

TOWN OF GLEN ECHO
COUNCIL MEETING MINUTES
February 14, 2011

ATTENDANCE: Debbie Beers, Mayor
 Nancy Long, Councilmember
 Eve Arber, Councilmember
 Dan Macy, Councilmember
 Steve Matney, Councilmember
 Nicole Fraser (filling in for Cathie Polak, Clerk/Treasurer)

VISITORS: Polly Angelakis, Glen Echo Park Site Manager, NPS
 Raya Bodnarchuk, Resident
 Willem and Phillip Macy, Residents
 Sophie Keefer, Echo Reporter

Mayor Beers opened the meeting at 8 p.m.

Mayor Beers opened the meeting by noting the passing of former town councilmember, Jim Anderson, on April 30, 2011. She announced that Mr. Anderson contributed a lot to the town and a memorial service would be held February 27 in the Town Hall. Councilmember Long announced that she will go through the town minutes during his tenure and will make a note of the various issues that came before our government at the time.

GLEN ECHO PARK (GEP) REPORT

Ms. Angelakis announced that Montgomery County's environmental assessment for the MacArthur Boulevard Bikeway continues with no word from the county when there will be a hearing for public input.

Four interns were trained in proper oral history, legality and techniques and have started the interviews with people knowledgeable about the history of the park and its communities, and who were visitors to the Amusement Park. Ms. Angelakis said that she sent a note to all of the interns' supervisors to make sure that the interns talk to Nancy Long. Councilmember Long asked where the interns are coming from. Ms. Angelakis said that she believes two are from Eastern Mennonite University and another from George Mason University.

Ms. Angelakis reported that NPS employees and the Glen Echo Park Partnership for Arts and Culture (GEPPAC) will offer a two hour orientation on February 3rd to both organizations to address the many questions about the roles of the two organizations.

The park will offer several new interpretative programs at 3 pm daily on special topics on Clara Barton's life: women's rights, civil rights, her letters and teachings. Please call the Clara Barton site to check the schedule and availability. The topics are mentioned in the catalogue. By reservation only, the park will offer tours of the Spanish Ballroom. The park will observe the 150th anniversary of the commencement of the Civil War with a variety of programs highlighting Clara Barton and her life. For example, a "Flat Clara

Barton” along the lines of “Flat Stanley,” will be sent to various battlefields. Children can do an activity and get a badge related to the “Flat Clara Barton” program.

The trolley restoration will continue in the spring. New way signs will be completed by Family Day.

Councilmember Matney asked Ms. Angelakis about the state of drainage on the MacArthur Boulevard bike path as it passes along the upper park boundary. Ms. Angelakis noted that the engineers plan to dig a trench along that boundary in an effort to solve the problem. Councilmember Matney said that last week the bike path along park property showed no improvement and it was the worst spot between Glen Echo and Georgetown. Ms. Angelakis said that the park engineers plan to sand the area and dig the trench. The problem is two-fold: standing water and formation of ice.

Councilmember Long queried that, with spring coming, will the park identify new areas for planting. Ms. Angelakis said that Sharna Plater the park’s facilities manager, plans to meet with the park horticulturist and talk to him so that she has an understanding of what needs to be done and how to maintain it. Councilmember Long asked if any of the plants put in by First Bloom have survived the winter. Ms. Angelakis said that we can’t tell right now but anything that needs to be replanted will be. Councilmember Long suggested that it would be preferable if a group of hardier plants could replace the delicate ones that were planted around the civil rights memorial, and that for the most part, have not survived. Ms. Angelakis concurred and will pass this along to the park’s horticulturist and facility manager.

Ms. Angelakis asked if the town’s lawyer had received the paperwork on the Oxford Road memorandum of understanding. Mayor Beers said that she will get in touch with him and follow up.

Councilmember Long asked if the GEPPAC was planning any new programs. Mayor Beers believed that they were moving forward on offering the currently empty yurt to a stone sculpture group. The sculpture group may also use the Cuddle-Up covered area when it is available seasonally for the group to work on larger pieces. Councilmember Long said that this is the same sculpture class that has been using the Cuddle-Up; thus it is not a new offering but rather a new use for the empty yurt.

TOWN HALL USE

The Town Hall is being used by English Country Dance on Wednesdays. And FSGW Family Dance will be held on Sundays February and March. A resident requested use of the Town Hall for a business meeting on February 15. On February 25, the a capella group Slaveya will hold a concert open to all. February 27 the Anderson Family will hold a celebration of the life of Jim Anderson. Mayor Beers noted that the Washington Post ran a profile on Jim Anderson and his life on February 9.

Mayor Beers asked if she should get in touch with Kate Horwitz about holding the St. Patrick’s party on March 19; there was general agreement to that suggestion.

