



# NEWS

www.chrs.org

November 2002

## Public Space on Capitol Hill and Beyond

by Dick Wolf, Chair, City Planning Committee

On Wednesday November 6, 2002, at 7:30 pm, the Capitol Hill Restoration Society will put on a forum concerning the future of our public spaces on the Hill and throughout the city. This discussion will address policies and issues that have recently surfaced concerning street furniture in our public spaces and how they will be planned, paid for, and maintained.

It is not an idle matter. Recently, the District's Department of Transportation (DDOT) proposed a street furniture bill that met with overwhelming opposition—in part because of the vast amount of advertising deemed necessary to support this effort.

At the same time, a streetscape plan has been completed for the Main Street/Barracks Row project that may be a model for other planning on the Hill. There is also a local effort to rehab and clean up the Eastern Market Metro Park.

The Hill contains some of the most historic public spaces in the nation. Pennsylvania Avenue SE is a principal gateway to the National Capitol. Most of the Capitol Hill Historic District follows the L'Enfant street system, which is on the National Register of Historic Sites and Places. We have a unique system of small and medium-sized parks and triangles: some are National Park reservations and some are under the control of the District Government, including the critical but seedy Eastern Market Metro Park. Anything put into these spaces needs to enhance and not detract from our sense of time and place and our history.

Our distinguished panelists can provide national and local perspectives. Meg McGuire, a Hill resident, is President of Scenic America, which for many years has been the foremost advocate for national and local

### Don't Forget: Fall Member Meeting

**Date:** Wednesday, November 6

**Time:** 7:30 pm

**Location:** Old Naval Hospital, 921 Pennsylvania Avenue, SE

**CHRS Business:** 2003 budget review and vote

**Panel Discussion:** The Future of Public Spaces: Capitol Hill and Washington D.C.

**Panel Members:**

**Meg McGuire**, President of Scenic America

**Bruce Robey**, President of CHAMPS;

publisher of *Voice of the Hill*

**Dan Tangherlini**, Director, District Department of Transportation (DDOT)

policies to enhance and strengthen protection of public spaces—particularly from the blight of billboards. Meg's offices at 801 Pennsylvania Ave. SE overlook the Capitol and Eastern Market Metro Park. Bruce Robey is President of CHAMPS, publisher of the *Voice of the Hill*, and a strong advocate of improving conditions at Eastern Market Metro Park. Dan Tangherlini, also a Hill resident, the director of DDOT, is carrying the weight of creating and implementing a street furniture program for the District and, we hope, an entire public space plan for the District of Columbia.

Capitol Hill encompasses all the public space issues faced by citizens and the District Government. How we plan here may well be a template for the rest of the city. I urge you to attend this important and interesting discussion. \*

## President's Column

I recently attended the first of several planned public meetings led by the DC Department of Transportation (DDOT) on the South Capitol Street Gateway project, where I viewed a dizzying array of charts, maps, and visualizations of alternative proposals. The project area extends from the bridgehead of the Frederick Douglass Memorial Bridge and up South Capitol Street to the Capitol, and, on either side, to Second Streets SW and SE. It was a lot to take in, and not easy to explain within the compass of this column.

The motivation for this work comes from the DDOT appropriations conference report of the U. S. Congress. The vision is the “creation of a grand and lively urban boulevard serving the neighborhoods, the District of Columbia, the capital region, and the nation as the principal gateway to the U. S. Capitol, the Anacostia waterfront, and the Southwest, Southeast, and Buzzard Point neighborhoods.”

*The vision is the “creation of a grand and lively urban boulevard serving the neighborhoods, the District of Columbia, the capital region, and the nation as the principal gateway to the U. S. Capitol, the Anacostia waterfront, and the Southwest, Southeast, and Buzzard Point neighborhoods.”*

Four stages will take the planning into March 2003, beginning with analysis of existing conditions, the development of scenarios, and the development of proposals. There will be three more public meetings before the final recommendations.

