

CPCA November 2009 Meetings

Report on Break-out Groups

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Overview: Discussion in the four breakout groups on Saturday, November 7 and in the three breakout groups on Tuesday, November 10 covered two major areas: 1) Issues related to the Cleveland Park Community for which we were specifically seeking input from members; and 2) Issues related to CPCA itself which were important to a number of members to raise. Both are reported below.

Caveat: It was not possible to capture all the richness of the discussion but based on the notes from the seven facilitators, this report is able to cover a great deal of what was said by members. Special thanks to Leila Afzal, Kris Davis, David Isaacs, Rufus King, Caroline Mehta, Mark Rosenman and Barbara Stevens for their facilitation and to all the members who participated.

Survey: For our many members who were unable to attend either of these meetings, the member survey being developed will provide you with a chance to be heard. The areas of concern raised at these meetings will help guide the issues to be covered in the membership survey.

Part I: Issues related to Cleveland Park Community

Connecticut Avenue garnered the most comments related to a specific area of concern, with some concerns such as parking, walkability and traffic being raised both in relation to Cleveland Park and more generally. There were also many comments relating to Cleveland Park in general. This report will start with the general and move to the specific.

Cleveland Park as a Community

“Vibrant corridors with a sleepy green core” seems to best characterize what members expressed. Other comments that reinforce this include “preservation of the neighborhood as an urban oasis,” “balance improvement with preservation,” “maintain the unique character of the neighborhood,” “preserving neighborhood quiet,” “enhancing the village in the city.” Cleveland Park’s diversity of residents, institutions, commercial and residential balance, urban oasis was seen as unique.

There was also a plea for “peace and civility” and a need voiced for “rebuilding community civility” and creating a “sense of community.”

The need to increase neighborhood loyalty and support to local businesses and merchants was mentioned in general. The specific idea of reviving Cleveland Park Day to bring the community together was mentioned twice. At the same time there was concern expressed that Cleveland Park “needs to be less insular.”

There were specific concerns relating to all of Cleveland Park brought up in the discussion. These included the need for

- historic district sign uniformity
- low and moderate housing
- underground utilities (e.g., electric, cable, phone lines)
- safe drinking water, DCWASA
- walkability
- loss of public and quasi-public space, the latter being part of what is lost when the neighborhood loses small coffee shops, places to interact.

There were also suggestions about CPCA's role.

- "CPCA should look forward (Historical Society looks back) in order to reflect and adapt to the citizens and young people of today, reflect their vibrancy, be open to change and innovation."
- "CPCA should identify public spaces or buildings that may need renewal or renovation in the future (such as the Cleveland Park Library) so when an opportunity arises we are ready to lead or guide, not just respond."
- CPCA should advocate that the "Zoning Commission allow parties to participate without selecting 'for' or 'against'."

Development and growth

There was much interest in the balancing of development with retaining other values important to the community. For instance, the need to respect and balance historic nature of community and future growth was mentioned. This was also stated somewhat differently as the balance between development and the preservation of the neighborhood's character, the qualities that make Cleveland Park special. Stated a little more strongly: There is no "need" for development in the same way that other communities need to encourage development; rather, we need to manage it carefully to preserve the character of the community. There was also a comment suggesting development should be off the table: People live in CP because they value the way it is; the residents of the community are not seeking to transform the way it is.

To frame the discussion, it was brought out that we need a common base of knowledge about development and growth issues, that we need to use common language. Also that development should reflect the needs of the immediate community and not ignore the environmental realities such as rocks and water.

Finally, what should CPCA's role be? How does CPCA balance the different attitudes toward development and different interests? Should Cleveland Park grow and change – if so how? What is the "smart" way to grow? How can CPCA facilitate these discussions and conclusions?

Connecticut Avenue renewal

Vision: Some comments related to the overall vision for Connecticut Ave. as being vibrant and business friendly with mixed use retail and a well-designed streetscape including beautification of the service road. This needs to be realized pro-actively. One member wondered: Could the "Uptown be more like the Avalon, with repertory of films and more advertising?" Another raised the contribution of having a Business Improvement District --BID or BID-lite. A third laid out the need for forward-looking plans to provide for public space and public buildings such as the library. And a fourth pointed out that development on the major avenues (including Wisconsin Ave.) needs to be managed in a way that preserves the character of the nearby neighborhoods.

Businesses: Other comments had to do with the relationship between Connecticut Ave businesses, CPCA and the larger community. There was a request that there be more coordination between CPCA and the businesses and that CPCA better inform resident about what's going on. (CPCA has set up a Connecticut Ave Focus Committee which will be doing this.)

