



Greater Olney Civic Association

Post Office Box 212 Olney, Maryland 20830

www.goca.org

MINUTES – July 8, 2003

The meeting was called to order by President Stephen Smet. Following introductions, the minutes were approved with no additions or corrections. The agenda was approved with one addition to New Business. There were no Public Comments.

OFFICERS/COMMITTEE REPORTS

President's Report – Stephen Smet reported that the issuance of the draft master plan had been delayed and it is now expected that it will be released on July 24th and there have not been any major changes to the version presented at the May meeting

Correspondence Report – Don Schmelter reported that we had received:

- a letter from a resident expressing her concern about the traffic problems that have been occurring in the Olney Village Mart Shopping Center recently. She noted that there have been numerous accidents and incidents of damage to cars.
- a letter from the Maryland National Building Association which is looking for nominees for an environmentally sensitive developers to recognize. Anyone aware of such a developer can get the information from him on how to contact them

Treasurer's Report – Roy Peck reported that there had been very little activity this passed month, so there is no new report.

Membership Committee – Roy Peck reported that we had received dues from one additional association – Norbeck Grove that brings our membership closer to 20 member associations. Dave Eskenazi indicated that if Roy or John gave him a list of those associations we sent dues letters to but have not heard from, he would help contacting them.

OLD BUSINESS

Update on the Inter-County Connector – Stephen Smet noted that there has been some recent activity with the development of the Inter-County Connector (ICC), (the road planned to connect Rte 370 with Rte.95). Since Mike Knapp, District 2 County Councilmember and Karen Montgomery, District 14 State Delegate were at the meeting, he asked them to summarize what is happening. Mike noted that Governor Ehrlich held a kick-off event recently as which the Governor indicated that he is planning to move ahead with the ICC as quickly as possible. But, Mike is not sure how he can speed up the environmental study of the impact of the route. But, the Governor has indicated that he has a high priority to, at least break ground on this road before the next election.

Karen Montgomery added that there are several alternatives to using the Master Plan alignment of the road that are being discussed to address the need for east-west transportation routes. One of the possible alternatives being discussed is the proposal to expand Rte. 198 to 6 lanes in Montgomery County. It is already 6-lanes in Prince Georges County. Most people in Montgomery Co. want to keep 198 4-lanes. But they are considering making it 6-lanes because it would be a less expensive solution. However, Karen is very disturbed by this proposal. This proposal is not on any funding tracks yet, but is being discussed. If the community does not want to see this solution used, it may take strong community action. Chuck Young noted that the ICC was intended to be a limited-access roadway and it is clear that this road would not be. Karen agreed and noted that this could be an interim solution that could easily be achieved by the next election. There are no written proposals for this idea yet, but she wanted the community to be aware that it is being discussed. Mike noted that this could move quickly, so it is important that there be good lines of communication between the community and the legislators at both the County and the State level. He and Karen indicated that they would notify the community as soon as they hear that something is happening and encouraged the community to contact them if they hear about anything happening. The community does not need to wait to hear from them, but should contact them about their position on any proposals they may hear about from other sources.

Dave Eskenazi noted that one related issue would be any additional development that would be supported by an improved roadway and asked if Karen thought this desire for additional development might be driving this effort. In response, Karen noted that the Governor wanted to show that he is a "can-do" governor and so it is important to him to get some east-west roadway built. She expects that a road would be started within the next 5-6 years. Its route is anyone's guess because of all the Federal and local input on the alignment, and it will take a lot of work on the part of the community to control development. She noted, as well, that the Governor expects to get a large amount of Federal highway funding to pay for this road, but that has not been finalized yet. She added that several of the PG County legislators are opposed to this road because they believe road will just be a way to

get people to jobs in Montgomery County rather than creating jobs in PG County. Helen Dodson noted that she had not seen where a lack of roads stopping development, so that will go on with or without this road. She also felt that Olney Mill had been badly treated because it has 3 cut-through roads that bisect their development, so some alternative east-west road is needed to keep additional traffic from coming through their development.

Dave E. also asked what the impact would be on funding for things like schools and other public facilities if all the money is put into transportation. He asked how we get the road built but limit development so that we do not put additional strains on those other public facilities like schools and recreational facilities. Mike Knapp agreed that this road is meant to meet a need resulting from existing development, not support new development. The Council will be looking at the County's Annual Growth Policy (AGP) which he expects will get a major overhauling. He plans to hold 3 public meetings across his District, including one in the Olney area to get input from the community. And, on Sept 6th, the Council will host an informational meeting open to the public where representatives from the Park and Planning Commission (P&P) and Council staff will explain what the current AGP is and how it is used. They do not expect to get as much money from the State for schools. So, they are considering impact fees for new developments, but he is not certain that would generate enough funds to meet these needs. So, the AGP needs to be designed so that it can control development effectively. Karen sees the impact tax as a way of ensuring that our schools maintain their caliber and continue to produce students who have the necessary skills to perform work in the high technology industries Mike is trying to attract to the County.