What emerged throughout the evening was a very consistent commitment to preserving neighbor-

hoods, creating green space, and solving traffic congestion in any way other than the creation of more traffic lanes. When representatives of the Washington Area Bicyclists Association made a case for enhancing bike commuting, they found they were leaning on an open door. DDOT pledged remedial work on bike routes without waiting for the consummation of the grand plan. Indeed, they said, work on the South Capitol Street bridge is needed just to make it safe.

The National Capitol Planning Commission presented several notional views of an improved South Capitol Street. Although each showed a widened street, the extra width was given over to creation of a light rail line, pedestrian and bike paths, and a greensward. While auto traffic continued to have only two lanes each way, there was a proposal for four more lanes in a tunnel. This prompted considerable sentiment for spending the money for such a

tunnel on alternatives to automobile lanes. The presentation of a wider right-of-way was also accompanied, emphatically, with the pledge that housing would not be displaced for roads. Any widening would move east into commercial areas, not west into neighborhoods.

As these visions of grand plans were presented, I couldn't help



thinking about the CHRS attempts for more than a year to deal with the smallest-scale problem—nuisance property—detailed in the last issue of the *News*. Regulations required by recent legislation have now been published, and we are struggling to make common cause with the Department of Consumer and Regulatory Affairs (DCRA) in identifying properties and putting pressure on owners to remove the nuisance. DCRA won't release their list of nuisance properties, although we have obtained portions of it from elsewhere in the DC Government. Mr. Clark has invited us to talk to him regarding our differences with respect to “responsiveness” and we hope it will lead to the small actions as energetic as this large plan for a South Capitol Street Gateway. We'll report on both these developments in future issues of the *News*.

If you want to know more about the Gateway project, contact John Deatruck, Deputy Director, DC Department of Transportation at [john.deatruck@dc.gov](mailto:john.deatruck@dc.gov) or Hadiyah Jordan, Project Manager, Justice & Sustainability Associates at [hadiyah.jordan@justicesustainability.com](mailto:hadiyah.jordan@justicesustainability.com). Information may also be available at [www.ddot.dc.gov](http://www.ddot.dc.gov) or [www.publicspace.justicesustainability.com](http://www.publicspace.justicesustainability.com). \*

## Capitol Hill Restoration Society (CHRS)

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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](http://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.

# Get the Leaves Out!

## Leaf Collection—For a Cleaner Neighborhood

by Gene M. Smith, Chair, Environment Committee

The long, dry summer may well mean that the leaves drop in a heap—soon. The city does provide some relief, but it is very specific pick-up service for the Hill. Get with the program, or those leaves may be drifting from one end of your neighborhood to the other.

Here are the guidelines for treebox collection:

**Option 1:** Dump the loose leaves in your treebox. This is fine if you have hardy landscaping (or none at all) in the treebox. The leaves will be vacuumed up.

**Option 2:** Bag the leaves, and dump the bags in the treebox.

If you have alley trash collection, bagged leaves can be put out along with your trash.

Nothing in the city is ever simple, so here are some additional tips:

- \* No trash with leaves. The vacuum trailer is a delicate piece of machinery. Leaf collection means leaves only: no limbs, trash, bricks, dirt, or other dregs of civilization should be mixed in with the leaves in the treebox. Same rules apply for the bagged leaves, since the leaves are meant for composting.
- \* No leaves in the street. While it may seem to make more sense to pile the leaves in the curbside gutter, parking spaces on the Hill are always at a premium. The leaves go in the treebox or in a bag.
- \* Timing is everything. Ward 6 is divided for leaf-collection services into two sections: Area

A—north of East Capitol St.; and Area B—south of East Capitol St.

For Area A:

- \* If you put your leaves out by 3 November (Sunday)—Pick up over the next weeks.
- \* Get the leaves out by 8 Dec. (Sunday)—Pick up over the next 2 weeks

For Area B:

- \* Get the leaves out by 17 November (Sunday)—Pick up over the next 2 weeks.
- \* Get the leaves out by 22 December (Sunday)—Pick up over the next 10 days.