Related to this, some members wanted the businesses to be more focused on the local community and CP residents to patronize local stores which would also help alleviate parking problems. Incentives such as store discounts/rebates for CP residents were suggested. But it was recognized that local businesses also have to attract customers from outside Cleveland Park, such as public transit riders and a specific suggestion was made to use advertising to entice Metro riders to exit at CP to run errands.

There was general concern that restaurants are becoming more upscale and expensive and by contrast businesses and restaurants in particular are not family friendly. (Could also apply to Wisconsin Avenue.)

The need to look at Connecticut Ave. businesses in relation to those planned for Wisconsin Avenue was expressed.

Empty storefronts: Underlying the discussion was the concern about empty storefronts with a call for CPCA to investigate the causes including whether high commercial rents are a contributing factor.

Overlay: The Overlay came up more than once with the critical need for education of CPCA members and residents on the history and purpose of the overlay. There was confusion about the administration of the overlay, particularly the 25% limit for restaurants.

Transportation. The need for more public transportation options was expressed in a number of ways. The possibility of jitney service between shopping centers on Connecticut and Wisconsin was expressed three times. There was also the idea of having a shared delivery service among stores. The Iona House transport service for the elderly was mentioned approvingly. Finally the need for trolleys and/or a Wisconsin/Connecticut Ave circular bus was expressed. There was also concern about adequate parking.

Pedestrian/traffic safety. In addition to general concerns (see below), several members emphasized the importance of walkability with better sidewalks on the east side of Connecticut Ave and fixing the broken bricks between the service road and Connecticut Ave. There was also concern about public safety in relation to the service road.

Library. The importance of preserving and modernizing the library was brought out along with a recommendation to have a community liaison.

Health. The rat problem has got to get solved.

Wisconsin Avenue/Giant

This was mentioned three times with a specific concern about height restrictions and more generally about development. There were also several comments which related to both Connecticut and Wisconsin Avenues, e.g. jitney service.

Parking in Cleveland Park

In addition to general concerns raised about the lack of parking, there were some specific concerns and ideas. Primary focus was on Connecticut Ave. These included:

- Encourage more car sharing (e.g., Zipcar and Flexcar);
- Create parking subzones which will help with parking for commercial establishments;
- Capture street parking in areas currently zoned “no parking” at all times such as on Macomb north and south of Connecticut. Could parking be allowed in some of those areas during non-rush hours?
- Make better use of the Park & Shop lot so that it is fully utilized, e.g. by providing parking coupons;
- Build a parking garage, possibly, at Park & Shop or behind P.O. It was recognized that a developer or the city would have to undertake this.

It was suggested that CPCA explore options and economics of various options and study applicable city policies. Also that we see how CPCA could coordinate with the city to improve parking, e.g., by changing zoning.

Traffic

There were both general and specific concerns raised about traffic flow, safety and speed which would all fall under the comment “There needs to be an overall plan to improve traffic (and parking) on CP streets.” Specific concerns mentioned were

- Police enforcement of speeding and cell phone use;
- Control of traffic lights;
- Traffic flow south of Cathedral on residential streets and on 34th Street from Newark to Woodley where lights seem to be timed so that you have to stop at each one;
- Connecticut Ave traffic safety;
- Need to look at placement of multiple lanes;
- Avoid ad hoc solutions such as speed bumps.

Pedestrian Safety

Closely related to traffic issue, pedestrian safety was raised in relation to dangerous intersections such as Ordway and Tilden corners with Connecticut Ave. Other comments were more general but viewed this as a key issue.

The importance of walkability was stressed in general as both a concern and a positive aspect of Cleveland Park. Keeping sidewalks in good condition, especially brick sidewalks, was stressed along with problem where some sidewalks are lacking. This issue also ties into Greening Cleveland Park (see below) as pedestrian safety can decrease car trips.

Public Safety

This was seen as both a positive aspect of Cleveland Park but more often as a problem needing attention. The need for a crime neighborhood watch came up twice, along with more community involvement by 2nd District police, more interface between community and police, and more foot patrols.

Fire Safety

Fire hydrants were the main concern, including concern over water pressure and general adequacy of the fire hydrants. The need to interface with DC WASA was stressed.

Greening Cleveland Park

There is interest in having Cleveland Park become the leading community in this area, with energy efficiency receiving the most attention. Specific comments on energy efficiency included:

- installing LED street lights;
- exploring historic district implications for weatherization and solar installations;
- not just focusing on houses, but also on condos and apartment buildings, as well as commercial buildings and shops

Recycling was brought up several times with particular concern about recycling by apartment buildings.

Members also raised the connection to transportation and walkability issues as part of the greening agenda.

Other specific ideas included:

- sponsoring Clean Up Days, using city services, as well as community volunteers;
- taking a census of trees.

Schools/churches

CPCA's relationship to our local public and private schools was a topic in several breakout groups, with special concern about public schools in general and John Eaton in particular. Most concerns reflected in the notes were fairly general, e.g., How do schools fit into the neighborhood and how does the neighborhood embrace schools? Several more specific comments were made.

