

Old Town Residents' Association meeting. December 22, 2005

Venue: 104 Tulip Avenue, home of Wolfgang and Gertrud Mergner

Convener: Seth Grimes, President (Willow Ave)

Present:

Joy Austin-Lane (Spruce Ave. Takoma Park City Council member for Old Town.)

Sabrina Baron (President of Historic Takoma)

Ken Firestone (Park Ave)

Andy Kelemen (Philadelphia Ave)

Jessica Landman (Park Ave)

Susan Lawrence (Cedar Ave)

Wolfgang Mergner (Tulip Ave)

Gertrud Mergner (Tulip Ave)

Dan Mudd. (Park Ave)

David Pittman (Park Ave)

Charlotte Schoeneman (Tulip Ave)

Steve Shapiro (Willow Ave)

Margo Kabel (Tulip Ave)

Mar-E Robnett (Maple Ave)

Seth Grimes called the meeting to order.

Meeting agenda:

- I. Report by council member Joy Austin-Lane.
- II. Q&A with Joy Austin-Lane.
- III. Report by Jessica Landman on the Metro development project.
- IV. Set date for next meeting: Thursday, January 26, 2006. Venue to be determined.

I. Report by council member Joy Austin-Lane on recent city developments level affecting Old Town residents.

- **The Community Center.** The center was dedicated for community use on December 11. It has meeting rooms available for use by local groups with a community purpose, including neighborhood associations such as OTRA. Each group is entitled to a maximum of 11 free meetings in a year, but the rooms are already very heavily booked. The City Manager will have staff come to neighborhood association meetings in the New Year to provide information about Community Center policies, recreation programs, computer space, etc. Joy has told the staff about Seth Grimes' interest in having a staff person come to an upcoming OTRA meeting.

- **The Cady-Lee tree.** A number of local residents had questions about the tree recently felled at the Cady-Lee House on Eastern Avenue. Joy says the issue has had an

“interesting resolution.” A company has taken the logs off to mill into useable items. So “People may be able to get a piece of the Cady-Lee tree in the future.”

- **The Carriage House.** Joy worked closely with Sabrina Baron of Historic Takoma to solve the house’s lighting needs. As an interim solution, the city will finish the lighting so that the Carriage House is “well lit but not obtrusive to the neighbors.” The city is developing a system to keep people who live around carriage house informed about developments there. The plan is to use email for most communications, but to inform immediate neighbors about substantial issues by mail.

II. Q&A with Joy Austin-Lane

-**The Carroll Avenue streetscape project.** Responding to a question from David Pittman, Joy reported that the city’s work on Carroll Ave plantings is “pretty much finished.” She said she was pleased that the plantings had been completed in winter rather than in spring when they might have had a harder time taking hold. She also reported that the city’s tile work and brick work on Carroll Ave are nearing completion. She noted, however, that she had not seen much progress on lamp bases. She added that property owners have other projects that they continue to work on.

- **The Carroll Ave parking lot moved to Park Avenue.** Joy explained that Carroll Avenue residents interested in improving pedestrian safety have been trying to reduce the number of curb cuts on Carroll Ave. As part of that effort, the city moved a parking lot for 7118 Carroll Ave from the front of the house to the back, involving the paving over of much of the house’s grassy backyard next to 117 Park Avenue. Concerned Park Ave neighbors took the issue to the City Council. Joy reported that Council members “have been talking about this, making plans for what needed to be done to fix something that was not well publicized, but needed fixing.” She said that the City Council is “supportive of city staff working on this until it is resolved.”

Dan Mudd reported that he and other neighbors have been trying to contact the owner of 7118 Carroll Ave, Mr. Ramos, to discuss their concerns about the parking lot. Dan said that neighbors have tried to visit Mr. Ramos “two or three times,” but have not yet found him home. The neighbors are now moving ahead with writing a letter, though Dan said he is still “hoping to do it in person, rather than through a letter in the letterbox saying we don’t like your parking lot.” Dan said he does not require OTRA’s intervention.

- **Park Avenue street paving.** Joy said this will happen in the spring and will be one of the first jobs the street paving crew undertakes.

- **Park Ave speed bump location.** Dan Mudd raised his effort to get a speed bump on Park Ave relocated. According to Dan, the city does not want curb cuts to straddle speed bumps. To avoid an existing speed bump on Park, when the city put in a curb cut for the 7118 Carroll Ave parking lot that has been moved to Park Ave, it chose what Dan described as “the worst possible spot, right next to a fence.” Dan said the fence makes it

difficult for drivers leaving the parking lot to see traffic on the street. Dan suggested that, “Since the city is just about to mill down the street, there is an opportunity to move the speed bump with no extra cost,” allowing for a relocation of the curb cut.

