

# COMMUNITY UPDATE

A Neighborhood Newsletter Published By The  
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And Neighbors for a Livable Community  
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## WELCOME TO COMMUNITY UPDATE: ABOUT THIS NEWSLETTER

During the 10 years that I represented Spring Valley on ANC 3D, I wrote and disseminated a newsletter to report ANC news and information of relevance to the Spring Valley and Wesley Heights neighborhoods. With the support and assistance of the Spring Valley-Wesley Heights Citizens Association (SVWHCA) and Neighbors for a Livable Community (NLC), two long-time neighborhood organizations that have worked to promote and protect the interests of our community, this newsletter is being re-established to help inform and engage you in issues of importance to the future of our neighborhoods. The newsletter is distributed by email. Please share with your email networks.

-- Tom Smith

## SV NEIGHBORS GET THUMBS DOWN FROM ANC IN REQUEST FOR MORE TIME TO WORK WITH AU ON OBJECTIONS TO SCIENCE BUILDING DESIGN

*Spring Valley Neighbors Ask AU To Address Light  
Impacts, Upgrade Landscape Buffer; Divided ANC  
Says Neighbors Must Accept Consequences  
Of Living Next To A University*

A divided Advisory Neighborhood Commission (ANC) 3D voted 5-3 on September 6 to recommend that the DC Zoning Commission approve zoning relief for American University (AU) to amend its Campus Plan and permit construction of a new Hall of Science building adjacent to Spring Valley. Located next to the Beegly Building, the new science building facing the Spring Valley neighborhood will be 91 feet high (including the penthouse), according to AU.

AU filed its application for the new building just 10 days prior to the ANC action. The Zoning Commission is not scheduled to hear the case until November 20.

A group of Spring Valley neighbors requested that the ANC delay its recommendation until they had an opportunity to work with AU directly to mitigate concerns about lighting impacts of the building and the need to upgrade the landscape buffer along University Avenue to better shield neighbors from the new building.

Neighbors pointed out that the ANC could defer a vote until the ANC's November 1 meeting and still have time to submit its recommendation for the November 20 Zoning Commission hearing. But, a majority of the ANC dismissed neighbors' concerns. **(Continued On Page 2)**

## **SPRING VALLEY NEIGHBORS ASK AU TO ADDRESS LIGHT IMPACTS, UPGRADE LANDSCAPE BUFFER; DIVIDED ANC GIVES NEIGHBORS THUMBS DOWN AND SAYS NEIGHBORS MUST ACCEPT CONSEQUENCES OF LIVING NEXT TO A UNIVERSITY**

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Even before neighbors had an opportunity to address the full Commission at its September 6 meeting, the ANC posted a draft letter on its web site indicating its support for AU's application to modify its Campus Plan to build the new Hall of Science. The letter was drafted by first-term ANC Commissioners Troy Kravitz (Spring Valley) and Chuck Elkins (Wesley Heights).

The application filed by AU also seeks permission to reduce the number of parking spaces AU provides on campus from 2,500, as now mandated by the Zoning Commission, to 2,200.

Neighbors informed the ANC that AU had not yet responded to a series of questions about lighting and landscaping that they raised at an August 14 meeting with university officials. Residents said they had no objections to the construction of a new science building, but they were concerned about lighting at night since AU indicated the building would be in use 24 hours each day. Neighbors noted that AU offered to put shades on a 17-foot wide portion of the building, but this would address lighting issues only from a small portion of the building that would be facing residents' homes in Spring Valley. They noted that tall trees in the buffer had been lost to bad weather over the years and had not been replaced. They showed the ANC Commissioners a night-time photo demonstrating the impact of lights shining from the AU campus into the neighborhood.

Dennis Paul, president of Neighbors for a Livable Community, who has resided on University Avenue for 47 years, asked the ANC to hold off approving AU's application until neighbors could negotiate with AU over landscaping to mitigate the effect of the lights from the new building. He noted that there probably would not be any opposition to the new building if AU had maintained the landscape buffer with the neighborhood.

