



CHRS CELEBRATING 60 YEARS OF PRESERVATION

NEWS

www.chrs.org

October 2020

Reflecting on Capitol Hill's Public Squares and Parks

By Christine Mullins

On September 16 CHRS was pleased to host its first-ever virtual Preservation Café with longtime friend and Capitol Hill resident Justine Bello, project manager and architect for the National Park Service and architectural conservator. During her well-attended discussion, Bello described the history and jurisdictional issues that surround the many parks of Capitol Hill. She noted that our neighborhood is dotted with public squares, grassy triangles, and parcels of land in every shape and size imaginable. These lands give us parks and playgrounds, statues and shade. They also contribute to the human scale of the city, and to the cultural landscape of our neighborhood.

Bello said that three government agencies are responsible for maintaining the parks on Capitol Hill: the D.C. Department of Parks and Recreation, the Architect of the Capitol, and the National Park Service. Stakeholders include district residents, visitors, and the property owners that live in the surrounding neighborhoods.



The statue of Nathanael Greene in Stanton Park.

To untangle the jurisdictional “soup,” the District has benefitted from a great history of mapmaking. The framework and structure for our community is “all there” in the L’Enfant Plan, which Major Pierre Charles L’Enfant developed for George Washington in 1791. However, money has always played a significant role in determining how the city would evolve as private citizens purchased and lay claim to the federal government landholdings.

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2020 House Tour: A Virtual Success!

By Elizabeth Nelson

The 63rd annual House Tour “opened” without a hitch on September 12, as planned. It has been popular, with almost 800 views already and has driven additional traffic to other posts on the website. Folks come for the Tour and poke around a bit while they’re there, increasing community awareness of our broad range of activities.

CHRS continues to promote the Tour beyond its initial opening, to justify the work that went into creating it and to give good value to the advertisers. So, if you haven’t seen it already, please do take a peek: chrs.org/vht-2020.

It is surprising how much the virtual experience parallels the in-person experience. Visitors can “walk” back and forth, turn around, look at the ceilings and floors, zoom in for a closer look at art or furnishings. And, unlike the in-person tour, visitors can view it as many times as they like at any hour of the day or night. It will continue, indefinitely, in cyberspace without charge.

Our Communications Committee has done a great job of getting the work out but would appreciate the public’s help by passing the link on to friends and social media contacts. Many thanks to the House Tour Committee: Heather Schoell, Betsy Rutkowski, Jackie Krieger, Etta Fielek, Maygene Daniels, Joanna Kendig, Beth Purcell, Tiffany Barnard-Davidson, Nancy Metzger and the Communications Committee: Nina Tristani, Jennifer Cate & Carey Paquette.

And to Wallace C. Dean for the image on our poster. ★



IMAGES COURTESY HOMEOWNERS

LEFT: Handbuilt stairs at 521 2nd Street SE. RIGHT: Vintage globe collection at 630 E Street NE.



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ABOUT CHRS

Capitol Hill is a special place. We promote, preserve, and enhance the character of our historic neighborhoods.

Since its founding in 1955, CHRS has worked continuously to make Capitol Hill the desirable location it has now become. Due to CHRS's efforts, Capitol Hill won designation as a historic district in 1976. Today, that legacy of standing up for the community continues with our work in planning, zoning, historic preservation, and public safety.

CHRS is a volunteer organization, made up of Hill residents who love their historic neighborhoods and want to ensure that the unique character of the Hill is around for future generations. Come join us!

To learn more or join, please visit:
www.CHRS.org

Zoning Report

By Gary Peterson

The CHRS Zoning Committee has considered the following cases via email. Below are the findings.

BZA# 20280. This case involves the application of VBS Community Builders LLC for a special exception under the RF (residential flat) use requirements to convert an existing residential building into a five-unit apartment house in the RF-1 Zone at 622 I Street NE. The property is a meat cleaver-shaped property with the handle fronting on I Street.

The 1360 square foot handle is improved with a derelict, two-story brick house. The head of the cleaver contains 3,124 square feet, fronts on the alley, and is unimproved. The applicant plans to make the house three stories containing two apartments and to construct a three-story apartment building with three apartments at the rear. The two buildings will be connected by a 25-foot-long enclosed passage. The improvements will extend more than 70 feet beyond the rear wall of both neighbors.

The committee voted to oppose the application because the property is 16 square feet short of the 4,500 square feet lot area required for 5 units, the depth of 70 feet beyond the rear wall of neighbors is well beyond the 10 feet allowed as a matter of right, and the improvements are really two primary structures.

