

CCV Arbor Committee
Minutes 8/20/08
At 4020 Everett Street

The meeting convened at 8:05 pm. Rachel Ritvo, Chair, Marcia Keppel, Jule Crider were present.

Absent: Celeste Park, Marty White, and Jack White

Rachel reported that Celeste was unable to attend at the last minute because of unexpected house-guest but had sent comments that Rachel was to share with the committee at the appropriate times on the agenda. Further, Marty White had emailed last minute that she was delayed by an emergency at work.

The minutes of the July meeting were accepted without changes.

Ongoing role for the Arbor Committee: Committee members expressed disappointment that Peter Roman, councilmember for trees, had declined to meet with the committee until after the council's worksession on the master plan on August 25th. Jule raised concerns that the current Arbor Committee is experiencing the same waxing and waning support from the councilmember for trees as the previous Arbor Committee in 2003. Clearly there was a different councilmember at that time. The discussion turned to structural issues that seem most likely to make the relationship between the committee and the council member and council unstable. Various ideas were put forth. 1) There are no similar committees and no ongoing "modus operandi" for committees working with the council. We are breaking new ground. 2) The tasks involved in looking after the ROW trees are numerous, have time-sensitive issues, interact with the citizenry individually and with several professionals (the town administrator, the state forester, the tree maintenance company and the consulting arborist). The role of a citizen committee in moving any or all of these tasks forward is unclear. 3) Citizens join the committee because they wish to advocate for the trees and actively participate in keeping the "look" of Chevy Chase View's ROW trees. The committee members also value citizen involvement in town activities.

Rachel raised the question of whether the ROW tree program would be better off without an Arbor Committee under the aegis of the Council? Since the members of the committee are motivated by a desire to have a robust tree program and retain the View "look" could this be done better as a citizen committee engaging in active advocacy but not working as volunteers for the town? Jule reported that in the records of the town it seemed that committees were formed to plan for the trees that worked with the Council or governing board of the time to design and plant the trees on a block by block basis. Rachel commented that this block by block decision making structure had led to the unique "look" of the View that does not have the uniformity of all blocks as a builder designed subdivision might but also does not have the randomness of county roads. Rather there is coherent design of different sorts giving a very unique feel to the town.

The committee decided to continue this discussion with the Council at the meeting to discuss the Master Plan that is to follow-up on the Council's worksession.

Preparing for the Council Worksession on the Master Plan: The worksession is open to observers but no comments or questions are allowed from the floor. Jule and Marcia will try to attend. Rachel will be out of town. Rachel felt she would like to send an email to the Council hoping to help them focus on priorities of decision making in the assessing and revising the Master Plan draft. After some discussion the committee framed two basic comments: 1) that the ROW trees are comparable to the setbacks and building lot requirements in determining the traditional "look" of the View. 2) that using a consulting arborist (probably on an hourly basis, not retainer) has many benefits that are not immediately obvious to anyone who has not grappled with managing the ROW trees.

The following paragraphs were drafted:

1. Why do we need some sort of written plan for dealing with the town's right-of-way trees?

Chevy Chase View's "look" or "character" is defined by its large lots, sizeable setbacks and well-designed and established right-of-way trees. Whereas the lot size and setbacks are written down, the principles for maintaining the right-of-way trees are not documented.

The lack of written principles leads to inconsistent management with frequent changes in approach and often neglect and failure to replant or to maintain the traditional "look". The impact of this inconsistent management is not always immediately evident but over the years it threatens the future of the unique appearance of our town and a regression to the unplanned plantings as are found on county right of ways.

For this reason the council needs to have written guidelines that can be followed and handed down as council members come and go just as the setbacks are handed down.

2. Why does Chevy Chase View need a consulting arborist?

Is this similar to hiring Alan Beale to manage the setbacks? Although not nearly as time consuming or as expensive a job, managing the trees requires expert knowledge of trees and is in its own way just as complicated and complex as the building supervision. Other towns which have remarkable right-of-way tree canopies (Garrett Park, Chevy Chase and, we are told, Somerset) have been successful maintaining their characteristic appearance by having their programs overseen by a consulting arborist. These towns know that you need the expertise of an arborist who is not primarily focused on running a tree maintenance service. Phil Normandy has been willing to work with the town on an hourly basis and has

not required a retainer so we are not paying for any more services than the council member for trees approves.

Celeste Park is a committee member who is trained as a master gardener. She was unable to attend the meeting Wednesday but sent her comments by email mulling over the role of a consulting arborist “I do think that more than one opinion can be helpful when a tree is in question... I do not think Meyers and Law always have the best information and they obviously have some conflict of interest as they are the ones getting paid if a tree is removed. Trees take a special expertise. I do not think the town council can be expected to have the knowledge, time, or interest to be experts in dealing with the trees. This would be another good reason to have an arborist available.” The committee endorsed all these points.

Rachel agreed to circulate these paragraphs to the members not present and then draft a letter to send them to the Council by email before she leaves town on Sunday.

The next meeting was set for Thursday, September 11th at 4020 Everett Street. The meeting adjourned at 10 pm.