"Our issues are landscaping and lighting," he said. "I would like to see the ANC not act tonight so we can negotiate with AU on a solution. The ANC has two more meetings – October and November – before you have to act. What's the big deal in delaying?"

The day before the ANC meeting, Paul along with Dr. Jeffrey Kraskin, President of the Spring Valley-Wesley Heights Citizens Association (SVWHCA), sent a letter to the ANC encouraging the ANC to defer action and outlined nine points, including issues with light and landscaping, and other areas where the application was lacking and not in compliance with existing zoning regulations.

"Lighting is an issue now and it could be an issue even more in the future," a Spring Valley resident told the ANC. The resident said that neighbors have always had a good relationship with AU and that an agreement on landscaping could likely be negotiated by the ANC's November meeting.

"I would like to know the answers to the questions we asked about the lighting, landscaping, and building height," Jessica Herzstein, a Woodway Lane resident, told the ANC. Herzstein said she was one of

the residents who attended the August 14 meeting with AU, where the questions were raised about the project, but not answered. She pointed out that AU's application did not include either a lighting or landscaping plan.

No resident commented at the meeting in support of the AU application.

Kravitz took the lead in responding to residents' concerns saying he supported the AU application saying that the ANC and AU had been in communication about the building for six months. Kravitz said that there had been adequate engagement by AU with the community despite the fact that AU did not meet with immediately-impacted neighbors until August 14. Kravitz said he was encouraging the ANC to act on the measure at its September meeting because he would not be available to attend the October and November ANC meetings.

Kravitz acknowledged in subsequent emails to residents that "members of the ANC instructed AU to not negotiate" with neighbors on their concerns with the application. He also stated in subsequent emails that "we asked them (AU) to not have private meetings (with neighbors) on inherently public issues." Kravitz added he would reiterate this request to AU. However, the ANC has not taken any steps to discourage AU from meeting with other neighborhood groups in recent months on issues of concern, including the landscape buffer on the East Campus.

Kravitz was joined in support by Elkins who noted that Spring Valley residents had far more of a buffer than other neighborhoods surrounding the university. He stressed that Spring Valley was a university neighborhood and that neighbors had to accept the consequences of living next to AU. Elkins said his primary concern with the building was with any type of environmental discharge from the building, but said he was satisfied with the steps taken by AU to address this concern.

But, ANC Commissioner Alma Gates (Palisades), who has a long history of working on zoning issues, argued that the ANC was acting prematurely and encouraged her colleagues to heed residents' concerns.

"The hearing on this case is November 20," she noted. "The ANC letter to the Zoning Commission is due by November 13. Today is September 6. ANC 3D is basing its support on a preliminary application – so preliminary in fact that the application does not even have a case number to identify it."

She outlined a list of required items for AU's filing that were missing from AU's application, including a construction management plan and a chart showing the location of parking spaces that were to be eliminated.

"There is a need for a discussion with neighbors on a landscaping plan," she said. "For these reasons, I find it is premature for ANC 3D to take action at this time and am unable to vote in support of it."

She was joined in opposition by Commissioners Sylvia Lucero (Massachusetts Avenue) and Holmes Whalen (Spring Valley). Voting to support the AU application, in addition to Kravitz and Elkins, were Commissioners Steve Gardner (Berkeley), Conrad DeWitte (Foxhall), and Michael Siriquii (Palisades). Commissioner Michael Gold (Wesley Heights) left the meeting before the vote was called.

Following the meeting, AU indicated that it would amend its filing by November 9, as Gates said would be likely to happen.

## **U.S. ARMY CORPS INVESTIGATION EXPANDS ON GLENBROOK ROAD**

The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (USACE) announced last month its intent to expand its investigations for buried munitions along Glenbrook Road and begin sampling under the current home of the American University (AU) President at 4835 Glenbrook Road. As part of its broadened investigation, the Corps also plans to conduct additional soil sampling in the front yard of the AU President's house. The Corps said the decision to conduct sampling at 4835 Glenbrook Road was due to the discovery of lewisite along the property's side yard. The lewisite was discovered as part of an ongoing investigation at the site of 4825 Glenbrook Road.