**Help-yourself Option:** You can dump your bagged leaves, for free, the city tells us, at Fort Totten Trash Transfer Station (4900 Bates Road NE) six days a week. Hours are Monday–Friday, 1 pm–5 pm; and Saturday, 8 am–3 pm. Need directions or more details? Call the station at 202-576-6803.

The neighborhood collection option has only been around since 1999—in case you're wondering why you didn't know about it before. City-wide, it is a massive campaign, with over 200 workers and 120 pieces of equipment devoted to the collection effort. In 1999, the Department of Public Works picked up almost 5,400 tons (that's right, tons!) of leaves. In 2001, the city picked up almost 9,000 tons.

Do your part. Stick a note on the fridge, right now, on your collection deadlines (there are only two dates). Miss the first one? Then hit the second one. It's good for your block; it's good for the Hill. \*

# Saga of a Request for Vacant Buildings List

## CHRS Appeals Denial of Information

by Gary Peterson, Board Member  
at Large

The DC Department of Consumer and Regulatory Affairs (DCRA) hasn't responded to my Freedom of Information Act request to make available its City Council-mandated vacant property list. Because the time for a response has expired, I have now filed with the Mayor an appeal to the denial of information, as required by the Act.

This sad saga started in July 2002, with my e-mail to DCRA asking how to get a copy of the vacant property list that the City Council told the DCRA to create by May 27, 2001. A month went by with no response. On August 29, 2002, I filed a Freedom of Information Act request (FOIA) with DCRA Director David A. Clark. Clark responded on September 10 that he had referred the FOIA to Gregory Love, Administrator of the Building and Land Regulation Administration.

Seven days later, I received a letter from Robert Henry, DCRA FOIA Officer, requesting an indefinite extension of time and that I contact him with questions. The DC FOIA statute allows for a 10-day extension. After that, no response may be treated as a denial for appeal purposes.

On October 10, I sent an e-mail to Henry to ascertain the status of the FOIA. As of this writing, it has elicited no response, though I was encouraged by Director Clark's letter to send the e-mail to Henry. I have treated this unresponsiveness as a denial: thus my appeal to the Mayor's office.

A professed list of the vacant buildings in Ward 6 has been obtained from the Office of the Ward 6 Coordinator for the Mayor's Office. The list has no label and the source of the information is unknown. The



Your assistance is needed in identifying vacant properties. Boarded up and unoccupied structures, such as these houses, are examples of nuisance properties. Top, 221-223 11th Street, SE. Bottom, 1000 C Street NE

list comprises around 500 structures; about 100 are within the general boundaries of the Historic District. However, a sample of the list indicates that is generally unreliable—it includes occupied buildings and omits others that obviously have been vacant for a long time.

As stated in the September News, your assistance is needed in

identifying vacant properties. To date, the story resulted in reports of only two buildings. Both have been photographed and reported to DCRA. CHRS will track the progress on these properties.

Please contact me with addresses of any vacant buildings on Capitol Hill at 547-7969 or at [pgaryl@comcast.net](mailto:pgaryl@comcast.net). ✧

## Looking Back on Capitol Hill



by Nancy Metzger, Chair, Historic District Committee

It wasn't exactly an archaeological dig, but John Boyle, new owner of 527–29 Eighth Street SE, found some interesting artifacts when he was cleaning out the building where Marty's Restaurant will open in spring 2003. First was a long stack of pint ice-cream containers (for the hand-dipped market); then an early toaster; and finally the ledger books for a restaurant or luncheonette that operated from December 1943 through September 1944. With sales of \$26,722 and expenses of \$22,372, it doesn't seem to have been a major moneymaker. Although the ledger recorded weekly salaries paid of approximately \$144, it's not clear if a salary for the owner was included.

