

Neighborhood Club of Bala Cynwyd
Board Meeting February 12, 2008
Lower Merion Academy

Board Attendees: Casey O'Bannon, Michael Taichman-Robins, Deedee Litvin, Eric Foster, Maxine Goldberg, Meredith Toole, Mark Kocent, Jerry Skillings, Judy Strazzella, David Haas, Bob Zimmerman, Dan Russoniello, Anne Greenhalgh, and Serge Nalbantian

Excused: Ann Cotton, Ilene McCaffrey, Ellen Wertheimer, Phyllis Faber Kelley, Roger Moog, and John Grugan

Officials Attending: LMPD Officer Baitinger, Commissioner Paul McElhaney and Commissioner George Manos

Call to order:

President O'Bannon called the meeting to order at 7:35 p.m.

PRESIDENT'S ANNOUNCEMENTS

Casey taped a segment for Channel 99, all civics were invited to do it. Channel 7 is doing segments too (30 minutes each). Casey and Anne are doing an interview with Channel 7 on April 21 at 9 a.m. and they welcome a third participant from the Board or the community.

520 email addresses have been submitted to the NCBC for purposes of receiving information.

Tax bills were mailed. If residents did not receive their tax bills, information is available on-line.

Meeting Minutes: Anne Greenhalgh moved to approve the minutes circulated for the January 2008 meeting, Jerry Skillings seconded the motion, and it was unanimously approved.

POLICE REPORT:

Officer Baitinger reported that arrests were made yesterday in connection with armed robberies in the Penn Wynn area.

TREASURER'S ANNOUNCEMENTS

To be circulated by email.

SOLICITOR'S ANNOUNCEMENTS

Nothing to report.

MEMBERSHIP ANNOUNCEMENTS

We have received responses from more of the members we had last year. Fairmont (9 responders) and 191 Presidential (fewer than 9) and other buildings are not even that well-represented. 400 members have already responded, this includes 8 PayPal responses and 55 new members. Over 2,000 residents and businesses solicited. We have also received 10 volunteers for the Cynwyd Trail, Beautification, City Avenue Business District, New Comers committee.

COMMISSIONER'S ANNOUNCEMENTS

There was a piece on WHYY this morning about the Cynwyd Trail walk. The planning and development for the Trail is proceeding well. There will be another walk in the Spring. Judy Strazzella will send Commissioner McElhaney the names of those who have expressed interest in volunteering with respect to the Trail.

Ardmore Transit Center – a favored developer was selected to negotiate with and those discussions are underway.

Commissioner McElhaney indicated that the Township is looking at the Bryn Mawr master plan as well. Efforts related to Rock Hill Road and the M-District are proceeding. Buses are being parked at Righters Ferry location and the impact on traffic patterns has been monitored and no adverse impact has been observed.

Lower Merion is one of three townships in the nation that has been recognized as having a well-managed and transparent budget and budgeting process, and Lower Merion has won this award for several years.

ZONING PRESENTATION:

O'NEILL PROPERTIES GROUP, 131-151 ROCK HILL ROAD

Dan Russioniello explained that 131-151 parcel and the former Plant Outlet are owned by O'Neill Properties and the NCBC invited them to present their ideas for the parcels. In addition, there will be a traffic study and also O'Neill will contribute funds that will be used toward the road improvements at each end of Rock Hill Road.

Ed Campbell (atty) and Kevin Cobb (PM) from O'Neill addressed the parcels and distributed a handout. Additional copies of this handout will be made available to President O'Bannon.

Ed Campbell spoke about the concepts of mixed-use development and encouraging retail development in proximity to residential spaces. In this market, it is contemplated that these properties would be apartments, not condos. O'Neill is working with Township on the ROHO Ordinance to strike the right balance.

President O'Bannon inquired about whether other O'Neill properties offer shuttle service to mass transportation. There are two locations where such a service has been considered or discussed, but it is not offered anywhere at this time.

David Haas inquired about intended commercial uses in 131-151 and also about available parking on this site. 45% of the street front would be commercial – retail and restaurants, and that would be a total of 6,000 square feet. The current ordinance provides for 2 spots per unit but can be reduced to 1.5 depending on certain circumstances, such as the mixture of uses. The Township wants all of the parking to be out of site, and O'Neill is suggesting that some of those spaces should be visible.

