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July 3, 2008

MEMORANDUM

TO: Montgomery County Planning Board

VIA: Mary Bradford, Director of Parks *M Bradford*
Mike Riley, Deputy Director of Parks for Administration
John Hench, Chief, Park Planning and Stewardship Division *J Hench*

FROM: Brenda Sandberg, Legacy Open Space Program Manager *BBS*
Dom Quattrocchi, Legacy Open Space Senior Planner *D Quattrocchi*

DATE: June 26, 2008

RE: **Chevy Chase Open Space Urban Park: 1)** Briefing on Park Planning Process; and
2) Recommendation for Demolition of Buildings, Resolution #02-01-08 of Chevy Chase Village Board of Managers

Recommended Action

Staff recommends that the Planning Board:

- 1) Review and comment on the proposed planning process for Chevy Chase Open Space Urban Park.** Park Planning & Stewardship Division of the Department of Parks is initiating the planning process for this important site that has recently become available for park use.
- 2) Approve demolition of the house, garage and associated paving contained within Chevy Chase Open Space to achieve the urban park goal for which the parkland was acquired through the Legacy Open Space program.** Chevy Chase Open Space was acquired in FY03 as a designated Urban Open Space within the *Legacy Open Space Functional Master Plan* (2001). A resolution passed by the Commission's partner in the acquisition, the Chevy Chase Village Board of Managers, and communication received from other civic associations strongly recommend the demolition of the buildings on the site as soon as practical (see Attachments A, B and C). Staff concurs with the Village resolution to demolish the buildings to prepare the site for the eventual construction of this new urban park.



Figure 1 - Chevy Chase Open Space Urban Park Vicinity Map

Background

Chevy Chase Open Space Urban Park (also known as the Wohlfarth Property) was identified in the 2001 *Legacy Open Space Functional Master Plan* (LOS Plan) as one of six urban open spaces that met the Plan's criteria to be one of the "best of the best" open spaces within Montgomery County. The site was identified as a critical open space



Figure 2 – Park Locator Map

opportunity in the very dense neighborhoods next to the Friendship Heights Metro station. The goal of the Urban Open Space category within the LOS Plan is to serve the open space needs of existing neighborhoods, including spaces along major roads and highways, vacant land within existing urban neighborhoods, and important urban natural areas. The Wohlfarth property (as it is identified in the LOS Plan) was evaluated and found to be a minimally developed, relatively large parcel of open land in one of the most densely developed corridors of the County.

The property was acquired in partnership with Chevy Chase Village who contributed 25% of the acquisition cost to the Legacy Open Space program through a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) signed by the Village, the Commission, and Montgomery County (See Attachment D). Issues addressed in various clauses in the MOU include:

- Contribution of \$1.25 million to the Legacy Open Space program over a period of nine years toward the acquisition of the site. To date, the Village has contributed \$343,000 in allocated State POS funds and \$700,000 in cash. The contributions outlined in the MOU will be completed by FY11.
- Annexation of the park into the Village at the cessation of the life estate. Annexation into the Village boundaries was completed December 10, 2007.
- Initial division of responsibilities for maintenance of the property. The MOU outlines that Chevy Chase Village will provide police services and trash removal and that the Commission will provide for other maintenance of the buildings and grounds, including lawn and vegetation maintenance, winterization and maintenance of the house, and removal of large debris.
- Discussion of a partnership between the Commission and the Village for joint development of a Management Plan (now called an Operation & Use Plan) to determine design and uses for the park.

The 1.9-acre site consists of ten recorded lots between Western Avenue and Grove Street adjacent to the Chevy Chase Land Company development and one block from the Metro station (see Figures 1 – 3). The site is located within the corporate limits of Chevy Chase Village and is immediately adjacent to the Friendship Heights Sector Plan area and across Western Avenue

