

November, 16, 2021

To: Mayor and Town Council
Re: Compatibility of proposed Pepco EV chargers

John:

The Town Council requested the HPC examine the proposal by Pepco to install Level 2 chargers on the Chestnut Road side of Howard Park, the parking area on Center Street and the parking area in Woodward Park for issues of compatibility and impacts on the integrity of the Historic District.

We understand that the Town has committed to work toward meeting the goal of the UNFCCC Paris Climate Accords of keeping under the 1.5°C rise in global temperatures; has joined *Sustainable Maryland* and will work toward certification by broadly improving its sustainable features; joined *ICLEI Local Governments for Sustainability* to assess its GHG emissions and develop a Climate Action Plan for reduction; and has integrated a Sustainability Section in its draft Comprehensive Plan that promotes efforts to increase adoption of electric vehicles (EVs). These efforts reflect the overall goal of stewardship that is the basis of historic preservation as well.

Looking to the future, we also understand that electric vehicles will soon replace most gasoline-powered vehicles and locations for charging will become common elements of the landscape. While most residents will have private chargers on their own property for home charging, there will be need for visitors to top up charges while attending Town events. There are also 6 houses around the Circle that do not have vehicle access to their property, so will have no chance of charging, while others residents may face other impediments to charging at home. The HPC recognizes that a critical aspect of preservation both of our Historic District and the contributing houses is that they remain viable in the modern world and that accommodation of elements of modern life be adapted and incorporated into the historic fabric so as to retain the integrity of its character-defining features. The Town has successfully done this over the years both with its houses, public buildings and landscapes. Indeed, the eclectic nature of the adaptations is one of its character-defining features. This assures that the houses and the District not become outdated and risk replacement.

The proposal is to install 2-4 charging stations and a meter cabinet adjacent to the existing graveled parking shoulder between the McCathran Hall driveway and Miller Drive. The cabling is to be underground from a pole adjacent to Miller Drive, with the meter cabinet near the pole. The charging stations are to be paired, placed about 36' apart with 2 small charging devices on a steel post about 4' tall mounted on a concrete slab with two 6' cable management masts and two protective bollards. There are to be no markings on the gravel and signage can be provided by Pepco or by the Town. Provision by the Town would assure it match the other signage in Town. None of the trees, plantings or landscape elements would be affected.

The historic landscape elements directly impacted by the proposed charging stations are Chestnut Road and its viewshed and Howard Park and its viewshed. Indirect impacts would include views of and from adjacent McCathran Hall and the easement property, the Woman's Club, and the Methodist Church.

Howard Park, named after the first president of the Association, and the property across Chestnut Road at various times contained a lumber yard, superintendent's house, areas for laundry, a carriage park, the Albany Hotel, a dining hall, furniture store, food market, tennis courts and miniature golf. As such, it historically has not and currently does not serve as a residential use. Howard Park now has lost its more utilitarian functions but remains the focus of Town activities. In the *Cultural Landscape Analysis* prepared by Robinson & Associates the landscape is described thus:

“...it provides a common green for McCathran Hall and the Woman’s Club. Footpaths associated with the structures pass through the park which otherwise features turf lawn, rhododendrons, oakleaf hydrangeas, and other shrubs, and deciduous and evergreen trees, including holly, oak, and tricolor beech. Behind the Woman’s Club is a stand of cherry trees. The Park has an uneven topography that slopes down to the northwest. Small scale features include four concrete and wood slat benches and various types of signage.”

Chestnut Road was laid out in the 1897 Maddox Plan to run from Brown Street to Laytonsville Road and serve the Hotel and the various service structures and subsequently the Hall, Woman’s Club and Church. It has a 30-foot right-of-way of which approximately 15’ is paved and has a graveled shoulder toward the Park. The viewshed north of Center Street is fairly open with vistas of lawn and mature trees, and the public structures. It differs from the viewshed to the south of Center Street and north of Johnson Alley with its close-in canopy and dense clusters of cottages and garages close to the road.

The placement of charging stations in this location is consistent with the historic uses of the property that were devoted to shared utilitarian purposes. They would have a negative visual impact on the viewsheds of both the Park and the Road and would reduce their bucolic nature to a degree. This impact would be moderate, seen as clearly modern and could be further minimized by following the recommendations below. These recommendations would resolve most of the visual conflicts.

Two other alternate locations have been proposed: the parking area for McCathran Hall along Center Street and the parking lot(s) at Woodward Park.

The first alternative would be located in the graveled parking area in Chapel Park across Center Street from McCathran Hall. The park was originally planned to hold a Chapel that was never realized, but was used for recreational sports like roque, croquet and badminton, and according to Robinson:

“Today, the park features mature oak trees on turf with some understory plantings, including a row of hydrangea shrubs along Grove Avenue. Small-scale features include a concrete and wood-slat bench. A pull-in parking area at the north end of the park is paved with gravel.”

Center Street marks the boundary between the original Tent Department and the Cottage Department and is a paved road with varying ROWs and shoulders. This is also the public approach to McCathran Hall and one of its most iconic views.

The charging stations would be placed to handle 4 cars parked side by side, and the pole and meter cabinet would be at the corner of Chestnut Road and Center Street.

The placement of the chargers here would be consistent with the public use of the space, is the parking area most associated with McCathran Hall, and thus potentially of the greatest service to the public. The viewsheds of Chapel Park, Center Street and Grove Avenue would suffer a negative visual impact. The Center Street viewshed is closely bounded by cottages between Grove Road and Grove Avenue but then opens to the views of Chapel Park and Howard Park with the focus of McCathran Hall. The impacts on the views of Chapel Park and of the Hall as you approach along Grove Avenue are somewhat mitigated by the line of shrubs at the front of the parking area. Placing the chargers closer to Chestnut Road would reduce this impact. Though not in a residential area, it is closer to and within view of the contributing structures along Grove Avenue. The scale of the chargers is minimal relative to the scale of the space, trees and landscape that defines the parks, and would be further mitigated by the recommendations.

The second alternative would be at the gravel parking area for Woodward Park. Half of this area along Grove Road was platted as residential lots in the Maddox Plan and the other half along Maple Avenue was designated a park. When the Auditorium was built, the residential portion was added to the park. It has always been used for

active and passive recreation, and during the heyday of the Auditorium it hosted many Chautauqua events of over a thousand people. There are many structures in the park including the Maintenance Shed, tennis courts, basketball court, playground equipment, etc. as well as a log guardrail separating the parking from the grounds. There is a gate at the Grove Road entrance drive that is closed at dusk. This is a public location that has always drawn people both from the Grove and outside so this would be compatible with its historic use.

The chargers have been proposed in the lot adjacent to the clay tennis courts and would be configured for 4 side by side spaces. The meter cabinet would draw power from the adjacent pole.

The viewshed from Grove Road would be relatively unaffected due to the number and scale of the other structures already there. The viewshed within the park would also have minimal impact for the same reason. The scale of the tennis fencing itself would mitigate the impact of the chargers and meter cabinet.

A fourth site, at the Commercial Corner has also been discussed. There would be no concerns placing the charging stations at that location, but cars would have to park in the Commercial Corner parking lot. If parking in a public way is a requirement, then the Commercial Corner would not be possible.

Recommendations:

1. Screen the meter cabinet with plantings and/or fencing.
2. Pair two chargers per mounting post.
3. Stain pad brown.
4. Modify bollards to reflect historic character of Washington Grove, but still be compliant with safety standards.
5. Provide signage in a style to match signs used in Washington Grove.
6. Restore all gravel surfaces, lawn and plantings to same condition as found before the installation.

Thanks for your consideration.