



# Williamsburg Civic Association Newsletter

NOVEMBER 2016

[WWW.WCA-ARLINGTON.ORG](http://WWW.WCA-ARLINGTON.ORG)

## WCA President's Message

Hi Neighbors,

I hope that you and your families enjoyed the summer and are settling back into the fall routine. You may be wondering why we have not convened a WCA meeting this year. It will be clear on 8 December 2016, when we unveil the draft of our Williamsburg Neighborhood Conservation Plan!

Throughout the year, representatives of the WCA have worked very hard on the revision of the NCP. I commend and sincerely appreciate all of the volunteers who worked tirelessly to analyze the survey results and write the various sections of the draft plan.

As you know, the NCP is critically important to the WCA...it captures our vision of what our community will be in the future. The WCA NCP will ensure that we maintain the beauty and appeal of our community, and continue to positively influence future development. It is also key in securing funding for community capital improvement programs. The current WCA NCP, last revised in 2001, is credited with numerous successful improvement initiatives. We look forward to reviewing the plan with you and getting your feedback so that we can look to finalize the plan in the first quarter of 2017.

Finally, I would like to encourage you to subscribe to the WCA listserv to stay up to date on breaking news. Visit our website, [www.wca-arlington.org](http://www.wca-arlington.org), to learn how to subscribe to the Yahoo group and stay informed.

Thanks, and we look forward to seeing you at the meeting on December 8<sup>th</sup>!

- Ruth Shearer

## General Membership Meeting

**Thursday, December 8, 2016  
7:30-9:00 PM**

**Nottingham Elementary School  
Library  
5900 Little Falls Road  
Arlington, VA 22207**

**Topic:  
Neighborhood Conservation Plan**

**Jonathan Levine, Chair,  
WCA Neighborhood Conservation Plan  
John Seymour, Member NCP Committee  
Ruth Shearer, WCA President**

## Neighborhood Conservation Plan Highlights:

Below is a brief summary of the key findings and recommendations in the NCP draft. Please read the full draft at the WCA website: [www.wca-arlington.org](http://www.wca-arlington.org)

**County Services** – Residents rated County Services favorably, particularly core services such as schools, libraries, police and fire response. There were, however, concerns expressed about traffic and pedestrian safety. The NCP recommends improving walkability and reducing local traffic risks.

**Schools** – Although the public schools (Nottingham, Tuckahoe and Williamsburg) were rated highly, residents expressed concern about traffic and pedestrian safety issues near the schools. The same was true for those living near Bishop O'Connell, but those neighbors also expressed concern about littering, nighttime disturbances and crowds. To improve school/ neighborhood relations, the NCP recommends a Complete Streets program to improve walkability, enhance traffic and pedestrian safety, beautify the streets surrounding the schools, and incorporate modern streetscape engineering standards.

*Continued on Page 4*

## Neighborhood Conservation Plan Drafted, Will be Presented to WCA Members on Dec. 8

The process of updating the WCA's Neighborhood Conservation Plan has been underway for the past year. The NC Plan serves as the WCA's vision for future development and improvement of the neighborhood and makes specific recommendations on implementing that vision. The NC Plan typically forms the basis for the various NC capital improvement projects funded by Arlington County, such as sidewalks, street lighting, traffic and pedestrian safety measures, park improvements and renovations, and other beautification projects.

A dedicated group of WCA residents has been meeting regularly to complete the revisions and its hard work is paying off. Many thanks to Ruth Shearer, John Seymour, Jonathan Levine, Paul Douthit, Colleen Ryan, Angela Dickey, Kit Norland and Elaine Tucker for getting all of the pieces in place. The drafters would also like to thank the many other residents of the WCA who participated in the survey that forms the basis for the recommendations in the NC Plan and who provided other input for the NC Plan. The survey, which was distributed in hard copy and electronically, had an 18% response rate, which is about average when compared with other civic associations.

After receiving the survey results, the data had to

be interpreted and tabulated, which was an interesting process given the many open-ended questions in the survey. Following the interpretation and tabulation of the data, the drafting process began in earnest. Additionally, members of the drafting committee undertook a walking tour of the WCA to catalogue and inventory various aspects of the infrastructure of the WCA, such as curbs, gutters, sidewalks and street signage, to determine whether there were any areas in need of improvement.

