

Minutes of the January meeting of the Cleveland Park Citizens Association

Meeting Date: January 7, 2006

Location: Cleveland Park Public Library

President George Idelson called the meeting to order at 10:05 a.m. and outlined the following agenda:

- Settlement of the long-running dispute over development of the Tregaron estate, on the south side of Macomb Street west of Connecticut Avenue.
- Measures to improve pedestrian safety on Connecticut Avenue between Macomb and Porter Streets.
- A proposal by Branch Banking and Trust to open a banking office in a now-vacant property on the east side of Connecticut Avenue between Macomb and Ordway Streets.
- A proposal to redevelop the Macklin property, an apartment house, on the north side of the intersection of Newark Street and Connecticut Avenue.

Tregaron

Bonnie LePard, president of Friends of Tregaron, a nonprofit organization that has opposed development on the wooded 21-acre property, summarized the compromise settlement reached by the property owner, Friends of Tregaron, the Washington International School and other interested or abutting parties. The agreement, when finally approved, should end a dispute that has roiled the neighborhood for 25 years.

Subject to approval by the Historic Preservation Review Board, which will review the compromise on January 26, eight houses will be built on the periphery of the estate. The present owner, Tregaron Limited Partnership, which represents Israeli interests, will donate 10 acres to a conservancy to be managed by Friends of Tregaron Foundation and contribute \$1 million to maintenance of the grounds. Friends of Tregaron will contribute \$600,000. The Washington International School, which sits on the estate, will over 10 years contribute three acres and \$1.3 million.

The Cleveland Park-Woodley Park ANC gave conditional approval to the settlement on December 19, which makes it likely that the Review Board will go along. The Israeli development group acquired the property in 1979 from the estate of the late former ambassador Joseph P. Davies and his wife, Marjorie Merriweather Post, heiress to the Post cereals fortune (later General Foods).

Pedestrian Safety

George Idelson observed that there have been traffic-and-pedestrian safety issues on Connecticut Avenue for a long time. The death late in 2005 of a pedestrian who was hit

by a car has refocused attention on this matter and possible ways to make crossing Connecticut Avenue safer. Before inviting discussion from the membership, Mr. Idelson listed several proposals that have circulated:

--Installation of a traffic signal “actuated by pedestrians” between Macomb and Ordway Street.

--Reprogramming the “convoluted set of lights” at Ordway and Connecticut, signals that regulate not only traffic on Ordway and on Connecticut but also vehicles exiting northward from the service lane on the east side of Connecticut and pedestrians crossing the service lane and the avenue. Several members agreed that the traffic signals at Ordway Street were confusing and needed to be reprogrammed.

Another suggestion, from the floor, was to discourage pedestrian jay-walking—crossing in the middle of the block—by asking the Metropolitan Police Department to have a police officer present from time to time to issue tickets to jay-walkers.

Members were encouraged to direct suggestions to ANC commissioner Bruce Beckner. Sharlene Kranz, an aide to Council member Kwame Brown (At-Large), said Mr. Brown was aware of the problem and that his office would be willing to help.

Branch Banking and Trust

Three representatives of the bank, which they said was the ninth largest in the United States, outlined the case for granting an exception to the 1989 zoning overlay to allow BB&T to do business in a property that had housed a McDonald’s restaurant. An exception is needed, they explained, because the overlay otherwise would restrict the bank to 20 percent of the 3,500 square feet, a surface area that BB&T regards as inadequate. BB&T holds a conditional lease on the property, subject to getting approval from the Board of Zoning Adjustment to use the entire property. The frontage on Connecticut Avenue is about 30 feet, the representatives said, and there is a second floor that would be used for back-office (record-keeping) functions.

The BB&T representatives stated that the bank gives a lot of discretion to its local and regional managers. Consequently, despite its founding in Wilson, NC 134 years ago by a man named Branch, BB&T amounts to a network of 34 regional or community banks that “operate autonomously.” They said that typically, 90 percent of decisions on loan applications and other matters are made in a local banking office. They also said BB&T had a solid record of charitable giving and would bring new capital to the Cleveland Park neighborhood, capital that would be available for business loans, including loans to start-up enterprises.

In discussion from the floor, members expressed reservations, but not outright opposition. One suggested that because issuance of an exception was necessary, it was incumbent on BB&T to demonstrate “an exceptional need” for a third bank in addition to the two in place now, one between Macomb and Newark Streets and one between Newark and Porter Streets. (A third bank has a stand-alone ATM at the corner of Ordway and Connecticut.) Another member said that BB&T would have to persuade the Board of Zoning Appeals that its entry would not “injure the intent” of the zoning restrictions.

(Post-meeting conversation established that some members prefer small, locally owned retail businesses to an investor-owned bank.)

Macklin Apartment House

A proposal to renovate and enlarge the Macklin apartment house provoked the liveliest discussion of the morning—and outright, passionate expressions of opposition. Except for the developer, Mark Kaufman, who holds an option to buy the property, no one spoke for the proposal.

Mr. Kaufman said he has been a resident of Cleveland Park for 18 years and is the sole owners of Hastings Development Corporation. Saying he did not have a proposal with specific details, Mr. Kaufman said in a general way that he wanted to buy the apartment house and enlarge it beyond its present 17 rent-controlled units. He would create underground parking spaces and a loading dock in the rear for deliveries, to be accessed from Ordway Street, that would keep trucks off Newark Street. With underground parking spaces, the building's effect—even after expansion--on Newark Street parking would be "positive," i.e. there would be fewer Macklin cars parked on the street and there would be no "curb cut" on Newark Street. Some members expressed skepticism about a "positive" effect.

A member commented that small-package delivery trucks would continue to stop on Newark Street, obstructing the narrow right-of-way.

The building's main entrance is now on Newark Street. The property encompasses the several small retail stores and the Four Provinces bar-restaurant on Connecticut Avenue, including a small parking yard. Mr. Kaufman portrayed the Macklin as part of Connecticut Avenue and said it is zoned commercial. He said Macklin's tenants would be entitled to all protections of DC law.

Harry Sachse, a Newark Street resident, made a statement on behalf of 25 neighbors in opposition. He said Mr. Kaufman contemplated adding 24 to 28 units to the present 17 units, according to conversations he and others have had with Mr. Kaufman. Mr. Kaufman said the ultimate number of units was "unknown" because he had no specific plan.

Mr. Sachse said Newark Street had been laid out by the great 19th century architect Frederick Law Olmsted for single-family homes. "We're the guardians of Newark Street," he declared. "We are inexorably opposed."

Mr. Sachse also said that Mr. Kaufman, if he pursued the project, would encounter legal difficulties having to do with covenants the Macklin's builder had given and with its effective loss of about six feet on the property's west side through adverse possession by an abutter named Kopff. Speaking "as a neighbor," Mr. Sachse advised Mr. Kaufman to abandon the project. After the meeting, Mr. Kaufman said he intended to pursue it.

Two residents of the building voiced concern that they would be forced out of their apartments by the renovation project and, eventually, by higher rents or the cost of buying a condo if the building is converted.

President Idelson said that as with the BB&T proposal, it would be premature for the association to entertain and vote on a formal expression of sentiment.

The meeting was adjourned at 12:15 p.m. []