



NEWS

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February 2002

The Planning Circus Needs A Ringmaster!

by Dick Wolf
Chair, City Planning Committee

Like clowns tumbling out of a midjet car, the planning problems confronting the Hill just seem to pile up. Like the clowns, they go every which way, tumbling and crashing into each other and causing mayhem in the neighborhood. Unfortunately, there is no ringmaster to bring order out of the chaos.

Accordingly, CHRS, ANC6B, and CHAMPS (Capitol Hill Association of Merchants and Professionals) agreed to set up a joint planning taskforce to seek rationality and connection among all the competing plans and proposed developments in our neighborhood. Representatives of all three groups will meet with another taskforce that has been organized by the Committee of 100 on the Federal City, the region's oldest citizen-based planning group. The collaboration will help to provide our local group with professional expertise and disinterested perspective. We hope to produce from this effort coherent and soundly based positions that will enable the Hill to progress while protecting its hard-won gains.

To understand what this undertaking entails, one needs to look at the myriad of issues and plans that affect us now as well as those that may do so in the future.

The controlling plan, if any, for the Southeast waterfront is the "Near

Southeast Neighborhood & Waterfront Workshop Report" — a fine piece of work that has been largely ignored or undermined by other developments. (The report derived from a three-day planning exercise in May 2000, sponsored and paid for by the Office of Planning and the General Services Administration.)

The over-arching planning effort is the Anacostia Waterfront Plan: it encompasses both Federal and District land along the river that stretches from the Southwest waterfront to the Benning Road bridge in Northeast.

There are numerous subsets to this planning effort, some connected and most not. Among them are:

- **The Florida Rock Planned Unit Development (PUD)** flanking Fort McNair. It calls for more than one million square feet of office development, with no residential included. (The developer has just requested a two-year extension of their PUD order and no development has proceeded.)
- **Federal Center Southeast**, which is due to receive the new Department of Transportation building— a behemoth of some two million square feet of mundane offices that pre-empts all the good policies of the workshop.

Uncontrolled and uncoordinated development continues along M St. SE and New Jersey Avenue SE. Without zoning and the cooperation of the Federal Government, this area will be

Attention Please!



Your ideas on what to do with the DC General/Jail Complex are needed! Please see page 9.

worse than Roslyn and not as good as Crystal City.

Buildings that are 130 feet high already exist along New Jersey Avenue SE, south of the freeway. Already oversized zoning in the area between New Jersey Avenue SE and South Capitol Street has been bolstered onward and upward by the so-called transfer of development rights. This device gifts downtown developers who build housing downtown, who can then sell their office rights in such "undeveloped areas" as near Southeast.

But the worst is yet to come.

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President's Column

by Rob Nevitt

In the *News*, you have read a lot about the more than six-month effort by the CHRS taskforce that has worked closely with the Stanton Park Neighborhood Association to moderate the proposed Station Place building next to Union Station. The work of over sixty people and innumerable meetings and hearings contributed some welcome modifications to design and construction plans.

Along the way, members of regulatory review bodies made it clear that they saw the wisdom in the views of the taskforce, though almost no accommodation of these views was made at decision times. It seemed as if our reward was to be told that we were right; the developer's reward was to be told to go ahead.

An approximation of the phrase, "this is too far along to stop now" was heard during one of these hearings. One wonders: When was it NOT too far along?

When we first met with the developers there was considerable vagueness in their descriptions, as if they were preliminary. At the same time, there was frequent mention of the tight deadline for completion, since the SEC (the building's only tenant) had to vacate present locations.

From that point, the city regulatory wheels ground slowly: we continued to wait for decisions from the developers to our call for changes. In other words, it seemed as if the regulators were on the sidelines, waiting for us to carry the dialog with the developers. To my mind, there was never a moment when we got more or less than guarded acceptance of our views — possibly excepting the remark of the

Fine Arts Commission that the building was an "eyesore" and looked like "a beached whale." Even that strong description didn't translate into a requirement for more than cosmetic changes.