The first draft of the plan will be presented and discussed with the WCA membership on Thursday, Dec. 8. Given the plan is quite lengthy, we have posted it to the WCA website at [www.wca-arlington.org](http://www.wca-arlington.org). Please take the time to read it in advance of the meeting. Should you have any comments you'd like to share, please send them to [jonathanlevine@verizon.net](mailto:jonathanlevine@verizon.net). Once we gather member feedback, we will incorporate key changes and present a final plan for WCA approval at our meeting in the first quarter of 2017. The next steps after that would be to present the NC Plan to the full Neighborhood Conservation Advisory Committee to obtain its recommendation that the County Board approve the NC Plan, and then seek the County Board's approval by the Spring of 2017.

### Construction of Sycamore Street Median Expected in Summer 2017

The Sycamore Street project calls for renovations between 26th Street North and the Williamsburg Circle (by the CVS), including reducing the lanes of traffic from two lanes each way to one lane each way and installing a median on that stretch of Sycamore Street. The goals of the Sycamore Street Project include slowing traffic speeds, increasing pedestrian safety, beautification, and storm water management. The Sycamore Street Project was a proposal by the WCA through Arlington County's Neighborhood Conservation Advisory Committee ("NCAC").

Construction was initially scheduled to begin in late 2014, but has been delayed several times. County staff recently informed the WCA that construction is now slated to begin in the Summer of 2017. Design challenges and staffing issues in the County's engineering department have contributed to the late start. There also have been numerous changes since the project was approved and funded by the County Board in October 2013, such as the elimination of bio-retention/storm water gardens due to complexity and costs. When the median was initially funded three years ago, the cost was \$1.2 million. The increased cost is not currently known, but with every delay by the County the costs increase more.

The WCA has not been included by the County in the construction process to enable it to see the project through to completion or when changes have been made to the project. The WCA encourages residents to contact the County Board to voice support for completing the Sycamore Street project.

## Williamsburg Lights Work Group to Complete Its Work in December

During the site planning for the new Discovery Elementary School, the County approved the replacement of grass on two soccer fields at the adjacent Williamsburg Middle School with synthetic turf. At the same time, however, it deferred a decision whether to erect lights on the field for evening soccer practice and games.

In September 2013, the Arlington County Board directed the County Manager to convene a “Williamsburg Field Site Evaluation Work Group” to lead a “robust community process to evaluate whether or not to light the Williamsburg synthetic fields. The Work Group was appointed in the fall of 2015 and consists of representatives of the three Civic Associations (Rock Spring, Yorktown, and Williamsburg) as well as representatives of nearby homeowners, several County commissions, and sports groups. Ruth Shearer serves on the Work Group as the representative from the Williamsburg Civic Association. John Seymour serves on the Work Group as the representative from the Environment and Energy Conservation Commission.

The goal of the Work Group is to determine

whether the various adverse impacts (light, noise, traffic) of lighting the fields can be mitigated sufficiently to “preserve the character of the neighborhood and provide a reasonable quality of life to the nearest neighbors.”

Beginning in the fall of 2015 and continuing to date, the Work Group has held more than 20 meetings, visited numerous sports fields in Arlington and elsewhere, and reviewed materials prepared by the lighting vendor and several independent engineering firms. At its November 2nd Open House, Work Group members discussed various educational materials and took questions about the process and possible outcomes.

The Working Group has been directed to prepare its final report and recommendations this month — November, 2016. Currently, the County Board has scheduled a Work Session to review and discuss that report for January 2017. In the spring of 2017 the County Board is expected to review the current Williamsburg Middle School special use permit and, at that time, also consider the option to add lights, in light of the recommendations of the Work Group.



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**Land Use and Zoning** – The neighborhood is primarily zoned residential, but there is some commercial and special use zoning as well. Since the 2001 NC Plan, there has been a great deal of redevelopment. Older, smaller single-family homes are being demolished or renovated and replaced with much larger single-family homes that use the maximum allowable lot coverage. In-fill development brings concerns of the increased number of “McMansions,” loss of large lots, loss of trees, and affordability of houses, which many feel adversely effects the character of the neighborhood. Recommendations include modifying the county’s Zoning Ordinance to require developers to consult with civic associations on “by-right” construction; re-examining the county’s Zoning Ordinance on allowable heights for the construction of new residential housing and the renovation of existing homes; re-examining the county’s Subdivision Ordinance on access requirements for pipe-stem and in-fill development and minimum street coverage; re-examining the county’s Zoning Ordinance for residential zones in terms of lot coverage for buildings (including decks and detached structures); and improving the procedures for notifying civic associations and community residents about variance applications.

