Cleveland Park Voices

Cleveland Park

V O I C E S

VOL. 1, NO. 2 NEWSLETTER OF THE CLEVELAND PARK HISTORICAL SOCIETY FALL 1987

Cleveland Park

By Tersh Boasberg
President
Cleveland Park Historical Society

Only about once every 30 years does a neighborhood get a chance to re-examine its zoning. We have that extraordinary opportunity now.

Zoning Hearing Set

Because the designation of Cleveland Park as an Historic District does not adequately protect the small-scale, low-rise commercial structures on Connecticut and Wisconsin Avenues, the Cleveland Park Historical Society (along with ANC-3C and other neighborhood groups) initiated a rezoning action before the D.C. Zoning Commission in July. On October 1, 1987, the Zoning Commission agreed to hear the Connecticut Avenue petition (Case 86-26) and scheduled formal administrative proceedings for January-February 1988 (exact date still to be set). We expect the Zoning Commission will soon agree to hold similar hearings on Wisconsin.

These hearings will give us an excellent chance to change the commercial zoning on Connecticut and Wisconsin so that the character and integrity of our historic, neighborhood-serving businesses will be saved. (The residential areas of our Historic District between Connecticut and Wisconsin are not affected since they are already properly zoned.)

Key Points

The rezoning fact sheet included in this issue ("The Truth About Rezoning," page 4) should answer most of your questions. Here are the key points to remember:

First, the proposed rezoning does not deprive anyone of his property rights; the purpose of zoning is to benefit the whole community—not just commercial property owners.

Second, our present zoning, established 30 years ago in 1958, obviously did not take the new Historic District into account and, in any event, was designed by the Eisenhower Administration to allow the downtown to spread out in case of Soviet atomic attack.

Third, without a zoning change, current development pressures in Northwest Washington will rapidly turn both Connecticut and Wisconsin into high-rise office corridors—as a matter of right. This is exactly what has occurred further up on Connecticut (at Van Ness) and Wisconsin (at Van Ness and Friendship Heights). And witness the massive development proposals for the Park & Shop site at Connecticut and Ordway!

Fourth, all of us—as neighborhood residents—have a right to say what should happen to Cleveland Park. There is no reason for us to be dictated to by developers looking only for the fast buck.

Continued on next page

Park & Shop: Massive New 10-Story Proposal

In a letter from attorney Whayne Quinn dated November 10, 1987, notifying adjacent property owners, Caffiz (as owner) and Patricia Daniels (as developer) announced plans to request the D.C. Zoning Commission to approve a huge, 10-story, 210,000 square foot office/retail/residential complex on the Park & Shop site. The plans would necessitate both a PUD and a rezoning of the area from the current C-2-A (5-story, 125,000 sq. ft. limit) to C-2-B or C-3-A, defined in the Zoning Code as appropriate only for "major business and employment centers." In all probability, however, the Zoning Commission will hear CPHS's rezoning petition for Connecticut Avenue before it tackles the Park & Shop request.

Commented Tersh Boasberg, CPHS President, "I think it's unfortunate that Caffiz and Daniels, without any prior consultation, have thrown down the gauntlet of a massive, downtown-style office complex in an area designated by the Comprehensive Plan as a 'low-density, local neighborhood center'—especially since we were just designated a D.C. and National Register Historic District." Boasberg added, "We are prepared to employ all our resources to fight this kind of senseless destruction of Cleveland Park."
Activists Successfully Replace Safeway
By Margaret Hare

All signs point to a big success for citizen activism in Cleveland Park. If all goes as planned, we will have a new grocery store, the Brookville Supermarket, at the Connecticut Avenue location vacated by Safeway on November 28th. This is good news for the many area residents who have come to depend on having a supermarket in that location. And it has resulted largely from local residents making themselves heard.

