

Fuentevilla

A HISTORY OF THE PARKWOOD ASSOCIATION 1975-1995 (4/1/95 RWL)

AS THE PARKWOOD RESIDENTS Association is being rejuvenated in April, 1995, it's time to look back at how and why it began 20 years earlier. The PRA was established at a meeting at the Parkwood Elementary School (now "Kensington-Parkwood") on May 7, 1975. A predecessor civic association had been active in Parkwood in the early 1950's, founded about 1948 to deal with problems of a new community and to sponsor social activities such as an annual Halloween party for children; but by 1959 interest had waned and the association had become defunct.

IN JULY, 1972, NEARLY 200 people responded when a meeting was called for the purpose of reviving the citizens' association, prompted by fear of noise from an unsightly elevated subway which -- 12 years later -- would emerge from under Rockville Pike and pass over the Beltway at Grosvenor. Another meeting of this "Parkwood Civic Association" on October 18, 1972, also was well attended; but the result was simply a one-issue ad hoc committee urged to continue its lobbying efforts for an alternative Metro alignment -- i.e., a tunnel. The committee "disintegrated" when that Metro fight was lost in early 1973. The battle over Metro noise was to be fought again later, in the 1980's.

IN FEBRUARY, 1975, the Md. Department of Transportation held a public meeting on proposed changes to the Beltway between Georgia Ave. and the Rockville Pike/I-270 interchange. The next day's newspapers reported that local residents had succeeded in killing the notorious "Plan E," which would have rerouted that strip of Beltway northward to eliminate dangerous curves. Under Plan E, which some of us considered a smokescreen under which the DOT would get what it really wanted via one or more Plans A-D, several community churches and 200-300 homes would have been uprooted.

NO VICTORY HAD BEEN ACHIEVED, the first issue of PARKWOOD NEWS warned as it called for unity in order to prevent the inevitable Beltway widening process from eating up Rock Creek Park and raising noise and air pollution to intolerable levels. (You've noticed that I-495 did stay on the other side of the park, but we've still got work to do on noise/air pollution.)

OTHER PROBLEMS ALSO WERE ADDRESSED. Racial imbalance in the schools -- the Rosemary Hills problem. And declining enrollments at Parkwood and Kensington Junior High. (If you're new to the area, you may not know that KJH was located atop the hill at Saul Road and Kensington Parkway.) School issues could be left to the PTA, or -- more productively -- involve entire communities which could be affected if something disruptive occurs at a school.

OTHER CONCERNS: NEW SEWAGE lines were being planned, a new hike/bike path eventually would go all the way from Franklin and Beach Drive to Lake Needwood, and some believed the path should stick close to the road for safety's sake. There continue to be drainage problems along the path, which would have been worsened if the WSSC later had been allowed to install its proposed 10-12 foot (diameter) water supply pipe to P-G Co. under Beach Drive -- an installation that would have elevated the road, narrowed the flood plain, and subjected the path to even more flooding than usual. Another issue in later years was the effort by Coleman Cadillac to build its sales/repair facility on the southwest corner of Rockville Pike and Grosvenor Lane, where townhouses are now located, instead of at Montgomery Mall where the dealership finally settled. Earlier, traffic routing -- including restricting access to Beach Drive at that intersection -- was a concern for many. Perhaps you can recall other disputes or problems I've overlooked.

IN THE EFFORT TO AVOID A ONE-ISSUE ASSOCIATION, most of those concerns were addressed as a steering committee headed by Leonard Kohn and Rob Lodge convened the first PRA membership meeting at Parkwood school in May, 1975. Lodge chaired the initial meeting -- and prompted a motion that Kohn and the rest of the slate be elected by acclamation. Lodge, elected first vice-president and then president the following year, drafted the PRA constitution and bylaws, which were fine-tuned and adopted at the initial meeting and amended slightly at the 1976 annual meeting. They provided for three vice-presidents, so there would be someone ready in case the V-P designated to act for the president in his or her absence should move away or otherwise become inactive.

VINCENT PRICE AND RICHARD SHERRICK also were elected vice- presidents at that initial meeting. A summary such as this can give only a few details on all the fine work that Len Kohn and Vincent Price have done for Parkwood. Dr. Kohn, although his training is medical, was unusually gifted in dealing with experts in other disciplines; for instance, he could make a compelling case whether talking to highway engineers -- or a school board about to close Parkwood. Dr. Price worked hard for Parkwood ever since moving in more than 40 years ago.

