

Minutes of the February 2004 Meeting of the Cleveland Park Citizens Association

Meeting Date: Tuesday, February 3, 2004
Location: Cleveland Park Library
3310 Connecticut Avenue, NW; Washington, DC

Cleveland Park Citizens Association ("CPCA") President George Idelson called the meeting to order at approximately 6:40 pm.

I. Gilpin C. Walker

Gilpin C. Walker, a loyal member of CPCA and CPCA's current delegate to the DC Federation of Civic Associations, passed away recently. Gregory New reminded the members of Ms. Walker's contribution to the association and another CPCA member shared some personal memories. Ms. Walker was not only a loyal fixture at CPCA meetings but also a neighborhood fixture of Cleveland Park as well outside her Connecticut Avenue apartment building.

II. Wisconsin Avenue Corridor Development

Cathy Wiss, a commissioner of ANC 3F and former chair, discussed the Office of Planning's proposed Upper Wisconsin Avenue Corridor Neighborhood Plan which focusses on the Tenleytown area of Wisconsin Avenue. In response to a neighborhood request for some modest retail upgrading, The Office of Planning recently released for public review the draft *Upper Wisconsin Avenue Corridor Study - Strategic Framework Plan*. The purpose of the plan is to provide a strategy and overall development plan for the Tenleytown/Friendship Heights neighborhood, encouraging a better mix of retail uses, creating a sense of place, and preserving the existing assets along Wisconsin Avenue. To that end, the Framework Plan policy recommendations are organized under four primary themes: managing growth, protecting neighborhoods, encouraging a greater retail mix, and creating an attractive streetscape and improved public realm.

The plan covers a broad area of Wisconsin Avenue extending to the Van Ness Street intersection to the south, so it borders on Cleveland Park. Ms. Wiss stated that the plan went far beyond what the neighbors envisioned. She said it would double the suggested permitted heights of most Wisconsin Avenue buildings, to 130 feet, in the Tenleytown neighborhood. Wisconsin Avenue car traffic, she noted is already at gridlock, the subway is congested, and Tenleytown's neighborhood elementary school, Janney School, has little room for growth. She criticized the aesthetics of the plan (creating a Wisconsin Avenue canyon) and for encouraging an influx of new residents to add to an already congested neighborhood.

Cindy Petkac from the D.C. Office of Planning, defended the Plan. She argued that it made economic sense to build around Metro stations, which would facilitate traffic flow and, for many, minimize the need for owning or using a car. Ms. Petkac stated that the fear of a "canyon" along Wisconsin Avenue was overstated, for the zoning board would still be able to consider all proposed developments. Ms. Petkac also announced that the Office of Planning would conduct another public hearing on the plan on February 17, 2004 to solicit additional public input.

Barbara Beeler asked how much more transit-oriented growth and new residents around metro stations we can really afford, with congestion on metro trains already at a critical amount.

Peter Espenschied stated that the Tenleytown neighborhood does not need more density and growth at all. Mr. Espenschied then moved a CPCA resolution, read by Nancy MacWood, that opposes the draft plan. The motion was seconded and a discussion followed. Eleanor Oliver spoke about the proposed plan ruining beautiful vistas from Northwest DC to Northern Virginia. Others argued that the proposed plan had been “rushed” without sufficient public input. Counter arguments held that transit-oriented growth would yield benefits to residency by attracting retail and restaurants and noted that the reason Tenleytown had gained the nickname “Mattresstown,” reflected its lack of appeal to other more stable and diverse forms of retail. The question was then called, voted upon, and passed, with one vote against and three abstentions. (See Resolution below.)

II. Approval of January 10, 2004 Minutes

The next order of business was the approval of the minutes of the January 10, 2004 meeting of the CPCA. A motion to approve was moved, seconded and unanimously approved.

III. Tregaron

Next, Bonnie LePard, president of the Friends of Tregaron Foundation, who made presentations at CPCA’s December and January meetings, provided further details of a new home development proposal put forward by the Tregaron Limited Partnership (TLP), owners of the fourteen undeveloped acres of the Tregaron property. The Tregaron estate is an historic landmarked twenty-acre wooded parcel between Macomb Street and Klinge Road, west of Connecticut Avenue. The Washington International School (WIS) owns six acres of the Tregaron estate and leases use of the remaining fourteen acres. TLP would now like to sell the property, and developers have proposed nestling 17 custom homes on the land, with underground garages and a new road. It is estimated that some 100 trees would be lost in the process. Also lost, would be the integrity of the historic site and some of its original wooded vistas, according the LePard. The issue is complicated by the fact that the Washington International School also has plans for additional buildings on its portion of the Tregaron estate. The Historic Preservation Review Board has scheduled a February 26 meeting to consider the TLP proposal. WIS had not yet applied.

