

Rock Creek Hills Citizens Association Fall 2017 Meeting – October 24, 2017

RCHCA President Jim Pekar brought the meeting to order, introduced RCHCA officers, and acknowledged several neighborhood volunteers: Sam Hoxie (website and directory); Mike Baker (rchcanet listserv), Laura Dennis (environment/Silver Creek adoption and neighborhood signage); Vince DeCain (RCH covenants), Rick Bond (monthly construction meetings); Suzanne Mintz, Kathy Morgan, and Erica Weiss (Welcoming Committee); Jennifer Rosenberg, Randi Wortman, and Erica Weiss (Social Committee/Party Planning); Anne Levin (Silver Creek MS PTSA Social Committee neighborhood liaison); Fern Shepherd, Gary Ditto, and Winnie Holbrooke (Nominating Committee); Jim Branscome (McNeely Triangle maintenance for 20 years); and Bob MacDowell (Safety Committee). Thank you!

Pedestrian Safety on Neighborhood Streets

Two representatives from Montgomery County Department of Transportation – Mr. Khursheed Bilgrami and Mr. Boris Calderon – updated the neighborhood on safety improvements the county has made to RCH streets in conjunction with the opening of Silver Creek Middle School (SCMS). The DOT reps discussed the addition of crosswalks and school warning signs, as well as parking restrictions on some parts of our streets. They have completed their tasks for this school year in the school zone, but are aware that there are still some concerns, including the increase in the number of commuters using community roads. On Oct. 18, two DOT technicians performed a tag survey on Saul of cars exiting south and coming from the north in both the morning and evening (They still have to analyze the data). After the survey, they will develop a plan and present to the community. Once the community endorses it, it goes through a public hearing and people can testify for or against. If restrictions are approved, the county will install the signs restricting access. Those restrictions apply to everyone, including residents. The only exempt are school buses and transit vehicles. Neighbor said that if you restrict on one street, it will push the problem to other streets. MoCo agreed and said if they place restrictions, they will do all of the streets to avoid this problem. Plan has to be approved by police, 911 responders and school transportation. Mulroney was surprised to hear that the school population is planned to be 1,200, and said they will have to come out to do another survey if need be.

County traffic calming: Neighbors had many concerns about traffic and running stop signs. Mulroney said he will look at the markings in the neighborhood and may paint stop lines to reinforce stop signs. In RCH, the county implemented curb extensions and narrowed Saul to help control speed. They don't use stop signs for speed control, but said one option is speed cameras. This option first requires a speed study (7 miles over posted speed limit is considered speeding). Islands have been used in several nearby neighborhoods for traffic calming. Speed hump program produces good results. Speed humps require approval via a voting process by the people who live on the streets. There is concern about the current sign at SCMS that calls for no left-turn only during school hours. DOT said it will be reviewed to consider altering it to no left turn at all times, and suggested getting in touch with police for enforcement of these signs.

Neighbor expressed need for speed and volume study on Old Spring, specifically Elrod and Old Spring. A motion was passed to ask DOT to consider filling in the triangles at Saul/Elrod and Old Spring/Elrod triangles.

Neighbors discussed traffic calming measures for the area from East Bexhill to Saul on Kensington Parkway (narrowing of road/islands) and possibly trading the current speed humps on Kensington Parkway for islands or other. There was also discussion of implementing a no left turn restriction on Franklin Street from Connecticut Avenue in the morning.

Jim Pekar spoke about the difference between RCHCA as a volunteer organization vs. a town/village. As a volunteer organization, RCHCA has no authority to implement or enforce our own signage, etc.

Sidewalks: Neighbors spoke about the changing nature of traffic in our neighborhood, including some who favor sidewalks because of the new school and bus stops. Another neighbor suggested a porous-type sidewalk that might be more in favor with those concerned about the park-like atmosphere of RCH and the creek.

A motion was passed to request sidewalks at four locations: Saul Road between Haverhill Drive and Old Spring Road; Kensington Parkway between Beach Drive and Littledale Road; Kent Street between Kensington Parkway and Stoneybrook Drive; and, Elrod from Saul to Old Spring Road, and then down Old Spring to Beach Drive.

Permit Parking

RCHCA Vice President Hill Carter gave an update on permit parking. Permit parking can be requested by anyone, and doesn't have to be done via the Association. There is a \$250 fee/year.

The county is rebuilding the sidewalk on Kingston Road, but is looking at the other items from a (date?) letter sent from RCH because of lack of funds.

Neighborhood Signage

Neighbor Laura Dennis displayed a draft of a sign designed for entries to Rock Creek Hills to create a sense of neighborhood and, hopefully, to encourage respect from cut-through cars. She put out a request for quotes on both PVC and wood. A neighbor pledged funds and design of an alternate sign to consider.

Covenants Update

Jim Pekar announced that litigation has been filed in the case of a front-yard fence on Kensington Parkway. The fence, which is prohibited in RCH, was described as a "slippery-slope precedent" leading to the proliferation of more front yard fences and other violations that might impact property values. . The litigation is about protecting the character of our neighborhood. RCH is valued for its park-like setting as opposed to "wooden walls" lining our streets that would change the open feel of the neighborhood. If neighbors wish to contribute to the litigation fund, there is a suggested minimum contribution of \$150/household.

The Board has been asked to revisit the "neighbor notification form," which is the form used by residents who are planning a renovation or construction at their home in order to notify and get signatures from their neighbors that is then submitted to the Rock Creek Hills Covenants Board for approval. If the board sees construction in RCH that has not been approved, it will take steps to address it.

RCH neighbor and real estate agent Gary Ditto said covenants are not discussed in the real estate process, but the covenants are part of the deed and run with the land. The racial portions of the covenants are odious, but not enforceable; however, the bar for changing them is so difficult that they are virtually unchangeable.

A neighbor asked about the prospects for this case. Jim Pekar said it would not be prudent to discuss details of suit, but said that an officer elected to protect covenants has a duty to do so, adding "We have tried to come up with a solution, but to no avail. It's not about one fence in one yard."

Nominating Committee

Please let board members know if you want to participate on the Nominating Committee, which was formed in order to find new officers to replace RCH board members Jim Pekar, Maria Marzullo and Jill Gallagher, who have served for three to four years. Please also let the Committee know if you'd like to serve on the board.

Treasurer's Report

Treasurer Maria Marzullo reported that we have \$8,300 in income – \$7,200 from dues, representing 180 homes out of 640 homes – an increase from last year. This amount also includes some donations for signage. Expenses were \$7,000. Most expenses have been paid: communications, directory, insurance. Since we aren't a mandatory dues association, we don't have an income stream to cover these expenses.

Other Business

Minutes from last meeting were approved.

A neighbor asked about the status of the planned WSSC project. RCHCA has not been advised as to why it hasn't started.

Neighbor Winnie Holbrooke offered yard signs reminding drivers to slow down – as well as "we're glad you're our neighbor" signs.

The meeting adjourned.