

Tara-Leeway Heights Civic Association
Meeting Minutes
February 23, 2009

Time: 7:30 pm

Location: Lee Center, 2nd floor

Attendees:

- 30 residents
- Kellie Brown – Arlington County NC Project Planner

Topic 1: Informational meeting only on choice of projects to advance for study by the county Neighborhood Conservation Advisory Committee (NCAC)

President Ted Stump asked Bill Braswell to give an overview of the history of the TLH neighborhood conservation process. Bill provided a brief overview, after which Ted provided an overview of the NCAC funding process, including the two projects currently in process (15th/Ingelwood sidewalks and Big Walnut park part 1). One resident noted that the sidewalks along Harrison Street have been under consideration by the civic association and NCAC for 40 years.

President Stump passed out results of the sidewalk survey given to Harrison Street residents along the following blocks: 1500, 1700, 1800, and 1900. The 1600 block was not surveyed because it was not included in the current proposed sidewalk area, for budgetary reasons: funding three long blocks (1600, 1700 and 18/1900) was considered unacceptably expensive for one NC project. However, the decision not to include the 1600 block residents in the sidewalk survey was not communicated to these residents.

At this point, several residents of the 1600 block voiced their strong complaints with the process. They noted their concern for taxpayer dollars being used to fund the engineering survey and the execution of the sidewalks themselves. Particular points made:

- Paul Sullivan (1606?) – asked why did we not get any communications about this? He is suspicious that someone is undertaking this project without Civic Association knowledge.
- Bill Hooper (1625?) – noted that residents of the 1600/1700 blocks met last evening to discuss this project. The families are dismayed by the rapid pace of the decision to move sidewalks to the number one priority of projects considered, especially considering that the residents were not consulted at all. He feels the whole process to be ad hoc, and asked two questions:
 - What does the civic association master plan say about providing a sidewalk from Harrison St to Washington Boulevard?
 - Does each block get to vote on its own, or only as an aggregate of residents?

Mr. Hooper produced a petition of 1600/1700 block residents opposed to the sidewalks; signatories are the Augusta, Foote, Ford, Hooper, Hurt, Lewis, Mann, McCarthy, McGuirk, Meditz, Thomas and Wolff families.

- Ann Lewis (1721?) noted that, historically, newsletters produced by the civic association have been very helpful, but in this case the process seems to have failed. The usual transparency available in civic association processes is missing.
- Roberta Fox voiced the view that several individuals have voiced interest in improving access to Big Walnut Park.
- Richard Swan asked why we haven't proceeded more sensitively
- Eric Willis said that public safety is the central issue. Most critical is the sightlines at the intersections and on the streets. He passed out photos in an effort to prove his point that the 1800/1900 blocks have clear sight lines, while the 1700 block has no sight lines.
- Residents voiced concern that taxpayer dollars are being used to fund the survey and the execution of the sidewalks themselves.

Kellie Brown from Arlington County then gave a presentation on the county's Streetscape Improvement Scoping Process. She addressed concerns over use of taxpayer money to fund these projects, but did not get the opportunity to complete the presentation. Presentation subtopics included Overview, Scoping Steps, Proposed phase, Active/Funding phase, and pictures of Completed projects. A PDF of the presentation is available at website. She noted that Arlington County's Neighborhood Conservation program provides many opportunities for residents to provide input into streetscape designs: clipboard petition to gauge interest, citizen meeting to review concept design, formal second petition, another citizen meeting to review design following funding. In addition residents are welcome to attend and provide input at County Board meetings, where the County approves projects for funding. (Note that residents may provide input into the detail of the design after the Board votes to provide funding, but the residents effectively commit to moving forward with the project in their vote in the second petition following completion of a concept design for a proposed project.)