Chuck Y. suggested that there should be some way to attach restrictions to the funding that would limit the growth along new roads. Roy Peck noted that developers are not required to provide their studies of the impact their developments will have on schools which often do not make sense. He feels the County should do these studies. Mike K. noted that patterns related to various types of housing stock have not been as predictive as they have in the past because families are moving into housing stocks that they did not tend to use in the past because they have become the affordable housing. So formulas used by the County in the past may not be as helpful as in the past. Time frames for growth projections are being dramatically shortened by market affects. So they have to find ways to consider that development is faster than projected as they consider the Capital Improvements Program budget over the next year. Khalid noted that master plans decide the amount and type of development that is appropriate for an area during the 10-20 years a plan is meant to cover. And, the AGP is intended to control the phasing of that projected development. Rick Coburn added that it seemed there are a couple of decisions we need to make. First, do we want a connection between Rte. 370 and PG County; and, second, do we want that road to have limited access or do we want it to spring up as a hodge-podge that may be cheaper, but may not be as well thought out and planned. Those are the issues we need to focus on.

Mike K. noted that the Council is on record supporting the Master Plan alignment with limited access. They are now trying to make sense of what the Governor is proposing. They are watching to see how this will play out so that they can figure out how to react. It will be important to hear from the community quickly on their position on whatever is being proposed. Karen noted that she did not think the County has taken full advantage of new technology or made some of the smaller changes that would enhance traffic. There may be things that can be done to coordinate traffic signals better. She noted, too, that it is important to remember that the ICC will only fix a small portion of the road congestion problems and that we need to move ahead and fund all the other smaller road projects proposed for the County. She agreed that the ICC needs to be a limited access road so that we don't get another Rockville Pike which is what we might get with the proposal to widen Rte. 198. And, we shouldn't lose sight of those smaller things we can do that might be more effective than this expensive solution that will only solve a small percentage of the transportation problems. She suggested that the community be vigilant and pay attention to what is happening. She suggested writing to the newspapers, including the Baltimore Sun, the Gazette, and even the Washington Post; as well as to their legislators.

She suggested speaking loud, clear, long, and often. She also suggested that GOCA assist the Sandy Spring community with their effort to get a traffic light at Rte. 108 and Brooke Rd because of the relocation of the fire house.

Development Issues in the Southeast Quadrant – Stephen Smet asked Khalid Afzal to outline the recommendations in the Draft Olney Master Plan with respect to the southeast quadrant of Olney. Khalid noted that the southeast quadrant is bounded by Georgia Ave, Old Baltimore Rd, Rte. 108, Dr. Bird Dr, Norwood Rd, Layhill Rd, back to Georgia Ave. The current zoning is principally RE-2 which yields 1 unit per 2 acres to 1 unit per 5-6 acres on septic development. Some acreage is permitted to have sewer at 1 unit per acre. They have identified 880 acres of vacant or redevelopable land in this area. They are proposing that no new sewer lines be introduced, but that properties that can access the existing sewer line in the area through gravity feed should be give sewer. No new pumping stations should be built. They anticipate that there will be no net increase in the yield. The only area he anticipates an increase is in the area he describes as the Golden Bull triangle, that is, the area south of the driving range on Norbeck Rd at the tip formed by Norbeck Rd and Georgia Ave. Batchellors Forest Rd. is currently designated as an interim rural rustic road. It is the role of the master plan to designate if it should be retained as a rural rustic road and they are recommending that it retain the rural rustic road designation.

They are proposing the Rural Neighborhood Cluster (RNC) zone for the whole area instead of the mixture of zones that currently exist there. Property developed with no sewer should be developed at 1 unit per 5 acres. With sewer, they would be developed under the RNC zone. This zone encourages clustering. Properties need to be 10 acres or more to use this zone and would yield 1 unit per 3 acres. With the RNC, they can set the density in the master plan. With other zones, the density is set in the definition

of the zone. He has had conversations with the Washington Christian Academy that is interested in the Gandell property. They are now at University Blvd and Arcola Ave. P&P staff say the property is not suitable for sewer, but the school believes they could get an institutional exception. There is currently nothing to prevent property owners from combining smaller properties to form a minimum of 10 acres to qualify for the use of the RNC zone, but properties must be contiguous, and there may be physical barriers to combining properties. The zone cannot currently be applied to properties that are less than 10 acres, but the staff may have to look at modifications to the zone to allow sewer for smaller properties that can access the sewer through gravity feed. Khalid confirmed that the draft plan will be presented to the Planning Board on July 24th.

NEW BUSINESS

Reduction of Metrobus Service on Georgia Avenue – Ed Weisel noted that, as a bus rider using the Norbeck Park and Ride Lot, he had learned by chance after just missing a bus, that WMATA had changed the schedules for the Y-7, Y-8, and Y-9 buses that run on Georgia Avenue without any apparent advance notice or public hearings to get input on the proposed changes. These changes will reduce service by approximately 40-50%. The Y-7 services the Norbeck Park and Ride Lot and the Y-8 services Leisure World, and the Y-9 is an express bus between Montgomery General Hospital (MGH) and Glenmont. The new schedule merges the Y-7 and Y-8 routes at the early hours. The Y-7 will not make more stops going both in to Leisure World and the Park and Ride Lot so it could take an hour to go from MGH to Glenmont.