Safeway announced in September that it planned to close the store at 3427 Connecticut on October 17th. Its long-term lease had expired last year and been replaced by a month-to-month lease while the owners tried to sell the building. Shortly after the announcement, Advisory Neighborhood Commission (ANC) member Roger Burns initiated a petition drive. He also joined with Peggy Robin, Ward 3 ANC Chair, in calling a citizens meeting on September 12, 1987. Over 300 concerned residents gathered at the Cleveland Park library to protest the loss of this vitaly needed service.

A number of those present agreed to organize a campaign to “Save Our Supermarket” (SOS). The short-term SOS goal was to convince Safeway to keep the store open until a replacement could be found. Long-term efforts would focus on putting together a package agreeable both to residents and the building owners. Over 200 people volunteered to work on the campaign. They immediately began an expanded petition drive and public awareness campaign. Supporters signed up at a great rate—over 2,500 the first weekend. They also wrote to Safeway and to Mayor Marion Barry. Meanwhile, SOS Chair Margaret Hare called Safeway officials both here and at corporate headquarters in California and talked daily with Mayor Barry’s office.

The level of concern soon convinced Mayor Barry to intervene. He followed up D.C. Council member Jim Nashanson’s call to Safeway officials with one of his own. This succeeded where the efforts of others had not. Safeway agreed to keep the store open at least until the Saturday after Thanksgiving. The short-term goal of buying time had been accomplished!

Early hopes that Safeway might stay were soon dashed. What the extension provided was time to find a buyer who would keep a grocery store there. A contract was signed by Anita Spain and Dolores Montgomery, two of the three owners, to sell the property to the three Shirazi brothers, who own and operate the Brookville Supermarket in Chevy Chase. And thanks primarily to the efforts of John Boniaz in the Mayor’s office and Tiford Dudley (see “Cleveland Park Personalities,” spring issue of this newsletter), Mrs. Montgomery put a covenant in the sales contract requiring that a grocery operation be continued at the site.

The Shirazis indicated in a meeting with the SOS Steering Committee that they want to move in as Safeway moves out and provide uninterrupted grocery service. “The neighborhood has suffered enough,” they said. “We don’t want to lose any more business by being closed.” With much renovation required, they are considering alternatives, such as doing the work at night, to avoid closing for even a few weeks. They committed to having a full range of goods in the new store and prices competitive with the chain stores. They also announced plans to institute delivery service.

The news couldn’t be better for their prospective Cleveland Park and Woodley Park customers. However, at press time (late November) there were still hurdles to overcome before the SOS “long-term” goal could be assured. The biggest was Safeway’s cooperation in a smooth transition. Safeway officials seemed unwilling to negotiate on the Shirazis’ purchase of existing equipment and stock. The Shirazis proposed using a third-party appraisal or that Safeway donate the equipment to the Cleveland Park Historical Society, which could then lease it to the Shirazis. With less than a week left before the November 28th closing, SOS again asked Mayor Barry to intervene to ensure that the neighborhood would not be without a grocery store during the holidays.

The outcome will be known by the time you read this article. Meanwhile, we say goodbye to our Safe- way friends and even if the store is closed for a short period, we can look forward to the community-oriented grocery operations the Shirazi brothers have planned.

Margaret Hare is Chair of the victorious “Save our Supermarket” campaign.

Re zoning Battle
Continued from preceding page

How You Can Help

Our hearings will cost a good deal for graphics, traffic experts, and other witnesses. However, the neighborhood is organizing. Ten of us have volunteered our time as attorneys. Thirty-seven of us have agreed to help with fundraising and scores more are working on organization and grassroots support. Many of you have already contributed substantial sums to this community effort. To all of you involved in this battle, I want to say a heartfelt “Thank you.”

To those who have not become active as yet, give a call to Kathy Wood (244-1278) and learn how you can help. If you do nothing else, please write a one-paragraph letter supporting the CPHS rezoning in Case No. 86-26. Address it to: Chairman Lindsey Williams, D.C. Zoning Commission, District Building, Washington, D.C. 20004. Tell him (in your own words) why you want Connecticut and Wisconsin Avenues in Cleveland Park rezoned, i.e., to preserve our historic buildings; to save the neighborhood businesses; to keep the area residential; to limit high-rise commercial office construction; to stop pollution, reduce traffic and parking congestion, etc. Be polite—but be firm.

