

Town Council Reports for October 2022 Council Meeting

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Conservation Meadow

Dave Cosson

Montgomery Parks reports that maintenance actions previously discussed are still planned, but that staff shortages and scheduling issues have delayed work. Later in the fall or early winter the concrete debris will be removed and the missing wooden bollards along Ridge Road will be replaced. The metal fence posts currently in the bollard line were not installed by Montgomery Parks.

Contracts

Dave Cosson

Landscaping/Maintenance. I again recommend that the Council begin now to evaluate whether the Town should continue to use contractors for all or most of the landscaping and maintenance work. Related to this issue is the inventory of riding and walking lawn mowers in storage as well as a truck. Regarding the latter, used vehicles in good condition are being actively sought by dealers and are bringing premium prices at present. These issues still need discussion.

Dog Park Committee

Christine Dibble

Nothing to report this month.

Emergency Preparedness and Safety Committee (EPSC)

Gray Yachup

EPSC continues to discuss and work on overgrowth and line-of-sight issues prevalent on Town roads and had a brief walk to surveil the most affected sights.

EPSC continues to have talks with Montgomery County on the installation of speed cameras and speed humps on Washington Grove Lane and Railroad Street.

EPSC is coordinating with the Gateway Committee to remove the dumpsters at the Commercial Corner.

EPSC is working with Picea View and the Fire Department to review coverage of fire hydrants for lower Ridge Road.

Forestry & Beautification Committee

Barbara Raimondo

Stadler is installing twelve new trees in locations chosen by the F&B committee. Details to follow later.

Gateway Committee

Eva Patrone

Held a meeting via Zoom on September 15. Highlights of the meeting include:

- **The last welcome sign was placed at Commercial Corner**
- **Identity Fencing Updates**
 - Fencing has been purchased 2 months ago. Six weeks ago, Peter made arrangements with RJ through Darrell about installing fencing. Peter is thinking about purchasing a piece of equipment from Home Depot so that Peter and other town volunteers can do it themselves.
 - Priority places for fencing: Corner of Daylily near new sign, across from train station at Grove and Railroad, WGL, Oak Street, possibly across from Robert's Oxygen with the new sign.
- **West Woods Brush Clearing, Safety Issues**
 - The County cleared the brush. Good news: the road signs can now be seen.
 - Bad news: the culverts are now exposed. It's a sharp four-to-six-foot drop-off which could be dangerous for vehicles and for pedestrians who might try to walk on that side of WGL. (And for those who pick up on trash along WGL.) This should be MoCo County's responsibility to put up guard rails.
 - Right now, caution tape and stakes mark the most dangerous of the culverts.
- **Center and Oak Streets at WGL – Site Visit Update**
 - Long-term priorities: water control, creating nice walkways, making it more aesthetically pleasing
 - Immediate improvements:

- remove the chains and install more bollards in their place
 - add new bollards down closer to where Center and Oak intersect with WGL
 - look at the signage in those areas
 - Need to talk to Gray to get this project on the draft RFP for residential stormwater/flood management. Also, need to get feedback from engineers.
- **Other Business**
 - Peter will work up a draft of the Gateway Committee's purpose/goals for posting on the town website.

Historic Preservation Commission

Darrell Anderson

The HPC held a virtual meeting on September 20, 2022; the next meeting will be held on October 18, at 7:30 pm by virtual means.

The HPC had no projects to review.

There was a continued discussion about changing the Historic District wording on the new WG signs and the possibility of adding more signs to mark interior avenues.

There was an extended discussion between the HPC and the chair of the PC about the preservation/demolition ordinance plan in which mansionization and overlay zones as well as changes in the building permit process were addressed. Some suggested changes would require an HPC review for a building permit and an HPC consultation and a report for changes to public ways, buildings, or demolition. There was discussion of a possible Montgomery County consultant and a PC/HPC workgroup.

Based on resident feedback, it was decided that resident comments could be included with the home descriptions on the architectural survey website.

