

Parkwood

Residents Association - Spring 2013 Newsletter

Next Meeting: Tuesday, June 4th, at Kensington Parkwood Elementary School, at 7:30 pm

Letter from the President

Neighbors and Community Members,

The next meeting of the Parkwood Residents Association will take place Tuesday, June 4th at 7:30 p.m. at Kensington Parkwood Elementary School in the multi-use room on the lower level. Our guest speaker, At-Large Councilmember Marc Elrich will share his perspectives on the “Zoning Ordinance Rewrite” under consideration by the Planning, Housing and Economic Development Committee of the Montgomery County Council. Neighborhood homeowners will need to stay abreast of this issue because it could affect future property values. According to the local activist web site *WeAreMoCo.org*, Councilmember Valerie Ervin wrote to PHED Committee Chair, Nancy Floreen and stated, “The majority of agricultural and single-family residential [zones] have no significant potential for further development, so there are no compelling reasons to change the zones and the standards that apply to those areas.” But as history has shown us repeatedly, there are no guarantees when it comes to zoning issues.

We’ll also have an update on the work that the PRA Tree Committee has conducted to improve the health and variety of the trees making up the canopy in Parkwood. A small group of volunteers have worked with the county and conducted a door-to-door survey of the neighborhood to determine what trees homeowners would most like planted on their home’s right-of-way. If the county agrees, then the diversity of species lining our streets will increase and the health of the canopy should improve over time.

Members of the community should begin to seriously consider who they would like to assume the duties of PRA president effective March 1, 2014. The PRA also needs a secretary and volunteers to assist with welcoming new residents. The secretarial post has been vacant for the last 13 months. The association has done a great deal for the neighborhood over the last decade, which has been enumerated in past newsletters, but the vast majority of PRA members do not participate in the association’s governance, or volunteer for neighborhood projects. We have increased membership in the association and built a respectable bank account. If the neighborhood wishes to continue to have a strong neighborhood association, then residents need to elevate their engagement.

The agenda for the meeting will also include an update on membership, a discussion on how to support the Welcoming Committee, the search for a new secretary, neighborhood beautification efforts, and an update from our Treasurer.

I look forward to seeing you at the meeting.

Bailey Condrey
PRA President

Become a Weed Warrior in Rock Creek Park

Diana Del Grosso, PRA Weed Warrior

What Weeds? In Montgomery Parks (a system of almost 34,000 acres), non-native invasive plants (NNIs) have begun to take over many areas. They have been introduced into an environment that is free of the natural

controls present in their native lands (including herbivores, insects, parasites, and pathogens) that would otherwise limit their reproduction and spread. Free of these controls, NNIs are relatively unencumbered in their competition with desirable plants. Yes, that springtime carpet of yellow flowers in Rock Creek Park is invasive. Remember kudzu?

Coupled with plant destruction by over-abundant herds of white-tailed deer and various ecosystem disturbances, such as development, erosion, and storms, NNIs are causing significant changes in the composition, structure, and ecosystem function in natural areas. Non-native species are considered by most experts to be the second most important threat to biodiversity after outright habitat destruction.

What Can You Do? Carole Bergmann, Montgomery Parks Forest Ecologist, created Weed Warriors in 1999 to respond to the NNIs problem. To become a weed warrior, there are three steps: take an on-line course (1 hour); enroll in a two-hour course at Meadowside Nature Center; and go on one weed pull with Meghan Fellows, the Weed Warriors coordinator. Visit WeedWarrior.org to learn more about becoming a Weed Warrior. Trainings are held throughout the summer, April to October, usually on the 4th Wednesday of the month. There are workdays almost every weekend--the Parks Events Calendar has a (nearly) complete list of events. It is free, you learn just how many NNIs we have in the park and you can go out to the park and weed on your own. You can also recognize NNIs and take action if they begin to invade your own garden.