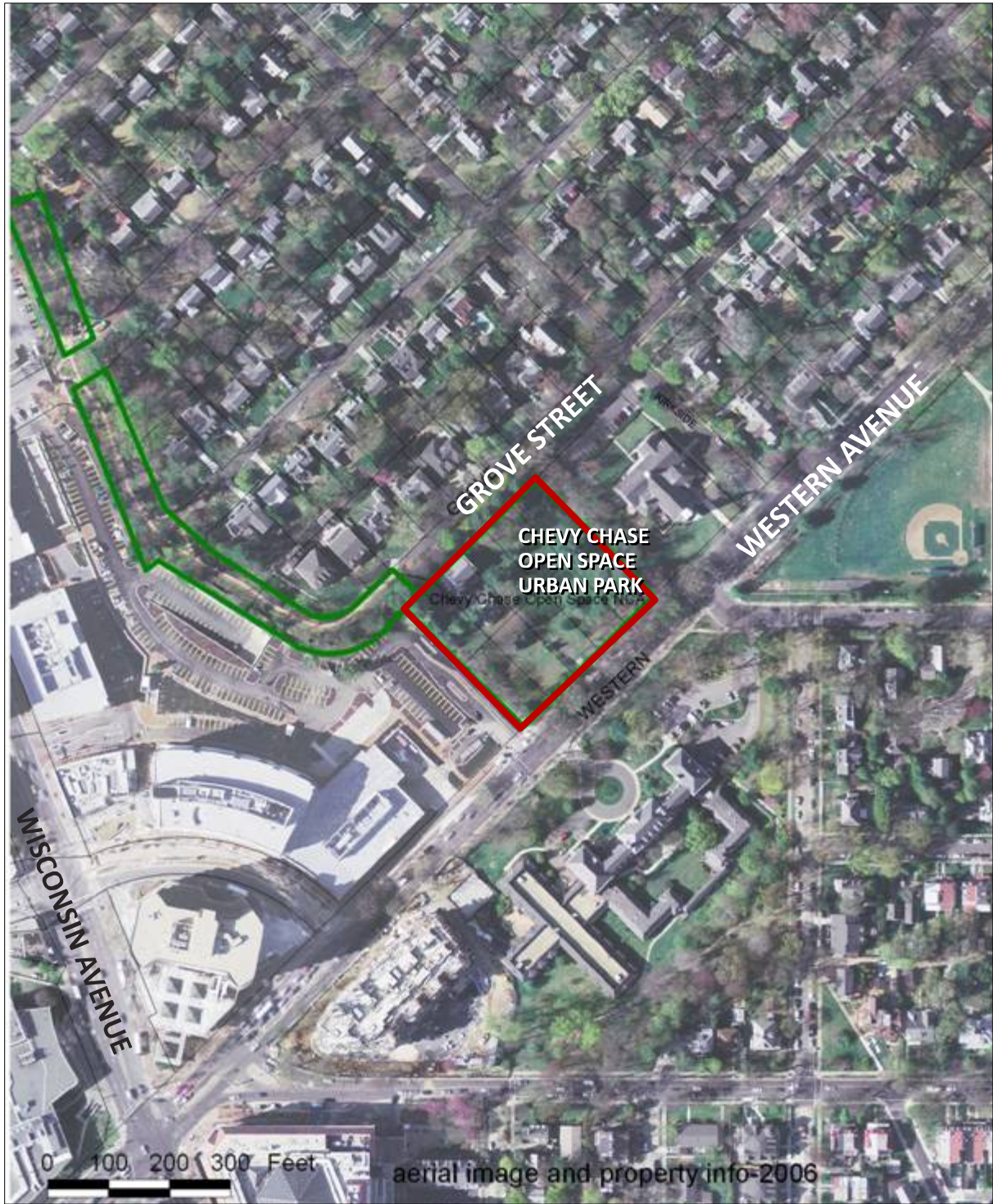


Figure 2 – Aerial View of the Park and vicinity

from Washington, DC. The site is currently configured as a single family residence and a three car garage/workshop with significant plantings of trees and shrubs throughout the property and along the perimeters. Vehicle access to the driveway and parking pad is provided from Western Avenue.

The Colonial Revival house dates from 1975, matching a common architectural style in the surrounding neighborhood of single-family homes. The house served as the home of Mr. William Jarboe Wohlfarth from its construction to his passing at the beginning of this decade. Mr. Wohlfarth donated the property to the Washington Masonic temple of which he had been a high ranking member for many years. Cultural Resources Stewardship and Historic Preservation staff have reviewed the buildings and determined that they do not qualify for any type of historic designation based on their recent age and lack of distinguishing characteristics.