Questions asked by meeting attendees included:

- Please explain the meaning of 'projects must be approved by 60% of residents'
 - Answer from Kellie Brown: approval of 60% of linear frontage on both sides of a street in the proposed project area must be achieved. E.g., given the lack of support in the clipboard survey on the 1700 block, the 1700 block was removed from the project scope
- Who has veto capability – individual blocks or the overall expanse of a project?
 - Answer: individual blocks may decline to participate
- How is the master plan affected by individual (one-off) blocks not being completed?
 - Answer: circumstances such as this go back to the civic association, since CA residents are the ones who first recommended the master plan, more commonly known as the Neighborhood Conservation Plan. If a Neighborhood Conservation Plan was recommended for change by the civic association, it would then go through a review and recommendation process by County staff and a variety of County advisory Commissions before being finally considered for approval by the County Board.

- The county is surveying for sidewalks now ... why? I can see need for water, gas and electric surveying, but to survey for sidewalks before residents are consulted leads us to believe that sidewalks are being built.
 - Answer: just because a survey crew is on site does not mean the decision has been made and the project is underway.

- Pete McGuirk (1640 Harrison): minutes from the previous meeting show that the 1600 block is under consideration for getting sidewalks. Is this accurate?
 - Answer: The Arlington County Neighborhood Conservation program is not considering the 1300, 1400, and 1600 blocks of Harrison for a streetscape improvement project, to include sidewalks. Any decision to consider a streetscape improvement project originates in the civic association and is then vetted by residents of the proposed project area through a formal process – including two separate petitioning efforts.

- If the 1600 block declines a sidewalk, does that mean the contiguous sidewalk from end to end will be stopped?
 - Answer: If a Civic Association proposes a streetscape improvement project, 60 percent of the linear frontage in the impacted project area must provide support for it to move forward in the planning process. If multiple blocks are proposed and there is a significant lack of support for a project on a particular block, then the NC program in consultation with the civic association can remove that block from the proposed project scope.

 - Further, it is the NC program's policy to fund projects only on contiguous blocks. If removal of a block from a proposed project scope would result in a noncontiguous project area, then the NC program in consultation with the civic association may need to take another look at the project scope to determine how to best achieve streetscape improvements.

- If the Civic Association continually declined to have sidewalks built, could some county-level process override residents' expressed thoughts? Can the County decide (somehow) to build sidewalks anyway?
 - Answer: Sidewalks are built within the County right of way. There are programs within the County that do not require citizen input/approval to build sidewalk within the County right of way. However, the NC program is the County's primary vehicle for building sidewalks in Arlington's residential neighborhoods. Given limited resources, other County programs prioritize based on greatest need (e.g. high volumes of pedestrian traffic, proximity to Metro stations, proximity to schools), and there are 50 miles of County right of way that do not have sidewalks.

- Can our Neighborhood Conservation plan be amended so the decision of 1600 block residents not to build sidewalks can be made permanent?
 - Answer: After going through the required citizen level processes for altering a Neighborhood Conservation Plan, a civic association can then recommend a

change to Neighborhood Conservation Plan. Such a change would then go through a review and recommendation process by County staff and a variety of County advisory Commissions before being finally considered for approval by the County Board.

1600 block residents forcefully say: the 1600 block does not want sidewalks, now or ever!

Topic 2 (Ted Stump): How can we improve the communications between/among residents?

- Ted solicits email addresses from all 1600 residents (names and addresses were provided on a petition to Dave Shepherd, who gave it to Ted Stump) so they can receive updates
- View the CA website
- Sign up for the listserve, which exists to push emails to all recipients
- The TLH needs a single, central POC: Ted Stump volunteers (ted.stump@comcast.net)
- Come to CA monthly meetings

Topic 3: Tree giveaway

Dru Fearing volunteers to be the CA POC for upcoming tree giveaways

Topic 4: Nominating Committee for 2009-2010 officers

A search committee to look for next year's CA board officers has been established. Members will be John Vihstadt, Cynthia Shea, and Robert Fox.

Treasurer's Report (Paulette Cross)

No treasurer's report provided.

Meeting was adjourned at 9:10.