Final Zoning Victories on Connecticut And Wisconsin Avenues

By Tersh Boasberg
President
Cleveland Park Historical Society

In a tremendous victory for the Cleveland Park Historical Society and our copetitioners, the D.C. Zoning Commission registered two unanimous votes on June 13th and September 15th which have substantially lowered the zoning for Cleveland Park's commercial areas on Wisconsin and Connecticut Avenues.

With the Commission's June 13th decision, the shopping strip on the west side of Wisconsin between Lowell and Idaho Streets was rezoned from C-2-A to C-1, the lowest possible commercial zoning category. The Wisconsin Avenue Task Force, spearheaded by CPHS, had presented the community's case for this change at the packed April 25th hearing of the Commission.

Then the Commission's September 15th decision put the final seal of approval on a special "overlay zone" for both sides of Connecticut Avenue between Macomb and Porter Streets, including the Park & Shop property at Connecticut and Ordway. CPHS and other groups had first aired the case for this overlay at a January 29th hearing. On March 14th the Commission approved our proposed lower height limit (40 feet) but took no action on our lower-density proposal or on Planned Unit Development (PUD) exceptions to the overlay zone requirements, which could have granted developers an escape from these limits. The Commission's September 13th decision came in response to further testimony on these two pending matters presented by CPHS and ANC-3C at a July 7th hearing.

On Connecticut Avenue, here is what has now happened as a result of the March 14th and September 15th decisions. Height: Reduced from 50 to 40 feet; reduced PUD guidelines on height from 65 feet to those of the overlay zone, 40 feet. This means buildings of no more than three or four stories. FAR (density): Reduced from 2.5 to 2.0 in the overlay zone; reduced PUD guidelines on FAR from 3.0 also to 2.0. This means that no building can exceed (in square feet) more than twice the size of the lot it sits on. (For example, the Park & Shop lot is 40,000 square feet; any new building thereon must be limited to 100,000 square feet.) Moreover, of the 2.0 FAR allowed, at least 1.0 must be residential, not commercial office space.

For the Wisconsin Avenue shopping area, the new C-1 zone approved on June 13th lowers the limit on height to 40 feet (with the added proviso of no more than three stories) and reduces FAR to just 1.0. These limits will now also apply to PUD guidelines for this area; in C-1 zones, PUD guidelines on height and density are automatically set at those of the zone.

Overlays in the new zonings for both Wisconsin and Connecticut set other helpful requirements. (1) They limit bars and restaurants to only 25% of the ground-floor frontage in the zones. (This will help prevent "Georgetownization" of the two

Continued on back page

Park & Shop: A New Developer

During the summer, the Pedas brothers (former owners of the Circle Theater chain) bought the Park & Shop property from the Cafritz Foundation and developer Patricia Daniels for $5.5 million. Mr. Ted Pedas has been in touch with CPHS and has requested an early meeting to discuss the future of the site at Connecticut Avenue and Ordway Street.

CPHS President Tersh Boasberg commented, "We're delighted that Mr. Pedas wants to work with the community to develop the Park & Shop site compatibly with the Cleveland Park Historic District." Boasberg added that CPHS would like to retain as much of the old structure as possible, perhaps incorporated into the sensitive design of a new three- to four-story, 80,000-90,000-square-foot building. CPHS will appoint a task force to sit down with the Pedas brothers to see if a mutually satisfactory solution to the three-year-old controversy can be worked out.
By Kathy Wood

Bungalows in Cleveland Park


"Bungalow . . . has come to represent for many of our contemporaries, the concept of a distinct longing. It is an expression of the need for rest, a return to Nature, of protection from the wearing side-effects of modern technology. And finally of the fulfillment of the desire to live undisturbed as an individual."