Intriguing entries include a nearly weekly \$2.50 charge for knife-sharpening, and daily deliveries from Thompson's Dairy, Wonder Bread, and the Crusty and Connecticut Pie Companies. Coffee was purchased from M.E. Swing (which is still in business). The establishment served Coca-Cola, Suburban Club Ginger Ale, and Seven-Up, but apparently no alcoholic beverages. Daily food sales ranged from \$60 to \$140, beverages from \$4 to \$18. A little research in the city directories will give us the name of the establishment—and we might even find out how much they charged for a meal, cup of coffee, and piece of pie. The ledger book will be donated to the City Museum for its business collection. ✧

## Acronyms Used in This Issue

|        |   |
|--------|---|
| aka    | also known as   |
| ANC    | Advisory Neighborhood Committee                       |
| BZA    | Board of Zoning Adjustment                            |
| CHAMPS | Capitol Hill Association of Merchants & Professionals |
| DCRA   | (D.C.) Department of Consumer and Regulatory Affairs  |
| DDOT   | District Department of Transportation                 |
| FOIA   | Freedom of Information Act                            |

## E-mail List for Environmental Alerts—Volunteers?

The practice of a phone-tree alert doesn't work very well for those of us with answering systems that are accessed by spouses and kids—where messages may be deleted and never reach the intended recipient. Things like dates of community meetings of interest and various deadlines are best addressed by an e-mail list.

Current examples that could be e-mailed to interested persons are Department of Public Works notices on deadlines for leaf collection and disposal of computer trash and other hazardous household wastes. Some of these can't be publicized in the *News* because of the interval between its deliveries.

If you would like to be part of tier I (to pass notice on to your block, circle of friends or neighborhood), or part of tier II (willing to receive e-mails but not able to pass them on), please let me know. This will be an on-going effort, and if anyone can volunteer to assist, it would be appreciated.

Please put "CHRS/Environmental Notices" (or any close equivalent) in the subject line, and drop me an e-mail at [gmsmith@smithbrandon.com](mailto:gmsmith@smithbrandon.com). ✧

## WELCOME CHRS SUPPORTERS

### NEW MEMBERS:

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*The Restoration Society is open to all who have an interest in Capitol Hill. Please fill out the membership form online at [www.chrs.org](http://www.chrs.org) or contact the Society offices by calling 202-543-0425 to request an application by mail.*



# October Preservation Café Brainstorms and Shares Ideas for Call Box Art

by Nancy Metzger, Chair, Historic District Committee

Folks who came to the October Preservation Café had a chance to look at sketches and mock-ups of call box artwork and talk about themes and topics that might be represented in Capitol Hill call boxes. The group also discussed timetables: in January, the Capitol Hill review group should see proposals so that several call boxes are ready for submission and approval during the winter session of the city's Art on Call review committee. The manufacture of the artwork could begin immediately after that. Installation of the artwork and final painting would be in the spring. There is no cutoff date for the call box project. Because of the large number of boxes on Capitol Hill, it will take several years to "recycle" all the boxes.

Among the boxes already in the planning stage (all in SE) are:

- \* 8th & I Streets—theme: old Anacostia Fire Company;
- \* 8th & G Streets—theme: architect Benjamin Latrobe;
- \* 7th Street & Pennsylvania Avenue—theme: Wallach School;
- \* 14th Street & Potomac Avenue—theme: trolley line;
- \* 17th & D Street—theme: Eastern Terrace ad;
- \* 11th & East Capitol Streets—theme: Carolina Theatre;

- \* 5th Street & Seward Square—theme: police box with photo of 1905 station force; and
- \* 18th Street & Potomac Avenue—theme: dogs in the cemetery.

Some boxes will have more generic themes such as the trees of Capitol Hill. Themes don't have to be historic: soccer on the Hill would be great. So would representations of historic athletes of the old recreation leagues (both black and white), and excerpts from the diary of Michael Shiner, a former slave who worked in the Navy Yard for 52 years, spanning a period between the War of 1812 and the Civil War.