Regarding Cherry Avenue, the HPC supported avenues being maintained as walkways.

There was discussion about finding a storage place for historic house parts.

Lake Committee

Gray Yachup

Lifeguards: Coverage remained until August 1st, at which time the “Swim at your own risk” sign was put up. The Lake is now officially closed for the season.

Maintenance: Asphalt apron from Washington Grove Lane to Maple Lake path patched. After conversations with Montgomery County Police, the signs on the Lake entrance will be edited. Barbed wire will be replaced behind the lake shed.

Wildlife: No additional reports.

RASEC: Current efforts with RASEC are to review documentation for appropriate wording and to review de-escalation training for lifeguards. All Lake regulations were translated into Spanish. This Summer, lifeguards were trained in de-escalation, a training which will be repeated yearly.

Lighting Committee

Barbara Raimondo

The two walkway bollard lights for McCathran Hall that were approved by the Town Council, the Historical Preservation Commission, and the Maryland Historical Trust have been purchased. An additional transformer was also necessary to purchase in order run all the lights. These lights are now in the hands of Steve Werts to install.

As a result of advocacy on the part of some Maryland Municipalities including The Town of Washington Grove, the Maryland Public Service Commission (MD PSC) rejected Pepco’s new streetlight tariff and directed them to meet with Maryland municipalities concerning options on streetlight ownership.

Pepco announced a series of four meetings: 9/14; 9/21; 9/28; and 10/6 - each three hours long - to discuss “The Pepco and Municipality Streetlight Purchase Process.” Town Councilor Dave Cosson and the Chair of the Streetlight subcommittee, Virginia Quesada, have attended the first three meetings and will be attending the last. Additionally, they will attend a fourth meeting in Baltimore on October 12th where Pepco and the municipalities will be discussing their progress on the process of streetlight ownership before the MD PSC.

This is a surprisingly complex issue and though it is far from a resolution at this point, in general, these discussions have been positive in terms of trying to forge some sort of reasonable compromise between the different entities.

It was discussed that since TWG's attorney Suellen Ferguson is involved in these proceedings with Pepco that we might submit some questions to her concerning her advice for TWG. Dave Cosson will be collecting the questions and then they will be sent to Mayor John Compton.

Lower Ridge Road Water Main Project

Darrell Anderson

WSSC Engineering and Construction Department employee stated that they had no authority to install or abandon wells or septic. He said that fell under the Health Department.

The Health Department employee from the Well and Septic Section of the Department of Permitting stated that if a waterline is installed, wells can still be used. If a well fails, the resident would not be permitted to drill another well; they would have to hook up to the waterline.

We are unlikely to get a WSSC response in writing, so the Council needs to decide how to move forward based on this information. In addition, the MC Fire Department has access to fire hydrants in the event of a fire on Lower Ridge Road.

Maintenance

Darrell Anderson

As the growing season comes to an end, there have been less frequent mowing and trimming. This month the rainy weather also interrupted the number of days available for landscaping tasks. This brings to mind the need to determine tasks that could be done this winter.

Among the specific tasks completed this month are the following:

- Removed barriers and tape from the culverts on the south side of WGL.
- Installed barriers and tape at the culverts on the north side of WGL.

- Installed Washington Grove sign at the Commercial Corner.
- Installed six more trail signs in the woods.
- Installed ten signs at entrance of various woods trails.
- Cut foliage on WGL.
- Responded to two residents' requests to mow missed areas.

Maryland Municipal League

Darrell Anderson

The next meeting of the MML will be October 20, 2022 at 6:30 pm by virtual means.

MML legislative priorities will be presented at the Fall Conference in Annapolis from October 9 –11. Priorities include, but are not limited to, police accountability and new revenue streams.

Some municipalities were invited to a series of virtual meetings with PEPCO regarding municipal ownership of streetlights. Virginia Quesada and Dave Cosson from the WG Lighting Committee attended the first meeting. They were congratulated for their work on this issue and for their continued communication with the Public Service Commission (PSC) on this issue and the tariff rate proposals.

