

Mayor and Council Meeting
Town Hall, La Plata, Maryland
October 22, 2002, 7:00 PM

Present: Mayor William F. Eckman, Councilman Wayne Winkler, Councilman Thomas W. Fritz, Councilman Gene Ambrogio; Councilman Roy G. Hale; Douglas R. Miller, Town Manager; Judith T. Frazier, Town Clerk

Guests: (See attached roster)

Minutes:

Mayor Eckman called the meeting to order at 7:00 PM and then led the Pledge of Allegiance.

Treasurer's Report (not presented)

Petitions, Communications and Appearances

Neighborhood Conservation Program Streetscape presentation

Mayor Eckman praised the efforts of the State and the La Plata Streetscape Task Force members for preparing the streetscape project in four months, noting it normally would have taken a minimum of twelve months.

Paula Winkler, Joselle Gilpin, Calvin Bowling and Lock Wills, task force members, presented the La Plata Streetscape Project. They provided information about the project's context, limits, goals and elements, the task force's process and schedule, and the recommended concept plan. The streets currently being considered for this phase of the improvement program are:

Md. Rt. 6/Charles Street - from U.S. 301/Crain Highway to Garrett Avenue
Centennial Street - from U.S. 301/Crain Highway to Maple Avenue
St. Mary's Avenue - from Charles Street to Spanish Moss Drive
Maple Avenue - from Charles Street to Carroll Street
La Grange Avenue - from Charles Street to Carroll Street
Oak Avenue - from Charles Street to Milton Somers Middle School

Following their presentation, Mayor Eckman remarked that all members of the Town Council had attended a work session prior to this meeting, at which the streetscape project was presented and discussed. Councilman Hale commented that any major changes should be coordinated with the Planning Commission. Mayor Eckman invited a motion on the concept plan. Councilman Hale made a motion to endorse the concept presented by the task force. Councilman Winkler seconded the motion and it passed by unanimous vote.

Charles County Rescue Squad

Councilman Winkler advised he attended the Charles County Rescue Squad's 50th anniversary celebration dinner and accepted plaques in appreciation of the Town's and La Plata Police Department's support during the past year. Councilman Winkler presented the La Plata

Police Department's plaque to Sgt. Jeff Huffman, and the Town's plaque to Mayor Eckman.

Legislation

Ordinance 02-17 Historic District (For Adoption) - For the purpose of requiring a Certificate of Appropriateness from the Historic District Commission before any permit shall be issued in any designated Town of La Plata historic area; providing that decisions of the Historic District Commission may be appealed to the Board of Appeals; creating a new Article VII setting forth the authority, purpose, designation procedure, guidelines, application and review procedure, appeal process and enforcement provisions granted to the Historic District Commission; and matters generally relating to the Historic District Commission.

Mr. Miller briefly explained this ordinance, noting that hearings had been held by the Planning Commission and the Mayor and Council. He advised that the Planning Commission held a special meeting on October 17, 2002, and passed a motion to recommend adoption of this ordinance.

Councilman Ambrogio made a motion to adopt Ordinance 02-17. Councilman Fritz seconded the motion and it passed by unanimous vote.

Unfinished Business

Historic District Commission appointments

Mayor Eckman proposed the following appointments to the Historic District Commission: Wayne Winkler, chairman, Mike Pellegrino, vice chairman, Cathy Hardy, Tom Mudd, Ron Litten, Jack Warren and Sam Phillips. Councilman Hale made a motion to confirm the appointments. Councilman Fritz seconded the motion and it passed by unanimous vote.

Council Reports

Councilman Hale reported that the Planning Commission held a special meeting on October 17 to discuss and make a recommendation on Ordinance 02-17. He noted that the special meeting was scheduled because the Commission had been concerned about recommending the ordinance be adopted prior to having the historic district identified.

Councilman Fritz reported that the Parks and Recreation Commission would be visiting sites in their work on the new park.

Councilman Ambrogio reported that the Beautification Commission met October 21 and installed the light bulbs on the strands for the outdoor tree.