Councilmember Matney reported that a number of residents asked if the sound system could be used as a PA system. At present the sound system is not appropriate to use as a PA system because of the placement the components would result in feedback. He proposed that the town look into a PA system; his quick look online found PA systems for \$350-600. Councilmember Long said that we ought to have in time for the Jim Anderson memorial. Councilmember Matney demurred; it would be unlikely to organize a PA system by that date. Councilmember Macy said that maybe we can get the Folklore Society to help out as the town has borrowed their PA system for previous events. Councilmember Matney offered to continue the search for a PA system.

TOWN MAINTENANCE

Councilmember Arber announced that the orange dot on the tree on the Church Annex property (corner of Harvard and University) means that approval has been granted for the tree to come down. The council noted that the debris had finally been cleared from the base of the tree.

Councilmember Long noted that the hot water system in the Town Hall has been fixed. It had been out off and on for 2-3 weeks, including the four consecutive days when there were events at the town hall. All the Town Hall users seemed to manage; the plumber had to come three times to finish the job. The hot water heater and the heating system are separate.

Councilmember Macy asked if anyone had observed if the tree fire at Harvard and University burned a hole in the asphalt.

PEPCO

Mayor Beers plans to draft a letter to Pepco detailing the particular problems of Glen Echo. She mentioned that Jim Shaut observed that the wires are uninsulated and that may be why trees have caught on fire when the wires come in contact with them. The maintenance of the electric utilities in Glen Echo is wanting; the town lost power last week in the middle of the day. The power should not go out every time the wind blows. Her letter will outline:

- 1) the general “terribleness of the situation,”
- 2) uninsulated wires,
- 3) isolation of 78 houses (of the approximately 100 buildings) in town on a loop which means that those houses will always be a low priority for Pepco’s attention during blackouts,
- 4) how the continual power outages are a relatively recent phenomenon.

Councilmember Macy asked if we could switch the 78 houses to the other loops and if it would be possible for the town to hire a private maintenance company to help out during storms. Councilmember Arber said that scenario would be unlikely as Pepco would most likely not want to have a private contractor working on Pepco’s infrastructure. Mayor Beers said that she would rather be proactive and put measures in place before the power goes out. Councilmember Arber offered to invite Kim Watson of Pepco, to the next council meeting. Councilmember Matney asked if we could invite a staff member from the state senator’s office or Roger Berliner from the county. Mayor Beers said that she will copy all the local politicians, county and state, on the letter but it would be unlikely

that the state offices would attend. Councilmember Macy said that we need to find our own solution: switch to another circuit or contract out repairs. Mayor Beers said that we can ask but it would be better to get Berliner or someone else to take notice and apply pressure that way.

TOWN WIDE GENERATOR BIDS

Mayor Beers offered information collected by Elaine Bodlander about generator bids. The generators cost roughly \$3500-\$4000 but this does not include installation and a necessary switch. Ms. Bodlander has offered to collect more information and maybe the town could negotiate a reduced rate if a large enough number of residences were interested. Ms. Bodlander works with electrical distributors professionally and has offered to spearhead this project and meet with authorized installers. Mayor Beers asked if the town council had a sense whether or not people in town were interested in purchasing generators. Ms. Bodlander has offered to hold the meeting at her home. Councilmember Matney asserted that he felt very strongly that the generator proposal should not come from the Town Council or appear to be endorsed by them. Mayor Beers said that people will be invited if interested; she continued that it is “a fine mess if we can’t rely on the public utility to provide power as if we are living in Borneo.” Mayor Beers said that the community could receive a flyer only about the meeting at the Bodlanders and that a .pdf of all of the pertinent information will be sent to the town council members. Resident Raya Bodnarchuk said it would be better to get Pepco on task then for individuals to have to purchase a generator.

Mayor Beers said that people are very attached to trees but given the fiasco involving Pepco the law should be changed about tree removal. Pepco contacted the Baptist church prior to the recent storm to inform them that the tree on their property at Harvard and University should come down. The church did not respond; subsequently a limb from that tree fell and caused a fire and power outage. Mayor Beers said the utilities and the town need to be more flexible; the law should change if no response within 30 days the tree will be taken down. Council members noted that this could lead to large problems about private property issues. Councilmember Long noted that the church’s tree was in bad shape anyway and she’d like to make sure that there is something put in to replace it. Councilmember Long continued that when Asplundh (Pepco’s tree removal contractor) comes in to remove the tree to make sure that they don’t leave the kind of mess like the one by the bus stop and other areas. They left a large amount of debris on the right of way between Harvard and Oxford. When Councilmember Long spoke with the contractor, he said he didn’t know it was town property but thought it was county property. Mayor Beers said that when Asplundh removed a limb from a tree on the property line between McGunnigle and Long properties, they cleared all the debris including the leaves. Ms. Keefer of the Echo asked “Maybe they knew you were the mayor?” Mayor Beers said that she merely wished to point out that sometimes they do an excellent job on the debris removal and sometimes not.