Now, the Zoning Board has spoken. Work will begin on:

- the largest private office building ever built in the District; at the proposed 933 feet it is 25% longer than the Capitol;
- a building that will go off the tax rolls when the SEC exercises its right to purchase;
- a building whose full completion will await (how long?) the acquisition of new tenants;
- a building that will crowd against a sidewalk where, inevitably, security devices will compete with walkers and bicyclists;
- a building starkly at odds with the architecture around it;
- a building that will be created with little official concern and less public comment than an undertaking this significant deserves.

From the grand scale to the small scale, there is similar frustration.

Our new, energetic Environment Committee Chairman Gene Smith has invited members to use the Society as their surrogate in dealing with issues like asphalt plugs in brick sidewalks. Vice President Mark Anderson has been trying to find out how new laws on nuisance property translate into regulation and action at the working level. Dick Wolf has been trying to see whether good planning is represented in various decisions being made on the development of M Street SE.

The list of issues and our involvement goes on. Often there is evidence of familiar parallel tracks:



Advocacy of common-sense neighborhood concerns emanates from the voluntary and part-time energies of citizens, while governing bodies appear supine before the forces of development. This comes in part from bureaucratic inertia, although it also seems that the city is afraid that large-scale projects will do an abrupt about-face before any defense of quality of life concerns.

Now, a panel has been convened as a steering committee for plans for Reservation 13, or the land proximate to RFK, DC General, the jail and Congressional Cemetery. We have been asked to be on it (see item on page 9).

The cross-currents here are terrific, ranging from the Department of Corrections search for halfway-house type facilities to the hopes for capturing the Olympic Games in the future.

Reflecting on how we can wield immediate influence commensurate with our numbers and our purposes, two obvious solutions recommend themselves: spend more on lawyers to argue our cases, and/or more effectively mobilize the membership to speak up.

I hope we can do both, but tell us how we might do more. ✧

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To contact any of the above, please contact the Society offices by calling 202/543-0425 or sending email to CapHRS@aol.com.

www.chrs.org

Founded over 40 years ago to preserve and protect Capitol Hill's residential character, the Society is now the largest civic association on Capitol Hill, and one of the largest in the entire District of Columbia. From the beginning, the Society has played a key role in maintaining the diverse, residential character of our neighborhood.

Circus continued from page 1

The giant Forest City development looms. It includes very large office buildings stretching from 4th Street to 8th Street SE which will support the cost of the Hope 6 redevelopment of Capper-Carroll public housing. Because of the requirement of one-for-one replacement of subsidized housing as well as the addition of mixed income housing, Forest City must put such housing into a large, crowded development that is backed against the Freeway and surrounded by large office buildings. This thing is totally out of scale with the workshop plan: the hip bone is not connected to the leg bone.

By DC Council law, the most immediate planning effort is required for a very contentious piece of ground — the 67 acres of federal land known as Reservation 13 on which sits the DC

Jail and DC General Hospital. Reservation 13 was included in the Anacostia Waterfront planning effort and in the National Capitol Planning Commission's Monumental Core Plan. The new plans for it will encounter rearguard efforts to rebuild DC General as well as new corrections facilities — perhaps a huge halfway house and/or a new prison.

Lurking in the background is the prospect of a new baseball stadium and/or facilities in support of the city's Olympic bid. That ringmaster has his task cut out for him, because the clowns are completely out of control.

Any CHRS members who would be willing to try to bring order and rationality to this mess should call me at 202-543-4353. ✧

Call Box Re-Call; Computer Assistance Needed

by Nancy Metzger
 Chair, Historic District Committee

After a long hiatus, the Call Box project (newly dubbed "Art on Call") is again gearing up for action. According to Paul Williams, city-wide coordinator of the Call Box Project, a contract was signed in January with Unity Construction to clean and prime call boxes throughout the city. The historic street furniture will then be ready for the next step: neighborhood groups will install art, neighborhood historical facts, photos, or other items in them.

