q: The speed of vehicles on Dale Drive near Mansfield, where families often cross to access Nolte Park, is an accident waiting to happen. In the past, cars used to be required to stop here – why is it so difficult simply to get a crosswalk here?

A: We're working with the Dept. of Transportation and MCPD to address speeding on Dale Drive and throughout Silver Spring.

Q: What is the status report of PHCA's longstanding request to participate in the County's Adopt-a-Road program on the stretch of Piney Branch Parkway between Wayne and Piney Branch?

A: Ben Stutz, Legislative Aide to Ervin, reported that the Montgomery County Department of Transportation is no longer responsible for roads on park (M-NCPPC) property. The civic associations, who have already adopted other parts of Sligo Creek Parkway prior to our request, apparently have been “grandfathered” in. However, in a stunning and unexpected turnaround, Tom Pogue, Community Relations Manager for the County's Dept. of Public Works & Transportation, informed Alan Bowser on March 13<sup>th</sup> that DPWT has worked out the issues that were preventing Park Hills from participating in the Adopt-a-Road program!

Q: It is frustrating to have formally convened the MTA Purple Line planning team five times on behalf of the Park Hills community, identified legitimate concerns, adverse local impacts, and various engineering challenges – only to have all this information omitted from MTA's Alternatives Analysis/Draft Environmental Impact Statement. While we very much appreciate

both the Council's recent decision to fully study the different tunneling options and Councilmember Ervin's letter to Transportation Secretary Porcari detailing specific community concerns, nevertheless what makes the Council's request binding?

A: Ervin acknowledged the push back from those in the community who are concerned about the impacts of a street-level light rail on Wayne Avenue and assured residents that the Council's request for a full and proper analysis of tunneling options is, indeed, binding.

### **Treasurer's Report.**

Sandra Fair, PHCA Treasurer, reported a balance of approximately \$834 in the Civic Association's bank account. Dues notices for 2009 have recently been distributed to all households.

### **Secretary's Report.**

Chris Richardson, PHCA Secretary, reported that the previous PHCA General Meeting – a special meeting convened for taking a final community vote on the Purple Line – took place on November 20, 2008, while the Executive Committee recently met on February 17, 2009. Richardson noted that membership on the Park Hills Civic Association listserv currently stands at 192. The Park Hills community includes approximately 328 residential households, plus two apartment buildings on Dale Drive.

### **President's Report.**

Park Hills is now firmly ensconced on the World Wide Web:

- Yahoo Listserv [<http://groups.yahoo.com/group/parkhillscivic>]
- Facebook Group [<http://tinyurl.com/calfzm>]
- Flickr Group [<http://www.flickr.com/groups/parkhills/pool>]
- PHCA Website [<http://www.parkhillscivic.org>]

\*The Park Hills Civic Association is looking for someone with website experience to help keep the website up-to-date. Just a couple hours of time each month is needed. Neighbors interested in helping out should contact Alan Bowser [abowser@starpower.net](mailto:abowser@starpower.net)

As students return to school from Spring Break, Bowser suggested, that might be an opportune time for the Civic Association to re-post its Pedestrian Safety yard signs along the Dale Drive/Wayne Avenue area near Sligo Creek Elementary and SSIMS schools (repeating our efforts during last Fall's big pedestrian safety campaign).

Bowser expressed excitement about this summer's annual Park Hills BBQ, as well as the prospect of Park Hills being represented in the County's big Thanksgiving Parade. In the meantime, Bowser is boldly proposing a Park Hills Civic Association Happy Hour mixer at a downtown Silver Spring establishment near you – stay tuned for more details.

The Silver Spring Town Center – a not-for-profit organization that has been established to provide community-based programming for the new Silver Spring Civic Building and Veterans Plaza – is organizing the first Annual Silver Spring Blues Festival on Saturday, May 9<sup>th</sup>. This musical event will also include face painting, a Guitar Hero contest, a “musical petting zoo” and vendors from Pyramid Atlantic.