Councilman Winkler presented a check in the amount of \$2500 from Atlantic Golf at Potomac Ridge, proceeds of a fund raiser they held to benefit the La Plata Disaster Relief Fund.

Mayor Eckman reported on the press conference he attended at the County Government Building. Congressman Hoyer presented \$365,000 to Charles County for emergency watershed clean-up, and \$50,000 to La Plata for rural business opportunity use. He also reported that Congressman Hoyer advised that over \$1 million is allocated for water and sewer infrastructure.

Mayor Eckman acknowledged the presence in the audience of representatives from Kent Square and The Meadows neighborhoods. He advised them that SMECO has promised the Town they will upgrade the street lights to provide brighter lighting.

Proclamation - Trick or Treat Evening and Great Pumpkin Halloween Party

Mayor Eckman noted that there were three proclamations dealing with Trick or Treat Evening and the Great Pumpkin Halloween Party, from which to choose one or none. He explained that the Town traditionally issues a proclamation specifying the date and hours of Trick or Treat evening and the Great Pumpkin Halloween Party; however, due to the risk of danger to children caused by the sniper shootings in the area, the Town Council must discuss whether they want to issue a proclamation this year. Councilman Hale pointed out that, in a news report at 4:15 p.m., the police advised that a note left by the sniper said no children were safe. Based on the risk posed to children being outdoors, Councilman Hale felt the Mayor and Council should take the position that we do not support Trick or Treating and also cancel the party scheduled for October 26. He noted that if parents do wish to allow their children to trick or treat, the date and times should be October 31, 6:00 to 8:00 p.m. Councilman Fritz and Councilman Winkler agreed, and noted that no proclamation should be issued. Councilman Ambrogio stated he believed the Mayor and Council should provide direction and should issue the proclamation which discourages parents from allowing their children to go out trick or treating.

Councilman Hale made a motion that the Mayor and Council take the position that they do not support trick or treating and that the Great Pumpkin Halloween Party be cancelled; that indoor events be encouraged; and that no proclamation be issued. Councilman Fritz seconded the motion. In discussion before the vote, Councilman Ambrogio again expressed his belief that the proclamation he recommended be issued spells out what Councilman Hale said. Councilman Hale advised he would agree with Councilman Ambrogio if that proclamation was mailed to all of the Town residents. Vote on the motion: Mayor Eckman, Councilman Winkler, Councilman Fritz and Councilman Hale voted aye; Councilman Ambrogio voted nay. The motion passed by majority vote.

Kent Square Homeowners Association road closure request

Councilman Ambrogio read into the record a letter from Mike Murphy, president of Kent Square Homeowners Association, dated October 21, 2002, asking that the Town close the Cedar Court entrance into Kent Square. He noted he attended their homeowners association meeting and told them he supported their request. He also noted that Officer Payne, of the La Plata Police Department, was also at the meeting and said that people run from the police using Cedar Court to go out Kalmia Court in Kent Square. Councilman Ambrogio said he spoke to Don McGuire (Charles County Department of Emergency Services), who said a semi-permanent closure would

be okay.

Mayor Eckman pointed out he believed the Town needs to seriously consider such a request, which could be precedent-setting, and noted that other areas all throughout Town could also ask that streets be closed off. In response to Councilman Fritz's question, Don McGuire advised he told Councilman Ambrogio to discuss this with the fire chief and police chief. Councilman Fritz advised he was not ready to make a decision on this request as he had just seen the letter and needed more discussion on the matter.

Councilman Ambrogio made a motion that the ingress/egress at Cedar Court and Kalmia Court be cordoned off by some means that vehicles would not be able to use it. Mayor Eckman asked if there was a second to the motion. The motion died for lack of a second. Mayor Eckman advised that this would need further discussion.

Letter from residents on Forest Lane

Councilman Ambrogio provided an update on the problems described in the letter from Forest Lane residents about the problems they are having at the end of their street, where people are cutting through to paths leading to the railroad tracks and the townhouse area. He noted that the Town Council looked at the problem and he had spoken to the person who wrote the letter to advise that there would be increased police patrols there and that installing a fence at the end of the street would not do any good because the neighbor there only has a split rail fence. The resident acknowledged seeing more police patrols, but asked that they especially patrol on Friday and Saturday nights and shine their light at the playground area.

