

## Minutes of the May 2005 Meeting of the Cleveland Park Citizens Association

**Meeting Date:** Saturday, May 7, 2005  
**Location:** Cleveland Park Library  
3310 Connecticut Avenue, NW; Washington, DC

Cleveland Park Citizens Association (CPCA) President George Idelson called the meeting to order at 10:15 a.m. 38 persons signed the attendance sheet, of whom 25 indicated that they were members.

### I. Reading of proposed Bylaws Amendment

Gregory New read a proposed Bylaws amendment to delete Section IX Order of Business, and to replace it with the following:

Section IX Rules of Order. Roberts Rules of Order Newly revised shall govern in all proceedings of the Association in the absence of any other rule adopted by the Association. He explained that the packet of amendments adopted last month had inadvertently left the provision for reading the minutes in Section IX that contradicted the new provision in Section VI Paragraph 4 for approval of the minutes without a formal reading. The Executive Committee had reviewed the other items in the Order of Business, and recommended that Section IX be deleted as unnecessary.

### II. Slate of the Nominating Committee

Isabel Furlong reported that the Nominating Committee recommender the following slate:

President	George Idelson
First Vice President	Peter Espenschied
Second Vice President	Barbara Beelar
Recording Secretary	Edward Cowan
Assistant Recording Secretary	Gregory New
Corresponding Secretary	Jean van der Tak
Treasurer:	Jill McCannon
Assistant Treasurer	Ana Aldama

### III. Coalition to Save the Mall

Mr. Idelson, who also serves as vice chairman of the Coalition to Save Our Mall, called attention to its newly published brochure/map, "The National Mall; Stage for Democracy." The Third Century Mall Initiative, a project of the coalition seeks to expand the area officially designated as the National Mall to provide space for future memorials and museums. Brochures were circulated to all present.

### IV. What's Happening to Our Trees?

Peter Espenschied introduced the program by displaying aerial photographs showing the dramatic loss of tree canopy in the District of Columbia at 12-year intervals, from 1973 through 1985 to 1997. He then introduced the panelists and respondents.

**Jim Urban**, landscape architect and arborculturist, said he focuses on one tree at a time, to make sure that all he plants are successful. 80 to 90% of all tree problems are soil problems, he says. Problems appearing in the canopy are usually secondary to soil deficiencies that leave trees vulnerable to stress.

In summary: 1) If you have limited resources, plant the easy places first, that is, those with large soil volumes. 2) How can I find easy places in commercial areas when DC zoning standards for pavement cover leave the tree space so woefully inadequate? A tree is like a wine glass on a

dinner plate, the plate symbolizing the extent of the space needed for a healthy development of the roots. 3) The closer the tree is to people, the more beneficial it is to people. This principle is the flip side of the first one, since places nearer to people are usually harder to plant.

**Barbara Deutsch**, deputy director of Casey Trees, noted that the District has lost 200,000 people during the decades that it has sustained such a dramatic loss of trees. The loss of trees, has resulted in a 24% increase in storm water overflow, violating clean water standards. Casey Trees supports research looking to retrofit the city in green by identifying all the possible places we can plant trees. Casey is developing a model of benefits, and tree-cover goals. It finds that there are 132,000 tree spaces in the city, 23,000 of them empty. After factoring in an inventory of public school grounds, the ravages of Dutch elm disease, etc, Casey hopes to plant 50,000 trees in the city, four or five thousand per year.

**John Poole**, tree chairman of the Cleveland Park Historical Society, observed that the society has become the de facto volunteer tree advocates of Cleveland Park. In the 90s it started buying trees to plant block by block, building up a sense of proprietorship to get people interested in watering them. Unfortunately, nobody in the public tree-planting system is responsible for watering the trees it plants. He called for:

1. Supervision of tree-planting contractors to overcome the early death of newly planted trees.
2. Quicker removal of elms dying of Dutch elm disease to prevent the spread of the disease. The city still has 8500 elms to save.
3. Getting the city to give out information on where it is planning to plant. He cited a case where the historical society had spent a lot of time planning a tree planting on Lowell Street, and the city came in to plant on our spots just before we planted.

Bill Rice of the DC Department of Transportation (DOT) responded to the last point by giving Mr. Poole his card, and assuring Mr. Poole that he (Mr. Rice) would make every effort to establish channels whereby citizens could find out where the department was planning to plant.

**Phil Mendelson**, At-Large Councilmember, was introduced as the principal author of the Tree Preservation Act. Mr. Mendelson observed that trees have become a passionate neighborhood issue. His plan to list landmark trees and to require payment for cutting down large trees was watered down. He had not been considering new legislation, but observed his work with the Council of Governments found that the loss of tree cover correlated with the heat island effect.

He noted that trees were often removed or mutilated to protect overhead electric and telephone lines from storm damage. An alternative, burying the lines, involves enormous costs.

Mr Espenschied introduced a panel of four citizen activists to respond to the panel: Sally Boasberg, Nancy Macdonald, Bruce Beckner, and Sheila Hogan.