PRA Beautification Report

April showers bring May flowers. So what do May showers bring? Well, more healthy plants for Parkwood, of course. The annuals are in at the gardens at Saul, Wildwood and the entrance at Cedar/Parkwood. A new area on the Parkwood/Parkwood Terrace island has been planted with three 'volunteer' crepe myrtles moved from Wildwood and a fig tree (wrapped in netting to protect from the deer).

Are you interested in having a street tree planted on the county easement at the front of your property (between the curb and the sidewalk area)? Please contact the recently established PRA Tree Committee by May 31. This volunteer team formed during our last PRA meeting to put our community at the top of the county's list to ensure the tree canopy in Parkwood is harmonious and sustainable. While Montgomery County provides the trees and labor, the Tree Committee is working with residents to specify where trees are desired and agree to care for new trees as they get established. The goal is to see new trees in Parkwood at the next planting cycle (fall/winter 2013/14). Without this concerted effort, individual requests for tree replacements may take years.

PRA volunteers and consultants, including master gardeners and professional arborists, have identified a list of suitable street trees that will thrive in our neighborhood. The list was extracted from a list of those trees permitted by the county, and includes facts and images of the trees to assist in selecting the most desired tree for your property. The information is posted on the PRA website <http://parkwoodresidents.org>.

In order for trees to be planted this fall, **PRA Tree Committee must receive your request by May 31st, 2013.** Send an email to Treesofparkwood@gmail.com specifying your tree choice and contact information so that the County and Miss Utility can follow up with you to ensure safe placement of trees and to verify your agreement to regularly water the sapling until it becomes established.

A special thank you to the PRA Tree Committee for their time, expertise and energy. These neighbors include Erin Haney who led and organized the committee and coordinated with the County; Jeff and Jan Griffith who surveyed and photographed stump locations throughout the neighborhood; Peter Katz and Pat Newman who compiled a

list of viable trees to best improve the overall PRA tree canopy into the future; and the neighborhood survey team who went door to door communicating the plan which included Erin, Pat, Jan Rothman, Kathy Byar, and Bailey and Gail Condrey.

Come to the PRA meeting to learn more about the work to sustain the community gardens, a memorial garden request, and to hear the final tally and next steps on County tree replacements.

Lastly, thanks to those of you who include donations to the Beautification Committee with your annual PRA membership dues. Your generosity and kind words are very much appreciated and help sustain the community gardens we all enjoy. Cheers!!

Gail Dalferes Condrey
PRA Beautification Committee Chair

Start School Later Campaign

Peter Mansbach, PRA Webmaster

In Montgomery County, the local chapter of Start School Later formed last fall under the leadership of Mandi Mader, a Montgomery County Public Schools parent and a clinical social worker who works with adolescents. The Start School Later group spearheaded a campaign in which over 10,000 citizens petitioned the Montgomery County Board of Education and Superintendent Joshua Starr to move high school start times to 8:15 am or beyond from the current start time of 7:25 am. Dr. Starr established a High School Bell Times Workgroup that began meeting in January 2013 and that will issue a report in July 2013. The workgroup has been charged with revisiting Montgomery County late 1990s studies of high school start times. At the State level, a bill to study the issue passed the House unanimously, but failed by one vote to move out of committee in the Senate.

There is scientific evidence that circadian rhythms shift during adolescence so that onset of sleep is delayed. This means that due to developmental changes in the brain, many adolescents are unable to fall asleep until very late, often later than their parents' bedtimes. Yet at the same time, the required duration of sleep is an average of 8½ - 9¼ hours. Getting up for very early high school start times means that most teens are not getting the sleep they need. Most experts agree that circadian rhythms--which govern the time

adolescents naturally start to feel sleepy--cannot be artificially shifted.

As reported in the Washington Examiner, Mader formed the chapter in September 2012 due to the impacts she has seen of the mismatch between adolescent sleep patterns and school start times. "I've been very frustrated with some of the adolescents I've worked with being anxious, stressed, even suicidal and cutting, and they're Montgomery County high school students who need to get healthy and need more sleep," she said. The Start School Later group has presented benefits of later start times that would allow high school students more sleep in the morning. These include increased school attendance, decreased drop-out rates, decreased tardiness, decreased instances of students sleeping in class, improved first period grades, fewer student traffic accidents, decreased visits to nurses and counselors, and decreased depression and irritability. The Start School Later group has argued that these benefits result in better learning.