We will be back in touch with each of you when an actual hearing date is set so you can join us in person before the Zoning Commission. And, if you haven’t done so already, do join the Cleveland Park Historical Society now (and send us a contribution for the rezoning battle). Thanks.
Our Neighborhood Shopkeepers

Wally Valentini

By Rives Carroll

Wally Valentini, assistant manager at the departing Cleveland Park Safeway on Connecticut Avenue, was making arrangements with his Italian teacher when I arrived for my interview with him. He is reviving his facility with Italian, once his native language. Born in Rhode Island to Italian parents who immigrated to this country when they were children, Wally—as he is affectionately known to customers and colleagues alike—spoke only Italian until he attended elementary school in Providence. As a result, the language comes easily to him and has been useful on his recent trips to meet relatives in Southern Italy near Naples.

Sporting a bright red Safeway tie, secured in place by an American flag tie stud, Wally was “at home” being interviewed among the boxes and crates piled high in the basement of the Safeway where he has worked for the past 21 years. When he moved to Washington from Providence, Wally did not plan to work in the grocery or retail business. He came here to attend hotel school on the G.I. bill, following the Korean War. He worked for a restaurant chain, was maître d’ at fashionable Paul Young’s, and managed a government cafeteria until 1963 when, on a friend’s recommendation, he launched his Safeway career. Now a Safeway employee of 25 years, Wally began as a part-time apprentice meat cutter at the Park and Shop branch, before it replaced Kresge’s at 3427 Connecticut Avenue.

Within his first year, Wally became a full-time employee, leaving the meat department for groceries, with a brief stint at the checkout counters. At that time, the Valentinis lived on 27th Street and Wally walked to work, a luxury he misses today as he waits in 6 a.m. traffic on Route 270. Soon he was promoted to assistant manager, his current position, which he will retain at the Van Ness Safeway Emporium, where he moves in November.

Wally has seen shifts in both the age of his customers and the selection of foods displayed. The clientele is primarily younger than it was, and the sale of canned goods has decreased in favor of frozen and fresh produce. Because of its limited space, this Safeway has never offered more than the basics. Wally has mixed feelings about this restriction. He prefers greater freedom of choice to meet customer requests, but he knows only a larger store affords that discretion. And it is the intimate size of this store that has been a large part of its appeal, and, unfortunately, the reason the Oakland, California, Safeway headquarters closed it permanently on November 28.

Of his quarter century at this Safeway, Wally recalls: “We’ve never had any problems. It’s been so pleasant to come in here and know what’s ahead of you. When you’re comfortable with something, you don’t make a change. I’ve always been very comfortable here, so I figured, ‘Just let me stay here.’” In doing so, Safeway has allowed Wally to touch the lives of hundreds of customers, their children, and their children’s children. He knows them on sight, greets them by name, and welcomes them with a smile and appropriate comment as they enter the store. There is a noticeable hole at the Safeway where Wally has his day off; customers look forward to his light-hearted humor and personal attention.

A loyal core of employees has stayed with this Safeway by its decade or two of service and its familiarity with its customers and what they buy to eat. Wally explains: “Generally, employees don’t stay this long in one store. They just left us here, so we got to know all our customers fairly well. I guess [Safeway] just forgot us.” This oversight was fortunate for those who shopped there regularly and counted on being fed in more ways than one. Of the move, Wally says he will miss the customers most. Of that loss, he may not have to worry. Already, many customers plan to follow the 14 employees who will transfer up Connecticut Avenue.

The residents of Cleveland Park will miss the sense of community at their small neighborhood Safeway where some have shopped as much for conviviality as for food and where the children have been happily acknowledged when sent with a list of groceries and a blank check. But they are richer for their friendship with Wally Valentini, and as he philosophically responds, “It’s sad that we’re closing, I guess life has to go on.”

Join the Cleveland Park Historical Society!

