

Minutes of Executive Board Meeting of the West End Citizens Association
January 13, 2022

Attendance

- WECA Officers: Brian Shipley, President; Noreen Bryan, Vice President; Jen Timmick, Treasurer; Jane Pontius, Corresponding Secretary; Margaret Magner, Recording Secretary
- WECA Block Captains:, Liz Baldacci, Thomas D’Albora, Kristin Gilchrist, Maggie Hadley, Anne Marill, Rich Panzer, Kevin Pedone, Rev. Jane Wood, Kevin Zaletsky
- Other Attendees: Lt. John Berry, Jim Donohue, Emad Elshafei, Tracy Saltarelli

Call to Order

President Brian Shipley called the Zoom meeting to order at 7:01 p.m.

Announcements

- In view of the Omicron surge, WECA will continue to meet via Zoom until further notice. We are anxious to begin meeting in person but want to be safe.
- The Affordable Housing and Villages topics considered for this meeting have been pushed to next month in view of the urgent topics that came up this month.

Business Items

• **Treasurer’s Report**

Treasurer Jen Timmick gave the report. We started and ended last month with a balance of \$1,832.97. There was no income or expenses.

• **Approval of Minutes from the November, 2021 meeting**

The draft minutes were distributed to the Executive Board in advance of this meeting. A motion to approve was made and seconded. They were approved by a vote of 11 Yes.

• **Report from the Rockville Police Department**

Lt. Berry gave the update.

• **Crime Report**

- There were 47 calls for service in West End since our last report. Theft from Autos rates are down.
- Please lock your doors to your vehicles and your homes. Close garage doors. Turn on exterior lights overnight.

- An officer from the City Police Department participated in the country-wide Holiday Task Force.
- A new City Police officer recently graduated from the Police Academy and is now training with a certified field training officer for 3 months.
- Two new lateral officers were hired.

- This is one of the most challenging times for Police Departments. Recruiting and staffing challenges exist nationwide. The City Police Department is down 10 officers at present. Quality recruits, especially those who know Rockville, are sought. Please mention to friends and neighbors.
- The prescription drop box program is now fully operational. A labeled drop box is available 24-hours a day in the lobby of the Police Office where residents can drop in unused prescription drugs.
- The Rockville City Police non-emergency number is 240-314-8900. Please call if you have any questions or concerns. You can email Lt. Berry at jberry@rockvillemd.gov or call 240-314-8954.

Items of Interest in the Neighborhood

- **Road Diets**

Emad Elshafei, Rockville Chief of Traffic and Transportation, addressed the meeting.

- Two years ago the Urban Land Institute did a study at the City’s request. They provided a report on measures the City can take to improve Rockville Town Center. One of these was Road Diets – making the road “skinnier”.
- The project consists of reducing the number of car lanes and using the gained space for other purposes such as bike lanes and parking.
- The area for the project is E. Middle Lane from Washington Street to 355 and Washington Street from Route 28 to 355.
- This project came to the Mayor and Council and they were very excited about it and wanted to go ahead and implement. The Staff decided to do a study and has now taken 3 different concepts to the Mayor and Council and to bicycle and pedestrian groups. There was also a public meeting for feedback held on December 2.
- Regarding neighborhood concerns about traffic cutting through neighborhood streets to avoid the Road Diet areas, Chief Elshafei stated that this change has been designed to keep intersections the same number of lanes as they were previously. He said doing this will minimize any kind of congestion that can happen on that street.
- Chief Elshafei showed graphics indicating the changes for each block along the area of the project and spoke about each block.
- Questions for Chief Elshafei were raised during the presentation. Questions included:
 - Q. Will buses in the one lane of traffic have to block that traffic when they stop for bus riders?
 - A. This is not 100% resolved yet, but in general, yes, the bus will need to stop in the lane of traffic when riders are getting on or off. Right now the City’s design is between 30% and 60% complete, so some solutions are still being examined.
 - Q. How will cut-through traffic be avoided on West End neighborhood streets?
 - A. The Road Diet intersections are being designed to avoid causing additional traffic jams, so hopefully there will not be any need for cut-through traffic. If this does happen, we will see what can be done. The City has policies for reducing cut-through traffic and has used them in the past.
 - When driving west out of the Giant parking lot across 355 and onto Washington Street, this block of Washington is already dangerous, even though today both southbound

lanes of Washington can proceed straight ahead at the Martins Lane intersection. Won't this be more dangerous when one of those lanes will become a right turn only lane onto Martins?