BZA# 20289. Application of 400 Seward Square LLC for an area variance from the lot area requirements to permit an addition of 3 units to the existing 14-unit apartment building in the RF-3 Zone at 400 Seward Square SE. An apartment building in any RF zone requires 900 square feet of land area per apartment or, in this example, 15,300 square feet. The committee voted to oppose the request because the application does not meet the test for an area variance that, as a result of the attributes of a specific piece of property the strict application of a zoning regulation would result in peculiar and exceptional practical difficulties to the owner of property. ★



Original Tyler Elementary School

The original Tyler Elementary School, built in 1890 for African American students and named for President John Tyler, was a typical eight-room schoolhouse, located on the west side of 11th Street between G and I Streets SE.

In this early photograph, students admire a horse. After a new school was built in 1949, the original building was razed to become part of the school playground.

IMAGE COURTESY: FRANCES BENJAMIN JOHNSON, DC PUBLIC LIBRARY HISTORICAL IMAGE COLLECTION.

The McMillan Plan, which was initiated a century later in 1898, expanded on L'Enfant's vision by re-landscaping the city's ceremonial core: the Capitol grounds, the Mall, with new extensions west and south of the Washington Monument. McMillan established a comprehensive recreation and park system that would preserve the ring of Civil War fortifications around the city.

Bello described how L'Enfant's Plan designated several historic reservations—the lands the federal government acquired through purchase, condemnation, dedication, or gift for its own use. On his maps, L'Enfant had shaded and numbered 15 large open spaces for these reservations at the intersections of the city's avenues named after the nation's states.

These reservations were "reserved" for the parks that would feature the statues and memorials that would honor "worthy" citizens. The reservations follow a basic numbering system: of course the White House, the so-called President's Park, would



IMAGE COURTESY CODY RICE

ABOVE: The Mary McLeod Bethune statue in Lincoln Park. BELOW: The L'Enfant Plan.

have the honor of being number one. Nearly all of the reservations are now under the jurisdiction of the National Park Service.

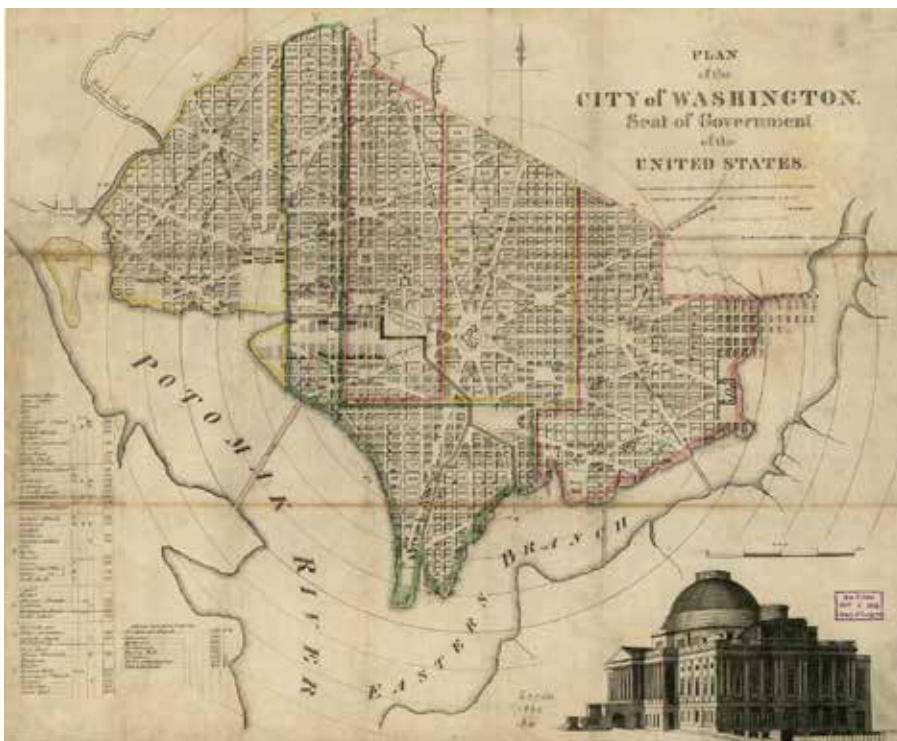
The National Park Service has posted information for each U.S. reservation and appropriation on the Open Data DC website, with detailed information on any transactional history. Bello noted that the ownership of our parks and memorials is fairly fluid and transactions have occurred from time-to-time. For example, the

Grant Memorial, located at the base of the Capitol at the Reflecting Pool changed hands from the National Park Service to the Architect of the Capitol. In 2016, the National Women's Party donated the Belmont-Sewall house to the National Park Service and was later established as the Belmont-Paul Women's Equality National Monument.