Bungalows, as we know them today, derived from India’s native Bengali huts. During their long involvement in India, the English, iveteran travelers, visited notable temples in remote areas. Western accommodations were unavailable so an adaptation of the Bengali hut evolved. The Dak-Bungalow, or house for travelers, consisted of a large central room covered by a thatched roof extending beyond the house walls to create an encircling verandah or porch that provided essential coolness. Subsequently the bungalow developed into a British colonial housing type used in hot-climate countries.

Two key elements in the bungalow’s development were established early: that it should be a simple, inexpensive shelter with rustic overtones and its connection with travel or vacation time.

As the technological revolution transformed English cities into polluted, congested industrial centers, individuals began longing for the simple pleasures of rural life. Seaside resorts burgeoned in response to the increasing wealth and leisure of the middle class, thereby linking their aspirations with the pursuits of the wealthy. Bungalows were first introduced to England in 1869 at two speculative resort developments on the coast of Kent, two hours by train from London.

Although rustic in appearance and association, bungalows incorporated the latest technology. They were built of mass-produced, readily available, inexpensive materials and designed to be maintained without servants. The floor plan was laid out for convenience and the kitchen included the latest advancements to make life easy and carefree.

The first American bungalows also were summer cottages. In 1884 New York architect Arnold Brunner used his design for a "Bungalow as a Summer Cottage" as the frontispiece for his book Cottages or Hills on Economical Building. He noted that: "Bungalows, as the one-storey houses in India are called, seem adapted to some parts of America, particularly as summer cottages."

An ideology was closely associated with the American bungalow and popularized through journals and magazines. The Craftsman, a journal published by Gustav Stickley from 1901 to 1916, popularized the bungalow and the English Arts and Crafts Movement. Early American bungalows exemplified three tenets of this movement: simplicity, communion with nature, and craftsmanship.

Books and magazines spread bungalow designs across the country in the first quarter of the 20th century. The bungalow became identified with newly developing suburbs like Cleveland Park and Takoma Park. Owners and builders had easy access to numerous plans and elevations from which to select designs. Working drawings or pre-cut, ready-to-assemble bungalows could be purchased inexpensively by mail. Sears, Roebuck and Co. featured bungalows in their catalogues, two of which can be seen at 3635 Rodman (1921) and 3424 Quebec (1922).

Bungalows come in many different styles but their primary identifying characteristics are the single-story appearance (although they may in fact have two or even three stories) and the front porch. Cleveland Park bungalows can be seen at 3635 Macomb (1911) and 3425 Porter (Craftsman style, 1915). Two of the earliest are 3409 34th Place (1906) and 3501 Lowell (1907).

With her unique expertise in Cleveland Park history, architectural historian and CPHS Executive Director Kathy Wood played a key role in Cleveland Park’s designation as a Historic District and the successful drive to protect its commercial core. She is author of the chapter on Cleveland Park in Washington At Home: An Illustrated History of Neighborhoods in the Nation’s Capital (see page 30) and teaches American architectural history at local colleges.
Cleveland Park Personalities

Susan Shreve
By Rives Carroll

She is petite, soft-spoken, and unassuming, not the kind of person you would expect to write books with characters of extreme personalities and dramatic lives. She has lived most of her life in four different houses on the peaceful streets of Cleveland Park. And yet she says, "I'm not a quiet writer," as her books often depict violence and threatening circumstances.

When asked about these contradictions, Susan Richards Shreve, mother, novelist, and teacher, responds, "There's a lot of violence in my books, but I tend to feel that I'm a really optimistic writer. I think this is about the most violent country in the world. And I feel I grew up on the cutting edge of it. I think that the possibilities in America, the fact that anything is possible for anybody against the frustrations of reaching those [goals]... and the classlessness where nobody really knows his place and everybody is fighting for the best place [have] created a lot of violence."

Her childhood imagination was fed by Susan's journalist father, a crime reporter, who provided a daily diet of "high drama." For a time, he invited a single mother, black and unemployed, to live with the Richards, exposing Susan to threats and problems beyond her comfortable community. And unlike many children, Susan spent hours playing with paper dolls and making up stories, since her outdoor play was curtailed following bouts with polio, pneumonia, and rheumatic fever, all before she was five.