When the Capitol Hill Call Box Taskforce last met in June 2001, it decided to focus initial efforts on 10 selected boxes across the Hill. The group will meet again to assess progress and plan next steps soon after a city-wide meeting (not yet scheduled) that will lay out city requirements for participation.

So far, over 40 people have signed up to work on this project but many more are needed — including painters, artists, designers, writers, and researchers. An immediate need is to set up a database to track work on each individual box — there are over 100 in the greater Capitol Hill area.

If you can do this and are willing to donate some time, please contact me through the CHRS office, 543-0425. ✧



Preserving Green Space and Opposing Curb Cuts

by Pat Schauer

CHRS has for years actively and adamantly opposed the addition of curb cuts to existing properties. Thus, we were pleased in December 2001 when the Mayor's Agent for Historic Preservation for the District of Columbia denied the application for a curb cut filed by the Capitol Hill Supermarket at 241 Massachusetts Avenue NE.

In March 2001 the Historic Preservation Review Board (HPRB) had unanimously adopted a staff report that said the application was incompatible with the character of the Capitol Hill Historic District and the purposes of the preservation law. The applicant appealed this ruling to the Mayor's Agent. After two postponements, a hearing was finally held in October.

The applicant had requested the curb cut and the use of public space for employee vehicular parking because of "economic hardship" and "special merit." Neither the applicant nor his employees qualify for residential parking stickers that allow parking on the street at all times. Their vehicles have been traversing the existing curb and sidewalk to reach a parking pad illegally installed by a prior owner on public space next to the store.

The D.C. Historic Preservation Office, Capitol Hill Restoration Society, and Stanton Park Neighborhood Association opposed the proposed curb cut, both before the HPRB and at the hearing before the Mayor's Agent. Supporting the application were letters from Council members Harold Brazil and Sharon Ambrose, ANC 6A, Representative Tom Lantos, Senator Mitch McConnell, and several residents of the area. A petition with 217 signatures was also presented.

The Mayor's Agent noted that not one of the "community and politi-

cally-based sources" that urged granting of this application had addressed any of the legal issues at hand or legal standards for the granting of such an application.

Photographs were submitted that showed various parking pads and curb cuts in the area, but all were constructed prior to creation of the Historic District in 1978. The Mayor's Agent noted that creation of a curb cut eliminates two or three on-street parking spaces, thereby causing additional parking problems in the residential area. He also noted that there is no legal justification for "grandfathering in" a curb cut and a parking pad simply because prior owners parked on the site illegally.

The Mayor's Agent found that neither "economic hardship" nor "special merit" have any basis for application in this case. The strict burden of proving "economic hardship" was not met because applicant has a thriving business. "Special merit" does not apply because such

projects must benefit the community at large, not a special group.

CHRS opposition to curb cuts in our Historic District is in keeping with both the Historic Preservation Act and the Comprehensive Plan, which advocate the preservation of public green space. As a result of our opposition to curb cuts in residential areas, a two-step process has evolved when dealing with new construction: the HPRB opposes curb cuts in historic areas, and the Board of Zoning Adjustment then grants a variance from the off-street parking requirement on lots without alley access.

A considerable amount of professional and volunteer time is taken in each of these curb cut applications for existing properties. Again and again, it is ruled they are illegal and incompatible with our Historic District. It is time to recognize the legal basis for the regulations, and to be grateful to those who continue to protect our heritage. *

Looking Back on Capitol Hill

by Nancy Metzger

Tony Cuozzo was the son of Dominico and Elivira Cuozzo, who owned a grocery store at 9th and South Carolina SE. The family's private quarters were behind and over the store. Tony and his siblings all worked there.