OXFORD ROAD STOP SIGN

Mayor Beers presented the police citation report from the off duty officers that issue citations at the Oxford Road and University Avenue stop sign. Mayor Beers said that one person that had been issued a citation protested at the appeals hearing that the speed

bump does not conform to Montgomery County specifications. Mayor Beers said that she knows that the height and grade are compliant but at issue is the placement of the speed bump relative to the stop sign. Councilmember Macy said it would be great if the town could receive the citation revenue at least to offset the cost of the officers (\$1120). 89 citations/warnings were issued in January. Councilmember Long asked that this and future citation/warnings reports be attached to the minutes.

POST OFFICE UPDATE

Mayor Beers asked Ms. Bodnarchuk if she had noticed an improvement in the traffic on Harvard Ave since the post office moved the USPS mail drop box. Ms. Bodnarchuk said it is better, more people are pulling into the driveway but there are some people still turning around on Harvard in front of her home. Councilmember Matney asked if the one way sign had been posted yet. Mayor Beers said not yet but it will be soon. Mayor Beers expressed concern that the new mail drop box placement is not handicapped accessible; however, this is not the town's problem it is for the USPS to handle but she will not be surprised if someone complains. Ms. Bodnarchuk said that the new mail drop box location is not stable; the plinth was placed, not poured, into the ground and may eventually fall over. Councilmember Long noted that there is a considerable slope where the mail drop box was placed, and that there is continuing soil erosion on that slope. It would have been better if they had dug down and poured the slab on site. Mayor Beers hopes that for the interim this mail drop box location and other measures outlined in the memo help alleviate the damage to Ms. Bodnarchuk's property and traffic problems caused by Post Office customers.

TOWN MAINTENANCE

Mayor Beers read a letter from Waste Management that announced that they will be raising their rates by 1.6%. Councilmember Macy noted that they do a good job and that the overall cost is not astronomical.

Councilmember Matney asked if the town has obtained the uprights for the "no parking" signs. Mayor Beers offered to check.

Councilmember Matney reported that within the last month there are three dogs running off-leash in town, across MacArthur Boulevard and back. These three dogs belong to town residents who are new to the town and the county, and as a result these residents might not be aware of the regulations. Ms. Keefer noted that there is also an issue with dog owners not picking up their dog's waste. Mayor Beers asked Ms. Keefer to put a reminder in The Echo, and she would look up the town's prohibitions related to dogs. Councilmember Matney reported that there is another rash of unlocked cars being broken into in town, mostly on Vassar Avenue. The affected resident called Montgomery County police and was advised that "word is out in Baltimore that cars in this area are often left unlocked."

CHURCH ANNEX

Relative to the Baptist Church Annex, Councilmember Long asked that the Town attorney provide an opinion on what uses could be made of the property if the town does not buy it. Councilmember Macy asked if we want to move forward with an offer

contingent on an inspection of the building. Mayor Beers said she was unsure if the town has enough cash on hand and is unwilling to float a public bond; she would rather not buy the property. She would rather save the town's money to upgrade the sidewalks. She cannot see the purchase going forward as the building is not handicap accessible and needs a lot of work; a house would not be so bad as a new structure could not go beyond the existing foot print. Mayor Beers said that she will ask Norman Knopf about potential allowable uses for the property. Councilmember Matney voiced his support for further investigation of buying the property. Mayor Beers countered that it cost the town \$90,000 just to make the Town Hall accessible; to get the church annex up to ADA standards would be equally expensive even if the church offered it to the town for the low end of the price (\$350,000).

Councilmember Macy added that he cannot see a long term use for the property by the town; he asked if the town could purchase it, place a restrictive covenant on it, and then sell it. His informal polling of town residents shows mixed feelings: some say the town should buy it, some are ambivalent, and some asked what the town would do with it. An important concern in town is that someone would tear it down, and build a two story structure which could hurt the character of Harvard Avenue. Mayor Beers said she is reluctant to buy it unless the town has a specific use for it, she noted that purchase would wipe out the town's surplus. Town revenues are going down; as are highway sharing fund money from the state. She continued that she cannot see asking people to pay more in taxes to finance it.

Councilmember Long said that if a church or another organization purchased the property, the result could be a substantial increase in traffic and an unsustainable parking increase. Councilmember Arber added that the best-case scenario is that someone buys it as a residence; to preserve the character. Mayor Beers said it is difficult to get historic preservation status. Councilmember Arber asked if the council could make an overlay zone. Councilmember Matney said it was unlikely for a single property. Councilmember Arber countered that it might be possible.

Councilmember Macy asked if it would be possible to ask the church to do a restrictive covenant prior to the sale. Mayor Beers said that she believes it is height (a two story structure) that is the true issue. Mayor Beers said that any inspection should also include the approximate costs to bring the structure up to code for use as a public structure.

Meeting adjourned at 9:20 p.m.