Founded in 1985, the Cleveland Park Historical Society has won its initial battle to have our neighborhood designated as an historic district. But much remains to be done to meet the CPHS's goals of promoting public interest in the history of Cleveland Park and encouraging preservation of its architectural heritage and character as a friendly neighborhood.

With the support of your $25, tax-deductible, annual membership dues, CPHS can pay for architects, traffic and economic experts, and printing to continue our fight against inappropriate commercial development along Connecticut and Wisconsin Avenues.

And when you send in your membership, it's not too late to receive the handsome 1987 decal of a neighborhood landmark, designed by Cleveland Park artist Di Stowell.

Send checks for $25, or more, payable to Cleveland Park Historical Society, to:
Cleveland Park Historical Society
Membership
3224 Highland Place N.W.
Washington, D.C. 20008

We also need your volunteer help for our many activities. Phone Danny Ince (966-4621) if you can help, and for further information.
The Truth About Rezoning

Who is really harmed by rezoning?

The owners (not tenants) of the commercial properties on Connecticut and Wissahickon have a great deal of control over their development rights. The owners of the building are benefiting from rezoning. Is this really beneficial for the neighborhood? No, because rezoning increases the development potential of buildings. In other words, the owners of the building are benefiting in the short term. Is this really beneficial for the neighborhood? No, because rezoning increases the development potential of buildings. In other words, the owners of the building are benefiting in the short term.

Is rezoning really necessary?

Yes, otherwise, there will always be an economic incentive to tear down the existing low-rise historic structures for new 5-story buildings. Further, to replace the G Street and other historic buildings, commercial zoning means even more office buildings. This will destroy the existing neighborhood and cause severe changes to the adjacent residential areas near both avenues.

There will be greatly increased traffic, pollution, and parking congestion on the side streets, and gradually downtown will be squeezed between heavily commercial Wisconsin and Connecticut to the point where its livability and character are irreparably destroyed.

Are there other similar D.C. commercial areas that are zoned C-17?

Yes, many. For example, the Connecticut Avenue shopping strip between Livingston Street and Chevy Chase Circle; Connecticut and Aurora, MacArthur Blvd., between Arizona and Dana Place; and just recently, Nebraska and Wisconsin Avenue Circle was downzoned to C-1 by the Zoning Commission.

Don’t forget that our existing C-2-A zoning was put in place in 1958—30 years ago—at a time when significant cross-town highways were planned, and the Interstate Administration, fearful of atomic attack, wanted to spread out the downtown.

Doesn’t the presence of a METRO station warrant adjacent development?

The short answer is that we’re not against limited development (3 stories, not 5 or 6). The long answer is that METRO was sold to the neighborhoods as a way of transporting people, not as a development tool. Besides, a METRO station is located in an historic district in the Capitol Hill Historic District. Also, the Ward 3 Draft Plan calls for development only at appropriate stops, and we submit that metro development is definitely inappropriate. Lastly, we believe most of the new office work is moving to communities in the Northwest Washington commune in cars, not METRO. That’s another reason we’re against high-rise office buildings in the neighborhood.

What does the city’s Comprehensive Plan say?

The Comprehensive Plan, Land Use Element, adopted as recently as 1985, provides that our shopping areas on Connecticut and Wisconsin should be “low-density” (1107(a)(1))—“local neighborhood centers” (1108(b)(1))—the lowest commercial designations in the Plan. C-1, not C-2-A, is the lowest zoning classification, and the Home Rule Act specifically provides that zoning “shall not be inconsistent” with the Plan.

How can I learn more?

Contact the following:

For Connecticut Avenue

For Wisconsin Avenue

For Metropolitan Area

Organizing

Moeke Peters 36-3019

David Mutai 36-3048

Legislative

Tom Roesbeck 32-4000

Diane Owen 32-7279

Rives Carroll guides visiting preservationists on a CPHS tour of Cleveland Park (see page 8). Author of the interviews on pages 3 and 5, Rives is Enrichment Coordinator at John Eaton and Phoebe Hearst Schools and edited Cleveland Park Voices: A Social History 1890-1984.