When she moved to middle-class Cleveland Park in the 1940s, Susan was six, entered Sidwell Friends School, and recalls her embarrassment by the rundown condition of the neighborhood, verging on an area of boarding houses. While not fashionable, the neighborhood thrived on a sense of community stronger than it has today, thanks primarily to active and civic-minded mothers and housewives.

Her mother was head of PTA at John Eaton School, where Susan went when suspended from Friends for pulling the trigger on a cap gun in a Quaker Meeting. She was one of the organizers who turned a vacant lot into Macomb Playground, around which the children's activities revolved when they were not in and out of each other's houses.

Susan attributes the upsurge of interest in the neighborhood as desirable real estate to the Kennedy Administration, a magnet for politically active people who bought Cambridge-like Cleveland Park houses, such as the one in which her family, including new husband Tim Seldes, lives. Calling this transitional period one of "studied poverty," she cites today's house renovations as the biggest change in the neighborhood. "I don't want to see Cleveland Park reserved for people with a lot of money," she cautions, treasuring the diversity of the residents and fearing the toll on the once "over-the-backfence" community affected greatly by "the number of highly professional and ambitious women living rushed lives."

This neighborhood matters to Susan. Her roots are here. This is where, in grade school, she distributed her own newspaper, where, in her early teens, she was a budding director of her theater troupe of children which performed in her Macomb Street living-room. Here she has raised her four children and sent them to the local public and private schools.

Susan envisioned a career in the theater, but plans to study directing at Yale Drama School were superseded by marriage. Although, Susan claims, "I never did well in writing in school," the shift to novelist must have been smooth. By the time she left her doctoral program at the University of Virginia, she had written A Fortunate Madness, published by Houghton-Mifflin.

Susan studied, taught grade school, and traveled until she and her first husband, Porter, were ready to reestablish roots in a familiar place, Cleveland Park. On returning in 1975, she taught English at National Cathedral School for one year, but since then has been on the faculty at George Mason University.

Her return to the neighborhood reflects Susan's strong sentiment for place and continuity in her life. Equally important is her family. These themes of place and family are underscored in her writing. "I like books where place is described in detail. The reason I've always written about Cleveland Park is that I know it." In her most recent book, Queen of Hearts, which she considers her most magical, the descriptions are set in Massachusetts. Her favorite book, Miracle Play, draws on her own family, its spirit, and "the family I've always wanted to have."

"My ideas come from something I see or hear... and if it continues to interest me for a year, it is likely material for a book." She draws also on her childhood experiences, because "when you see things for the first time is the most memorable." Her own children have provided ideas for some of her 13 books for children, such as The Flunking of Joshua Bates and The Bad Dreams of a Good Girl.

Her seventh adult book, at the publisher now, draws on family experiences. "I'm not a good nonfiction writer," Susan says. "If I don't have a story, it's very hard for me to think of the words." Although writing fiction clearly comes naturally to Susan, she admits concern for the material for the next book, even while writing the present one. But she adds, as long as "writing fiction is about character, and as long as I'm interested in people, there will always be stories to write."

Rives Carroll is currently developing educational materials for the National Geographic and the Museum of American History and teaches architecture at John Eaton School.
An Apartment Dweller's Perspective
On Cleveland Park
By Kirk Johnson

Apartment living in many urban areas means not having a neighborhood you can call your own. But in the year that I've lived here, Cleveland Park has proved an exception to that rule. It's a place where apartment dwellers can become an integral part of an already close-knit community.

My wife and I moved to Washington from Portland, Oregon, a little more than a year ago. To the newcomer, Washington can be a big, crowded and sometimes frightening city. So we were relieved to find a relatively quiet neighborhood like Cleveland Park that offers some refuge from the hectic pace of urban life.