Joy said she had asked the City Manager, Barb, to find a design consultant from outside the city to discuss both the layout of the parking lot and the location of the speed bump.

- Concerns about speeding on Park Ave during repaving. Steve Shapiro raised concerns about the possibility of speeding on Park Avenue when the speed bumps are removed prior to the street’s repaving. Joy said the contractor has said milling, repaving, and replacement of the speed bumps be finished within five days so long as the weather cooperates.

- Longer-term traffic calming measures for Park Ave. Ken Firestone inquired about the possibility of traffic calming measures for Park Ave in addition to speed bumps. Other Park Ave residents expressed reservations about adopting any other measures. Joy said a lesson she took away from the repaving of Maple Ave is “don’t do traffic calming unless residents come to you.”

- Curb extension at end of Park Ave. Joy characterized this as “very modest.” She said that although it does not contribute significantly to traffic calming, it allows more options for cross walks, etc. Part of the area has a man hole. The city has bricked around that so that it is not a tripping hazard. If people have suggestions, for planting the area, Joy asked that they let her know. Otherwise, the city will work with adjacent neighbors on something they would like to see outside their windows.

- Community Center problems. Steve Shapiro asked about air quality in the new Community Center. Joy said air quality is a priority for the phase two contract. She explained that the paint, carpet, and other items used in the phase one construction all affect air quality. For phase two, she said, the council has insisted on air-quality-friendly paints, little carpeting, wood floors, and tile that is “not very reactive.”

III. Report by Jessica Landman on the proposed townhouse development at the Takoma Metro site.

Jessica described the history of the development project and explained her and her colleagues’ strategy for bringing Takoma Park concerns to bear on the development plans. She also described various politicians’ and groups’ positions on the project.

Jessica and her colleagues are basing their position on provisions they have identified in two key documents, The Takoma Central District Plan (CDP) of 2002 and the Takoma Transportation Study of 2003. (See Jessica’s handout: “Specific Redevelopment Guidelines: Takoma Metro Site.”) She explained, “Rather than saying no development there or yes development there, we’re saying that once they have addressed transport-first

concerns and the buffering concerns of people who live in the apartment building that literally abuts the site, we can determine how much is available for development.”

Key to their strategy is “trying to have no space between Takoma DC and Takoma MD people,” on the project. Three years ago, Takoma DC had a “strong, small but vocal, group of supporters of development.” Since then, as Takoma DC residents have seen plans to cut parking in half, without providing any new amenities, such as a new western entrance to the Metro station, Takoma DC support has waned, she said. The most effective activists are the Takoma DC residents of the apartment buildings on Eastern Avenue who could see buses driving within a few feet of their bedroom windows.

Jessica Landman and Sabrina Baron’s recommendations for Old Town residents:

1. Maintain a unified voice with DC residents. This is important as the Metro site is entirely in DC, and as the most powerful player in the development project is perhaps DC council member Jim Graham. Graham represents Takoma DC and is also chair of the real estate subcommittee of WMATA.

The unified message from concerned citizens, Jessica said, should be that officials must look at the Central District Plan and the Transportation Study, address the key provisions of those documents, and then make a decision on development. “If these developers are no longer interested, that’s OK by us. We are willing to take the risk that they will walk. We may not like who comes in. But if they don’t address our concerns, the community’s transport needs won’t be met.”

Responding to pressure from his DC constituents, Jim Graham has already suggested putting a hold on the developer’s proposal to cut the parking spaces at the Metro by 50 percent. He has said he wants to hear more about the community’s views. Jessica’s group wants to hold him to this.

2. Express thanks for Rep. Van Hollen’s efforts. Sabrina Baron, who has been working closely with Jessica on the Metro development issue, suggested that Maryland residents send emails to Congressman Chris Van Hollen, who has put a provision in a bill to fund WMATA saying that development should not go forward until the transportation-related concerns of Takoma Park, Maryland residents are addressed. “Say we appreciate him standing up for his constituents on the Takoma Metro project,” Sabrina urged residents. “Let him not feel his arms are flapping in the wind.”

3. Express thanks to Brian Glen, head of the Washington office of the Federal Transport Authority.

4. Put pressure on the Montgomery County WMATA representative, Bob Smith. “Our county representatives are not consistent in supporting us,” on the Metro development project, Jessica said. “They need to be hearing from Takoma Park, Maryland residents.” WMATA members tend to not to be active on issues outside their

own geographic jurisdiction, Jessica and Sabrina explained. Because the Metro site is in DC, Smith so far “feels he has to tread very lightly,” Sabrina said.