Since our parks are maintained by the National Park Service, the Architect of the Capitol, and the DC Department of Parks and Recreation, the function of our green space can take on several different forms.

For example, the mission of the Architect of the Capitol is to serve Congress and the Supreme Court as the "builder and steward of the landmark buildings and grounds of Capitol Hill." Their "staff preserves and maintains the historic buildings, monuments, art and inspirational gardens on the Capitol campus." This mission says nothing about recreation or leisure.

Meanwhile the stated goal of the National Park Service is to preserve "unimpaired the natural and cultural resources and values of the National Park System for the enjoyment,



Continued on page 6

Union Station Expansion Project

By Beth Purcell

The Federal Railroad Administration (FRA) anticipates increased rail traffic in the Northeast Corridor by 2040 and to meet the need, it plans to expand Union Station by reconfiguring the station tracks, adding a new train hall, bus facilities, and parking facilities; new concourses and rail support spaces; pedestrian and bicycle access improvements; and improved pick-up/drop-off areas for vehicles. FRA has issued a draft environmental impact statement (DEIS), 1,500 pages plus a 4,000-page appendix. See <https://railroads.dot.gov/environmental-reviews/washington-union-station-expansion-project/draft-environmental-impact>.

CHRS questions the compatibility with the historic Union Station and the implications for closely-related developments inclusive of Burnham Place, the H Street Bridge replacement, and potential federal air rights development. The DEIS focuses exclusively on the project's federal portion: 1. new passenger concourses below the rail yard; 2. use of the H Street tunnel exclusively for pedestrian access; and 3. in-kind replacement of the H Street Bridge and fails to consider all projects together. This piecemeal approach fails to convey the potential transformation for this site. CHRS also questions potential effects of on the Capitol Hill Historic District, such as unnecessary increases in vehicle traffic.

Drury Tallant, who also serves on the Historic Preservation Committee, has led CHRS's participation in the Union Station Expansion since 2016, and continues to represent CHRS at Consulting Party meetings, and drafting comments.

For prior reporting on Union Station see chrs.org/union-station-expansion. ☆

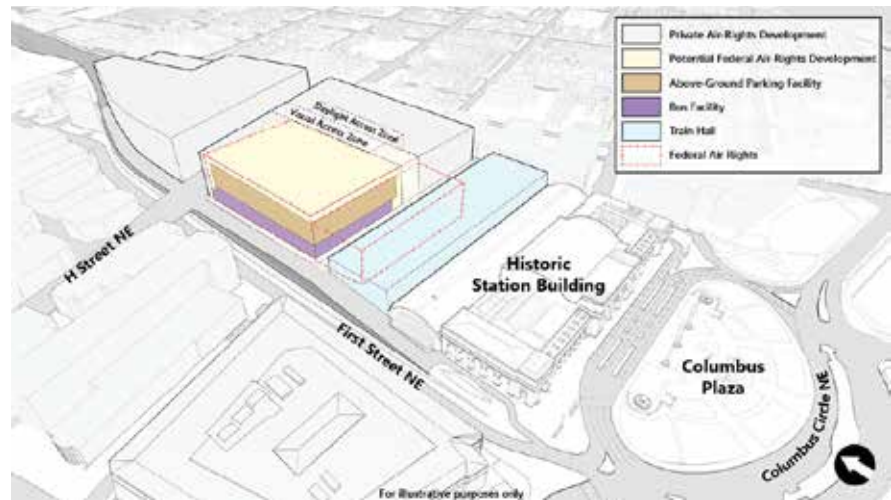


IMAGE COURTESY FEDERAL RAILROAD ADMINISTRATION



IMAGE COURTESY LIBRARY OF CONGRESS (WWW.LOC.GOV/ITEM/2016824096)

TOP: Alternative A-C from the draft environmental impact statement on the proposed expansion of Union Station. BOTTOM: Union Station from the air, circa 1921–22.

Preservation Café, *continued from page 4*

education, and inspiration of this and future generations.” In other words, most NPS parks support recreational activities, but they can also play a cultural role by commemorating and honoring past leaders. Many NPS green spaces are also highly designed to impress: from the glory of their tulips to our prized cherry blossoms which have their very own festival.



The Sewall-Belmont House.

Bello offered several examples of how these dual missions present themselves in the parks of Capitol Hill.

The function of Providence Park (which many of us call “X park”), is primarily recreational. This former location for Providence Hospital seems designed to promote the medicinal and healing benefits of fresh air and exercise. Young families use this wide open green space to play soccer and tee-ball.