After several weeks of intense searching, we were fortunate to find an affordable one-bedroom apartment in Sedgwick Gardens, 3726 Connecticut Avenue. Completed in 1932, Sedgwick Gardens is one of the half dozen particularly distinctive apartment buildings in the Cleveland Park Historic District.

The Art Deco-style structure was designed by architect Mihir Mesrobian, who designed several other notable buildings around town, including the Dupont Circle Building and the Wardman Tower (now a part of the Sheraton Washington Hotel).

Mesrobian was born and educated in Turkey and served as a palace architect to the Turkish sultan before coming to this country. His unusual background shows most clearly in Sedgwick Gardens' lobby. The lobby features arches and columns with a distinctly Byzantine flavor. Herds of griffin-like creatures charge forth from the tops of each column and the faces of minotaurs stare down from the arches. Depending on the time of day, the lobby can look like a chamber from a medieval castle, an elegantly-styled ballroom, or a stage set from a Humphrey Bogart movie.

At its prime, Sedgwick Gardens was considered one of Washington's most luxurious apartment buildings. Goldfish once swam in a marble fountain—which now serves as a planter—located in the middle of the lobby. An army of doormen, porters, parking attendants and elevator operators catered to residents' every need. The building featured an advanced (for that time) air-conditioning system that pumped water to the roof and circulated cooled air through the hallways. One former resident recalled that then-Senator Harry Truman lived in Sedgwick Gardens for a brief period in the 1930s, and that his daughter Margaret would ride her tricycle through the halls.

As much as we enjoy the building we live in, it's the neighborhood feeling of Cleveland Park that keeps us here. Occasionally over the past year we have considered moving out to the "burbs," with their promise of cheaper rents, quieter surroundings, and a less hectic pace of life. But we just as quickly abandon the idea, because we can think of no comparable neighborhood in the metropolitan area.

Of course, Cleveland Park's shopping district is one of the neighborhood's chief attractions. It's just a short walk to the grocers, dry cleaners, post office, drug store, bank, movie theater (though we wish they'd change the feature more often), bookstores, good restaurants and other amenities of life.

We also appreciate the fact that Cleveland Park is not one of those high-rise jungles so common across the river in places like Rosslyn and Crystal City. Instead, the homes and apartments are surprisingly well integrated. And that makes it easy for apartment dwellers like us to feel a part of the neighborhood.

For instance, although we don't have "nextdoor neighbors" as a homeowner might, we frequently get out into the neighborhood on evening walks. One of our favorites is up to and around the Washington Cathedral at twilight, when the fireflies are dancing in the dimming shadows of tree-lined streets.

As apartment dwellers, we don't have a yard. But this summer when we wanted to barbecue, we simply packed up the hibachi, walked up the street to the small grassy area between Melvin Hazen Trail and Sedwick Street, and enjoyed an evening in the great outdoors. Nor do we have a porch. But when we want to sit outside, we stroll down to Connecticut Avenue, stopping at Bob's Ice Cream along the way. Then we find a place to sit on the apartment steps at the corner of Connecticut and Ordway and watch the world go by.

There's also a sense of community that Cleveland Park apartment dwellers share with one another—a fact that caught us and a lot of others by surprise. When an elderly woman was evicted from a nearby apartment building several months ago, many apartment residents came to her assistance—buying food, watching her belongings, and organizing an all-night vigil to ensure her safety.

Like many other residents in Washington, D.C., we're short-timers, living in the city for a few years until we return to the West Coast. That's too short a time to really settle in and buy a house, but long enough that a sense of community is important to us. Cleveland Park has provided that community. So as long as we live in Washington, we'll call Cleveland Park our home.