In 1960, all school start times in Montgomery County were standardized with high schools starting first. From that time until 1993, changes were made on a school-to-school basis for various reasons, so that high school start times ranged from 7:20 am to 8:20 am. In 1993, bell times were again standardized to reduce transportation costs and to address other negative consequences of staggered start times. In 1997, Montgomery County Public Schools researched moving high school start times to later in the morning and issued a report in 1998 (<http://www.montgomeryschoolsmd.org/uploadedFiles/boe/changing-belltimes.pdf>). One major drawback to moving high school start times cited in that report was the substantial cost of the additional buses needed. This concern remains today. Also cited as additional barriers are cutting time short for after-school jobs, supervision of younger siblings, and sports practices. Dr. Starr acknowledged the concerns of parents and charged the workgroup to study what he characterized as a complex issue and to look to the experiences of other school systems. For more information about the Start School Later Montgomery County chapter, see <http://www.startschoollater.net/md---montgomery-county.html>. For information about the High School Bell Times Workgroup established by Dr. Starr, see <http://www.montgomeryschoolsmd.org/info/belltimesworkgroup/index.aspx>.

Changes are coming: zoning and transportation

Lara Akinbami, & Gail Dalferes Condrey, PRA
Reps to Coalition of Kensington Communities

Montgomery County is bracing for population growth and the challenges of increasing demands for space and infrastructure. These developments will certainly impact quality of life in our neighborhood.

Zoning Ordinance Rewrite

The effort to modernize zoning, known as Zoning Ordinance Rewrite, began in 2008. The Zoning Ordinance specifies what is permitted in specific land use zones (e.g., commercial, residential, agricultural, etc.), how developers and owners can build, and the process by which development is reviewed and approved. The current code is not only decades old (previously revised in 1977), but complex with more than 123 zones and 400 permitted land uses, and over 1,200 pages thick. The Montgomery County Planning Board undertook the revision to streamline zoning codes, shift focus from greenfield to infill development, and improve the quality of development. The Planning Board Chair, Francoise Carrier, characterized the Rewrite as the single-most important project facing the Planning Board.

The Planning Department staff presented the draft Rewrite to the Planning Board in December 2012 which then held public hearings. On May 2nd, the Planning Board approved and transmitted the Rewrite draft to the County Council for final review and approval. The first public hearing for the full Council is scheduled for June 11th at 7:30 pm.

For established single family neighborhoods, changes are envisioned as evolving slowly, and include the inclusion of multifamily housing and allowing commercial uses in residential buildings. For Parkwood, zoning would be changed from “R-60 Residential One Family” to “R-60 Residential Medium Density.” R-60 denotes a minimum residential lot area of 6,000 square feet. The new zone is defined, “The intent of the R-90 R-60, and R-40 zones is to provide designated areas of the County for moderate density residential uses. In the R-90 and R-60 zones, the predominant use is residential in a detached house. In the R-40 zone, the predominant use is residential in a duplex or detached house. A limited number of other building types may be allowed in these zones

under the Optional Method of Development.” In R-60 zones, detached homes, duplex housing, mobile homes, townhouses and apartment and condominium buildings would be allowed for residential and/or commercial use in the Optional Method of Development under the Rewrite. Currently, only residential uses are permitted. Overall, these changes are designed to curb continued sprawl “upcounty” by increasing residential density “downcounty” where smaller lots are located.