**Traffic & Pedestrian Safety** -- The WCA has a Traffic & Pedestrian Safety Committee that has been proactive in surveying residents about where improvements might be made, and sharing those recommendations with County Staff. In prior surveys and in the NCP survey, “poor walkability” was cited as the most important aspect of the community that they would like changed, and excessive traffic speed was cited as the second biggest issue. Several trends exacerbate the problem at the present time, including increased commuter traffic, increased cut-through traffic, and a significant increase in commercial traffic. In general, WCA residents do not like such measures as a reduction in speed limits, electronic speed displays, one-way streets, traffic lights, street narrowing, traffic circles, and bicycle lanes. That said, respondents do support traffic calming in some specific areas, particularly near schools. Recommendations: Reduce posted speed limit to 15 MPH near schools; change criteria for stop sign warrants near schools; and install raised crosswalks on Little Falls Road near Nottingham School. Please view the draft posted online for further recommendations.

**Parks** -- There are only two small parks within Civic Association boundaries – Minor Hill and Sharp Park. Although residents recognize that the size and location of the parks limit access and use, they have identified some improvements intended to improve safety at the park, facilitate access, and enhance their natural beauty. They include recommended design and landscaping changes to integrate the two contiguous parcels more fully and enlarge the area of use; ornamental fencing surrounding Sharp Park to provide additional separation from the very heavy adjacent vehicle traffic; and improved plantings and landscaping consistent with small suburban green areas. The Plan also includes a recommendation to improve the Birch-Payne cemetery at the corner of 28<sup>th</sup> Street and N. Sycamore Street. This small neglected Cemetery is currently maintained by the County and the NCP draft recommends that the County consider purchasing the Cemetery and introducing appropriate landscaping, benches for contemplative seating, and historical markers.

**Commercial Establishments** – The Civic Association hosts two small 1950s-era strip malls at the junction of North Sycamore, Little Falls, and Williamsburg Boulevard. In general, residents are satisfied with their mix of service and convenience stores (dry cleaner, bank, Seven-Eleven store, CVS drug store, casual restaurants). Recommendations include summarizing survey responses for the landlords of the strip shopping centers to advise them of resident opinions, discuss the neighborhood’s wish for a desire for improved landscaping and beautification at this key neighborhood intersection.

**Urban Forestry** – The decline in the tree canopy occasioned by residential development and tear-downs was a constant theme expressed by survey respondents. Residents are concerned that the green and leafy ambiance of the neighborhood is threatened and recommend that steps be taken to enhance the tree canopy where possible. Recommendations include working with the County urban foresters to identify public spaces (Sharp Park, Minor Hill, Birch-Payne Cemetery) for the planting of large deciduous shade trees; working more closely with the Tree Canopy Fund to promote the planting of trees on private property; and promoting the removal of invasive species (English Ivy, Japanese honeysuckle etc.) on both private and public lands within the Civic Association.

*Continued on Page 5*

# July 2016 Memorandum of Agreement Between Arlington County and Bishop O'Connell High School Regarding Sharing of Athletic Fields

During 2012-13, Bishop O'Connell High School invested considerable resources in the renovation and enlargement of its athletic facilities bordering the Civic Association. The new baseball fields and synthetic turf football field (and associated structures and buildings) serve both Bishop O'Connell athletic program and serve as home field for the Marymount University Men's baseball team. The fields also host numerous summer camps, including camps sponsored by Arlington County's Department of Parks and Recreation (DPR).

More recently, DPR undertook a major renovation of Tuckahoe Park with major improvements to the two existing softball fields.

In July of this year, DPR and Bishop O'Connell entered into a memorandum of agreement (MOA) to establish a formal relationship for the sharing of the two sets of fields. The MOA replaces and supersedes long-standing oral agreements under which DPR and Bishop O'Connell shared use of the facilities. Members of the Williamsburg and East Falls Church Civic Associations had long-complained about the oral agreements because, they felt, the agreements discouraged Tuckahoe School administrators from requesting field time for after-school extended day and enrichment activities. Their concerns had grown in recent years because of the ever-increasing extended day population at Tuckahoe and the loss of much of the school's outdoor recreation space to relocables (trailers). A formal MOA was needed, they thought, to clarify everyone's expectations about space and, hopefully, to lead to a more equitable allocation of scarce and

valuable recreation space.