Lewisite is a powerful irritant and blistering agent that can cause immediate damage to the skin, eyes, and respiratory tract when exposed.

In addition to extracting soil samples through the basement into the subgrade below the AU President's house, the Corps also plans to sample the exposed concrete foundation wall along the shared property line. Additional sampling may be conducted depending on the results of the first round of sampling.

The USACE demolished the house at 4825 Glenbrook Road in Fall 2012 after determining that the home could be sitting on top of a munitions pit long suspected to hold mustard and other chemicals. The pit was known as Sergeant Mauer's Pit and often referred to as "Hades" because of the types and amount of chemicals thought to be buried there.

The area around Glenbrook Road was part of the AU Chemical Weapon Experimental Station during World War I. In 1917, AU contracted with the U.S. government to operate a chemical weapons experimental station on the campus. As part of the contract, the Army built several buildings that are still in use on the campus today. The use of the campus as a chemical weapons experimental station was largely unknown in the neighborhood until construction workers unearthed buried munitions on 52<sup>nd</sup> Court during the development of Spring Valley West in 1993.

At the time the homes were built at 4825 Glenbrook Road and 4835 Glenbrook Road in 1992, construction workers reported symptoms similar to chemical exposure when loading dirt into a dump truck. According to government reports, four loads of dirt from the site were rejected at a Lorton landfill due to odor problems and reportedly was eventually deposited at the Fort Totten Metro site.

A settlement in a lawsuit over the property at 4825 Glenbrook Road unrelated to the workers' complaints was sealed by the courts.

Excavations at the site of 4825 Glenbrook Road have not resulted in any major finds until recently as the Corps began excavating along the retaining wall separating the two properties. Previously, the Corps has unearthed materials used at the site during the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, including projectiles and glassware. Suspicious soil markings along the shared property line prompted crews to begin hand digging at the site

over the summer. Investigation at the site was suspended on August 9 when two separate teams working at the site experienced symptoms that could indicate exposure to a chemical agent along the property line between 4825 and 4835.

The USACE has convened a formal Board of Investigation to assess the incident. A final report is due by the end of October. At that time, the Army will assess whether work can resume at the site and under what conditions.

The areas around Glenbrook Road, including the home of the South Korean ambassador at the corner of Glenbrook and Rockwood and the adjacent AU campus, including the former location of the AU Public Safety Building, have been the site of extensive excavation since buried chemical munitions were discovered in Spring Valley in 1993.

This is not the first problem encountered at the AU President's house. In 1996, several bottles of unknown materials were encountered in the subsurface at the house while landscape workers prepared to plant a tree. According to a report prepared for the USACE, the contractor removed a plug of soil measuring approximately six feet in diameter and four feet in depth to insert the tree. Once the soil was removed, the workers were overcome by odors and experienced irritation of the eyes and respiratory system.

## **SPRING VALLEY PARK RESTORATION PROJECT UNDERWAY**

The initial phase of a project to restore Spring Valley Park is underway. The project is funded by the District Department of Energy and Environment and is intended to address soil erosion problems in the park caused by storm water runoff that damaged the trails and the stream channel. The goal of the project is to slow down and redirect the storm water being discharged into the park; to cover and protect the exposed sanitary sewer lines in the park; and to restore the stream to a more natural condition with improved wildlife habitat and stable banks that can safely convey storm water. The project also is intended to rehabilitate the existing walking trail to make for safer access throughout the park.

The Park is bounded by Fordham Road NW, Quebec Street NW, 49<sup>th</sup> Street NW, and Hillbrook Lane NW.

Uncontrolled storm water flowing into the park has degraded the stream and its banks over time and in some locations exposed sanitary sewer lines that pose a risk of breaking and discharging untreated sewage. A hiking trail currently exists in the park, but it is degraded and in some locations hazardous due to erosion, exposed roots, and fallen trees.

As part of the initial phase, a report was completed to explore options for redesign of the trails and stream channel. The report outlines the infrastructure repairs that must be made at the site and a series of design alternatives that are currently being assessed. According to the report, the Park has been impacted by storm water runoff from homes across the neighborhood and even the American University campus.