Dad and Mom worked while we were at the school. When I was going to grade school I used to take a pair of skates and skate around and pick up ten or fifteen grocery orders every morning before I went to school. I'd bring them back and Dad and Mom would fix them up. Then Dad would start out with the horse and wagon

and deliver them. Then he got the Model T Ford and delivered with that. I did that even when I was going to high school. A lot of our business was delivery. We delivered all over the neighborhood – went down as far as the Navy Yard, as far as 13th Street, Southeast. Customers called in their orders. I'll never forget the phone number was 3385.

If you know someone who grew up on Capitol Hill long ago and you'd like to suggest him or her as a candidate for an oral history interview, please contact the Ruth Ann Overbeck Oral History Project (info@CapitolHillHistory.org or 543-4544) *

Station Place Approved: the System Failed

by Charles W. McMillion,
Chair, Station Place Taskforce

The Louis Dreyfus Corporation's proposal for a ten-story, 1.4 - million square foot office building at Station Place was approved by the District's Zoning Commission on January 14th. Though Commission members expressed dissatisfaction with the zoning process and unease with many aspects of the development, they approved the largest private office building ever built in the District.

Commissioner Peter May asserted that it was too late to require that the building be set back from the property line to conform with other office buildings, or to provide the transition to the residential neighborhood (as directed by the District's Comprehensive and Ward 6 plans) or even to follow pre-September 11 security guidelines for a top security federal building.

Commission Chair Carol Mitten proposed that if the SEC does not occupy the initial portion of the building, the Commission should re-examine the design of that portion. She did not suggest what, if any, remedy might then be possible. Ms. Mitten was also uncomfortable about the open-ended nature of the construction plans and voiced concern lest site completion take 20 years. She required that the Dreyfus Corporation submit a report to the Commission every two years until such completion, but required no timetable. This reporting requirement may have no effect on the developer beyond the small cost of preparing these reports.

The Dreyfus Corporation has refused to perform an Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) or even the far less rigorous environmental assessment. No other District agency has authority to require such action, but the Zoning Commission insisted that

environmental matters are outside the scope of its authority. The Commission also asserted that it has no authority either to require or to establish an arbitration panel to resolve any disputes between homeowners and the developer, should construction-related damage to nearby homes occur as a result of pile driving, lowering of water table, heavy truck traffic, or other activities of the developer.

Together with a group of homeowners near Station Place and the Georgetown University Law Center, CHRS has retained legal counsel who will press for federal enforcement of an EIS at Station Place and for financial protection for nearby homeowners.

Less than 24 hours before the Zoning Commission's January 14 approval — but too late to affect their announcement — the SEC agreed that the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) applies to Station Place.

We are now waiting to see what, if anything, the SEC and the Dreyfus Corporation agree to do before construction begins. Thus far, our experience is that they will do nothing to safeguard the community unless forced to do so by a regulatory agency. Such agencies — from the Architect of the Capitol and the Commission of Fine Arts, to the District's Office of Planning and the Zoning Commission — have shown little interest in homeowners and have been preoccupied with pleasing the SEC and the developer.

Certainly the massive effort of the CHRS Taskforce on Station Place achieved some important results. Four Taskforce teams of over 60 residents prepared five very detailed reports for District regulatory agencies that do not have the resources to do this level of work on their own. We met with countless federal and city officials and gave formal testimony over and over

CHRS Board Commends McMillion

In recognition of Charles McMillion's efforts to organize and mobilize the community response to the proposed Station Place Development, the CHRS Board passed a resolution at its January meeting that commended "his work [that] brought together the resources of community organizations, individuals, neighbors, and institutions." The Board also expressed its appreciation and gratitude for his "resilient spirit, intelligent approach, and thoughtful management." The full text of the Board's January 15, 2002, resolution appears on the Society website, www.chrs.org/documents.htm.

again. CHRS stalwarts Brian Furness, Nancy Metzger, Lyle Schauer, and Dick Wolf provided unmatched expertise and leadership. Rob Nevitt supported the effort every step of the way and was always there when we needed him. Drury Tallant, Monty Edwards, and Warren Friedman of the Stanton Park Neighborhood Association were terrific and talented partners in this effort. The proposed Station Place building will be less of an eyesore and less of a menace to its neighbors than originally planned because of extraordinary efforts of the CHRS Taskforce.