The Commission acquired the property from the Masonic temple in 2002 with the condition of a life estate tenancy. The life estate ended recently and the Commission gained full control of the property in November, 2007. The site was incorporated in the Park Managers' schedules for regular grounds maintenance, and Property Management and Central Maintenance coordinated to winterize and secure the buildings. Police oversight and snow removal are being provided by Chevy Chase Village under the auspices of the interagency MOU. Since fall 2007, significant coordination with Chevy Chase Village has occurred through presentations and attendance at several Village Board meetings and additional coordination with Village staff.



Figure 3 – Oblique Aerial View of House looking northwest



Figure 4 – Front View of House from Grove Street



Figure 5 – the Garage / Workshop

Park Planning Process

An internal park and planning staff team has been selected to work on the Operation & Use Plan for the site, including Historic Preservation, Park Planning, Park Development, Park Management, Park Police, Community-based Planning, Landscape Design, and other Commission staff.

Staff proposes to proceed with the development of this site into a new urban park through several steps.

I. Public Outreach/Charrettes

Given the importance of this urban park site and the strong community interest in moving forward quickly with this planning process, public outreach efforts will be initiated this summer and continue into the fall. A multi-step charrette process has been determined to be the best tool for incorporating public input early into the planning and design process, similar to the charrettes conducted several years ago for the Warner Property. Outreach efforts will focus on reaching citizens of the Village, our primary partner in this project, and citizens from surrounding neighborhoods (Friendship Heights and others) and the District of Columbia. The Village also intends to establish a representative committee to be the primary communication link with the Commission throughout this planning process.

Commission and Village staff have solicited a proposed contract from a landscape architectural firm to conduct a two-part charrette and produce a final report with a single consensus concept drawing for the park. The contract includes a detailed site survey of all the vegetation on the site, a necessary step prior to undertaking any planning for the site. The Chevy Chase Village Board of Managers has committed to paying for half of the charrette contract under certain circumstances (see discussion in next section and Attachment D). Park staff has confirmed that adequate funds (approximately \$8,000) are available in an existing Facility Planning PDF to be used for half of the proposed contract. Park staff is coordinating with the Finance office to confirm the appropriate contracting arrangement.

II. Operation and Use Plan

The concept plan that results from the public outreach and charrette process will be evaluated by staff and incorporated into an Operation and Use Plan. Operation and Use Plans (formerly known as a Park Management Plans) are conducted under the leadership of Park Planning and Stewardship Division staff in cooperation with the Park Region staff and other divisions with Parks and Planning. O&U Plans include the overall concept plan for a park, a public access plan (trails/signage/parking), a resource management plan (forest/streams/horticulture), and a park operations plan. Operation and Use Plans also include estimates of the operating budget impacts (OBI) from the proposed park concept. The O&U Plan is primarily an internal staff-level document, but the park concept plan and the public access plan sections are brought to the Planning Board for your review and approval.

For Chevy Chase Open Space, the Operation and Use Plan will also include recommendations for the continuing partnership between the Village and the Commission for the development and operation of this park. The park concept plan, public access plan, and any proposals for the partnership with the Village will be presented to the Planning Board for their review and approval.

III. Facility Plan

Once the Planning Board has reviewed and approved the concept plan, the park will enter the queue to undergo Facility Planning, the process through which parks and park facilities undergo detailed design and engineering (30% design stage) and results in more refined cost estimates for implementation. Facility Planning is managed by the Park Development Division and is budgeted through a project in the Parks Capital Improvement Program (CIP). Facility Plans are reviewed and approved by the Planning Board. The earliest Chevy Chase Open Space could be added to the Facility Planning program would be in FY10, possibly much later depending on other projects awaiting facility planning.

IV. Design and Construction

Once a Facility Plan is completed and approved by the Planning Board, the Park may be added to the queue for final design and construction funds through the CIP. Design and construction is also managed by the Park Development Division.

One relatively unique factor the Parks Department and Planning Board will need to consider in funding and scheduling this park development process is the financial partnership with Chevy Chase Village. The Village is already a substantial financial partner in the preservation of this open space and has offered to support the planning, design, and construction of the park. The Village Board of Managers has committed to funding half of the consultant contract for the charrettes (see section below) and has publicly discussed additional contributions throughout the development process to ensure a timely development of this park within their borders.

Demolition of Buildings

As a designated Urban Open Space within the *Legacy Open Space Functional Master Plan* (2001), one of the primary goals for the Chevy Chase Open Space is to provide green open space as a respite from the urban environment. The first step in the planning process for this site as described above is to determine the fate of the improvements currently on the site in the context of the Legacy Open Space Plan.