Kirk Johnson is a legislative aide to Congressman Ron Widen of Oregon.
From the Executive Director

CPHS Benefit at Twin Oaks

The June 18th Twin Oaks Centennial Celebration, benefiting the Cleveland Park Historical Society, was a great success. We had glorious weather; Twin Oaks was festive with balloons; and many neighbors and friends of CPHS and our hosts, Dr. and Mrs. Fredrick F. Chien, participated in the celebration. Following opening remarks by Dr. Chien, Tish Boasberg and myself, D.C. Council Chairman David Clarke presented the Chiens with a plaque marking Twin Oaks' listing on the National Register of Historic Places and described the history of friendship between Washington, D.C., and The Republic of China on Taiwan. A Dragon Dance concluded the formal presentation. Guests then enjoyed touring the house, sampling the delicious Chinese buffet and mingling with friends in the garden. Mrs. Chien and her staff were dressed in beautiful traditional costumes.

Our first fundraising event would not have been such a success without the help of many neighbors, especially Libby Ross, Sally Boasberg, Danny Ince, Keith McDaniels, and Carolyn Cohan. Lou Stovall donated hours of his time to design and organize the printing of the beautiful invitation. Gerry Gleason quietly took and made sense of the proceeds, reporting that we took in about $13,000 for attendance and $2,000 more in new memberships and gifts. In his words: "Not only was it a great party, it raised a lot of money." Thanks to all of you for supporting this event!

Twin Oaks is nestled between Cleveland Park and Woodley Park and this event brought together neighbors from both communities. The two communities have worked together over the past year combining strategies for rezoning on Connecticut Avenue. We appreciate the help and support of our Woodley Park neighbors and will continue our support and assistance as they work toward the designation of the Woodley Park Historic District.

Architectural Review Committee

This past spring has been a busy time for renovators in Cleveland Park. CPHS's Architectural Review Committee (ARC) has reviewed about 150 projects since May 1987 and only one case remains unresolved. The ARC is purely an advisory group and does not have the definitive say on what makes a project acceptable or not. DC Law 2-144 set up a process whereby additions, alterations and demolitions to contributing buildings in historic districts are reviewed by the Historic Preservation Review Board (HPRB), which is appointed by the Mayor. Most additions and alterations in Cleveland Park are reviewed by the HPRB's staff members—Nancy Witherrill for residences and David Maloney for commercial—and are placed on the "consent calendar." This process expedites the review, saving time and money for the homeowner and the architect, who do not need to attend the HPRB meeting.

The HPRB and their staff look at each project on a case-by-case basis, following the guidelines established by the Secretary of the Interior. They have not established separate guidelines for the District of Columbia or for specific historic districts. Under the law, all exterior alterations are reviewed by the HPRB and their staff. Thus far the ARC has been following the guidelines of the Secretary of the Interior and in effect has been guided by an informal policy of concerning itself only with changes visible from the street. Occasionally the rear of a house is quite visible from another street, in which case the alterations are considered.

Some Cleveland Park homeowners have requested more concrete guidelines indicating what is considered compatible and not compatible to help them and their architects in their designs. The ARC has decided to work with a consulting architect to prepare some basic drawings emphasizing the most characteristic features of Cleveland Park architecture, thereby pointing out the sensitive areas to consider when changes are contemplated. Numerous architects in Washington work daily in historic districts and on historic landmarks. They are familiar with the process and can really make it quite painless.

Mrs. Julie Chien welcomes guests to Twin Oaks' 100th anniversary celebration and benefit for CPHS.

As with all new historic districts, we are experiencing a shakedown period as many homeowners and architects experience the review process for the first time. The ARC is preparing an information packet including these guidelines and an explanation of how the process works, which will be distributed to neighbors, architects and real estate agents (for prospective purchasers). If you have questions, call Kathy Wood (244-1276) or Nancy Witherrill (727-7360).

Spring 1989 House Tour

As we look ahead to 1989, we want to start planning for the Cleveland Park Spring House Tour. I know there are several houses which have recently been extensively refurbished, mine being one of them, and I hope we can show them off next spring. I need some volunteers who will work with me on the planning. Without this help, I fear the time will slip by and we will miss having a house tour, as we did this year. So please let me hear from you (244-1276) to know if we have the neighborhood energy to organize this event.