Meanwhile, Garfield Park, which is featured in L’Enfant’s Plan, is a ramble of green space with swings, picnic tables, and tennis and basketball courts.

Stanton Park has a popular playground with benches and grassy areas for residents and their four-legged friends. But this park also has a cultural purpose that commemorates the revolutionary war

hero General Nathanael Greene with a statue in the square’s center. Lincoln Park, which the NPS also maintains, offers two playgrounds, statuesque trees, and large areas of open green space for local residents, but it also features two statues: one to honor Mary McLeod Bethune, the educator and humanitarian, and the controversial statue Emancipation by Thomas Ball at its center.

Bello concluded her presentation by describing the hexagonal Summerhouse on the grounds of the U.S. Capitol which is a lovely quiet space that was built by landscape architect Frederick Law Olmsted to inspire us with the beauty of its design.

Residents have especially come to cherish our many divergent green spaces as places to reflect, learn, play, and meet friends even more during the current pandemic.

CHRS Preservation Cafés are free to members and non members. We hope to see you online on October 21 at 6:30 p.m. for Homicide on the Hill with Robert Pohl. Join us at www.chrs.org. ★

October Preservation Café: Homicide on The Hill

On Wednesday, October 21, Robert Pohl, a Capitol Hill neighbor, author, and professional tour guide will present “something spooky” for Halloween at this virtual Preservation Café, “Homicide on The Hill.”

Like every neighborhood, Capitol Hill has had its share of murders in its long history. Even the white-domed Capitol has been the location of a brutal murder, though the more usual backdrop for such events were the alleys and hovels in the poorer sections of the neighborhood.

Some murders are simply the usual tawdry acts of spite and anger, but others have had long-lasting consequences. This talk looks at all

manner of murders, including one committed in a house originally built by George Washington, another that had judicial repercussions that continue to this day, and an unsolved murder that involved one of Capitol Hill’s most famous names.

Join us October 21 at 6:30 pm from the comfort of your own home, maybe with a restorative close to hand, as Robert Pohl, local historian and author takes us on a ghastly tour of these grisly events.

Our CHRS Preservation Cafés are free to CHRS members and non members.

A WebEx link and call in number will be posted prior to the meeting. ★



Homicide victim Beulah Limerick. ★

DDOT Projects on Pennsylvania Avenue SE

By Beth Purcell

The District Department of Transportation (DDOT) is moving ahead on several Capitol Hill projects, the Pennsylvania Avenue SE Corridor Study—2nd Street to the Sousa Bridge. DDOT plans to redesign this section of Pennsylvania Avenue SE to improve safety for walking, biking, driving, and busses, balancing the interests of all these uses.

DDOT prefers Alternative A, which makes the fewest least changes to Pennsylvania Avenue traffic flows. The next public outreach will be in fall/winter 2020–2021. More information is available at: www.pennavese.com/publicmeeting. ★

Pennsylvania Avenue SE Corridor Study

Alternative A: Separated Bike Lanes with Peak-Restricted Parking



Concept Drawing: Penn Ave SE from 2nd Street SE to 4th Street SE (with Bus Lane Option)



Concept Drawing: Penn Ave SE from 2nd Street SE to 4th Street SE (without Bus Lane Option)



Concept Drawing: Penn Ave SE at Eastern Market Metrorail Station (with Bus Lane Option)



Concept Drawing: Penn Ave SE at Eastern Market Metrorail Station (without Bus Lane Option)



IMAGES COURTESY DDOT



CHRS CELEBRATING 60 YEARS OF PRESERVATION

Capitol Hill Restoration Society
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Washington, DC 20003

Mark Your Calendar!

Please check website for current information—cancellations and postponements are expected and will be posted as they are known.

OCTOBER

1 Thursday

If you're looking for another free, fun, family-friendly, socially-distanced activity, try out the Mural Hunt—going live on October 1, 2020 on chrs.org.

~~**4** Sunday~~

RESCHEDULED

CHRS House Expo has been rescheduled for 2021 due to restrictions on public gatherings during the pandemic. The next House Expo will be held on Saturday, October 30, 2021 at the Eastern Market North Hall.

21 Wednesday, 6:30 pm

Something spooky for Halloween: Virtual Preservation Cafe, "Homicide on the Hill," with our neighbor, author, and professional tour guide, Robert Pohl. Details at: chrs.org/homicide-on-the-hill-preservation-cafe.

63rd Annual Capitol Hill (Virtual) House Tour

Starting September 12, 2020

The 63rd Annual House and Garden Tour is virtual! Our #StayAtHome House Tour is now available on chrs.org. See story on page 2 for more details.

#StayAtHome
House Tour