- What are the development issues that schools present to the community?
- How does CPCA encourage families to get to know and use the local schools?

Regarding churches, the issue raised was the relationship with the National Cathedral, particularly the administration, monitoring, review of the CPCA use agreement with the Cathedral.

Parks and playgrounds

The only mention in this category was concern about Macomb playground.

Elderly/aging in place

The question was asked: How does CPCA reach out to and communicate with the elderly? Then it was brought out that CPCA held a meeting on “aging in place” in the last year – and the response was large and enthusiastic. The road block to proceeding was lack of a leader to move it all forward. There was interest in reopening the conversation, perhaps with another meeting.

Another member observed: Organizations that support aging in place are successful in other areas – the Palisades and Capitol Hill. Can CPCA find a way to adopt these models? Another suggested CPCA pay an organizer to start a group on aging in place, but then added that it might not be a priority over dealing with Connecticut Ave.

Part II: Issues related to CPCA

Mission

Generally, some felt we need to begin with CPCA’s mission statement while others asked “what is our purpose?” “what is our mission and how do we do business?” “what actions should we take?” Is CPCA’s mission educational, advocacy, or planning etc? One member felt that CPCA should educate first and advocate second, but both are needed. [CPCA’s mission is set out in the bylaws on the website but wasn’t available for the breakout discussion.]

There was also interest in having a way to measure CPCA’s impact.

The one specific comment captured regarding CPCA’s mission related to CPCA’s unique role for political influence to protect the community’s interests.

Question was raised as to whether there is a place for “one issue” members and whether CPCA might create procedures for non CPCA members and other citizens groups to weigh in on a particular issue that is of importance to them.

Governance

There were general concerns that CPCA should be modernized and that CPCA’s internal process, policies and procedures are key to getting things done in the community. It is important to review roles and responsibilities of CPCA officers. Also to examine how decisions are made with the need for inclusion and participation by members through meetings, the web and the listserv.

CPCA’s relationship with other organizations also needs to be defined – DC Federation of Civic Associations, other Citizens Associations, with schools, churches, other institutions and businesses.

Membership

Issues raised here relate both to governance and communications.

- How does CPCA reach out to young families and engage them in our work?
- We must bring people in, engage them, and ask them for their ideas, contributions, and energies.
- There must be consideration of varied demographics of the community – homeowners and renters, old and young, etc.

Communications

A great deal of discussion fell under this topic which was seen as a broad issue that touches upon all aspects of CPCA, including effective governance. A driving principle should be that communications serve the needs of the membership. It is key to effectiveness of CPCA. How CPCA will communicate with its members must be understood up front.

CPCA needs to enable communications and flow of information in many ways: from the CPCA to its members, from members to the CPCA, and between members.

CPCA should also expand communication among residents/neighbors and between organizations and neighbors through community events, including social events and fundraisers. There also needs to be communication and coordination with other civic organizations outside the boundaries of CPCA – McLean Gardens, Mt. Pleasant, Woodley Park.

The need for civil communications was stressed – the need to promote peace and civility; the fact that electronic communications are often less civil than face-to-face communications.

Frustration was expressed that many members feel their voices are not heard. [Keep reading. You are being heard!]

Diverse modes of communication are needed to provide various opportunities and mechanisms for participation and to engage the greatest number of people. These include formal meetings, email, list serve, educational forums, study circles (see below) and other group discussions, one-on-one discussions, special events that bring people together such as Cleveland Park Day. It was pointed out the...

- value of in-person meetings for exchange of ideas
- value of the listserv for discussion of issues

Use of local papers, such as the Northwest Current, to bring up and share issues and to provide information on meetings was suggested.

Several people said CPCA members should be able to designate how they prefer to receive communications—e-mail or USPS.

There was also a request that CPCA publish a membership directory which would be available to all members.

Meetings

There was interest in figuring out the best and worst times for meetings and considering alternatives to meetings. It was also requested that committees post their meeting agenda, minutes, decisions on the website.

Study Circles: There was much interest Tuesday evening in exploring the use of Study Circles which could be used when an issue is identified as critical and there are different points of view. It was pointed out that this is a way for small groups of members/neighbors to examine issue in detail and look for solutions that will work for everyone. For study circles to work effectively, participants need to have relevant background information.

Voting

Various options were discussed including on-line voting, extended hours for voting, absentee ballots, and proxy voting to address the problem of members having a hard time getting to meetings.

Surveys

Keeping in mind the complicated nature of surveys, there is need for a survey to understand what different views are and to gauge members' positions.

Boundaries

At least one participant was interested in reviewing CPCA's boundaries.

Committees

There was a request to form a "Traffic and Transit Committee."