The southbound routes used to have 42 trips under a schedule that has been in place at least since 2/2002 and now only has 27 trips. The number of northbound trips has gone from 33 trips to 20 trips. Actually, there is a slight increase in the number of trips to Olney, however, they will occur less often and the trips to take longer. The head time between buses has gone from 8 minutes to 15 minutes. So, if you miss a bus, you must wait at least 15 minutes for the next bus; longer if the buses are not on schedule that was often true with the Y-8 bus coming from Silver Spring. Often the Y-7 would arrive just behind the Y-8 bus under the old schedule. This may have distorted ridership statistics for the 2 routes since people that would otherwise have gotten on the Y-7 would get on the Y-8 that arrived just ahead of it. It probably would be appropriate to average the ridership on the two routes. In his first experience with the new schedule it took 2 hours for him to get to work – an unacceptable amount of time. In his second experience, he just missed a bus at the Park and Ride Lot and rather than wait the 15 minutes for the next bus, he chose to drive to Wheaton since it was late enough that the Glenmont parking lot would already be full. So, that day he became part of the problem rather than being part of the solution when he was riding the bus.

There are a number of concerns he has about these changes and the general service along these routes and in the Park & Ride Lot.

- Usually WMATA will hold hearings in advance of changes going into effect to get public input on the impact of the changes. He pays a lot of attention to these kinds of things, but was not aware of the proposed changes until they went into effect.
- All but the last Y-7 trip under the new schedule go all the way into Olney. The last trip only goes to the Park & Ride Lot. So people not familiar with the schedule could easily assume that all the Y-7 go to Olney and board the last bus not knowing it will only go to Norbeck Rd. Then have to figure out how to get the rest of the way to Olney which could mean a wait of 15-30 minutes and having to go out to Georgia Avenue.
- The Park and Ride Lot is only serviced during rush hour, so if someone goes there to park during the non-rush hours going southbound, they have to go out to Georgia Avenue and cross Georgia to get to the bus stop there, which is difficult and dangerous.
- The Park and Ride Lot and the path to Georgia Avenue are not well maintained. There is no lighting on the path and the handrail on the footbridge has rotted off. The lighting in the lot is not very good and many women do not feel comfortable parking there. Ed Daniels, with DPWT had tried to make some improvements there and had been responsible for having the Y-8 go into the Park and Ride Lot. But, the County never did any real marketing relating to the Lot and the related bus routes, nor offered any special promotions to encourage ridership as they have done with other routes such as on Rte. 29.
- They have eliminated bus service from the Park & Ride Lot to the Rockville Metro Station.

Ed W. suggested that some of the solution may be:

- Increasing service on the Ride-On 53 Route bus, but there needs to be a place in Olney where people could park and that doesn't exist right now.
- The last run of the Y-7 bus should be extended to go all the way into Olney like the other runs.
- Extra buses could be added to the Ride-On 51 Route that ends at the Park and Ride Lot and these extra buses would go straight to the Rockville station as express buses.
- The County could do more to promote and publicize these routes.
- An access directly from Georgia Ave would improve runtimes, at a minimum with a right-turn in and out only. A left turn access for southbound traffic would also be desirable, but not likely to be approved by the State Highway Administration (SHA) because of its proximity to Norbeck Rd.

Dave E. asked Mike Knapp to look at the feasibility of budgeting funds for the Georgia Avenue Busway within the next 5-6 years since that would be the best solution to this problem. Khalid A. suggested that GOCA consider asking SHA to work an access into the Park and Ride Lot as a part of their plans for the improvements to the Rte 28/97 intersection. So far they have resisted his suggestions to do that because they do not want to deal with it until the Georgia Avenue Busway project is funded. He thinks they may be more responsive if the community requests that they do it.

Ed W. asked that GOCA's Transportation Committee look into this matter, which Stephen indicated they would. Helene Rosenheim suggested that Ed discuss his concerns with the Mid-County Citizens Advisory Board by contacting their Community Services Committee that would deal with this issue. Helen Dodson noted, as an aside, that she had just learned that senior citizens can ride for 50 cents with senior fare cards that can be purchased at the Olney Library and some stores. With the fare card and the transfer from the Metro, it didn't cost her anything to ride home.

Following this discussion, the meeting was adjourned.

Respectfully submitted,

Helene Rosenheim

Helene Rosenheim'
Recording Secretary

People in attendance: Khalid Afzal, Rick Coburn, Helen Dodson, Dave Eskenazi, Mark Feinroth, Kara & Stephen Harris, Robert Hausman, Terri Hogan (Gazette), Mike Knapp, Karen Montgomery, Michelle & Roy Peck, Dave Quirk, Helene Rosenheim, Don Schmelter, Ed Weisel, and Chuck Young.