Neighbors offered various views on the aesthetics of the proposed development. David Haas requested that when renderings of the development are next presented, that the illustrations portray more accurately the back-drop on the site.

BRIAN GAYLES ON BEHALF OF REGINA ANGELORUM ACADEMY, WHICH IS SEEKING TO OPERATE A SCHOOL AT BALA CYNWYD METHODIST CHURCH

The School is currently being operated at Presentation building (16,000 square feet) in Wynnewood on Haverford Road (5 months ago) and they have 35 students. There is a sister school with 85 kids that has been operating for 6 years. It is a classical liberal arts private academy. They have a one-year lease at their current site and the rent triples in year 2 and quadruples in year 3.

They have looked at more than 20 properties and are most interested in the Bala Methodist Church site and are more than willing to do the work, studies and assessments needed to obtain the necessary approvals. The number of children in the school will be limited as required by the applicable statute. There are 31 parking spaces, and the church will need some of them. Under the statute, the number of parking spaces they get will determine how many children they would have at the school. A reasonable target of 60-90 children would be ideal but too early to predict more specifically.

Full-time school (8:40-3:15) and currently covering pre-K through 6th grade and they envision going through 8th grade. There is no after-care, no summer program or sports activities. The School is interested in a 5-year lease with a five-year option. The site has a u-shape driveway that is very convenient for pick-up and drop-off. The zoning issue relates to parking restrictions. There is presently a non-conforming use for the church and Sunday school and this would be a continuation of the non-conforming use. All improvements would be cosmetic interior work. The church was built with a religious education in mind and there are existing small and large rooms and a gymnasium as well, which are not presently being used other than for Sunday School and a school mentoring program on Wednesdays and Saturdays.

COMMITTEE REPORTS

ROHO ORDINANCE COMMITTEE

The Board discussed the mixed use concepts about Rock Hill Road and the feasibility of attracting people who would walk to this area for shopping and retail development. Maxine Goldberg noted that the Cynwyd Trail development would attract more people to the area though it may or may not be enough to support such development.

City Ave & St. Joseph's & the Bala Avenue/Merion Business District

Serge Nalbantian reported on a meeting he and Mark Kocent attended about the re-zoning of City Avenue that included public officials, civic leaders and community representatives. April 26 there will be a 5K run (One Bala Avenue to St. Joe's) with proceeds to benefit the Police Athletic League. Serge will gather interested neighbors, including Deedee Litvin and Commissioner Manos, to speak with the consultant about Bala Avenue.

Schools

The fitness center made two legal challenges to the buses being placed at the Righters Ferry site. Harriton and Lower Merion High Schools are on schedule and construction will begin in the spring. There have been preliminary discussions on re-districting. Governor Rendell proposed a new standardized exam for high school students to take (must pass 6 of 10 exams) in order to earn a diploma.

Public Service & Improvements

April 29 will be the public officials' dinner at the Tavern.

Transportation

Meredith Toole reported that the construction has started and the dumpsters are taking up two parking spaces. Parking is still an issue, even at the Bala Station, and the train seems to be crowded at all times. Commissioner Reed again passed out applications for parking permits. The rules have been changed to allow riders to qualify with one monthly pass (two were previously required). Some or all of the open space in the park adjacent to the Cynwyd station parking lot will be sacrificed to make more parking spaces, which will really be needed because that's the head of the Cynwyd Trail.

Independence Day Celebration Committee

Anne Greenhalgh reported that pony and petting zoo are all lined up. Anne requested assistance from the Board on finding our religious and patriotic speakers.

Federation of Civic Associations

Maxine Goldberg reported Federation is requesting support for Lower Merion Conservancy in efforts to seek a grant for historic district designations. President O'Bannon will write to the Conservancy in support of the grant application.

Zoning

The Board discussed the proposed use at Bala Methodist and no one opposed it.

New Business

34 Derwyn Rd – the home owner wants to renovate a carriage house and then intends to rent it out. The applicant was rescheduled with the zoning board for March 3, 2008, so the applicant could make a presentation to the NCBC, but the applicant could not attend tonight. President O'Bannon suggested that the applicant seek a postponement of the March 3, 2008 date so that the applicant can come to a regularly scheduled meeting.

ADJOURNMENT

Judy Strazzella moved to adjourn at 9:56 p.m. Eric Foster seconded the motion and it was unanimously approved.

Respectfully submitted,

Deedee Litvin
Secretary