A. If there is any backup, it will be before this intersection and hopefully that will not happen.

- Q. There are today, frequently, delivery trucks stopped on N. Washington. Will these be prohibited when it is only one lane?

A. Delivery trucks should not be stopped there and the police department is right there on the block. Although I would not like to confess this, some of the new parking spaces along Washington Street may be used occasionally for delivery trucks. And some of the hashed areas on the map will likely be used for deliveries at times. Again, here is where we need to rely on the police.

- Q. Is it possible that bike lanes could be removed in future if residents do not want them?

A. Anything is possible. For example, bike lanes were once put in on Hurley Avenue and then removed. If things are not going well, it's easy to remove the buffer and make it the way it was. This would require input from the Mayor + Council.

- Residents can email Chief Elshafei if there are further questions or if they would like to discuss this topic.

• 22 West Jefferson Street

Chris Colross of S.G.A. Cos. LLC addressed the meeting.

- S.G.A. recently purchased 22 West Jefferson Street from Christ Episcopal Church and are re-developing condos in the building, and townhouses surrounding it.
- S.G.A. addressed WECA about the plans seven months ago and are now providing us an update before the PAM meeting with the City on January 18.
- Chris showed multiple plan views of the project.
- S.G.A. is currently doing a Level 2 Site Plan for the City's comment, including Natural Resource Inventory/Forest Stand Delineation, Stormwater Management and Parking Agreement.
- 117 parking spaces are required under City formula. S.G.A. will be requesting an 8% reduction in the parking requirement at the site because this is residential. (The City allows up to a 30% reduction.)
- S.G.A. identified five areas of landscaping improvements to the site:
 - West Jefferson Streetscape upgrades – landscaping front of the 22 building and the new townhouses next to it; straightening the current sidewalk, at City request
 - Western Property line buffer and streetscape – a 4-foot green buffer is planned
 - Planted parking islands – medians with tree islands
 - Improvements around the Church trash enclosure
 - Foley Park Upgrades
- Questions for Mr. Colross were raised during the presentation. Questions included:

- Q. It's hard to tell from the site plan how many and where there will be trees.
A. There will be many trees planted throughout the site. Wherever the plan shows green color, trees will be planted. S.G.A. would like WECA's and the community's input on what type of trees are planted on the site – evergreen or deciduous.
- Q. Is it possible to show at the PAM where there will be large trees that will form a canopy?
A. Sure, we can do that.
- Q. The plan shows that the buffer on the west side along S. Adams Street properties has been reduced from 8 feet to 4 feet, reducing green space and buffer immensely. We were also told that large trees would be planted there.
A. We do still plan on planting large trees in that space, whatever trees will buffer the best. We plan on putting a privacy fence along that whole property line. But let's say the residents along that line would rather have a holly hedge. If that is a preference, we are totally open to that. The existing trees and all the plants that are there, that we can maintain we will maintain.
- Q. Since there is no yard space behind the townhouses – they back onto parking lot – is it possible to replace some of the parking spaces with trees?
A. We really wanted to put a green buffer between the aisles of the diagonal parking spaces, but because of the City's requirement for drive aisles, we were required to get rid of that. We are hoping that the Department of Public Works will be willing to deviate from their standards to allow, for example, an additional tree island. It's really a matter of whether the City will approve that.
- Q. As a neighborhood we are beginning the process of implementing Design Guidelines, some of which will deal with protecting and enhancing the neighborhood from the perspective of climate change. So we look at this project from that point of view and about how to make this as green as possible.
A. I think once we provide you with the drawing showing tree canopy you will realize there is going to be a lot more trees than are depicted on the current map.
- Q. Right now there is an 8 foot green space between the parking lot through road and the properties on S. Adams Street. Now it looks like, due to pressure to add more parking spaces, there is now a row of parking along this line, and a 4 foot green buffer. This was not in the original plan. This seems like a lot of parking for these townhouses and the School that does not really benefit the community because it is taking away green space and green buffer and creates more impervious surface.
A. We have to provide parking for the Church and School as part of our sales agreement. Unfortunately, that is why we're providing so much parking on our site. All the parking that is on the site for the residences are within the townhouses themselves or within the condo building, plus 6 above-ground spaces. All the other spaces you see on the plan are for the School and Church to meet the sale agreement.
- Q. Is there wiggle room to reduce the School and Church parking spaces since S. Washington Street has parking available to them?