—Kathy Wood
Executive Director
Zoning Victories
Continued from front page
areas.) (2) They mandate 50% ground-floor retail or service busi-
nesses in all new buildings. (3) They prohibit curb cuts on Connecticut
and Wisconsin, which means no “drive-ins” for banks or fast-food
parlors. (4) The Connecticut Avenue
overlay also prohibits conversion of
existing upper-story housing to
commercial use, which reinforces
the area’s residential nature.

These actions of the Zoning Com-
mission have substantially reduced
the allowable building envelopes for
our two shopping areas. Taken to-
together, the rezonings for both areas,
combined (on Connecticut) with the
extra legal protections of the new
Cleveland Park Historic District, give
us the necessary legal tools to restrict
development along the Wisconsin
and Connecticut corridors of Clevel-
land Park to buildings of compatible
height, density and design.

This is a resounding victory for
CPHS and our copetitioners: ANC-3C (Peggy Robin), the Tenley
and Cleveland Park Emergency
Committee, the Wisconsin Avenue
Corridor Committee and the Wash-
ington Cathedral. Our thanks must
start with Jim Nathanson, CPHS
Boardmember and D.C. Council-
member for Ward 3, always a strong
voice for intelligent city planning.
Also, thanks to our Mayor, Marion
Barr, and his top planning official,
Fred Greene of the D.C. Office of
Planning. To Fred goes the credit
both for designing the special overlay
zones and for strongly supporting
our petitions—in every expect—
before the Zoning Commission.

And to all of you, CPHS members
and Cleveland Park residents, what a
wonderful job you did! When we
needed legal advice, you were there;
it if we needed money, you came
through. You went door-to-door
with all our materials; stood outside
the METRO station on cold January
mornings; wrote hundreds of sup-
porting letters; and packed the His-
 toric Preservation Review Board and
Zoning Commission hearings.
You have truly made a difference.
Thank you.

Washington at Home Featured

The handsome 367-page book, Wash-
ington at Home: An Illustrated History of
Neighborhoods in the Nation’s Capital, came out
in June. Cleveland Park resident Kathryn
Schneider Smith is editor and CPHS Ex-
ecutive Director Kathy Wood wrote the
chapter on Cleveland Park. CPHS plans
two book-signing parties featuring the
book and our neighborhood bookshops:
Callope and Simeon’s, Terri Robinson
hosts the first, at Simeon’s, 370K Moadenham
Street, October 30th, 4 to 7. Callope’s
will be held December 4th in their newly
refurbished shop on Connecticut. Books
will be available for purchase; reserve one
early so you can have it signed. CPHS
members will receive invitations. Call Kathy
Wood (244-1276) for further information.

Join the Cleveland Park
Historical Society

The Cleveland Park Historical Society
has been successful in its three-year battle to preserve our
neighborhood and protect the low-
rise commercial sections along
Connecticut and Wisconsin Aven-
ues.

It has been successful because of
the voluntary efforts of many dedi-
cated individuals and generous
support of CPHS members.

Of the 626 families who have
contributed to CPHS’s efforts since
our founding in the fall of 1985:
415 have given between $5 and
$100 over the three-year period;
364 have given between $100 and
$500 and
47 have given over $500.

Now we need to turn our atten-
tion to consolidating our position,
monitoring the design of new de-
velopment and increasing neighbor-
hood interest in historic preser-
vation and other community
projects, such as saving our trees
from the Gypsy Moth.

If you are not a current member,
please join us now. Send your
check for $25, payable to Cleveland
Park Historical Society, along with
your name and address to:
Cleveland Park Historical Society
Membership Chair
3224 Highland Place N.W.
Washington, D.C. 20008

Many thanks!

Cleveland Park Historical Society
Newsletter Editor
C/o 3224 Highland Place N.W.
Washington, D.C. 20008