**Absentee Voting.**

In response to concerns by those who were unable to attend the big Purple Line vote at the February 28<sup>th</sup> General Meeting, Anne Gavin, Vice-President, distributed a suggested revision to Civic Association Bylaws regarding Absentee Voting. The original Membership section in the PHCA Bylaws includes language about Voting. Ms. Gavin then broke out this text about Voting into its own section and created a new section specifically about Absentee Voting with language that reads as follows:

“A member may cast an absentee ballot only in exceptional circumstances: Absentee voting is permitted if no person in a member household can attend the meeting at which the vote is taken because of physical limitations or the need to care for a member of the household with physical limitations. A member can receive an absentee ballot by submitting, no later than 7 calendar days before the scheduled vote, a signed statement to the Association Secretary verifying the inability to cast a vote in person due to such physical limitations. An absentee ballot is valid only if (a) the member’s dues are current and the Association Treasurer certifies that the household is a member in good standing; and, (b) the completed absentee ballot is received by the Association Secretary or other Association officer before the call to order of the meeting at which the vote is scheduled.”

The reasons for such limited circumstances for absentee voting include (1) the administrative hassle of monitoring and enforcing absentee voting in an all-volunteer organization, and more importantly (2) to prevent residents from engaging in absentia on hot-button issues, especially given that the primary goal of a civic association is to engender communication and active participation among members living in the same community. PHCA officers acknowledge work-related reasons (travel, late hours) that prevent others from attending Civic Association meetings and, therefore, recommend that members articulate these issues persuasively both on the Park Hills listserv and in person at the next Civic Association General Meeting, where members can discuss and even propose further Bylaw amendments.

Thus, with the understanding of only one vote per household (per Bylaws), the Civic Association voted with 19 in favor of and 4 voted in opposition to the proposed Bylaws change regarding Absentee Voting. Therefore, the motion – specifying a change in the Bylaws to allow absentee voting for households where residents are housebound – passed.

**Waiver of Bylaws Provision.**

Anne Gavin, Vice-President, distributed a suggested revision to the Bylaws regarding Waiver of Bylaw Provision. Article X in the PHCA Bylaws includes language about Amendments to the Bylaws. Ms. Gavin then broke out this text about Amendments to the Bylaws into its own section and created a new section specifically about Waiver of Bylaws Provision with language that reads as follows:

“A provision of these Bylaws may be waived on a one-time basis at any regular meeting of the Association by a majority vote of the members present; provided, that written notice of such a By-Laws waiver motion specifying the provision to which a waiver is sought shall have been

given at the previous regular meeting or by written notification at least fourteen (14) days prior to meeting at which such amendment is voted upon.”

During the ensuing discussion, the majority of people found this Bylaws amendment to be too broadly written and concerned about the potential (remote as it might be) for a Waiver of Bylaws to be abused.

### **Update on Graffiti, Trash, Crime and Temporary A/C Unit at Sligo Creek Elementary & SSIMS Schools.**

Sandra Fair, PHCA Treasurer, has been taking the lead on a number of issues pertaining to activities in and around the campus of Sligo Creek Elementary and Silver Spring International Middle Schools. In October 2008, Ms. Fair and Alan Bowser met with Sligo Creek Elementary School Principal, Diantha Swift, to discuss the following concerns:

- Disruption to the community caused by the noise of the school's temporary A/C unit ;
- Need for removal of trash and litter both along Schuyler Road and around the premises of the school;
- Maintenance and upkeep of parkland along Schuyler Road, including the removal of poison ivy;
- Resolution of parking problems along Schuyler Road, possible solution being to convert the west side of Schuyler - adjacent to the parkland - to permit parking for the school;
- Repair and/or replacement of bleachers and maintenance of the athletic field, a popular community amenity;
- Removal of graffiti on Schuyler Road and potential need for gang intervention efforts within the school community;
- Improving communication between neighbors and Sligo Creek Elementary School.

In December 2008, Ms. Fair reported that Ben Stutz in Council Member Ervin's office had put her in touch with Todd Johnson of Park & Planning, who came out in November to view the situation firsthand. Johnson was able to clarify that the land is not under Park & Planning's jurisdiction (which ends at the intersection of Windsor and Schuyler, where the park ends), but is likely maintained by the County - he was unsure of which division. Johnson made some calls and arranged a meeting on December 16<sup>th</sup> with two staff members from the County's Department of Public Works & Transportation. DPWT made inquiries and confirmed that this land is under the jurisdiction of Montgomery County Public Schools, and provided a map to illustrate this.

On March 10, Ben Stutz put Ms. Fair in touch with Janice Turpin, Real Estate Management Team Leader for Montgomery County Public Schools, and Ms. Fair sent an e-mail requesting help with the following problems:

- Litter around the entire school campus;
- Trash overflow around the SCES dumpster (including illegal dumping);
- Poison ivy in significant quantity on the school grounds;
- General maintenance of the park land adjacent to Sligo Creek Park.