More information about the Call Box project is given in the accompanying questions and answers. The Capitol Hill call box area covers the entire Hill, not just the Historic District. Capitol East, North Lincoln Park and Stanton Park are all participating in the effort.

## November Café

Patrick Lally, author of the CHRS guideline "Cast Iron: Firmness, Commodity and Delight" will be the speaker at the November Preservation Café on November 20, 6:30–7:15 pm at Trattoria Alberto, 506 Eighth Street, SE (one block from Eastern Market metro). If you're a homeowner with a maintenance problem or a Capitol Hill resident intrigued by the ironwork on the Hill, come with your questions. \*

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## Qs and As on Capitol Hill's Call Boxes

### What is a Call Box?

On many street corners throughout Washington, you'll see an elaborate iron base with a box mounted on top. Some boxes are topped with a long pole and a yellow light. Some are of a basic "house" shape, a few are harp-shaped, and still others are basically a rectangle with rounded corners. These are police and fire call boxes—remnants of a time before home phones were widespread. If there was a fire, someone could run and turn in the alarm at the nearest fire call box. These were painted gray on the base and red on the box. The police call boxes had a different purpose. A patrol officer would use one to notify a central command center that his patrol was proceeding without problems and that no

assistance was necessary. The police call boxes, which were painted blue, included a feature that allowed passersby to call for a wagon or other help.

### So what is the Call Box Project (aka Art on Call)?

This is a city-wide program to identify, protect, renovate, and reuse the city's abandoned fire and police call boxes. The Department of Transportation is responsible for stripping lead-based paint from the call boxes, then repairing and priming them. (Unity Construction started this work in the fall 2002.) The DC Heritage Tourism Coalition will coordinate community efforts to convert the boxes into neighborhood icons—showcases for the unique history and culture of each community.

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## A showcase for history and culture? What do you mean?

Each box will have a theme that reflects something about the neighborhood—perhaps a long-time resident, some building, a tradition (a block party, for instance), or a more generic topic like trees on Capitol Hill. Artists will decorate the box exteriors and create “plaques” or pieces of art to be affixed within the boxes. These might be inspired by old photographs, quotations, poems that capture the spirit of the place, or notes on historic events or personalities.

## I'd like to get involved. What can I do?

Each call box will need an artist to work on the design, of course, but each box will also need someone to research or write the information, raise funds to manufacture the plaque or art work, coordinate all the workers, paint the final coats, and monitor the condition of the box after it has been finished. We also need people to help with community-wide tasks—getting out notices of meetings and information about the program to groups, working with schools interested in the project, and mapping the location of the boxes for a later brochure.

## There's a box just down the street. Can I work on that one?

We're encouraging people to join with their neighbors to work on nearby boxes. Before you begin, contact the Capitol Hill Restoration Society (Nancy Metzger, 546-1034, n.metzger2@verizon.net) to “register” for that box. If others are already interested, you'll be given contact information so all can work together.

## After registering for a box—what do I do then?

*Decide on a theme.* If you're stuck for ideas, talk with neighbors or give us a call and we'll all brainstorm for an idea for the box.

*Work with an artist.* If you're not artistically inclined and the neighbors aren't either, we'll try to find an artist for you. The Capitol Hill Art League will be working with us on this project.

*Figure out a budget.* Some projects will be rather straightforward—similar to historic plaques—so we'll have a pretty good idea of what they will cost. Others will have to be sent out for bids or estimates. The city-wide Art on Call project will be funding approved boxes with up to \$250. Community groups are expected to match each \$250 grant with \$250 in cash or documented in-kind services. Some boxes may need more than \$500 to be completed—that will require more fund raising.

*Submit a proposal to the Capitol Hill Task Force for review.* This is a requirement from the city-wide Art on



*The call box at 11th & East Capitol, SE awaits renovation*

Call project—and will ensure that the proposal is ready to be evaluated by the city team. We'll need the proposed budget and a sketched-out design as well as references for the information presented. A review committee will be looking for the same things as the city group: artistic quality, historical accuracy, and durability and appropriateness of materials.

