

Minutes of General Meeting of the West End Citizens Association

May 12, 2022

Attendance

- **WECA Officers**: Brian Shipley, President; Noreen Bryan, Vice President; Jen Timmick, Treasurer; Jane Pontius, Corresponding Secretary; Margaret Wagner, Recording Secretary
- **WECA Block Captains**: Nadia Azumi, Maggie Hadley, Rich Panzer, Andrew Sellman, Rose Slater, Carol Starr, Lynn Wagman, Patricia Woodward
- **Others Attending**: Monique Ashton, Ricky Barker, Sheila Bashiri, Barb Beckman, Ellen Childs, C. Cirner, Patrice Davis, Joe DeMaria, Robert DiSpirito, Heywood Fleisig, Angela Geer, Michael Goldfinger, Trish Graboske, Claire Hannan, Lou Harrington, Jason Hubbarth, Ajay Khetarpal, Erin Mahoney, Craig Maloney, Joel Martinez, Eileen McGuckian, Ricky F. Mui, Robert Mullinax, Virginia Onley, Nancy Pickard, Suzan Pitman, Cathy Schairer, Donna Sprague, H. Strine, Michael Thorp, John Tyner, Galen Whittaker

Call to Order

President Shipley called the meeting to order at 7:05 p.m. The meeting took place in-person at the Rockville Presbyterian Church meeting room, online via Zoom, and by phone.

Business Items

• **Treasurer's Report**

Treasurer Jen Timmick gave the report. We began last month with a balance of \$1,832.97. We had income of \$900 in newsletter advertisement fees and expenses of \$1,484.05 for newsletter printing. Our ending balance at the end of last month was \$1,248.92.

• **Approval of Minutes from the April, 2022 meeting**

The draft minutes were distributed to the Executive Board in advance of this meeting. Nadia Azumi made a motion to approve them and Lynn Wagman seconded. They were approved by a vote of 10 Yes, 0 No, 0 Abstentions.

• **Election of 2022 – 2023 Officers**

- At the April Executive Board meeting, the Nominating Committee had presented the following slate of officer nominees:
 - President: Brian Shipley
 - Vice President: Noreen Bryan
 - Vice President, Outreach: Ellen Childs
 - Recording Secretary: Margaret Wagner
 - Corresponding Secretary: Jane Pontius
 - Treasurer: Jen Timmick
- President Shipley asked if anyone present wished to also be considered for an officer role. Ajay Khetarpal of 201 Adclare Road asked to be placed on the slate. Treasurer nominee Jen Timmick offered to step back, opening up the Treasurer role, and Mr. Khetarpal agreed to be considered on the slate for Treasurer.

- Mr. Khetarpal addressed the meeting, explaining that he has lived in the City of Rockville for 12 years. He was previously a resident of Montgomery County. He grew up in this area since he was 16 years old; attended high school here, completed a Masters in Marketing and MBA at Robert Smith School of Business. His experience includes being a Director of Marketing for one company for three years, and then starting his own real estate firm. He has his own brokerage, a boutique firm here in Rockville. Mr. Khetarpal said he and his family had been living in the West End for two years, since the beginning of the pandemic. He loves the community and wants to be part of the leadership.
- A motion was made to approve the revised slate including Ajay Khetarpal for Treasurer. Patricia Woodward seconded. The slate was approved by a vote of 18 Yes, 0 No, 1 Abstention.
- Jen Timmick addressed the meeting to explain that she had enjoyed being a WECA officer for many years. She said she and her husband would soon be moving to Silver Spring, so Mr. Khetarpal's interest in the role came at a great time. President Shipley thanked Jen for her service and welcomed the officers.

- **Report from the City**

Hjarman Cordero gave the report.

- The Mayor and Council in April approved the creation of an 11-member Education Commission to support the students of the City of Rockville. This step is intended to promote growth and collaboration across multiple education organizations such as MCPS, private and non-profit schools, the Montgomery County Board of Ed., parent-teacher associations, and more.
- The Saturday Farmer's Market will open May 14 for its 11th season and run through Nov. 19 from 9 a.m. to 1 p.m. in the Jury Parking Lot. There is a dollar-for-dollar match for customers using their Federal Nutrition Benefits.
- Hometown Holidays will be at Redgate Park this year, with many activities and musical acts.
- In June Rockville will celebrate Pride Month with two events: an online event on June 5 and a live event on June 26 in Town Center.
- Summer day camps will start soon. Please look for the Rockville Recreation guides with this and many other summer activities.
- For more information please read Rockville Reports, and also consider subscribing to one of the many newsletters the City provides that fit your interests.