On March 18, Ms. Fair posted the following update on the Civic Association listserv:

“Dear Neighbors,

We have been able to confirm that Montgomery County Public Schools is responsible for the land across Schuyler Road. I met this morning with three gentlemen from MCPS Randolph Maintenance Depot, which oversees maintenance for all 70+ MCPS, and here is the outcome of the issues discussed:

- Status of the temporary AC unit, which was installed last spring and caused much disturbance to the neighborhood - **THE UNIT HAS BEEN REMOVED AND THE A/C FOR SLIGO CREEK ELEMENTARY HAS BEEN REPAIRED.**
- Trash overflow from bins, which spills into parkland - **THEY ACKNOWLEDGE THE PROBLEM. THE BINS IN THAT AREA ARE FOR "SPECIAL PICK UP" (LARGE ITEMS) AND RECYCLED PAPER AND PLASTIC. THE OVERFLOW INTO PARKLAND HAPPENS FROM ILLEGAL DUMPING, AND FROM TRASH SPILLING OVER WHEN THE DUMPSTERS ARE EMPTIED. THEY WILL LOOK INTO INSTALLING A CHAIN LINK FENCE OR SOMETHING TO PREVENT THE SPILLOVER, AND THEY WILL MAKE THE SCHOOL AWARE THAT IT NEEDS TO DO A BETTER JOB OF REMOVING THE OVERFLOW AFTER THE BINS ARE EMPTIED MORE REGULARLY. A SECURITY CAMERA AND/OR GATE IS NOT POSSIBLE. A SMALL SIGN HAS BEEN POSTED. WHAT NEIGHBORS CAN DO IS TO CALL THE POLICE IF YOU SEE OR HEAR ANYONE ILLEGALLY DUMPING IN THAT AREA.**
- Litter problem along walkway and parkland - **WE DISCUSSED INSTALLING A TRASH CAN, BUT THERE IS NO WAY TO MAINTAIN IT REGULARLY SO IT WILL BECOME MORE OF A PROBLEM BECAUSE IT GET TOO FULL AND SPILL OVER. WHAT NEIGHBORS CAN DO IS HELP PICK UP TRASH AND PERHAPS ORGANIZE A SEMI REGULAR CLEAN UP OF THE LAND (LIKE FRIENDS OF SLIGO CREEK DOES WITH THE CREEK PARKLAND). IF ANYONE WANTS TO VOLUNTEER TO WORK ON THIS, PLEASE LET ME KNOW.**
- Removal of poison ivy - **IF WE CAN HELP IDENTIFY WHERE IT IS, AND IF IT IS ON A PART OF THE LAND THAT PEOPLE WALK THROUGH, THE COUNTY WILL SEND SOMEONE TO SPRAY IT. IF ANYONE WANTS TO VOLUNTEER TO WORK ON THIS, PLEASE LET ME KNOW.**
- General maintenance of the parkland - **THIS IS A CHALLENGE FOR SLIGO CREEK ELEMENTARY, WHICH IS RESPONSIBLE FOR THIS LAND, ESPECIALLY WITH RECENT CUTBACKS. HOWEVER, THEY WILL MAKE THE SCHOOL AWARE AND TRY TO GET SOMEONE OUT TO MOW MORE REGULARLY, ESPECIALLY IN THE SUMMER.”**

## **Silver Spring Development Update.**

Dwayne Jenkins, Assistant Director of the Silver Spring Regional Services Center, updated Park Hills residents on three major development projects in the downtown area:

### **I. New Silver Spring Public Library**

The Council and County Executive all support the pedestrian bridge overpass, but legalities need to be addressed. Silver Spring, along with Rockville, are regional libraries that contain special collections geared toward those with disabilities, thus safe access is key not only due to ADA issues but also to the impact of a Purple Line train operating at street level. One million projected visitors means that the new public library might be among the nation's busiest! The conceptual design is completed. In terms of timeframe, the best guess as to completion date is "a couple of years."

Q: Why can't the Library be built underground?

A: Costs are too prohibitive, particularly in this economy.