WITH THE AIM OF PREVENTING the Association from becoming defunct, the original PRA constitution and bylaws provided that a meeting could be called by petition of at least 40 residents with at least two weeks notice to all residents. Additional assurance that this association will endure was provided when three persons who have served as PRA president decided to incorporate in March, 1987. They are Michael Ackerman, Gerry Cepaitis, and David Rodkey. The three began as neighborhood delegates early on, working diligently for the PRA ever since.

THE EXCLUSIVELY MALE NAMES mentioned this far, by the way, may give a wrong

impression. Many Parkwood ladies have been active in PRA -- on the initial steering committee and as officers or neighborhood delegates. We are finally breaking the glass barrier at the top by electing Sue Lemich as co-president. Also by the way, we named it Parkwood Residents Association to distinguish it from -- and avoid any possible legal entanglements of -- any previous "civic" association.

IT'S IMPORTANT TO NOTE that the PRA Bylaws -- then and now -- are aimed at discouraging lone rangers, individuals who contact government officials on their own and usually don't achieve much in results. A civic association with hundreds of voters supporting its executive board has more clout, gets more respect from officials. In his defense, a Lone Ranger in the past often could not find any Tonto ready to go into battle with him; so it's important that the PRA meet at least once a year and publicize its existence and willingness to tackle the tough issues -- when there's a consensus that an issue is worth confronting. The Bylaws adopted in 1975 sought unified action by providing that the president had to sign or co-sign any documents or letters purportedly stating the PRA position on an issue. I feel that policy should be continued.

SOME ACCOMPLISHMENTS to which the PRA contributed over the years?

THE MD. DOT HELD another public hearing in March, 1976, at Einstein High School. Len Kohn testified for the PRA, and some of us for the Rock Creek Coalition. We had approached neighboring civic associations to form the Coalition, in the (still correct) belief that several organizations banded together have even more influence with officials. After the hearing, plans to straighten and widen I-495 at the expense of homes and precious park land were abandoned, and a new A-1 proposal for Beltway alterations was drafted by an independent engineer working with PRA Beltway chairman Leonard Kohn.

AN ANNUAL PICNIC at the school was co-sponsored by the PRA and PTA for several years. PRA, working through the Rock Creek Coalition, successfully headed off the huge water pipe through the park noted earlier. In response to a rash of burglaries in 1976, we formed a public safety committee, which sponsored a crime prevention (i.e., mostly burglary) session at the Kensington Library. It got many of us involved in Operation Identification, but efforts in later years (1987) to achieve the 60 % signup needed to qualify for Crime Watch street signs apparently fell short of the mark. The early Public Safety committee also addressed concerns about speeding traffic, vandalism, and fire prevention.

THE PARKWOOD GARDEN CLUB was independent of, but supported by the PRA. Among its activities is maintenance of the island at Saul Road and Cedar Lane, a principal entrance to Parkwood. Also noted in 1976: about 35 minority students from Rosemary Hills

were bussed to Parkwood, and Principal Joan Israel said their assimilation was "going very well." PRA had a School Committee, to coordinate its cooperation with local schools. Paths into the park were blacktopped at Parkwood Drive and Wildwood in 1983, and at Saul and Westbrook later; but we did not pursue opening the pedestrian access lanes set aside by developers at Delmont, Roxbury, and Edgefield.

IN 1977 PRA PARTICIPATED in discussing future development around Grosvenor and other Metro stations. A Parkwood Poll (regularly conducted through our Newsletter, by then in its tenth issue) indicated strong support for a hike/bike path from Saul Road directly over the water to the station. But there was strong opposition from Parkside Apartments across the Creek, and hope for any direct route was abandoned in 1982. A sidewalk alongside Beach Drive to Grosvenor was a big achievement. But a plan for a more direct route to Metro for Parkwoodites up the way kept getting pushed closer to Knowles/Strathmore and finally was abandoned.

IN 1979 WE CONFRONTED A NEW ISSUE. Kensington Junior High closed at the end of the school year, and the School Board planned to convert the hilltop school overlooking Kensington Parkway to a vocational school. We learned it would operate on several shifts, with classes such as welding and auto repair going on at any hour of the day or evening. The PRA supported the RC Coalition in opposing locating a voc-tech school in Rock Creek Hills. A PW Poll endorsed our position, and also showed interest in routing a Rideon bus through or near Parkwood.

MICHAEL ACKERMAN WAS elected PRA president in 1980, while his wife Judy became co-president of the PW PTA. He instituted area wide Milky Spore applications to combat Japanese Beetles, and set up block meetings to discourage and solve burglaries. Later he proposed an annual Parkwood flea market -- a community-wide garage sale in one location. The first was held at Parkwood School in 1983, and others in '85 and '86.