- **Report from the Rockville Police Department**

Lt. Berry could not attend this evening.

Items of Interest in the Neighborhood

- **Design Guidelines Survey**

The May WECA newsletter has an article covering the West End Design Guidelines initiative. Please read it for the details, and please take the neighborhood survey – either in paper form inside the newsletter, or using the QR code or url to do it online.

- **Road Diets Project (affecting Washington Street and Middle Lane)**

The May WECA newsletter has an article covering Road Diets and WECA's position on this City initiative. President Shipley said he received feedback from someone involved in the Road Diets planning process, stating that some content in the article was not the most up to date information. President Shipley confirmed that, in reporting information about this initiative, WECA worked directly with Rockville's Chief of Traffic and Transportation Emad Elshafei, who gave a detailed presentation on the Road Diets initiative to the WECA Executive Board in January, 2022, and then corresponded with WECA after that regarding questions and concerns raised from the neighborhood. We will follow up with Chief Elshafei for clarification.

- **WECA Springtime Social**

President Shipley gave the update:

- WECA is sponsoring a neighborhood social gathering on Saturday, May 21 from 12-3 p.m. at Monument Park. WECA will provide hamburgers, hot dogs, condiments, etc.
- We are asking that everyone bring a side dish or dessert to share, and your own beverages.
- There is an alcohol permit for the event. We are not supplying beer or wine, but you may bring it.
- There will be a balloon animal artist for the kids, cornhole, frisbees and other games.
- You can park along Monument Street, at Julius West, on S. Van Buren, Argyle Street, or on streets off of Falls Road.

- **Historic Preservation in the West End**

Vice President Noreen Bryan introduced the guest speakers Eileen McGuckian, Lynn Wagman and Nancy Pickard. Noreen provided examples from the West End's history when the future of the West End remaining a residential neighborhood hung in the balance. She explained that the West End exists as a residential neighborhood today only because residents have fought very hard for that, over a long period of time.

- **The History of Rockville West End and Historic Districts**
Eileen McGuckian and Lynn Wagman, guest speakers
- Eileen and Lynn recounted how historic preservation got started in Rockville through the grass roots efforts of citizens to protect what they valued in their neighborhoods and the city.
- Eileen covered a brief history of Rockville, showing a map from 1794 with the area that would become Rockville clearly visible as a crossroads of multiple important Montgomery Country roadways that still exist and are useable today.
- British General Braddock had called this area "Owen's Ordinary" when he passed through in 1755 during the French and Indian War. The area also would be known as "Montgomery Court House" and part of it named "Williamsburgh", before the crossroads community and County Seat was finally named Rockville.
- Eileen showed maps and photographs of houses, court houses, churches and other buildings through the decades as Rockville grew from a crossroads with population of 365 in 1860, into a rural county seat town with 1,422 people by 1930, to a city of 26,000 in 1960.