Concerns have been raised by community activists, including former Planning Board members who founded the watchdog group, Neighborhood Montgomery (<https://groups.google.com/forum/?fromgroups#!forum/neighborhood-montgomery>). A main concern is that the changes to residential codes may be difficult to understand and raise density in established neighborhoods. While Councilmember Valerie Ervin, in an April 2nd memo, praised the hard work of the Planning Department Staff and the Planning Board, she cautioned that changes to the zoning code should proceed with care. Included in her concerns were that changes characterized as “format changes” may unintentionally mask substantive changes, and that changes to agriculture and single-family residential zoning may be unwarranted because the majority of these areas have no significant potential for further development. She urged her fellow Councilmembers to take a deliberate approach in their review of “the many complicated changes proposed in the Zoning Ordinance rewrite.” The current Zoning Rewrite draft is available at: <http://montgomeryplanning.org/development/zoning/>. Information about the County Council’s oversight of zoning can be found at: <http://www6.montgomerycountymd.gov/csltmpl.asp?url=/Content/council/about/land.asp>.

Rapid Transit update

The need for traffic congestion mitigation in our area is clear, but the solution is not simple. One consideration is Rapid Transit Vehicles (RTV), or Bus Rapid Transit (BRT), which “combines the most attractive components of light rail with the flexibility and lower cost of bus technology” according to County Councilmember Marc Elrich. The proposed RTV/BRT system would use busses on dedicated narrow guideways that would be built along current roadways. The system offers a low-cost option to add public transit capacity in segments as funding becomes

available in stages. Councilmember Elrich established a Rapid Transit website (http://www6.montgomerycountymd.gov/elrtmpl.asp?url=/content/council/mem/elrich_m/brt.asp) with an FAQ document that offers answers to common questions such as: How would RTV interact with Metro and the Purple Line? Won’t you have to widen roads to give RTV a dedicated travel lane? Will this system enable the county to develop and urbanize even more quickly?

Chevy Chase West resident Naomi Spinrad agrees that a solution is needed, but advises increased community involvement (<http://wearemoco.org/bus-rapid-transit-express-lane-to-the-future/#more-3117>) and has more questions such as “What if fewer people than predicted opt for BRT and auto congestion is not reduced by the projected amounts?” Spinrad emphasizes that transit solutions must also work for current residents, not just future residents. “The challenge is to do something – for the social good, for the environment, for the local economy, for drivers’ mental health – that is perceived by a majority as having enough wide-reaching benefits to be worth the potential costs and downsides. We need to make sure that aspirations don’t become policy without proper consideration and safeguards for those who already live and work within the communities of Montgomery County.”

More information:

Montgomery County Rapid Transit System Project, including the project schedule <http://www.montgomerycountymd.gov/rts/>

Countywide Transit Corridors Functional Master Plan, with a map of transit corridors: <http://www.montgomeryplanning.org/transportation/highways/brt.shtm>.

Institute for Transportation and Development Policy: <http://www.itdp.org/where-we-work/united-states>

Costco Gas – To be or not to be?

Join the June 4 PRA meeting to hear an update on the Costco Gas Special Exception Hearing to determine whether Costco will be allowed to proceed with the 16-pump gas station at the Wheaton shopping center. The hearing sessions began in April and are expected to continue into July 2013. One of our fellow neighborhood associations, Kensington Heights Civic Association, opposes the siting of a mega gas station within 125 feet of houses. More hearing information: <http://www.stopcostcogas.org>.

Pepco rate hike request

Gail Dalferes Condrey, PRA Rep to Coalition of Kensington Communities

On November 30, 2012, Pepco filed for a rate increase that would cost the average residential customer \$7.13 more per month. Public Service Commission (PSC) Case No. 9311 explains “... Pepco is requesting a \$60,827,000 increase in its Maryland distribution rates and an authorized rate of return on equity of 10.25%.... Separately from the requested adjustments to base rates, in response to the recommendations contained in the [Report of the Grid Resiliency Task Force](#) (‘Task Force Report’), Pepco is proposing to establish a [tracker] Grid Resiliency Charge.”

Powerupmontco, a group of 80,000 Montgomery County Pepco ratepayers, opposes the requested increase. In an online newsletter, Powerupmontco member Abbe Milstein informed members “This latest request was filed just a short time after the PSC found that approximately three-quarters of Pepco’s [2012] request for \$68 million was not eligible for recovery [of expenditures]. Despite being denied most of their earlier rate request just months prior, Pepco filed their new \$60.8 million request [plus an added tracker (surcharge)] based on the

recommendations in the Governor’s [Task Force Report].”

