

Parkwood

Residents Association - Spring 2015 Newsletter

Next Meeting: Tuesday, March 24th, at Kensington Parkwood Elementary School, at 7:30 pm

Letter from the President

Our next meeting on March 24th has what I consider to be a very important theme for a Spring meeting when many of us are starting to think about our gardens again. The snow has finally melted, but nature seems to be a bit slow in waking up compared to past years. To get you in the mood, we have invited as our speaker Diane M. Cameron, Conservation Program Director, Audubon Naturalist Society and consultant to Natural Resources Defense Council. In 2005, Diane co-founded the Stormwater Partners Network which works to gain protection and restoration of our stream and their watersheds through improved water quality policies and programs. The theme of her talk at our meeting is "Restoring Rock Creek--How You and Your Family Can Help."

This is an important issue for Parkwood since half of our neighborhood is bordered by Rock Creek Park, making our gardens part of the creek's watershed. Fortunately, we have become more aware of the impact that our gardening practices have on the environment. We are planting more native species to reduce the need for water and fertilizer, using rain barrels to collect rainwater, practicing organic gardening, and reducing our use of herbicides and pesticides that are detrimental to beneficial insects such as butterflies and bees. Some have installed rain gardens to create ground permeable to runoff. Rain gardens create an environment in which many native plants thrive, and the plants in turn attract welcome visitors such as hummingbirds.

Some of this may sound contrary to having an expanse of green grass, and indeed it may be.

Fertilizer to encourage growth, herbicide to kill the weeds and pesticides to kill the bugs also wash into Rock Creek. The Rock Creek environment is increasingly fragile due to increased run off and erosion and deer overpopulation and the resultant mono-culture of plants resistant to the grazing onslaught. There is less habitat for diverse insect, bird and animal species. Perhaps there are ways to still accomplish our goals for the garden while also working to preserve and restore the beauty of the larger landscape in which we all live. I invite you to come hear Diane speak about Naturescaping and how our adoption of such practices can help not only Rock Creek, but the rest of our environment too.

Kira Lueders
President PRA

Vandalism at Kensington Parkwood Elementary field

Parkwood Neighbors,

I want to share with you an alarming trend over the past two years regarding vandalism of the Kensington Parkwood Elementary School field located behind the school. The field is used not only by the school for physical education, recess, and after-school activities, but by numerous sport organizations and Parkwood residents for many purposes. Last winter, the field was ruined as perpetrators driving a large vehicle dug figure 8's into the field. A great deal of money was spent by the school to repair the field, and this was already after the parent community had spent a sizeable amount to make the field as functional as possible for the children.

A few weeks ago, this unfortunate episode was repeated, and the impact on the field is significant. Apart from the obvious, the children cannot play on the field and are relegated to the blacktop for recess and outdoor play. It is not easy to confine 200 children into an area that is a quarter of the size of the field. Moreover, teachers have been finding myriad inappropriate items on the field such as undergarments that, suffice it to say, have no place on a school field.

The school is looking at possible solutions including a special kind of lock for the rear gate that must be approved by the county. Vehicular access to the rear of the school cannot be completely blocked because access must be available to emergency vehicles. I am asking for your help in preventing any further incidents and I urge you to report any suspicious activity. Please spread the word about what is happening to our beloved KP field.

Thank you for your time and attention to this matter.

Sincerely,
Dafna Silberfeld
PTA President

PRA Meeting Agenda

- Election of new PRA Webmaster
- Diane Cameron: "Restoring Rock Creek Park-How You and Your Family Can Help"
- Beautification Report, including the Request for Proposal process
- Treasurer Report
- KPES Solar Panels
- Montgomery County Operating Budget Overview
- Legislative Report, Costco gas update

Thank you Peter Mansbach, PRA Webmaster! Now we need to fill his shoes...

PRA Executive Committee

Our webmaster Peter Mansbach plans to resign at the March 24th PRA meeting. Peter set up the PRA website many years ago and has actively maintained it. He has also contributed in many other ways as a member of the Executive Committee, especially in the updating of the PRA bylaws. He leaves an established webpage that has served our community well. We thank him for his many years of service and will miss his participation in the Executive Committee and his excellent attention to organization details.