- Important events in the history of Rockville and the West End were:
 - the construction of the B&O railroad and the opening of the brick Rockville station in 1873
 - the development by Henry Copp of the West End Park subdivision in 1890 (with the city advertised by him as “Peerless Rockville”)
 - the construction of the Red Brick Courthouse in 1891
 - the WPA project construction of the Post Office building (N. Washington St. and W. Montgomery Ave.) in the 1930s
 - the courthouse expansion and opening of the Grey Courthouse in 193
 - the Roxboro development, completed by the end of WWII.
- By the 1960s Rockville had a City Hall and had done its first Master Plan for future growth.
- Eileen arrived in Rockville as a young teacher as the first Rockville Urban Renewal project was beginning in the 1960s. Downtown streets and structures such as Mr. T’s and the buildings of Black community on Washington St. had already been lost. An outpouring of citizen support had saved the Red Brick Courthouse, which had been slated for demolition.
- Eileen became involved in the mid-1960s when she witnessed a major outcry of protest to the Mayor and Council about the Archdiocese of Washington’s plan to tear down the 1817 St. Mary’s chapel when building a larger church there. Rockville Councilmember Matt McCartin of Woodley Gardens led negotiations with the Archdiocese to save the chapel.
- In 1966 the passage of the national Historic Preservation Act introduced historic districts as a potential solution for saving historic buildings. The State of Maryland followed with a law, and Rockville’s Mayor and Council passed a local law in 1966 and appointed commissioners to a Rockville Historic District Commission (HDC). However, as demolition continued and the Rockville Mall opened in 1972, there were few suggestions on the table as to how to stop further loss.
- The State Highway Administration proposed a project to widen W. Montgomery Avenue between I270 and Town Center. This is what spurred many West End families to get involved. A History Committee was formed within the new West End Citizens Association, and they “got anyone involved who wanted to research”, mounting a grass roots effort to document the age and history of houses along W. Montgomery Avenue and surrounding blocks such as Forest, Wall, S. Adams. One way of researching, for example, was by looking up the gossip columns in ancient copies of the Montgomery County Sentinel, where news of a family’s construction of a new home might be published. The group’s research was totally paper based, recorded on index cards, with hand drawn survey maps using colored pencil coding to show the ages of houses. The goal was to document what existed in the neighborhood and try to map out the boundaries along streetscapes of what might make up a historic district.
- After surveying the neighborhood this way, the West End Citizens Association then petitioned the Mayor and Council to try to do something to preserve the historic structures, and especially, to prevent the road-widening which would result in the loss of properties along W. Montgomery Avenue and impact surrounding blocks.

- An architectural consultant was brought in by the Mayor and Council to help draw boundaries and provide advice. The City used the State's template for drafting the local law, which would create an overlay historic zone on top of (not in place of) existing zoning.
- The group needed to educate themselves and others. A number of educational meetings were held with home owners. Some had researched the history of their own homes and were delighted to be part of the district; others were not so sure. Speakers such as Bernie Callan, who had started the historic districts in Frederick, came in and spoke and explained how historic districts worked there.
- Petitions were circulated to homeowners from the affected West End area, but also the entire City. 85% of the people whose homes were in the affected area signed the petition in favor. Many signers were also people who lived across Rockville. The public hearing on March 26, 1974 was packed. People who had to go to bed early were escorted and allowed to speak first. In April of 1974 Rockville's first 3 historic districts - W. Montgomery Avenue, S. Washington St. the St. Mary's/B&O district – were officially created.
- Lynn Wagman described her experience of historic preservation activity, first as a resident of Annapolis and then later as a young homeowner of one of the houses along W. Montgomery Avenue during the time of the fight to create the historic district.
- The West Montgomery Avenue Historic District which came out of this work is very representative of the history of Rockville. There are buildings from before 1800, particularly on N. Adams St., buildings that show the era leading up to the Civil War, buildings constructed after the war, often specifically because the railroad was now there.
- It was also very important to understand the value placed on the whole streetscape. Individual landmarks such as the Woodlawn Hotel, the B&O station, the Red Brick Courthouse can be recognized as historic. But for much of the W. Montgomery Avenue District, as also seen in the historic districts in Atlanta, Savannah, Boston, New Orleans: it is the entire streetscape, and how all the architectural pieces fit together and tell a story, that is important.
- The grass-roots initiative also worked to register the new districts into the National Register of Historic Places. W. Montgomery Avenue and the B&O district were accepted.
- Peerless Rockville was founded in May of 1974 because it was realized that government alone would not do all that was needed.
- Historic designation of other West End sites has followed, including the Bessie Hill House and another house within the Black Kinship Community on Great Falls Road; the Rockville Academy, Rose Hill and Frieda's Cottage.
- A question was asked about the Black Kinship Community on Great Falls Road and what has been done to honor that history.
 - Eileen gave a brief history of 4 Black communities in Rockville: Middle Lane, Haiti, the Black Kinship community, and Lincoln Park, which dates to 1890.
 - Noreen Bryan added some information about research done by WECA several years ago, spurred by the concern that critical properties within the Black Kinship Community would be lost to development: most of that neighborhood was begun

by free Black people before the Civil War. Most of the founding people were women, and the research shows how women kept the community together over time. Properties were sold, granddaughters came back and reacquired the properties and kept them going for more than 100 years. It was also a moving story: Black people were not allowed to marry until after the Civil War. The census records showed that before the War, some people living there were enslaved, some were free. After the war you saw the records show that marriages happened and families separated by enslavement came back together on these land holdings.