### **II. Silver Spring Transit Center**

Construction of the new Silver Spring Transit Center is already underway. In connection with the construction, all bus operations have been relocated to a new "interim operations site" on Wayne, Dixon, and Bonifant streets. The 8-acre site will be developed to accommodate a multi-level, pedestrian-friendly complex supporting rail traffic (Metro and MARC), bus traffic (local and inter-city) and automobile traffic (taxi service and Kiss and Ride). Major features include doubling the number of bus bays, a 4,500 square foot inter-city bus building, and extensive provisions for safe pedestrian and vehicular traffic movement under a landmark canopy. Hiker/biker trail enhancements and retail development are also included in the design concept.

Q: How long will the temporary fencing and altered pedestrian access routes be in place?

A: Three more years (!)

### **III. Silver Spring Civic Building/Veterans Plaza & Live Nation/Fillmore**

When construction is completed – now projected to be 2010 due to contractor delays – the 1.5-acre site will contain the new 42,000 square-foot Civic Building that will be fronted by the three-quarter acre Veterans Plaza, featuring a brick surface surrounded by grass and trees. Veterans Plaza will be the site of a memorial to veterans of all wars, host year-round activities from concerts to markets and festivals, and be converted to an ice rink from November through March.

Q: What is the status of the Live Nation/Fillmore concert venue in the old JC Penney building?

A: The principal parties – the Lees, County Council, the County Planning Board, and Live Nation – have not yet worked out an agreement.

## **Purple Line Update.**

Chris Richardson, PHCA Purple Line Task Force Chair, along with Alan Bowser, PHCA President, testified at MTA's public hearing on November 22, 2008 as well as at the public hearing convened by the Montgomery County Planning Board (M-NCPPC) on January 15, 2009.

The Planning Board voted for Light Rail over Bus Rapid Transit on January 15<sup>th</sup> and agreed with staff recommendations to go with a surface route along Wayne Avenue in Silver Spring and eliminate a proposed station at Wayne Avenue and Dale Drive.

The County Council then voted on January 27 for Light Rail with a surface route planned for Wayne Avenue but only after detailed analysis of various tunneling options is first conducted. Furthermore, on February 2<sup>nd</sup>, in a letter to Maryland Transportation Secretary, John Porcari, Montgomery County Council gave a series of recommendations on the Locally Preferred Alternative, including the following requests for the East Silver Spring portion of the Purple Line:

- Before selecting the LPA, bring the evaluation of a tunnel option between the Silver Spring Transit Center (SSTC) and the vicinity of Wayne Avenue/Mansfield Road to the same level of detail as has been already completed for the surface option between these points.
- If the surface option is ultimately selected for Wayne Avenue, delete the Dale Drive stop from the LPA, but design the line in a way that would facilitate adding a stop there in the future.
- If the surface option is selected for downtown and East Silver Spring, give special attention to the LRT vehicle crossing of Georgia Avenue and intersection of Fenton Street/Wayne Avenue to ensure that the LRT, pedestrians, and vehicular traffic will operate in a compatible manner.
- If the surface option is selected for downtown and East Silver Spring, conduct a detailed study to address:
  - a. Pedestrian safety and station accessibility;
  - b. Forecast ridership at the SSTC and Fenton Street stations;
  - c. Transit, vehicle queuing, and parking operations in shared lanes, including options to minimize adverse economic effects on retail businesses along Bonifant Street;
  - d. Wayne Avenue Green Trail design.

#### **Effort to Name the Silver Spring Civic Building For Doug Duncan.**

Leslie Downey supports naming the new Civic Building for former County Executive Doug Duncan given his leadership and dedication in creating a public/private partnership to stimulate economic development in the new entertainment district, especially given the state of downtown prior to redevelopment. At a recent Silver Spring Citizens Advisory Board meeting, Chuck Short, Assistant to Ike Leggett, stated that names for the new Civic Building are being considered. However, there is a rule or ordinance prohibiting the County from naming a building for a County official fewer than five years after leaving office. Consequently, this rule would have to be waived.

#### **New Business.**

Given the difficulty of a 7:00 start time for Civic Association meetings in light of commuting difficulties, dinner preparation, and other time challenges that go with a busy work life in the Washington DC area, a straw vote was held and a majority of members voted to change the starting time of General Meetings to 7:30. Thus, beginning with the May 20<sup>th</sup> General Meeting, all Park Hills Civic Association meetings will now begin at 7:30 pm.

**Adjournment.** The meeting was adjourned at 8:42 pm.

Respectively submitted.

Chris Richardson, PHCA Secretary.