5. Put pressure the Washington Regional Network for Livable Communities and its representative Cheryl Cort. Jessica described the Regional Network as “our biggest opponent.” She noted, “We have no quarrel with smart growth. We do have a quarrel with taking public land designed to be our Metro station, and building it out so we don’t have transport-oriented development, we just have transport-interfering development.” The Regional Network, she said, “need to hear from us that we’re not a community opposed to development.” Jessica said she would particularly welcome help persuading the Regional Network’s Cheryl Cort to visit the Takoma Metro site so she can “take a closer look at what the changes would mean for our community.” Jessica said, “We have every right to say, if you stick your nose in our business, you need to come here and state your position in front of us.”

6. Let officials know Maryland residents support a western entrance to the Takoma Metro. Jessica said both DC residents and Maryland residents need to send letters showing support for a western entrance to the Metro. DC residents very much want a western entrance, but Alyssa Hill, the WMATA representative in the negotiations over the Metro site, is strenuously opposed to one, citing cost concerns. Jessica would also welcome help in reaching out to business owners to persuade them of the benefits of a western entrance.

Jessica Landman and Sabrina Baron’s requests of OTRA

1. OTRA resolution. Jessica said she would welcome some kind of resolution supporting her group’s efforts from OTRA, as the neighborhood association that abuts the development site. Seth pledged to express OTRA support in written form.

2. Continue inviting the developer, EYA, to make a presentation to OTRA. Sabrina urged OTRA to continue its efforts to get EYA to send a representative to make a presentation to OTRA about the project. Seth had sounded out EYA’s Jack Lester about speaking to OTRA. Seth characterized Jack as “very reluctant” to speak. “His impression was. ‘I’ve been there. They jumped all over me. Would this be valuable?’ He doesn’t want to be yelled at by a roomful of people.” Sabrina said, “We’ve been working hard to get Takoma Park, Maryland a seat at the table. That’s why I’d like to see the neighborhood association continue to push with EYA.”

IV. Seth announced that the next OTRA meeting would be on Thursday, January 26, 2006 at a venue to be determined.

End

SPECIFIC REDEVELOPMENT GUIDELINES: TAKOMA METRO SITE

From the *Takoma Central District Plan(2002) & Takoma Transportation Study(2003)*

Generally Agreed Upon Guidelines:

The following guidelines, taken from the *Takoma Central District Plan (CDP)* and the *Takoma Transportation Study (TTS)*, are those with which many in the Takoma community in both Maryland and the District of Columbia agree:

Transit First: “It is imperative that the Metro site continues to serve transit needs first, and the revitalization goals of the community second” (CDP,51)
“Easy, safe and direct station access for pedestrians, bicyclists, vehicles and buses should be accommodated first.” (CDP,51)
“Provide Western Entrance beneath underpass and open tunnel to west.”(TTS, fig.54)
“Provide parking at 1:1 ratio” (TTS, fig.54)
“New Metro parking facility should be located so that it is convenient for both commercial district and Metro uses and minimizes impacts to adjacent residential properties, particularly those along Eastern Avenue.” (CPD, 52-3)
“Provide 12 bus bays”(TTS, fig.54)
“Allow buses to enter and exit site from Carrol and exit from Eastern” (TTS, fig.54)
“Provide 50 new bike racks” (TTS,fig.54)
“Support and incorporate the Metropolitan Branch Trail options into all transportation improvements for the area to ensure good access and connections to this regional resource.” CDP, p. 45

Residential Buffer: “A landscaped buffer of no less than fifty feet should be provided between the Metro station’s transit functions and the existing residential uses, such as the multi-family structures to the north along Eastern Avenue.” (CDP, 52)
“A minimum front yard setback of ten feet is strongly encouraged along Eastern Avenue and Cedar Street to provide a transition community frontage with existing residential uses on the east side of these streets.” (CDP,52)

Guidelines Upon Which there Does Not Seem to Be General Agreement:

The following guidelines, taken from the CDP and the TTS, are those on which there is mild to vehement disagreement among the Takoma community in both Maryland and the District of Columbia:

- V. **Village Green:** “Provide a community open space of 0.8 to 1.2 acres.” (CDP,52) [differences center on the amount of green space which should be provided]
- VI. **Development Capacity:** “The suggested development threshold for the Metro station site is approximately 65-95 townhomes at 22-32 units/acre.” (CDP,52) [differences range from the position of no development to support for 95 townhomes]

- VII. Taxi Stand Location: “Relocate taxi stand to Cedar, beneath Metro station, directly adjacent to the station entrance.” (TTS,FIG.54) [differences have been with WMATA – the public seems to support this recommendation.]
- VIII. Kiss and Ride Facilities: “In addition to the spaces in front of the Metro station (Cedar Street) identified under the proposed [CD] plan, additional Kiss and Ride spaces should be provided in the back of the Metro station (parking area) and on Cedar Ave. (across from existing 7-11) by eliminating parking spaces on S side of block between Eastern Ave and Carroll St.” TTS(fig. 54).