Many contend the utility should fund infrastructure improvements from reduced executive salaries and lower stockholder dividends rather than from rate payer increases. [Gazette.net](#) reports “Pepco’s request for a rate increase to pay for past and future infrastructure work met with criticism from several customers and public officials at a public hearing in Rockville May 9. ‘This is a significant increase for our residents and businesses that are already suffering under the current economic climate,’ said Gaithersburg Mayor Sidney Katz, one of about a dozen people who gave testimony at the hearing.

“In written testimony submitted to the commission, [Powerupmontco’s] Abbe Milstein criticized the high annual dividend yields and executive compensation packages of the Pepco’s parent company, Pepco Holdings, Inc. Thomas H. Graham, president of Pepco Region, told The Gazette after the hearing that advertising and executive incentives were paid for with money from shareholders, not ratepayers. ‘Over the last three years, we’ve been committed to improving service reliability for our customers,’ Graham said. ‘We’ve seen double-digit reductions in the frequency of outages. Also, when outages occur, the

length of them is not as long.’ The utility was now seeking recovery from expenditures that it has made, Graham said. Pepco is also asking to implement a grid resiliency charge to fast-track certain new projects, such as burying six distribution feeders. The charge for the average customer would be 96 cents per month in 2014, \$1.70 per month in 2015 and \$1.93 per month in 2016. Pepco expects the charge would be in place for three years.”

According to the [Washington Business Journal](#), on March 8, [Pepco](#) requested that the D.C. PSC approve a \$52.1 million rate increase for its 258,000-plus customers in the District. And though Pepco has been faulted for its spotty reliability, Pepco chief executive Joseph Rigby’s compensation package increased from \$6.7 million in 2011 to \$11.4 million last year, according to financial documents, [The Washington Times reported](#).

Individuals interested in commenting on this proceeding are encouraged to write to the PSC. **Written comments must be filed by Friday, May 31, 2012.** The PSC decision is due by July 12. Address comments to: David J. Collins, Executive Secretary, Maryland Public Service Commission, William Donald Schaefer Tower, 6 St. Paul Street, 16th Floor Baltimore, Maryland 21202. Reference “Case No. 9311.”

Mid-Year Treasurer and Membership Report

Pippa Elbel, PRA Membership Secretary & Gerald Sharp, PRA Treasurer

The PRA is well positioned to begin its spring and summer beautification projects. Currently the PRA Treasury has a total of \$16,453.25 in deposits and cash. To date, 265 households in Parkwood have sent in the annual \$10 membership fee, compared to 268 at this time last year. Our members continue to be generous in supporting our beautification efforts with \$2639 donated so far this year, just slightly less than the receipts received from membership dues (\$2650). About half our members paying the annual fee include an optional beautification donation, usually of \$10. But we have also

received some very big donations—up to \$250—from people we assume are appreciative of the efforts of our volunteers on the beautification committee. We began accepting membership/donation payments through Paypal last year, and received \$520 through this online service in 2012; so far this year, just 7 households have used this service. If you have not yet paid your \$10 PRA membership fee and would like to try paying online, a link to the Paypal service is available on the PRA website. Or you can support the US Post Office and mail a check to Pippa. Her address and the membership form are also on the website.

Connect to PRA online

Visit www.parkwoodresidents.org. This site houses the basic information about PRA

including an archive of meeting minutes and an electronic version of the PRA newsletter (where you can go to click on the hyperlinks included in the newsletter). There are also instructions on how to join the PRA listserv which offers a forum for exchanging information about issues ranging from recommendations about local services to updated crime reports from police.

Welcome to Parkwood

Do you have new neighbors? The PRA Welcoming Committee Chair, Valerie Gottron, has prepared welcome information packets for new neighbors. Please send the address to Valerie (valeriebend@gmail.com). She will deliver a welcoming packet to the new neighbor’s door.