Ms. LePard spoke about the ongoing efforts to gain a buyer for the disputed property, one that would be committed to its conservation. She hoped the neighbors would finally seen an end to the ongoing neighborhood vs. the developers scenario.

Pat Armbruster spoke about the beauty of the Tregaron grounds designed by landscape designer Ellen Biddle Shipman and their historic nature.

A resolution (see below) passed by the CPCA Executive Committee at its previous meeting, was then presented to the membership for ratification. It passed unanimously.

IV. New Business

The group discussed possible topics for the March general meeting, including lead issues relating to DC water and a possible presentation by the National Zoo.

A motion to take up the issue of how to encourage residents to clear their sidewalks following snowstorms was discussed briefly and then referred to the Executive Committee for consideration.

V. Adjournment

The meeting adjourned at approximately 8:15 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,
Donald A. Fishman and George Idelson

040203R1 Resolution Opposing Wisconsin Avenue Corridor Plan

WHEREAS the D.C. Office of Planning (OP) has issued a proposed “Upper Wisconsin Avenue Corridor Study Strategic Framework Plan” (draft plan) which, if approved by the D.C. Council, would become an addendum to the Comprehensive Plan Law, with which all zoning is required to be consistent; and

WHEREAS one of the core recommendations of the draft plan calls for substantial relaxation of current restrictions on maximum building heights, revising the limits sets in the Comprehensive Plan for this area; and

WHEREAS inserting these changes into the Comprehensive Plan would make it difficult for neighborhood residents, ANCs, or community organizations to effectively protest the height and (by extension) the density of Planned Unit Development (PUD) projects in the corridor; and

WHEREAS the draft plan recommends up to 1800 new residential units along the corridor, which would more than double the existing residential units; and

WHEREAS OP’s study did not incorporate any evaluation of public transportation limits or expansion possibilities, public school, emergency, police, fire, or public service capacities to absorb the increased population resulting from a doubling of housing units; and

WHEREAS the draft plan recommends a 33% increase in office space on the corridor based on market projections of interest, but does not explain how or whether the corridor can handle the resulting increased transportation and service needs, nor how such development would impact the surrounding stable neighborhoods; and

WHEREAS despite the fact that residents along the corridor have traffic concerns that have been repeatedly raised with DDOT, the plan makes recommendations that would adversely impact traffic on Wisconsin Avenue, the surrounding streets, and potentially Connecticut Avenue with spillover traffic, including all of the neighborhoods south of the development area; therefore be it

RESOLVED that the Cleveland Park Citizens Association opposes the draft plan, because of lack of any investigation into the current infrastructure limits and the resulting impacts of the development on the infrastructure of the corridor, and the strong adverse impact on the entire corridor and the neighborhoods surrounding the corridor; and be it further

RESOLVED that CPCA strongly urges the Office of Planning to withdraw this draft plan and abandon its focus on how to redevelop the area, and instead to plan improvements for the corridor that will not be focused on increasing its residential or commercial density, but will enhance the quality of life for the residents of one of the District’s most prosperous and stable areas; and be it further

RESOLVED that CPCA strongly urges our Councilmembers to oppose this draft plan.

040203R2 Resolution Opposing Tregaron Partnership Development in Tregaron

The Cleveland Park Citizens Association firmly opposes the Tregaron Partnership Limited's housing development proposed for the historic Tregaron Estates.

The historic Tregaron Estates, aka "The Causeway," has been a landmark in the District of Columbia since 1978 (See Landmark Case No. 77-8), before the parcel was purchased by the Tregaron Partnership Limited (14 acres) and the Washington International School (6 acres) in 1979. The landscape remains unified as a whole.

The Tregaron Estates was designed by renowned American architect Charles Platt and renowned landscape architect, Ellen Biddle Shipman. Their collaboration resulted in a historic landscape that remains intact with its natural woodlands, grassy green spaces, stonework, paths, bridges and historical mansion. Platt's original design concept is that the buildings and grounds be read as a single unit.

The Tregaron Estates is an important historic landmark, one of great significance in historic Cleveland Park, the District of Columbia and nationally.

The planned-unit development proposed by Tregaron Partnership Limited does not meet the legal criteria of the preservation law as it does not enhance the historic landmark. The housing development is inconsistent with the preservation law as it will fill most of the planned open green meadows with roads, garages and houses. These same roads and houses will surround the historic mansion, thereby damaging, not enhancing its historical integrity. In addition, the proposed residential project would require the cutting of many trees, destroying the natural woodland setting.

THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED that the Cleveland Park Citizens Association strongly recommends that the HPRB deny the Tregaron Partnership's application.