Nonetheless, it is clear that the District's planning and regulatory process failed badly in this very prominent case. Our community — the nation's Capitol — deserves better. CHRS and each of its members must do everything possible to ensure that nothing like this happens again. ✧

Changing of the Guard at Eastern Market: North Hall Legal Suit Gets Nasty

by *Brian Furness*
Chair, Development Committee

Eastern Market management reform took a giant step forward when a Superior Court judge dismissed Eastern Market Corporation's challenge to the city's termination of its lease. The Eastern Market Venture, selected by the city last year to manage the Market while a long-term business plan is negotiated, took over day-to-day management of the South Hall and the Farmers' Line on January 2.

The Eastern Market Community Advisory Committee (EMCAC) had advised the city to select the Eastern Market Venture and pressed for management reform. Members of this Committee represent Capitol Hill community organizations (including CHRS), Eastern Market business stakeholders, and elected officials. It includes an independent community representative.

Immediate challenges for the new manager, Stuart Smith, are regularizing tenant leases, dealing with the 15 percent rent increase instituted two months ago by the outgoing Eastern Market Corporation, negotiating a business plan with the city, and repair and refurbishing. (Eastern Market Corp. padlocked the trash compactor and dismantled the security alarm as it turned over the keys.)

In accordance with the community-inspired 1998 law, the EMCAC will be advising the city's Office of Property Management and the new manager. Key issues on EMCAC's agenda include reviewing his contract, operations at the Market, and parking and traffic issues.

Heery and Associates, the city's renovation architects, are reviewing aesthetic and structural work that

needs to be done to restore the Market. At a recent meeting of the EMCAC's Renovation Subcommittee, the architects asked for community ideas on the farmers' shed. Most believe that the 1930s addition has little historical or architectural value. Community comments focused on retaining the essential function—protecting and defining the area for the sale of fresh produce—while erecting a structure that respects the Market building itself.

The architects plan to present design mock-ups to the public by mid-April. Comments can be sent to EMCAC Renovation Subcommittee Chair Monte Edwards at (202) 543-3504.

As a separate issue, Market Five Gallery's suit against the city is in the discovery phase: both sides are

looking for ammunition to support their contentions. Market Five Gallery has subpoenaed the records of the two people who captained the community working group that spearheaded the management reform legislation: EMCAC Chair Ellen Opper-Weiner, and me, Brian Furness. We have both been ordered to submit to a deposition; the city's Corporation Counsel is handling the defense.

Perhaps taking a page from Boys Town's book, Market Five Gallery is amending its lawsuit to sue Ellen Opper-Weiner in her personal capacity. It alleges that she conspired with city officials (and with me and unnamed others) to injure Market Five Gallery. The complaint asks over \$1 million in compensatory and punitive damages. ✱

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Short Takes: Development and Other Sightings

Friends of the Old Naval Hospital (FONH) will contract with the Urban Land Institute (ULI) to convene a panel of experts to further the attempts to find the best use of the property. The panel will interview persons and organizations identified by FONH and then produce a document on the topic. The panel's job is not to tell the contracting organization what to do, but to offer their insights based on the testimony heard and their own expertise. CHRS Board approved a motion at their January meeting to contribute up to \$5000 to assist FONH in funding the study "with the understanding that FONH continue to seek additional sources of funding."

HPRB postponed consideration of the **Capitol Hill Historic District expansion** south of the freeway until the meeting now scheduled for February 7 (see Calendar). The January Board hearing was delayed because of difficulty in getting the appointment/reappointment of board members approved in time for the January 24 meeting.

The **DC Historic Preservation Board** remains without a director.

Stanton Development has begun work on the **Lennox School townhouse** site at 5th and G Streets SE, demolishing the modern annex attached to the historic school.

