



WORK SESSION of the Greenbelt City Council
Held Monday, December 11, 2000
For the purpose of meeting with representatives of the Westchester Park Civic Association.

Mayor Davis started the meeting at 8:06 p.m. It was held in the Council Room of the Municipal Building.

PRESENT WERE: Council members Edward V.J. Putens, Rodney M. Roberts, Alan Turnbull, Thomas X. White, and Mayor Judith F. Davis.

STAFF PRESENT WERE: Michael P. McLaughlin, City Manager; and Kathleen Gallagher, City Clerk

ALSO PRESENT WERE: Bob Crecco, President, and Joe Haskell, Board Member, Westchester Park Civic Association; Sheldon Goldberg, Advisory Planning Board; Barbara Young, the Greenbelt News Review; Amy Boyes, the Gazette.

Smaller Jaeger Tract:

Following introductions, Mayor Davis explained that the impetus for the meeting on Council's part had been their need to respond to the Planning Board regarding plans for parcel E of the Jaeger property. Mr. Crecco said that the Westchester Park Civic Association (WPCA) had opposed the preliminary plat of subdivision, simply in opposition to any development on the parcel, even though they knew the proposal was acceptable in a regulatory sense. He said they simply couldn't find much to object to. They have recently spoken with the developer-owner, who anticipates requesting temporary access from the State Highway Administration for construction vehicles from Kenilworth Avenue. The alternative would be to come all the way around Westchester Park Drive and through the lot for the 6100 building. Since the residents find that prospect even more objectionable, Mr. Crecco said the WPCA has agreed to support the developer's request as soon as it is made. There will be 47 units, in three-story buildings, mostly two bedrooms, to sell at \$140,000. Construction may start early in the new year. In response to a query from Mayor Davis, Mr. Crecco said the development was too small for there to be any significant traffic impact.

Mr. Roberts asked if there had been any consideration of accepting higher density development on this tract in exchange for less development of the lower 17 acres; there appeared not to have been.

Regarding the temporary access to Kenilworth, Mr. White noted that one of Council's conditions to the County had been that the Kenilworth woodland buffer would not be disturbed. He and the Mayor both commented that the City might object to this. Mr. White asked what the ultimate

road access would be and was told it would be the existing, one-way, Westchester Park Drive. Mayor Davis asked Mr. McLaughlin to alert Celia Craze to this issue.

In concluding this part of the discussion, Mr. Crecco emphasized again that WPCA had no strong objections to this particular development. Mr. White noted that it will be of the same character as the existing development, which would not have been the case if the previously proposed assisted living facility had proceeded there. Mr. Crecco said they have asked to join the section #1 condominium made up of the townhouses and garden apartments at Westchester Park, though this would be complicated.

The Lower 17 Acres

Mr. Crecco circulated a plan and map for this part of the property, which was recently given to him by the owner. Though not filed with the County, the plan indicates 21 houses on half-acre lots, expected to sell at \$400,000. Mr. Crecco says, however, that the owner is open to selling the property. Mr. Crecco said that, by his own report, the owner paid \$525,000 for both Jaeger parcels but would expect to sell for well over \$1 million. Mr. Crecco said he believes there are environmental problems with the land and that the owner's plans have been scaled down. He noted that \$400K houses would raise the property values of the WPCA owners, however.

Discussion followed on how the City, the WPCA, and other interested groups and communities might cooperate most effectively. Mr. Crecco said everyone seems to think this is someone else's responsibility. Congressman Steny Hoyer has made no response to letters and a petition. The Governor's office has said it's a federal issue, not a state issue, though Mr. Crecco wonders whether state open-space funding might not be relevant. He has received nice letters from Senators Sarbanes and Mikulski but no offers to initiate action. He said the WPCA has concluded it can write letters till Doomsday but that there will be no action unless elected officials take the lead. They have also made contact with environmental organizations that purchase property. The National Park Trust is the only one that has shown interest.

The Mayor said Greenbelt has a problem taking the initiative because the property is not in the City; she added that although the members of the 4 Cities Coalition would be supportive, there is not strong interest. Mr. Putens asked if the WPCA had talked about raising money at all; he said some people perceive the acquisition as primarily benefitting the residents of Westchester Park. Mr. Roberts and Mr. Turnbull both suggested that if the property was purchased and donated to the park, the tax benefits could offset the purchase and that it might be worth the WPCA's while to investigate further. But Mr. Crecco and Mr. Haskell both expressed the difficulties of doing that from the perspective of a condo board with limited jurisdiction.

The Mayor asked about using as a vehicle the "friends' agreement" that Superintendent John Hale of National Capitol Parks-East suggested forming during his presentation to Council at the November 27th meeting. Everyone agreed that this should be pursued, but Mr. Turnbull stated that since the Park Service cannot lobby on its own behalf, the friends' agreement will be limited in its use and it should be assumed that interested groups also need to assemble under another umbrella.

Mr. Roberts said he thought it was important that we get everyone away from the idea that acquiring the land for the Park is primarily of benefit to Westchester Park. He noted that the disadvantage of having the WPCA take the lead in letter-writing and such is that it contributes to the idea that it is a Westchester Park issue. He said we need to make it clear that the goal is to protect Greenbelt Park, not Westchester Park, and that any development would be detrimental. There was general agreement that this perspective was correct and that it would be better for the City to be the "front" organization.

It was then agreed that holding an informational meeting that would include a briefing from the National Park Trust could be a way of getting organizations together. Mayor Davis suggested that Mr. Crecco talk with the Trust and let Mr. McLaughlin know if they are agreeable; the City can then organize the meeting. She suggested it might be best to plan it for a Saturday.

Mr. Haskell asked if Council knew anything about the changing piles of debris and rubbish at the edge of the property that Greenbelt Park has at various times said it would clean up. Council was not aware of it and asked Mr. McLaughlin to check with Superintendent Hale about it, as well as following up with him about getting a copy of the standard friends' agreement.

Mr. White said Westchester Park should also be aware that there is some suspicion that developers will attempt to use the Jaeger property to mitigate environmental damage at the Smith property and that the City does not consider that to be an acceptable trade-off, given that one is located in Greenbelt and the other is not.

Informational Items:

Mr. McLaughlin announced that tomorrow evening there will be a reception at the College Park Aviation Museum to mark an installment of \$30,000 in Anacostia Trails Heritage Area funding.

The owner of the Greenbelt Theatre building has asked to meet with Council. It was agreed to hold an executive session on Wednesday, December 20, to talk with him. The quarterly CAR report will be discussed after that meeting, but the discussion of the City Manager's goals will be rescheduled later.

Mayor Davis announced that GAVA and the Pottery Guild have broken off negotiations and will go to mediation later this week. Mr. Turnbull raised a question regarding the City's oversight procedures for funding and for the use and disposal of resources by City contractors and contributions groups and asked the City Manager for a briefing or memo in this regard.

Mayor Davis reported on a conversation with Patti Brothers, in which she learned that the Labor Day Festival's reserves have been nearly depleted by two years of bad weather. They have also lost personnel.

Mr. Putens commented on recent complaints regarding participation in the Boys and Girls Club by non-residents. He also asked the status of the investigation of Donny Wolfe's complaint. Mr. McLaughlin said it was on the agenda of the Advisory Committee on Trees for this week.

The meeting was adjourned at 10:10 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Kathleen Gallagher

City Clerk