Although the MOA does add clarity, it largely ratifies earlier oral agreements to grant after-school Tuckahoe field space to O'Connell. The MOA provides that the two diamond fields at Tuckahoe Park will be reserved for the O'Connell girl's softball games for practices and games in the spring and for lacrosse and/or soccer practices during the fall. O'Connell will use the fields from 3:30 to 5:30 p.m. for practices and until 6:00 p.m. for games.

In return, DPR will be granted 5 hours on the O'Connell stadium field on Saturdays and Sundays during certain periods of the year and limited time in the O'Connell gym and on the baseball field.

The MOA did — at the insistence of the County — include some time for community use of the new synthetic track. When the O'Connell fields are not scheduled for O'Connell activities (including school activities and physical education classes), the track will be open for community use Monday through Friday from 9:00 a.m. through 8:00 p.m. or sunset, and Saturday from 9:00 a.m. through 5:00 p.m. and Sunday from 11:00 a.m. through 5:00 p.m.

In light of the very heavy use of the fields during and after school and on weekends, it is unclear what "community use of the track" will actually mean in practice. O'Connell has not yet clarified the scope and nature of community access, except that the MOA provides that O'Connell may "implement protocols for community access to the track" when School is in session.

*NCP Highlights, continued from Page 4*

**Urban Agriculture** -- WCA residents are generally supportive of steps taken by the County to encourage food sustainability and urban agriculture — urban garden plots, for example. They strongly oppose, however, possible County initiatives to promote urban animal husbandry such as "back yard chickens." Although vacant or underutilized land in the Civic Association (as in all of N. Arlington) is extremely limited, recommendations advanced in the draft plan include working with the County and Urban Agriculture groups to learn more about locating, developing, and maintaining urban gardens.

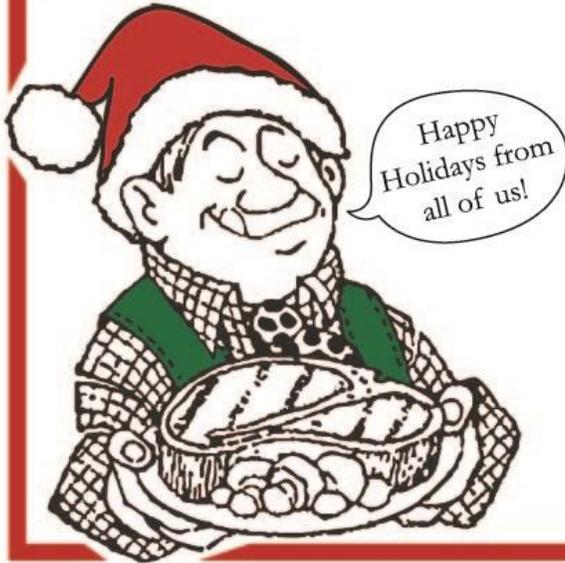
**Ageing in Place** -- WCA contains, relative to the Arlington population as a whole, a high percentage of elderly residents (nearly 25%). Residents express an interest in learning more about Arlington's Neighborhood Villages; working with the County to ensure that WCA streets, sidewalks and parklands are in compliance with the Americans with Disabilities Act; examining ways to improve neighborhood walkability through canopied bus stops, wider sidewalks, benches for relaxation and resting; and shade trees for comfortable passive recreation. In addition, residents are interested in learning more about granny flats and accessory dwellings and other approaches to increase the housing options in Arlington that could allow the elderly to continue to live in their homes.

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The purpose of the Williamsburg Civic Association is to promote the welfare of our community and its residents. We do this by holding meetings, issuing this newsletter, and interacting with the Arlington County Civic Federation, Arlington County Board, and a variety of local and regional organizations. You can support our efforts by paying your annual dues of only \$10 per household. Please tear off this sheet and mail it along with your check (made payable to Williamsburg Civic Association) to our treasurer, Jim Toronto, at 3577 Powhatan St., N., Arlington, VA 22213. You also can pay at the general membership meeting. **Please consider adding a donation to your dues, as we rely on dues and limited ad sales to pay for the printing of this newsletter and various other expenses, such as our website hosting fee and our dues to the Arlington County Civic Federation. Thank you for demonstrating your appreciation for our work by adding a small donation!**

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