Holliday Corporation is stabilizing the historic **Louise apartment house** (see below) at 7th and Massachusetts Avenue NE prior to construction of the surrounding townhouses.



Regulations to be prepared under the **Abandoned and Nuisance Properties Act** (effective April, 2001) were sent to the Corporation Counsel December 21. Final review by the Counsel was expected by the end of January. A 30 day comment period will be available following publication in

February Preservation Café: "Not Your Painted Lady"

by Katie Miller

The first Preservation Cafe of 2001, on Wednesday, February 13 at 6:30 pm. will treat an often-requested topic—painting a Capitol Hill house. It will be held at Trattoria Alberto, 502 8th Street SE (top floor).

In "Not Your Painted Lady—the Capitol Hill Victorian House," David Mahoney will share his knowledge and experience as president of a top-ranked Washington painting company. He will describe preparation, preservation, and protection of this decorative and maintenance job from both technical and aesthetic perspectives.

Mahoney has spent the past 26 years mastering the art of painting and finishing. Because of the professional challenge, he focuses his skill on the homes of Capitol Hill, Northwest Washington, and Old Town Alexandria. He is well acquainted with the Hill, having spent many childhood days here with his grandmother and other close relatives.

Preservation Cafes are held the second Wednesday of the month. Additional dates for 2002 are March 13, April 10, and May 8. Upcoming topics may include archaeology, Congressional Cemetery, call boxes, ironwork, Victorian interiors, and the 8th Street Heritage Trail. Speakers will be announced. ✧

the DC Register. As part of the activity ensuing from the law, DCRA has hired a contractor to complete a city-wide survey of abandoned properties. These are to be identified by electric, gas, and tax records, as well as drive-by inspections. DCRA also reports that they've hired 24 new inspectors who are trained and on the job.

Innovative Development Solutions, the company chosen by the DC Housing Authority (DCHA) to construct 38 townhouses and flats, has posted information about the **Kentucky Courts redevelopment** on their website, www.IDShomes.com. Information about how to place a deposit on a house or a flat is included; word is that 15 units are already under contract. Work hasn't yet begun, because the first stage — "remediation" of the pigeon dung etc. — has been delayed. Site preparation will follow that step. A design change was announced in January: access from an alley on Kentucky Avenue has been removed, because the slope of that area would necessitate reduction of parking spaces. One entry to the inside of the compound will be on C street. ✧

Challenge to Boys Town to be Heard February 5

by *Brian Furness*
Chair, Development Committee

On February 5, the Board of Zoning Adjustment (BZA) will hear arguments from representatives of Southeast Citizens for Smart Development (SCSD) concerning the four townhouses for troubled youth proposed by Boys Town on Potomac Avenue at 14th Street SE. SCSD maintains they should be seen as a single facility — not four separate townhouses — and that the Zoning Administrator mistakenly ruled that Boys Town could erect them as a matter of right. A single facility of that size would require a special exception to do business.

In the meantime, Boys Town has elected to press forward with construction, despite the risk that a defeat before the BZA could mean that Boys Town could not use the facility as planned.

The Society supports the SCSD, and will argue that treating the four adjoining townhouses as separate facilities flies in the face of the clear intent of the zoning regulations and sets a very undesirable precedent.

Boys Town's "SLAPP" (Strategic Lawsuit Against Public Participation) suit against city and community officials and neighborhood activists Will Hill (Vice-Chair, ANC 6B) and Ellen Opper-Weiner suffered a reverse when the judge dismissed the suit against Ward 6 Council member Sharon Ambrose. Accepting arguments that Ms. Ambrose was protected as a public official, the judge also criticized Boys Town for failing to cite any facts supporting its claims.

Nonetheless, Boys Town has pressed forward to request documents and depositions of SCSD members, and has even moved against Andrea Ferster, SCSD's attorney in the zoning issue. The American Civil Liberties Union and

Send contributions to help support the SCSD's legal expenses to:

Southeast Citizens for Smart
Development Legal Fund
Kathleen Donner, Director
18 3rd St., NE
Washington, DC 20002
(202) 543-3063

the Center for Individual Rights have filed to dismiss the case filed against Will and Ellen.