In a discussion of the current tariff rate for LED lights being overcharged at the sodium vapor rate, a suggestion was made that WG file a complaint with the PSC for unfair billing.

There was discussion about hate crimes in Montgomery County and an interest in municipalities brainstorming ways that there could be a unified response. It will be discussed at the next meeting.

McCathran Hall

Barbara Raimondo

For now, the holiday show is being planned to be live. We will reassess whether Covid-19 might impact the performers or excessively limit the live audience. *[Note: a screening of the filmed holiday show will be held in McCathran Hall, and the show will also be available for watching via MMC]*

Montgomery Municipal Cable

Gray Yachup

Nothing to report.

Planning Commission

Christine Dibble

- The PC will begin meeting with HPC representatives the third Wednesday of every month to discuss how the ordinances might be amended to encourage the preservation of historic cottages.
- The PC is requesting that the Council address the request from the Van Nostrand/Ambrose household to purchase town land adjacent to their property at 404 Fourth Avenue.

Racial and Social Equity Committee (RASEC)

Barbara Raimondo

The new RASEC logo is available. Requests for use by RASEC must be vetted by the Leadership Team and the general membership. If the event is endorsed by RASEC, it is approved. If someone wants to add the logo as a co-sponsor of an event or a cause, it must be discussed within RASEC.

RASEC is continuing to pursue removing restrictive covenants from deeds. A Maryland law allows homeowner associations, but not municipalities, to remove them *en masse*. Our state representatives will be contacted and asked if they will amend the legislation to include municipalities. Councilor Anderson will check with the Maryland Municipal League to see if other municipalities would like to join the effort. Charlie Challstrom has created a digital handbook on this topic that is posted on the Town website.

RASEC now has a domain-based email address. RASEC members are now finalizing the process to transition to the new address.

Analysis of the data collected during the inclusivity survey is still being analyzed. The analysis will be ready by the end of the year. The survey results will be presented to the RASEC membership and then to the community at large. The first ADU workshop was well attended and successful. Two more are planned, for October 26, and for December 1.

RASEC surveyed participants from its recent events: the walk with Emory Grove, the talk by Reverend Warner, and the ice cream social. Responses in general were positive and participants wanted more events. Suggestions included better communication of alternatives during the walk for people with limited mobility and soliciting volunteers from the communities at-large to help with future events.

The draft Resolution on an anti-racist statement was presented to the Leadership Team who made some edits. The draft will be presented to the RASEC membership for ratification and then to the Town Council. Residents will have an opportunity to comment.

The signage on the Woodward Park was discussed. The new, attractive sign with the same message in Spanish and English was noted. It was suggested the same sign be posted on the side of the board facing the parking lot as well. It was noted that the suggestion regarding periodically evaluating the permit process for field use was included in the Town Comprehensive Plan.

Recreation Committee

Eva Patrone

Haunted East Woods Spooktacular. The haunted trail begins and ends at the Gazebo. Kids and adults are invited to stay and enjoy the fire pit, s'mores, apple cider, and tales from the old timers about trick-or-treating uphill both ways in the snow, back in their day.

*Note: I assume this event is being hosted by the Rec Committee, but I have not been involved in the planning, and there have been no meetings or email communications about it, so all I know is what was posted in the bulletin.

Recreational Facilities (Woodward Park, Playground and Tennis Courts)

Eva Patrone

- New sign installed at the entrance to the park explaining (in both English and Spanish) that the parking lot is closed between sunset and sunrise. Eva worries it may be too small, but it will do for now.
- Edible Garden

- The buckwheat in the short beds is in flower; Red clover in the first short bed is up.
- The garlic has arrived. The group will schedule a day to harvest the sweet potatoes and plant the garlic around the first light frost (end of October)

Roads and Walkways

Gray Yachup

The new sign for the Woman’s Club/Miller Drive parking is pending fabrication.

Several graveling/seeding projects are pending completion. Namely, investigating the leveling of the street near Johnson Alley/Acorn Lane intersection. Will be messaging requesting Town residents and discussing at TC meetings when applicable.