The webmaster is responsible for maintaining the official PRA web site currently at parkwoodresidents.org. The web site includes notice of the association meetings, the bylaws, minutes of recent meetings as provided by the Secretary, copies of recent newsletters as provided by the Vice President, and other documents as determined by the Executive Committee. Please attend the meeting on the 24th at which a vote can be taken if you are interested in assuming this role, or contact Kira Lueders at kklarl@yahoo.com if you are unable to attend.

New “Dogi Pot” Dispensers

By Bailey Condrey

Based upon requests from the community and Kensington Parkwood Elementary PTA members, the PRA will place two new dog waste bag dispensers in the neighborhood.

Many dog walkers had noted that the eastern end of Parkwood did not have a bag dispenser. One will be placed on the traffic sign in the

median at Wildwood Road where it intersects Parkwood Drive. There is a bed of black-eyed Susan’s nearby this sign. The waste can closest to this dispenser lies down the path into Rock Creek Park by Beach Drive.

Kensington Parkwood Elementary has a large problem with dog owners repeatedly failing to pick up their dog’s waste when they visit the school’s playing field. Children then step in it while at recess and track it into the school. The PRA is asking community members to be more diligent about cleaning up after their pets. A “Dogi Pot” dispenser was attached to the baseball backstop by the children’s play equipment some years ago, and another one will soon be placed on the opposite side of the field, on the other baseball backstop.

We can help the teachers and children eliminate this problem with attention to our pets.

Envelope experiment

By Gerald Sharp, PRA Treasurer

A suggestion was made at a PRA meeting last year to increase our response rate for dues payments by putting stamps on the envelopes we staple onto the newsletter once a year, and we said we would give it a try. We decided to attach half the envelopes to each of two newsletters, rather than attaching all to the same newsletter as we have done in the past for two reasons: 1) because it is difficult for Pippa Eibel, PRA Membership Chair, to quickly process the large bolus of checks that arrive after envelopes go out, and 2) because Wells Fargo charges us a substantial fee when we deposit too many checks in one month. Therefore, envelopes were attached to 490 newsletters, and the other 447 went out without envelopes. To determine if adding stamps to the envelopes increased the response rate, we randomly attached stamps to about half of the 490 envelopes (273 with stamps and 217 without).

We gave white registration slips to the residents receiving stamped envelopes and colored slips to the others. Kira Lueders, PRA President and Block Captain, analyzed the results. We counted the number of each of the two types of registration slips that were returned and also calculated the total amount of donations and dues payments, by category.

As shown in the table, results of this PRA experiment were contrary to what we expected with a better response rate for the unstamped envelopes: 19% of residents receiving unstamped envelopes sent in dues and beautification donations, compared to 9% for those not receiving envelopes and 12% receiving stamped envelopes. Average dues and donations payments were highest for the unstamped-envelope-group (\$30.73) compared to \$22.32 for the no-envelope-group and \$18.75 for the stamped-envelope-group. We should note that one of the residents in the unstamped-envelope group donated \$200, which increased that average, although there were also people sending in beautification donations of \$50-\$100 in the other groups. Also, it is interesting that response rates varied a lot by street. For example, 50% of the residents living in the 10,000 block of Crestwood Road in Kensington sent in their checks with no envelopes provided.

To explain our contrary-to-expected-results for the stamped envelopes, we considered if people might be more likely to return colored forms than white forms (because the colored form would stand out from other documents on one’s desk), but direct mail studies have shown no difference in response rates associated with colored forms. So, in summary, there is no support for the PRA to buy stamps for our return envelopes in the future. Attaching envelopes to one newsletter a year is associated with better response rates and a higher average dues payment and donation.

Table: Results of PRA stamped envelope experiment with December 2014 PRA newsletter

Category	Number returned (%)	Total amount received \$	Average amount received \$
No envelope	39/447 (9%)	\$915	\$22.32
Envelope, no stamp	41/217 (19%)	\$1260	\$30.73
Envelope, with stamp	32/273 (12%)	\$600	\$18.75

Montgomery County Civic Federation

By Jeff Griffith

The Montgomery County Civic Federation, of which the PRA is a member, has begun a series of programs focused on decision-making that affects the future of our communities. The first two sessions covered the development application process and potholes.