SCSD has had to go all out to raise funds to defray the incidental defense costs and to bring the challenge the Zoning Administrator's decision before the BZA. The community has provided solid support and backing—the Capitol Hill Restoration Society contributed \$1,000—but the SCSD is still well short of the estimated \$30,000 or so that it needs. Contributions would be appreciated. ✧

HPRB Cases To Be Posted on Web Site

by *Nancy Metzger*
Chair, Historic District Committee

The preliminary agenda of cases that may be considered by the Historic Preservation Review Board (HPRB) at its monthly meeting will be posted at "www.chrs.org", in an effort to help Capitol Hill residents receive more timely notification of proposed additions and new construction in our Historic District.

City regulations do not require notices for historic preservation cases to be posted on the property, as is required for zoning and alcohol licensing cases. Instead, the Historic Preservation Office sends a written notice to ANCs, community

organizations, and others who request monthly notification. Because of the relatively short turn-around time from submission until Board hearing, often neighbors are not aware of construction plans until after projects have been approved by the HPRB —particularly if zoning changes are not needed. (More routine cases such as window and door replacements, fences and the like are approved by the staff following HPRB guidelines, and are not listed for the monthly calendar.)

The Historic District Committee will be posting the new cases on its page on the CHRS web site as soon as notification is received from the Historic Preservation Office — usually around the tenth of each month. Each project will have an

address, case number, and very brief description.

The best source of more information about such a project will be the applicant. CHRS encourages residents who are considering additions and extensive alterations to discuss their plans with their neighbors. Capitol Hill is a row-house neighborhood and many additions drastically affect neighboring properties. Sometimes fairly simple modifications can ease the impact on those nearby.

You may also call the Historic Preservation Office at 442-8818 for more information. As a last resort, contact the Historic District Committee through the CHRS Office, 543-0425. ✧

What to Do with the DC General/Jail Complex: Your Ideas Needed Now!

by Rob Nevitt
CHRS President

The U.S. Congress has made a condition for withdrawing a budget item that would fund a halfway house in now empty buildings in the DC General/Jail complex known as Reservation 13. Their condition is the submission of a plan by the end of March for the area that lies between RFK Stadium/Armory and Congressional Cemetery.

The City's Department of Planning outlined a timetable for meeting the condition at a community meeting at the DC Armory on January 23. This meeting — and successive ones on February 20 and March 20 — are intended to solicit ideas for a develop-

ment plan that would preempt isolated initiatives like a halfway house or auto impound lot.

I sit on the steering committee for this effort. Other Committee members represent various initiatives, including the return of baseball to Washington, the bid for the 2012 Olympics, and a group who thinks in turns of anchoring Massachusetts Avenue at the River. The interest of the representative from the Office of Property Management lies elsewhere. He clearly expressed the need for space to house city government functions — perhaps including those of the Department of Corrections, although he was not explicit.

At the January meeting, nearly all of those who spoke from the floor used the moment to flay the Mayor, the

Council, and the Department of Planning, and to demand the return of DC General Hospital.

Passing no judgment on any of these plans or comments, this is written to encourage members to use imagination and time to come up with ideas for the development of Reservation 13, with or without the existing buildings. E-mail them to CapHRS@aol.com or post them to the Society's website (www.chrs.org) and we will see that they get consideration.

As of this writing, the planners need more ideas from the public — other than the return of DC General. That one isn't on the agenda of this initiative. ✱

Babbitt Returns to the Nation's Capitol—or What Happened to the Billboard Bill

by Dick Wolf
Chair, City Planning Committee

Recent actions by the DC Council regarding the "Special Sign" (otherwise known as giant billboards) were disappointing—yes, even shameful. By a vote of 7 to 6, the Council approved the Ambrose-Evans bill that essentially allows a handful of permit holders forever to erect giant signs along the significant streets and roads of the District of Columbia and to transfer them without limit.