A. Unfortunately, what the plan shows is what we have to provide as part of the agreement.

- Q. We know from previous studies at this site that many of the parking spaces for the Church are primarily used on Sundays and often stay open during the week. Therefore would it be possible to request the full 30% reduction in parking spaces that the City allows, instead of the planned 8% reduction, to address the concern about green buffer raised by the residents along that property line? The ten spots newly added to the plan for the west property line could be eliminated, since they are the farthest away from the School and Church, on the other side of the townhomes, and the regained space used to return to having an 8 foot buffer.

A. There is a small amount of wiggle room on the number of spaces. Thirteen spaces in the agreement are “wiggle room” spaces. If neighbors make this point at the PAM meeting, it may be possible to further reduce them somewhat. Also, many Church-goers park in the City’s municipal lot. But the City has so far refused to make this an official parking option for the Church.

- The point was also made that parking spaces are needed for events other than Sunday worship at Church. Weddings, funerals and meetings can happen at other times.
- Q. What is the new pick-up and drop-off pattern for children being driven to/from the School?

A. This will pretty much stay the same. The biggest change is that the 5 parallel parking spaces along the back of the School, and the 7 parallel spaces in the roadway beside the School out to S. Washington Street, will not be available for parking during drop-off and pick-up times so that the flow of cars coming and going can be managed. To exit, parents can choose to drive either out to S. Washington or past the back of the townhomes out to W. Jefferson.

- Q. The point was made that, since the parking spaces for the townhomes are tandem (not side-by-side), residents jockeying to move both of their cars so that the innermost one can leave first, may create even more cars moving in the crowded aisles during drop-off times.

A. Since the pick-up and drop-off is happening next to the School, that conflict will only happen if the parent chooses to go past the townhomes to exit onto W. Jefferson. They could choose to go out onto S. Washington and never come into the residential area.

- Q. The parallel parking that is currently next to the School is slanted-in parking, but in the new plan they are parallel. Why is that?

A. The Fire Marshall is requiring this so that there is an 18-foot clearance for fire trucks to come through.

- Q. How tall are the townhomes? What will they look like?

A. They are the same height as the Jefferson Building. For the townhomes along the S. Adams Street property line, you will see 4 floors. The top floor is not a full floor. For the townhomes along W. Jefferson, you will only see 3 floors, since that is what you see from that vantage point of the Jefferson Building, too. The third floor there will also

be a mansard or other partial floor.

The materials proposed are mostly brick and possibly clapboard siding. S.G.A. met with the Historic District Commission for a courtesy review and discussed using the same materials and feel as the Historic District.

- Q. Will the roof decks face the Church?

A. Yes, we heard the community concern loud and clear on this. The roof decks will face the Church, not S. Adams Street.

- Q. How wide are the townhouses?

A. 16 feet wide.

- All interested residents were encouraged to attend the PAM meeting January 18 at 7 p.m. and/or submit written or verbal testimony.