Public Input

On February 11, 2008, the Chevy Chase Village Board of Managers passed a resolution (Attachment A) strongly recommending the removal of the buildings on the site as soon as practical to “fulfill the objectives of the Legacy Open Space Master Plan, by promoting the public health, safety and welfare, as well as the urban park objectives for which the Village contributed funds for the acquisition of the Wohlfarth Property.” The Village has received

comment on this site throughout 2007 and conducted a public hearing with a significant amount of testimony from their community prior to adopting this Resolution.

The Village sent an additional letter to the Commission (April 22, 2008, Attachment B) to reiterate their support for timely demolition of the buildings and to offer to financially participate in the public outreach charrettes. The Village is offering to pay one-half of the cost of the charrettes “provided the Commission agrees that the structures on the property will be removed promptly.”

Additional community support for the demolition of the buildings to maximize open space was received from the Citizens Coordinating Committee on Friendship Heights (Attachment C), an umbrella group that represents 15 citizens associations in the immediate vicinity of the site. The CCCFH says that the demolition of the existing buildings is necessary to achieve a well designed site that can function as a true urban park for the benefit of nearby residents and visitors.

Staff Analysis

The internal Operation & Use Planning Team for this site concurs with the recommendation to demolish the buildings to prepare the site for the park planning process and eventual construction of this new urban park. Evaluation of the Chevy Chase Open Space site by the planning team has identified several factors that influenced this recommendation to remove the buildings and associated pavement.

Policy Goals in Approved Public Policy Documents

- The ***Legacy Open Space Functional Master Plan’s*** designation of this site as Urban Open Space envisions a largely passive open space environment and identifies this site as a “rare opportunity to retain existing green open space” (LOS Plan, p. 80).
- The **Memorandum of Understanding (MOU)** between the County, Village and the Commission states that the site “will be used in a manner consistent with the purposes identified in the Legacy Plan.”
- Goals for LOS Urban Open Spaces include preserving green space, preserving undeveloped parcels, and providing a transition between central business districts (CBDs) and adjacent residential neighborhoods.

Community Input

- Since the acquisition of this site, the broader community has continuously expressed a desire that the entire site would be made available as open space by removing the buildings.
- Chevy Chase Village and the umbrella group of local citizens associations have sent formal communications supporting rapid demolition of the buildings.
- The Village has offered to fund half of the contractor cost for the charrette process and may consider funding demolition and other future development expenses once the policy decision to remove the buildings is made.

Site Constraints

- Approximately one-fourth of an acre, 12% of this relatively small park (1.9 acres), is currently encumbered by improvements. The pavement and buildings cut across the site from southeast to northwest, effectively removing a much larger portion of the site from feasible open space use.
- Retention of those improvements would significantly infringe on the amount of usable open space area and would impede the overall function of the park by obstructing pedestrian flow, negatively impacting the park-like atmosphere, and limiting the available area to meet passive recreational objectives.
- Almost any potential public or private use of the buildings would require additional infringement into the green open space for increased parking and further disrupt the pedestrian flow through the site. Initial evaluation of the site for potential park office use has determined that the necessary increase in automobile traffic through the property would unacceptably impede the use of the site as a park.

Planning Process

- The public outreach and planning process will be significantly streamlined and come to more productive conclusions if the absence of the buildings is a known factor.
- If this decision is not made now, the charrettes and planning work done by citizens, consultants and the staff planning team will need to look at two scenarios instead of focusing on one, thus diluting the effectiveness of those efforts.
- Creation of two concept plans during the charrettes will likely increase the cost of the public outreach consultant contract, as well.
- Once the decision is made to proceed with demolition, funding can be pursued. A funding source has not yet been identified to pay for the demolition. An estimated cost for demolition of the buildings, surrounding pavement, and temporary vegetative stabilization of the site is \$50,000.

Staff feels quite strongly that this site was acquired with the specific intent of creating the maximum open space possible in the midst of a densely developed urban area, and that removal of the existing development on the site is a critical step in achieving that goal. The policy decision to remove the buildings is the first step to be taken prior to proceeding with the rest of the Operation & Use Planning process.

Recommended Planning Board Action

In order to achieve the important urban park goals for Chevy Chase Open Space Urban Park, staff recommends that the Planning Board approve demolition of the house, garage and associated paving, to be implemented as soon as appropriate funding is identified.