THE PRESIDENTS OF THE ASSOCIATION, to review, were Leonard Kohn in 1975-76, Rob Lodge in '76-77, Ron Danielian from 1977 to late '78, and John Wilson in '78-79. Two Ackerman terms began in 1980 and again in '83. William Bonner was elected in 1981 and John Wunderlich in '82. Gerry Cepaitis started in '84-85, and served as co-president with David Rodkey in '85, and '86. Many others helped carry the load over the years by serving as officer or neighborhood delegate, the latter a contact with the members and insurance that the newsletter is delivered to every house in Parkwood. While only some residents pay their dues and take an active interest in PRA affairs, the Association represents everyone living in Parkwood.



IN 1982 THE ELEMENTARY SCHOOL WAS THE BIG ISSUE. Would it be our school or Kensington Elementary that would close? We had a big turnout at the school board hearing -- all wearing something red to demonstrate our solidarity -- and faced some heavy hitters in trying to sway the board. Columnist George Will testified for Kensington, arguing that his child would not continue to get the high standard of special education that he/she was getting if Kensington were closed. Our star witness was Leonard Kohn, who had gone on to head the PTA after a productive tenure with the PRA. The most convincing Kohn argument for Parkwood were his statistics from measuring width of hallways and stairways in both buildings to demonstrate that Parkwood was superior in access for the handicapped. Over 300 residents turned out for the February hearing, 150 wrote to the board, and 100 were there dressed in red the day the board voted 6-0 (with one abstention) to close Kensington Elementary and send its students to Parkwood. The combined KPW school opened in September, 1984.

A RIDEON BUS through Parkwood -- west on Saul Road, up Parkwood Drive to Knowles and over Strathmore to the Grosvenor Metro -- was proposed in early 1983 to begin in late '84. A Parkwood Poll indicated support for the plan. But Rideon forums were held in April of '84, and it was reported later that the minibus would not be routed through Parkwood because of "overwhelming opposition" that had been expressed.

ALSO IN 1983, PRA and police established a Neighborhood Watch program. Another effort in '83 was PRA spurring the Rock Creek Coalition into demanding noise barriers on our side of the Beltway. That effort is still unsuccessful, and barriers and berms on the other side have intensified our noise pollution by bouncing the I-495 squeal and roar over here.

NOISE FROM TRAINS ON THE METRO overpass was addressed at a hearing in October '84. This time, Parkwood and Parkside worked together, arguing unsuccessfully at a hearing for a reduction in train speeds, as Metro slows after 9 PM. In December '84 the County Council urged Metro to install noise barriers on both sides of the track across the entire bridge, as well as "soft" rail fasteners to reduce train noise. Metro acquiesced, but the barriers were not completed for at least another two years.

THE PARKWOOD NEWS REPORTED that about 70 persons attended the annual meeting in October of '86. The Rodkey-Cepaitis ticket was re-elected as co-presidents for 1986-87. Apparently because there were not any "hot" issues, interest began to wane. To prevent PRA from becoming defunct, as the first civic association had about 30 years earlier, this Association was incorporated in 1987. The co-presidents and Michael Ackerman sat down with lawyers, ignored the original PRA constitution and wrote a new set of bylaws that changed how the Association is run.

Now any family that pays the \$3 annual dues is a member of the Corporation. Most people are content to do no more than that, except to express their opinions now and then and expect to be kept informed of what the PRA is doing. Those who seek a more active role can be appointed to the board of directors, which will meet several times a year. And the co-presidents we elect here today will appoint a small executive committee to tend to the nuts and bolts operation throughout the year.

THIS REVIVAL OF THE PARKWOOD ASSOCIATION is a result of a Parkwood Residents Forum that Bill Fuentevilla and Sue Lemich convened at the Kensington Armory in December, 1994. A number of problems still confront us, such as slowing down dangerous speeders on Parkwood streets, the prolonged delay in repairing the bridge on Beach Drive, concerns about crime, the need for noise barriers on this side of the Beltway, and proper drainage along the hike/bike path that would eliminate countless mud puddles after every rain or thaw. (A good example of how the trail can be properly drained can be observed just after the path crosses Veirs Mill and Aspen Hill roads, where no less than 14 culverts have been installed under the path. We'd settle for 6 or 8 between Cedar Lane and Franklin.)

I'VE LIVED IN PARKWOOD SINCE 1961. It was a nice place to live when we moved in, and it's even better now. I would give the Residents Association at least 50 per cent of the credit for making Parkwood a better place to live, while enhancing real estate values. And the people who live here made a difference, too. Thank you.

- 30 -

This history of Parkwood was prepared by Rob Lodge, 9638 Parkwood Drive, Bethesda, 20814. For additional copies, see your neighborhood delegate.

⑥