This is an exciting project for the neighborhood with the ultimate goal of restoring the park and the stream to a healthy ecosystem and provide residents with a beautiful park to enjoy. Nevertheless, storm water management will continue to be an ongoing challenge in the park.

Neighbors can play their part by checking where drains and downspouts release rainwater and consider installing storm water management systems, such as rain gardens, rain barrels, and permeable paving, to direct the water away from the park. DC government's Riversmart Homes project offers low or no cost design and installation services to all DC residents interested in doing their part to control storm water. Information on the program is available at <https://doee.dc.gov/service/riversmart-homes-overview>.

## **UPDATE ON SUPERFRESH SITE - DEVELOPER POSTPONES ZONING CASE UNTIL JANUARY 2018**

**By Shelly Repp, Citizens for Responsible Development**

Valor Development has filed an application with the D.C. Zoning Commission for approval of a large project on the former SuperFresh site. Following three postponements requested by Valor, a hearing on the application is now scheduled for January 11, 2018. The application calls for two buildings of five to seven stories, consisting of a larger building containing 200 apartments and a smaller building with 20 units, which may be condominiums. Retail space and parking will underlie the entire lot.

The project's scale has raised serious concern among many residents of Spring Valley and American University Park. The 5-7 story project, which faces two residential streets (48th St. and Yuma St.), is not compatible with the adjoining residential neighborhoods. Valor admits that the project's density exceeds what can be built as a matter-of-right.

While Valor initially suggested that the project's scale was justified by the inclusion of a large full service grocery, it now says that no major grocery chain is interested and instead is trying to secure a smaller, more limited grocery in a downsized retail space. The height and scale of the buildings are unchanged.

While we'll need to stay tuned for more information on the retail tenant, it's clear that the project will exacerbate traffic problems in the area. The intersection of Massachusetts, Yuma, and 49th is already a bottleneck. Further, the proposed vehicular ingress and egress for both the residences and the retail customers will be through the alleys surrounding the site, particularly the alley behind the building owned by American University. It is likely that all trucks and most of the retail customers and residents will enter and exit the loading docks and underground parking from 48th Street using this alley, which means Fordham Road, 48th Street, 48th Place, Van Ness, and Massachusetts Avenue will be burdened with additional traffic. The alley behind the Spring Valley Shopping Center is already clogged with trucks servicing CVS and Wagshals. Commuters will inevitably seek to avoid the resulting congestion by re-routing through the neighborhoods on both sides of Massachusetts, endangering the elderly and young children.

Parking is also inadequate, with only 85 spaces reserved for the 220 residential units and 49 spaces reserved for the retail establishment. Additional spaces will be made available to American University under an easement granted in 1979 to the owner of the American University building on Massachusetts Avenue. While those spaces may be used by residents, there is no assurance that they will be available. In any case, since residents will be charged for parking, there likely will be an overflow onto local streets already clogged with customers of the very successful Millie's Restaurant and staff and students from the American University building.

Overlooking the one story Spring Valley Shopping Center, the project will be seven stories and 89 feet tall facing Spring Valley, detracting from the historically designated center. Further, any approval of this proposal would create a worrisome precedent for the entire Massachusetts Avenue commercial strip.

Citizens for Responsible Development (CRD) has been leading the opposition to Valor's current proposal. CRD would, however, like to emphasize that it is not opposed to development of the site, just to a massive 5-7 story project. The District's Future Land Use Map calls for the site to be low density, which can be up to 3 stories. CRD would support such a project, including one with a neighborhood serving grocery. CRD has retained legal counsel to help with its presentation to the Zoning Commission. Anyone with questions or who would like to lend support can contact CRD at [Repper3@aol.com](mailto:Repper3@aol.com).

## **NEIGHBORS SUPPORT ZONING RELIEF FOR WESLEY THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY**

With strong support from nearby neighbors, the Wesley Theological Seminary succeeded in modifying its Campus Plan to allow the Seminary to house non-Wesley graduate students in its on campus dorms. In its application, the Seminary said that its enrollment was continuing to decline and that it needed to rent its unfilled dorm space to other students to help balance its annual budget.