Worked with the Woods Committee to create a comprehensive Stormwater Management RFP, which is currently pending acceptance by the Council.

Continuing to work on creating a standardized process for requesting/approving projects like speed bumps, road repairs, or other similar maintenance projects.

Shady Grove Crossing

Barbara Raimondo

Nothing to report

Stormwater Management

Gray Yachup

Lorem ipsum

Sustainability Committee

Dave Cosson

The Sustainability Committee met by Zoom on September 29th and discussed the following:

Biochar Experiments. Committee members discussed whether Town residents who burn wood should be encouraged to use a “BioCharlie.” This is a metal cylinder that

when loaded with 5 pounds of plant material and placed in the fire of a fireplace or wood stove produces approximately one pound of “bio char.” The mostly carbon biochar can then be used as a soil enhancer that also results in carbon sequestration. The question of whether encouraging burning of wood in homes increases air pollution that negatively affects all residents was debated, including the use of “scrubbers” on chimneys to remove pollutants. The Committee will look into the feasibility of constructing BioCharlies and talking with residents who burn wood about participating in experimental use.

Green Team. The Green Team met on September 19th and worked on its files documenting the actions accomplished that will be used to document the Town’s application for certification to Sustainable Maryland. The Green Team has contacted other Town committees to document their activities relative to the certification application. So far, the prospects of the University of Maryland assigning a graduate student to work with the team do not seem favorable, but there will be further discussion. The final application will be completed by next spring.

Heat Pump Resident Meetings. Meetings were held September 13 and 27. Recordings of the meetings will be available on Google Drive. Many questions were asked and discussed, and residents shared their experiences. The Committee plans to ask the Methodist Church for information on its recent conversion.

Renewable Electricity Follow-Up. The function to discuss options for renewable electricity was held in conjunction with the Women’s Club and attracted about 20 people. Some participants noted their irritation with the website from which more information could be obtained. Other concerns were expressed with respect to the difficulty of tracking credits between bills, and with a perception that Pepco is incented to make the process complex and opaque. The Committee intends to revise and clarify the information it provides to Town Residents.

Edible Garden Group (EGG) Status. The sweet potatoes and cover crops are doing well. Garlic will be planted after the harvest of the potatoes around the first frost. The success of this pilot program and the possibility of expansion next year will be evaluated in the coming months. Committee members had a call with State Delegate David Fraser-Hidalgo regarding the potential for creating something like the Greenhouse in the Snow in Nebraska which uses geo-thermal energy to grow fruits and vegetables year-round.

Communications. The Committee reviewed the information it has published so far, discussed what needs to be removed, what should be revised, and what should be added. Heat Pump Water Heaters are a potential future topic.

Coordination with Other Committees. The work of the Lighting Committee to ensure it can retain the power savings of LED bulbs and of the Woods Committee to reduce tree damaging erosion was discussed. Further discussion focused on how to encourage residents to install Dark Sky appropriate exterior lighting that does not harm insects and birds.

ICLEI. ICLEI has produced a webinar on funding for sustainable infrastructure. The Committee hopes to develop an action plan follow up to ensure qualification for available funding.

Maryland Climate Change Program. The state has recognized it is not on track to meet its previous greenhouse gas reduction goals but is now focused on 100% reduction by 2035.

The next meeting is November 1st.

Website and Communications

Christine Dibble

New content:

- Posts:
 - Consider Induction Cooktops
 - Plant Free Trees to Fight Global Warming
 - Tree of Heaven (*Ailanthus altissima*)
 - A Series of Programs about Accessory Dwelling Units
- Agendas and minutes for Council, HPC, Planning Commission
- Home page features re: upcoming events of note (e.g., Bluestoberfest, Woman's Club auction)

Woods Committee

Dave Cosson

The Woods Committee met on October 3rd by Zoom and discussed the following:

Deer Management. Signs in English and Spanish, modeled on the Montgomery County Parks signs in the Conservation meadow, have been posted at all entrances to the East and West Woods, allowing the commencement of the authorized hunting. BHFFMD reported that two does have been harvested in the East Woods so far this season. The lower meadow was closed to hunting through September while the MC-DOT surveyors were working there but will open for BHFFMD bow hunting in October.