Although the number of signs is limited to 32, in square footage each contains many times more ad space than traditional billboards. The facts are laid out in considerable detail in the January 18-24th edition of the *City Paper*.

Who are the heroes?

Phil Mendelson carried the weight of introducing amendments to limit and amortize the signs, and

Carol Schwartz spoke loudly and to the point: she didn't want to see the city polluted with the signs and the deal served only a few interests. Four other Councilors voted for sanity and order.

The disappointments are Sharon Ambrose and Linda Cropp, for letting the power of the deal override their common sense and leadership.

The goats are Jack Evans and the Mayor, for letting this mess happen and making deals that benefit a few well-connected and wealthy businessmen who are always seeking favors from the Council.

As Mark Plotkin says, "Who takes the cake"? It must be Council member Jack Evans, who said more than once that only three people were interested in this issue. By the time it was over, he had heard voices of opposition from every major citizen group in DC, the National Trust for Historic Preservation, leading lawyers and law firms, Scenic America, and prominent citizens

from around the country. Though Evans had to concede that no one supported the signs, he continued to drag out the shop-worn argument that the companies would sue and win large judgments if amortization were approved. He solicited the companies to give him legal support for his position, but they couldn't find it in the current law.

No matter what was said or done, the deal made last summer prevailed.

Sinclair Lewis, winner of the Nobel Prize for his portrayal of small city life in mid-America, would have laughed in glee — not only at Council's internal politics, but at the mindless minutia of what passes for action by the city's greatest deliberative body as it wrestled with the question of whether to get rid of what some have called "litter on a stick." ✱

Mark your Calendar!

FEBRUARY

5 Tuesday, 1:00 p.m

Hearing on Boys Town Project, Appeal of Zoning Administrator's Decision. Board of Zoning Adjustment Hearing Room, 441 Fourth Street, NW, Room 220 (Judiciary Square Metro)

7 Thursday, 10:00 am

HPRB (Historic Preservation Review Board) scheduled to consider the expansion of the Capitol Hill Historic District south of the freeway, 441 Fourth Street, NW, Room 220 South (Judiciary Square Metro)

7 Thursday, 12:30 pm

National Capital Planning Commission Hearing on Station Place, 401 9th St NW, North Lobby, Suite 500.

12 Tuesday, 6:30 pm

Designing for Security in the Nation's Capitol, lecture and panel discussion of strategies that balance security with preserving and enhancing Washington's Monumental Core, National Building Museum, 272-2448.

13 Wednesday, 6:30 pm

Preservation Café, "Not Your Painted Lady; Painting a Capitol Hill House" by David Mahoney, Trattoria Alberto, 502 8th St. SE (top floor)

19 Tuesday, 6:30 p.m.

CHRS Board meeting, Old Naval Hospital, 921 Pennsylvania Ave. SE

28 Thursday, 10:00 am

Regular February meeting of HPRB (Historic Preservation Review Board), 10:00 am, 441 Fourth Street NW, Room 220 South (Judiciary Square Metro)

Excuse Me, Mr. Jefferson, Did You Drop a Coin?

A group of about twenty-five people was on hand December 15 for the discovery of an 1804 coin at the site of the original Eastern Market. The archaeological "open house" at 6th and K Streets SE, was sponsored by the Marines and the DC Office of Historic Preservation.



When You Renew...

CHRS Office Manager Charlotte Furness reminds members that the Society never sells its membership list, so members shouldn't feel it necessary to check the box on the membership and renewal form that says "Please do not exchange my name with other community organizations."

Checking this box will prevent a member from ever getting special mailings that usually contain information about a free activity members might be interested in and might otherwise not hear about. Charlotte says, "We do not share our list easily. When we do we retain control so the other organization cannot make a copy."

Capitol Hill Restoration Society

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