After approval, the Capitol Hill Task Force will submit your proposal and others to the city. When approved, the funds will be released to the Capitol Hill Restoration Society to pay for project materials and other expenses associated with each box. (The Society makes no profit on this.) The design will be translated into the plaque or object that will be inserted in each box; the exterior of the box will be painted and the plaque or art permanently attached.

## What exactly will the city be looking for in the proposals?

*Artistic quality*, including personal artistic vision, relation to the site or neighborhood, unique design, and lasting material.

*Historical accuracy*, interest value, relationship to the historic or current neighborhood culture, quality of photographs, and relevance to local political, social, cultural, economic, or architectural elements.

*Durability and appropriateness of materials* that maintain the integrity of form. Attachments are possible only if they enhance the call box design.

## I still have questions: who do I call?

If you have questions about the city-wide program, call the DC Heritage Tourism Coalition at 661-7581 or e-mail [callboxes@aol.com](mailto:callboxes@aol.com).

If you have questions or want to be included in the Capitol Hill effort, contact Nancy Metzger at 546-1034, or [n.metzger2@verizon.net](mailto:n.metzger2@verizon.net). ✧

## Mark Your Calendar!

NOVEMBER

### 6 Wednesday 7:30 pm

CHRS Fall Membership Meeting. Panel on Street Furniture and Public Spaces. Old Naval Hospital, 921 Pennsylvania Avenue SE.

### 12 Tuesday 8 pm

Overbeck Lecture, "Joining the Hill: Cauldron and Community." Naval Lodge Hall, 330 Pennsylvania Avenue SE. Reservations required.

### 14 Thursday 7:30 pm

CHRS Zoning Committee meeting; will consider 918-922 Constitution Avenue. Kirby Building, 420 Tenth Street SE

### 16 Saturday 9am - 3:30 pm

Oral History Workshop sponsored by The Historical Society of Washington, D.C. Participants will learn: techniques for conducting oral history interviews, transcription and editing, and how oral histories can be used. Instruction led by Dr. Laura Kamoie, American University. 1307 New Hampshire Avenue NW. Registration fee: \$30; bring a bag lunch. Call 202-785-2068 x100, email [reservations@hswdc.org](mailto:reservations@hswdc.org), or register online at [www.citymuseumdc.org](http://www.citymuseumdc.org).

### 19 Tuesday 6:30 pm

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

### 20 Wednesday 6:30 pm

Preservation Cafe. "A Homeowners Guide to Iron," with Pat Lally, author of CHRS Guideline "Cast Iron: Firmness, Commodity and Delight." Trattoria Alberto's upper room, 506 Eighth Street SE.

## Capitol Hill Chorale Inaugurates Its 10<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Season

Inaugurating its 10<sup>th</sup> anniversary season, the Capitol Hill Chorale will present "Some Lessons and a Bunch of Carols, Sacred and Secular Thoughts for the Season" in two performances, Friday, December 6, and Sunday, December 8, 2002, at 7:30 p.m. Both concerts will take place at St. Joseph's on the Hill, 2nd and C Streets, NE.



The Chorale's holiday concerts have become a popular and well-attended part of the holiday season on Capitol Hill. This year's program under the direction of Music Director Frederick Binkholder celebrates the wide range of choral traditions and composers from which the Chorale has drawn inspiration over the past 10 years.

Since its first concert December 11, 1993, the Chorale has performed twenty-five programs that illuminate the diversity and richness of choral music, from masterpieces such as Bach's St. John Passion to programs of spirituals, folk songs, and the music of Broadway.

Tickets for the Chorale's holiday concerts are \$20 for reserved seating, \$15 for general admission, and \$10 for special categories.

To order tickets or obtain more information about the Chorale, go to [www.capitolhillchorale.org](http://www.capitolhillchorale.org) or call 547-6839. Tickets will also be available at the door. \*

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### Capitol Hill Restoration Society

420 Tenth Street, SE  
Washington, DC 20003