**Sally Boasberg** observed that the city does not support systemically burying utility lines. However, when three or four streets are dug up, it might make sense to bury the lines. She noted that the Public Service Commission regulates Pepco, which does the tree pruning to protect the lines. She also noted that the Urban Forestry Administration is in the Department of Transportation, an arrangement that seems to put trees second to streets and sidewalks.

Jean van der Tak asked what we could do when trees planted in public space were allowed to die. Mr. Urban responded by stressing the importance of watering them the first two years. Planting a big tree costs about as much as putting in a street light. We must, therefore, bring our tree budget up to the level of our street light budget. He also stressed the importance of diversity. To achieve diversity we need to introduce new species on our streets, and that requires improving the soil. To ensure survival.

Ms. Deutsch added that we must also instill the idea that trees are not just decorations. They solve air and water pollution problems, reduce asthma rates, and lessen storm water overflow. Planting trees could cut the two billion dollars budgeted for storm water tunnels. Cutting down trees on construction sites should be noted in advance on construction plans and should require approval.

**Nancy MacWood**, ANC3C Chairman, cited a development the Advisory Neighborhood Commission is reviewing involving removal of 177 trees, 30 of which are landmarked. The plan would replace with different species planted elsewhere. She asked about the tradeoffs. Mr. Urban said that much is known about replacing large trees with small trees. He advocates a species mix favoring large trees. The benefits are ten to one in favor of large trees like oaks over small trees like dogwood. But it takes fifty small oaks to make up for the loss on one huge oak. When we replace one good big tree, we must replace it with the same kind of tree. Duff McCully of the Department of Parks and Recreation (DPR) observed that we plant and plant, but are not taking care of the trees we have.

Mr. Mendelson pointed out that trees will be cut down. The question is, What do we mandate for their replacement? What about several smaller trees that will eventually provide more benefits than the one old tree? We must ask, do the old trees really need to be cut down? Also, we should watch how they are replaced by a different kind of tree. We must not let the developer get off cheaply. He cited failures to maintain beautiful landscape plans. We must insist on a maintenance plan with each development. Mr. Poole commented that Cleveland Park focuses on preservation; and tries to keep the big old trees we have.

Ms. Boasberg said we lack government resources to review tree plans. The Zoning Commission and the Office of Planning both need staff to review plans. The city has 50,000 nonstreet trees, but currently only \$45,000 for their maintenance. From the audience, Mr. McCully commented that we have too many trees under too many jurisdictions. The enforcement issue comes down to stressing that trees are an important part of the green infrastructure.

**Sheila Hogan**, Commissioner ANC3C07, said the DC Council should require a cost-benefit analysis for trees that must be cut down, and require effective replacement. The Office of Planning needs to be trained and motivated to consider trees, and it should start with its present staff rather than bringing in tree people. She noted the effective tree planting in Bethesda developments. Mr. Urban said that these trees were some of the first five- to eight-dollar trees he had planted. Their cost came to a tiny fraction of the total cost of the project, which was a for special exception building where the developer got double density by jumping through a few Parks and Planning hoops. The developer was happy to pay the extra money. It was a prototype for his system, one that was used by the National Geographic Society Building in the District. The system requires putting in good soil, and providing larger tree openings.

Mr. Urban added that in residential areas where property owners are committed, trees can be saved during construction. Flexibility is also needed, however. In one case in Annapolis, the neighbors were happy to accept a house built on the property line without the required setback in order to preserve the wooded atmosphere.

Mr. Espenschied asked if it would be useful to have our tree department moved into the proposed Department of the Environment? Ms. Hogan thought it might make a big difference in enforcement.

Mr. McCully noted that the Department of Parks and Recreation has one third of the city trees under its care but only eight arborists.

Neighbor, Dick Randall lamented the ill effects of invasive vines and cuts them down when they endanger trees. Mr. McCully called for a ban on certain vines, particularly English ivy.

**Bruce Beckner**, Commissioner ANC3C06, said tree preservation regulations are observed only in the breach. He cited the retaining wall that DDOT was building on Ordway Street behind the National Child Research Center. DOT started cutting the trees that were in the way of the wall it had no permit to build. The historical preservation movement focuses too much on buildings, and ignores the trees, he said. Mr. Mendelson said the city grants permission to cut down trees too easily. There is no will to save trees in the executive department.

Isabel Furlong raised once more the issue of placing utility lines underground. She noted that more lines are to be added on Wisconsin Avenue. Mr. Mendelson remarked that a task force found pros and cons on burying the lines. He cited the difficulty and expense incurred in the Georgetown project when underground wiring needed to be replaced. Mr. Espenschied noted that the load on utility poles is increasing. Mr. Urban added that pruning standards have changed in response to frequent power and communications outages.

#### **V. Adjournment**

Mr. Idelson adjourned the meeting at 12:10 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,  
Gregory R. New and George Idelson