Montgomery County Development Application Review Process

The January Federation meeting featured a panel discussion on the Development Review Process. Speakers included Gwen Wright, Planning Director, Montgomery County Planning Department; Diane Schwartz-Jones, Director of the Department of Permitting Services; and Sue Richards and Craig Howard of the Office of Legislative Oversight (OLO). Each presenter noted the County's effort to make the review process more efficient, transparent, and predictable for applicants and affected communities. The County Council has requested the OLO to examine the approval time for preliminary plans, site plans, and record plats to better understand how long it takes to receive approvals and factors that influence the predictability of the County's regulatory land use processes.

Gwen Wright set the context by describing the county as stable, diverse, highly educated, and aging. She pointed out that only 19% of the County land area remains open for development, mainly along the I-270 corridor. The planning process has numerous stages, each with its own application or documentation requirements. The new zoning code which went into effect in October 2014 gives citizens more opportunities to participate because more development proposals adjacent to residential neighborhoods will be subject to sketch plan and site plan approval. These approvals require public hearings with the Planning Board and provide community members an opportunity to voice their opinion.

An example of the information available can be seen in the Planning Department's website for the Bethesda Downtown Plan http://www.montgomeryplanning.org/community/bethesda_downtown/index.shtm. This page has a link to the presentation made by the Department to the Planning Board in December 2014, slide 18 of which shows all the stages at which public comment is invited. There is

also a link to the Development Finder (www.mcatlas.org/devfinder) which shows projects in the entire county that are recently completed or are already moving forward through the review process. To see projects near Parkwood, search for "White Flint."

Diane Schwartz-Jones pointed out that some process changes have already been implemented, such as online tracking of applications. In some cases, 9-12 months have been saved in processing time. A briefing on the streamlining initiative is here: <http://permitting-services.montgomerycountymd.gov/DPS/pdf/StreamliningPresentationBriefing11-2012.pdf> And a list of initiatives implemented is here: <http://permitting-services.montgomerycountymd.gov/DPS/pdf/StreamliningInitiativesImplemented6-14-13.pdf> Ms Schwartz-Jones also highlighted some "signature services," such as "walk through" permits, e-services, next day inspections, design consultations, and case management.

Potholes and Roads

In February, the Federation held a program on "Perilous Potholes and Crumbling Curbs: Neighborhood Road Resurfacing." The speakers were Josh Faust, Public Outreach Manager for the Montgomery County Department of Transportation's Division (MCDOT) of Highway Services, and Lon Anderson, Managing Director of Public and Government Affairs for American Automobile Association (AAA) Mid-Atlantic. Mr. Faust reported that MCDOT is conducting its biannual survey of all county roads this spring. Using a Google Earth type van, equipment is run over all roads to collect data on 19 factors defining road condition and a repair prioritization score. MCDOT spends its funds equally throughout the five County districts. There are seven regional depots that are responsible for small service areas. They fill potholes within 48 hours of receiving a call from "311" or through mc311.org. After repaving a road, there is a three year moratorium on utility work. A question about permanent patching versus repaving revealed a preference for permanent patching on low traffic roads because it is quick and cheap. MCDOT wants to plant trees along roads because their cooling properties extend the life of pavement. Mr. Faust encouraged people to call or write with questions, 240-777-7642 or josh.faust@montgomerycountymd.gov

Lon Anderson from AAA congratulated civic organizations for opposing a recent proposal to

create an Independent Transit Authority funded by property taxes beyond current charter limits. He also lauded the 83% of voters who approved a referendum this past November for a State constitutional amendment to protect the Maryland Transportation Trust Fund from being "raided" for other purposes. Mr. Anderson detailed the high cost of potholes to motorists and insurance companies. Only 31% of people whose cars were damaged by potholes file claims. Road congestion in Maryland costs each motorist an average of \$422 per year. That said, Montgomery County does a good job filling potholes, with County Executive Leggett using additional funds when necessary to fix roads. AAA supports continuing to index the gas tax to inflation. Mr. Anderson pointed out that 93% of all person miles are traveled on roads, and Maryland's major transit carriers are buses. Maintenance of roads has declined, which also affects bus operations. Mr. Anderson questioned the absence of road projects on the County's recently released transportation priority list sent to the State.

County Operating Budget 2015

At the next PRA meeting, an overview of the Montgomery County Operating Budget, which will be presented at the March MCCF meeting, will be reviewed.

Kensington Parkwood Addition

By Bailey Condrey

The final meetings have been held with the KP PTA and the Citizens Advisory Committee to obtain feedback on plans for the school's addition. Substantial improvements were made to the overall design at these meetings.