- **Historic Preservation Today**

Nancy Pickard, Executive Director, Peerless Rockville, guest speaker

- Nancy spoke to modern historic preservation in general and how it functions in Rockville today.
- The purpose of preservation is to protect and preserve the historic, cultural, architectural and aesthetic character and heritage of buildings, site, and communities. Preservation helps to provide a sense of place and continuity. It can help neighborhoods and towns maintain and embrace their unique history and identity. It is most often associated with sites or structures considered to have architectural significance, or association with significant people and events. It often applies to sites that are 50 years old or older.
- The National Historic Preservation Act of 1966 established national agencies to provide oversight for historic preservation.
- Government bodies and non-government organizations partner at various levels to review and/or administer zoning, master plans, designations, history work area plans and tax credit programs. She explained the function of the local Historic District Commission, the Planning Commission and the Mayor and Council in historic preservation in Rockville.
- Nancy explained how and why historic preservation is relevant today, addressing threats to the historic fabric of communities, and the social justice and equity need to research, survey, document, and designate sites of historic importance to women and underrepresented groups such as African Americans and Asian Americans.
- Locally, the threat to older homes, structures, neighborhoods, and especially mid-century structures is very real. Rising land costs, pressure for development, transportation projects and dwindling open space in the metro region create pressure.
- There is a significant lack of survey data for early and mid-century properties in the West End and across Rockville. The file cards and hand-drawn maps of the 1970s effort Eileen referred to tonight are still the last time a major survey was done on historic significance in the West End. (That was nearly 40 years ago!) The properties being focused on at that time were from the 1920s and older. There is now a gap for significant properties from the 30s, 40s, and 50s. Being proactive to do a new survey would benefit homeowners, potential homeowners, builders and planners.
- Nancy referred to the work of Thompson M. Mayes, and his book “Why Old Places Matter” and described benefits of preservation to the community such as sustainability (rehabilitation and the reuse of local buildings prevents large amounts of waste through

demolition). Preservation is a public good meant to serve the present generation and those yet to come.

- Nancy and Andrew Sellman described the significant tax benefits to owners of historically designated properties. Sheila Bashiri, Preservation Planner for the City of Rockville, mentioned that she is working with officials at the state Historic Preservation Office and Montgomery County to present a tax credit workshop in September. Also, the possibility exists at some point in the future that some older homes in Rockville that are now zoned as commercial can be restored back to being residential, and tax credits may help in that process.
- Ways to get involved: participating in advocacy and preservation efforts with Peerless Rockville or WECA; helping to survey homes in the community; advocating for new designations; being watchful of changes that threaten the fabric of the historic district; volunteering at Peerless Rockville; serving as a member of the Historic District Commission.
- A question was asked about where the line is drawn concerning what is a historic property? The basis of historic preservation is regulated by specific criteria on significance: architectural, e.g., designed by a renowned architect; historical, e.g., demonstrative of an important period of the development in the City; or association with well-known people and events. She described the importance of the property's integrity, or how much it has been altered from its original form, in this assessment. Today there is a movement to also add more people-centered criteria, for example including meeting places in the interior of cities, getting at the heart of what matters not just to one segment of the population but telling everyone's story.
- President Shipley reminded all to visit the Peerless Rockville site at www.peerlessrockville.org for more information or to volunteer. To reach Eileen McGuckian about research or other questions, please contact her through WECA President Brian Shipley at shipley.brian@gmail.com.

Open Forum

- Joe DeMaria, who is running for state representative and lives in the West End, was present at the meeting and invited residents to contact him with questions or to understand his platform.

Next Meeting

The next meeting will be the September Executive Board Meeting on September 8.

Adjournment

The meeting was adjourned at 8:55 p.m.