Wesley has been renting its dorm space to non-Wesley graduate students for the last two years, but will now be able to increase the percentage of its on campus housing that can be used for non-Wesley graduate students. Just less than half of Wesley's current dorm space is rented to non-Wesley graduate students.

At the request of the Spring Valley-Wesley Heights Citizens Association (SVWHCA) and Neighbors for a Livable Community (NLC), Wesley Seminary agreed to include language in its application committing that it would not sell or lease any of its facilities to American University for the duration of its Campus Plan which runs through December 2019.

"Recognizing the difficult financial situation that confronts the Seminary, SVWHCA and NLC want to try to be as supportive as possible of the Seminary's efforts to put its financial house in order," the two groups said in a letter to the Zoning Commission supporting Wesley's application.

With the neighbors' support, the Wesley application did not require a formal hearing before the Zoning Commission and won quick approval.

ANC 3D also supported the Wesley application, but did not include language in their recommendation to the Zoning Commission supporting the neighborhood's request that the Seminary's facilities not be sold or leased to AU through the life of the Seminary's Campus Plan. However, this requirement was included in the Zoning Commission's decision with the support of the Seminary as neighbors requested.

## AU AGREES TO IMPROVE EAST CAMPUS LANDSCAPING FOR WESTOVER PLACE HOMEOWNERS

After extensive discussions with representatives of the Westover Place Homes Corporation, American University has agreed to plant as many as 90 new trees in the landscaped buffer of East Campus bordering the town home community. AU was required by the Zoning Commission to plant an extensive buffer at the East Campus in order to win approval for the construction of the East Campus buildings in 2012. The buffer was to be completed prior to occupancy of the East Campus.

When AU completed landscaping the buffered area, Westover Place homeowners complained that the landscaping was not consistent with the plans proposed during a series of Campus Plan hearings before the Zoning Commission in 2011-2012. AU had indicated that the buffer would be fuller when the new trees planted grew over a 20 year span. Neighbors indicated this was not consistent with the assurances provided by AU at the Zoning Commission hearings.

AU anticipates beginning the new planting sometime this fall. Several neighbors still do not believe the commitment by AU to plant an additional 90 trees is enough to meet the requirements outlined in the Campus Plan Zoning Order.

### UPCOMING EVENTS OF INTEREST

- October 14** 5<sup>th</sup> annual Palisades Village House Tour will take place in Kent from 11 AM – 4 PM. Proceeds benefit the Palisades Village which provides support services for seniors in Berkley, Foxhall, Kent, Palisades, Spring Valley, and Wesley Heights. For more information, see [www.palisadesvillage.org](http://www.palisadesvillage.org)
- October 26** Valor, the development company planning a new mixed use development at the former SuperFresh site, will hold a community meeting on its latest plans at 7 PM at the Tenley-Friendship Neighborhood Library, 4450 Wisconsin Avenue NW
- October 27** Turtle Park Halloween Parade and Dance will feature a costume contest and free pizza/sweets from 5:30 PM – 7:30 PM at Turtle Park, Van Ness and 45<sup>th</sup> Street NW
- October 28** Spring Valley Annual Halloween Party will be held at Tilden Street and 51<sup>st</sup> Street NW from 3 – 5 PM

*Community Update* is a newsletter established by the **Spring Valley-Wesley Heights Citizens Association (SVWHCA)** and **Neighbors for a Livable Community (NLC)** to report news and information on issues of importance to residents of Spring Valley and Wesley Heights. You may send information appropriate for publication to Tom Smith at [tmfsmith@rcn.com](mailto:tmfsmith@rcn.com) No portion of this newsletter may be duplicated without written permission from the Spring Valley-Wesley Heights Citizens Association. This newsletter is distributed electronically. If you want to be on the distribution list, send your email to [tmfsmith@rcn.com](mailto:tmfsmith@rcn.com) . Please share this with your neighborhood email networks.

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