Open Forum

There was community discussion about the two main topics tonight:

Road Diets

- There is concern about the dangerous area of Washington St. between 355 and Martins Lane. Could both lanes coming from the Giant continue straight at Martins and the road diet merge to one lane happen after the Martins Lane intersection? This is the same approach that works well on Maryland Avenue.
- Need for metrics and statistics about traffic in the Road Diet area: number of vehicles, number of bicycles, timing of lights, evidence to support the intention that intersection traffic won't be affected. This area already has substantial backups during morning and evening rush hours. Usually when a project is considered, a formal traffic impact study is done. That needs to happen here before work begins.
- Our survey showed clearly that people value walkability. If travel lanes will be reduced from 2 to 1 each way, some of that real estate should be used to increase sidewalk space and make it more walkable/adequate sidewalks. This plan would devote the 6 feet of road space to bicyclists and not improve the sidewalk space. We need wider sidewalks instead of concrete barriers for the bike lane. Also, bike lanes should be implemented consistently across the City. This approach using a concrete barrier would be inconsistent with how bike lanes have been implemented with a painted stripe on Maryland Ave. and elsewhere. On Maryland Ave., the new painted bike lanes are working well for bicyclists and motorists.
- Need positive, proactive solution, concurrent with the road diet work - not after the fact - to stop cut-through traffic into the neighborhood of drivers attempting to avoid the congested road diet area.
- Increasing traffic congestion will make it tougher on businesses on N. Washington and in Town Center, not better. Some small roads such as Gibbs Street have been closed down to good effect within Town Center, but these were not main arteries like Washington Street and Middle Lane. The load is already heavy on these roads. A traffic study is needed.
- There is concern about buses blocking traffic when they have to stop for bus passengers on a one-lane road. It is important that bus passengers can travel safely, the number of bus stops are

maintained, and a solution is found that allows buses to leave the one through-lane when stopping for passengers, allowing car traffic to continue moving. This issue has been raised multiple times in hearings during this project and there is still no answer. This should be resolved first before the project is done, not figured out along the way.

- **A motion was made that WECA send a letter to the Mayor and Council with our concerns regarding the Road Diet on N. Washington Street and E. Middle Lane, as discussed in our meeting on January 13. This was seconded and passed by a vote of 11 Yes, 0 No, 0 Abstentions.**

22 W. Jefferson

- The original plan presented by the developer to residents on S. Adams Street had gained their support in large part because there was an 8 foot green buffer area along the west line of the 22 W. Jefferson property. In the plan we saw tonight, this has been reduced to 4 feet. A request was made that the parallel parking in the new plan along the west property line, across from the townhomes, be eliminated, restoring the buffer to 8 feet wide.
- The point was made that the difference in the type of tree canopy and plants that can thrive in an 8-foot space vs. a 4-foot space makes a meaningful difference in the quality of the green buffer, and is worth fighting for. Four feet, with impervious surface beyond that, does not allow for much root system nor for plants that could truly grow into canopy and long-term sustainability.
- There was discussion about the need for the Church and School to have adequate parking available, including for events which don't happen on Sunday. The point was made that the agreement between the developer and Christ Episcopal about parking spaces for the Church is rooted in the contract of sale. The argument was also made that the contract between the developer and Church is one part of the triangle, but the community's willingness to accept the development is the other part, for which we are now seeking solutions.
- The suggestion was made that, with Rockville now producing a Climate Action Plan and looking for ways to avoid loss of green space, that the City make official the ability of Church visitors to park in the municipal lot during non-office hours, in order to save green space on the 22 W. Jefferson property while ensuring Church-goers can park.
- The request was made that we also ask for canopy trees to be located throughout the development, not just on the 8 foot buffer.
- **A motion was made that WECA write a letter to the developer, copying the City and Christ Episcopal Church, requesting the retention of the 8 foot buffer that had been previously proposed, and the inclusion of canopy trees located throughout the development to offset the loss of green space. The motion was seconded, and passed by a vote of 10 Yes, 0 No and 1 Abstention.**

Next Meeting

The next meeting will be the February Executive Board Meeting on February 10.

Adjournment

The meeting was adjourned at 9:29 p.m.