One detail that Montgomery County Public Schools did not address was the addition of solar panels to ~5,000 square-feet of roof space that will lie atop the addition. This roof space can be designed with a nearly perfect angle to the sun as it faces almost due south and has an unimpeded azimuth through all four seasons. According to MCPS, this school spends more than \$120,000 annually on electricity. Solar panels on the addition's roof would help to reduce this school's carbon footprint. However, MCPS did not ask the architect to design for this feature.

The PRA will discuss whether to formally request installation of solar panels on the addition and information relating to the process whereby the school system makes that determination.

PRA Treasurer's Report

By Gerald Sharp, PRA Treasurer

In 2014, the PRA received \$3150 in dues payments from 315 households, about 30% of the total 1000 houses in Parkwood. This is a high percentage for associations such as ours and reflects the good support the PRA receives from Parkwood residents, as well as our modest \$10 annual membership fee which has not increased for many years.

About half of people paying annual dues also contribute to our beautification fund. The PRA received \$2751 in donations last year. Most people contribute \$10 to the beautification fund, but some residents donate \$100 or more.

Total receipts for the PRA were higher in 2014 than in any other year since 2000, except for 2012 when receipts totaled an additional \$12.

Our expenses were also higher in 2014 than in past years. We spent more for administration in 2014 primarily because we gave out shopping bags to new residents in our welcome packages. The PRA also paid for stamps to go on some return envelopes for dues as part of our experiment to see if paid postage increases dues payments. Newsletter costs were slightly lower than in past years because all issues were hand delivered by volunteers, which saved mailing costs. Beautification costs were higher than in the past, except for 2011 when we bought entrance signs and installed a bench at the Wildwood garden. The higher beautification cost in 2014 is mainly due to our paying for labor to maintain the Parkwood gardens after the work overwhelmed our very limited number of volunteers.

The total in the PRA bank accounts at Wells Fargo and Capital One or in our Paypal account was \$15,595.84 at the end of the year, the highest balance in PRA history. Receipts have exceeded expenses for all but 4 of the years since 2000, and in 2014, we received \$786.50 more in receipts than we paid in expenses. Thus, once again, PRA finances remain strong.

2014 Receipts

	Membership Dues	Beautification Donations	Total
Jan-Dec checks/cash dues	2910.00	2651.00	5561.00
Jan-Dec Paypal dues	240.00	100.00	340.00
Sub-total	3150.00	2751.00	5901.00
<i>Interest: Well Fargo Checking & Savings (0.04%)</i>			0.12
<i>Interest: ING Direct Savings Account (0.4%)</i>			41.87
Total Income 2014			\$5942.99

2014 Expenses

Category	Approved budget amounts	Actual expenses
Administration		
<i>Membership expenses:</i> (envelopes-\$32.18; address labels-\$55.49; postage-\$158.76, paper-\$12.18; food-\$16.14)		274.75
Welcome packet for new residents, bags		329.78
Bank fees (\$27.00), Paypal fees (\$17.66), binder for checks (\$19.99)		64.65
Montgomery County Civic Federation (MCCF) annual fee		50.00
Website domain fee		34.95
Misc. admin expenses		15.99
Admin, other Total	\$1300.00	\$770.11
Newsletter		
March (\$445.2); Spring (\$232.59); and Nov. (\$201.40); envelopes (\$17.80)	\$1600.00	\$896.99
Beautification		
Mulch, fertilizer, supplies		690.56
Labor		2122.50
Plants		249.33
"Dogi Pot" bags		337.00
Beautification Total	\$3120.00	\$3399.39
Meeting Room Rental		
March (\$36); May (\$36); and Dec. (\$36)	150.00	108.00
Totals	\$6170.00	\$5174.49

PRA Membership

To pay your 2015 dues, please fill out the form and mail or drop off to the address specified, or bring your form and dues to the meeting on March 24th. Many thanks for supporting PRA!

2015 Parkwood Residents Association Membership/Renewal

Name: _____

Phone: _____

Address: _____

City: _____ Zip: _____

Email: _____

Enclosed: _____ \$10 annual dues (Checks payable to PRA) \$_____ donation to Beautification Committee (optional)

Send to: Kira Lueders, 10112 Wildwood Rd, Kensington, MD 20895-4113