

Minutes of the February 2006 Meeting of the Cleveland Park Citizens Association

Date: February 4, 2006

Location: Cleveland Park Public Library

George Idelson, president, called the meeting to order at 10:15 a.m.

Sabra Klein Maloney outlined plans for renovation of Macomb Park, which is adjacent to the John Eaton Elementary School (34th Street between Lowell and Macomb Streets). The meeting approved without objection a motion directing President Idelson to write a letter to the Department of Parks and Recreation expressing the association's support.

The remainder of the meeting was devoted to issues of public safety: the response of emergency medical and ambulance units to the assault on David Rosenbaum, emergency response issues generally, crime-prevention measures, and the desire of some EMT employees of the Fire Department to be spun off as a separate service.

Mark Segraves, a reporter for WTOP radio, and Council member Phil Mendelson (At-Large) summarized the city's response to the attack on Mr. Rosenbaum, who was walking on Gramercy Street NW, around the corner from his home on Harrison Street NW, at about 9 p.m. on January 6. (Mr. Rosenbaum died on January 8 of head injuries sustained when he was assaulted and his wallet was taken.) Two issues have emerged and are being investigated by the Fire Department, the District's Inspector General and possibly the Health Department. They are:

- Was Mr. Rosenbaum, found lying on the ground, adequately diagnosed by Emergency Medical Technicians, who arrived on a fire truck, and by hospital personnel when he arrived at the Howard University Hospital emergency room?
- Why did it take 23 minutes for an ambulance to arrive at Gramercy Street?

Mr. Segraves noted that it took the police eight hours to recognize that Mr. Rosenbaum had been the victim of a crime, and an additional four hours, or twelve from the time of the assault, to secure the crime scene and search for clues.

Mr. Segraves introduced a topic that was discussed at length later, whether the EMS personnel of the Fire Department should be spun off into a separate service. Several EMS responders at the meeting expressed support for a spin-off.

Council member Mendelson, who chairs the Judiciary Committee, said he had reviewed official reports and had read the autopsy report. He said that the blow to Mr. Rosenbaum's head was so severe and the injury was "so significant" that he could not have survived even if EMT personnel had recognized immediately that he had suffered a head injury. They did not recognize it, Mr. Mendelson said, because it was an "occult" or hidden injury, with no blood visible. Of six conditions typical of head trauma, such as

changes in pulse or eye pupils, only one was present, vomiting. In sum, there was “no indication of violence,” Mr. Mendelson said. Similarly at Howard’s ER, “patient assessment was adequate.”

Mr. Mendelson and other speakers discussed the “cross training” of Fire Department personnel as fire-fighters and as emergency medical technicians. The department also has Paramedics who have been trained in “advanced life saving” or ALS. The department has too few Paramedics, a reflection of a larger, nation-wide shortage. Acting battalion fire chief Rafael Sa’adah said that every Fire Department new hire is trained in EMS, and that only the most senior fire-fighters, with more than 20 years of service, have not had that training.

Anne Renshaw, First Vice President of the D.C. Federation of Citizens Associations, reported on her organization’s efforts to achieve an upgrade of fire-rescue services, including faster response times. She presented statistics on the size of the police and fire forces and said that the Tenley Fire House, which has been shut for a major makeover, is expected to reopen by April 1.

Ms. Renshaw said that the Fire Department’s goal has been to get EMT units to a victim within eight minutes, “from dispatch to arrival.” Chief Sa’adah said the department has achieved an 83 percent compliance rate.

Edward G. (Ned) Sherburne, chief of the Bethesda-Chevy Chase Rescue Squad, explained that it is a “bijurisdictional” service, staffed by volunteers, that gets no tax dollars from Montgomery County or the District. Its income comes from voluntary contributions. About 18 to 20 percent of the money comes from the District, and calls to transport District residents account for 15 percent of all dispatches. After “years of animosity,” relations with the DC Fire Department have improved since Adrian Thompson became chief and the two units have a memorandum of understanding.

Chief Sa’adah said that “response time now is better than it’s ever been” and that fire engines carry “automatic vehicle locators” that tell dispatchers exactly where in the District they are at any moment. He said the ill and injured sometimes cannot be transported to the nearest hospital when an Emergency Room is closed because it is overloaded.

Samantha Nolan, chairman of the Second District (Police) Citizens Advisory Council, stressed that many crimes can be prevented by simple precautionary measures, such as locking car and house doors. House numbers, she said, should be posted prominently near front doors, not on lawns, should be five inches high, and should be white-on-black or black-on-white. Brass numerals tarnish and their visibility diminishes. Ms. Nolan advised that house numbers also be posted in the rear so that a neighbor observing suspicious activity in a back alley can tell police the number of the nearest house.

Lieutenant Roger Roch said the Police Department has increased foot patrols since the start of 2006 in response to thefts from cars. “Leave absolutely nothing in a vehicle,” not

even coins or apparel from the dry cleaner, he cautioned. A rash of thefts from cars or burglaries in a neighborhood often are the work of one person, he said, and such perpetrators have been caught with the help of alert neighbors. Lt. Roch asked citizens to report the appearance of graffiti to the police because such markings on walls may signify gang activity; he advised citizens not to erase graffiti before the police inspect them. Giving a responding officer a photo of graffiti would be helpful.

Ann Loikow, a Cleveland Park activist, encouraged residents to report street lights that are out to 202-269-0855.

Several EMS technicians engaged Council member Mendelson and Chief Sa'adah in a discussion of the issue of splitting EMS personnel off into a separate service. Mr. Mendelson said he hoped to create a commission to examine this continuing issue. Mr. Segraves noted that it is intertwined with District politics and budgetary issues before the Fire Department.

The meeting was adjourned at 12:32 p.m.. The number of persons who signed in was 51.

Respectfully submitted,

Edward Cowan
Recording Secretary