Washington Grove Lane Culverts in West Woods. As reported last month, when the County DOT trimmed West Woods foliage back from the edge of Washington Grove Lane dangerous drop offs were exposed into the drainage ditches fed by culverts under WGL. Yellow caution tape was installed as a temporary measure; however, a permanent solution that would prevent both pedestrians and wayward vehicles from falling into these ditches is urgently needed. The Committee strongly recommends that a formal request to the MC-DOT be sent in writing by the Mayor, asking it to install metal guardrails and/or extend the culverts significantly further into the woods and cover with packed soil. The EPSC concurs with the Committee's assessment of the hazards and recommends the Mayor to request immediate mitigation by the County.

Stormwater Management Woods and Residential Combined Planning. Woods Committee Co-chairs and I met with two Soltesz representatives in the West Woods on September 19 for a site visit to look at the various erosion issues. The tour included the drainage ditches for water coming from the west side of Town, the damaged and topped trees near the lake fence perimeter, the deep gully ditch running beside the lake fence, the gravel-blocked stream culvert into Kelley Park and the cement culvert from the Towne Crest parking lot. The need to coordinate an RFP for the water flow, water volume, and drainage issues in both the West Woods and the residential areas of Town was emphasized. The Soltesz representatives indicated they would produce a high-level memorandum to assist the Town with preparation of an RFP. (The memorandum was received October 6th.) The Committee continues to coordinate with Councilor Yachup.

Trail Maintenance/Fall Workday. The Committee discussed East Woods trail maintenance and tree protection projects for a fall workday, which will be on Saturday, November 12, 9:30 AM to Noon. Detailed information will be provided in the Town Bulletin and on the Town website.

Reforestation and NNI Plant Control. Before beginning any further tree planting, the Committee will schedule a reassessment of our forest ecosystem restoration efforts based on the 2015 Stewardship Report prepared by Bill Bond, licensed Maryland forester. The Committee is also awaiting information from its contractor, IPC, which has been treating non-native, invasive plants, as to its potential fall schedule.

Incident Reports. The Committee Co-chairs have created an Incident Report page to document issues that arise. The current version is shown below.

Report of Incidents in the East and West Woods, Woods Committee

September 2022

- Someone has had wood chips dumped at the entrance to the Dogwood Trail off Ridge Road. Some of the chips were spread along the Dogwood and Frankland Trails. However, some were spread along a spur trail which leads to the backyard gate of a Town resident who lives on Center Street. This resident has been observed letting his two dogs run repeatedly unleashed through the woods.
- Along the Silver Dollar Trail near Boundary Street Entrance, someone has dumped a pile of evergreen trimmings. Also, there is accumulated party trash dumped at the site.
- Scott of BHFFMD sent this photo of a dog off leash investigating the feeding station in the East Woods.



July 2022

- Invasive Plant Employees discovered a partially buried dog carcass along the western edge of the West Woods near Newport Estates. The Committee co-chair reported the dog carcass to Montgomery County Animal Services, and they conducted a cruelty investigation. The owner of the dog was identified through a microchip and was upset to know that a family member dumped the dog rather than transporting the carcass to the animal shelter for disposal. No further action by the Town with respect to trespassing and dumping on town property was pursued. However, Committee members expressed the view that these and other recent instances indicate a need for better signage at entrances to the Woods Preserves.
- A couple was observed entering the East Woods at Maple Avenue, pulling a wagon. They later exited with several plants in the wagon and headed east on Center Street.
- The remains of about half a dozen chickens and quail were found lying along the Challstrom Trail near the Silver Dollar Trail. They appeared to have been ritually killed, with their throats slit. The people involved in dumping the poultry carcasses were not identified.