New Business

Design Review Board funding recommendations

Mayor Eckman explained that insurance companies would not pay property owners beyond what their original building footprint was. If they rebuild to the Vision Plan, they are able to meet with the Design Review Board to possibly receive money from the State which was allocated to help fund foundation relocation costs to rebuild to the Vision Plan. Two property owners have done so, and the following funding recommendations were forwarded by the Design Review Board to the Mayor and Council:

Larry and Barbara Jenkins
111 La Grange Avenue
\$20,000

Councilman Winkler made a motion to approve the payment of \$20,000. Councilman Hale seconded the motion and it passed by unanimous vote.

Paul and Lisa Bales
417 E. Charles Street

\$25,000

Councilman Fritz made a motion to approve the payment of \$25,000. Councilman Winkler seconded the motion and it passed by unanimous vote.

Public Forum

Tom O'Farrell, 104 Oak Avenue, advised he was again asking the Town to resolve the stormwater issue on Oak Avenue and Wicomico Street. He advised he needed the issue resolved so he doesn't lose his opportunity to grade and landscape his property to repair the damage done by heavy vehicles doing clean-up work after the tornado. Mr. O'Farrell also asked that the ditches be cleaned out, stabilized, and pipes under driveways restored. Mr. O'Farrell suggested that an opportunity exists to connect stormwater management through the Crowder and Dash In properties. Mayor Eckman and Mr. Miller commented that the Town may need to hire a surveyor and an engineer to shoot the grades and advise the Town how to resolve the issue on both sides of Oak Avenue and on Wicomico Street.

Phu An, a resident on Wicomico Street, advised he has the same water ponding problem as Mr. O'Farrell described.

Chris Thompson, 122 Kalmia Court, thanked Councilman Ambrogio for his efforts to obtain the road closure at Cedar Court, and noted he has spoken with the fire and rescue chiefs and Don McGuire. He advised letters of support would be coming from the chiefs and again asked the Town to close the road. In response to Councilman Fritz's statement regarding other neighborhoods asking for streets to be closed, Mr. Thompson advised that other neighborhoods don't have the problems Kent Square has with six shooting cases and a police foot chase after an armed subject in their neighborhood. Mr. Thompson advised that they needed the road closed to help them clean up their neighborhood. Mayor Eckman pointed out that the Town Council has not said they won't close the road. He noted that this is a major decision which requires more discussion. Mr. Thompson invited the Mayor to come to his home any Friday or Saturday evening to witness the problems in his neighborhood.

Mike Murphy, 114 Kalmia Court, also gave the Mayor and Council an open invitation to his home, and noted that they need the road closed as part of their plan to clean up their neighborhood. Mr. Murphy also expressed appreciation for the grant from the Town to purchase the fence.

Councilman Winkler advised he had been to their neighborhood regarding the location of the fence and realized they had many concerns. He pointed out that the Town Council needs to discuss their request to close the road, and may need more information from them and from the police department, rescue squad, and fire department. Councilman Winkler also pointed out the Town has a rental inspection program, which will be conducted by the Town's new Building Inspector. He noted that Kent Square has 50% rentals and noted that the Town is committed to cleaning up the problems in this neighborhood.

Councilman Ambrogio again encouraged the road closure, noting he believed the Town

should take the first step in helping to clean up the neighborhood.

Bill Webb, 1101 Station Drive (Northchase Subdivision), advised that for the last six to eight months he has been having a problem with extremely loud music coming from the neighboring property, Willing Helpers Hall, which is rented out for events on Thursdays, Fridays and Saturdays. He has called the La Plata Police Department but the loud music resumes after the police leave. He also spoke to the person who rents out the hall, who stated she believed it was a race issue and advised she would continue to rent out the hall.

After a brief discussion, it was agreed that the Mayor and Council would look at the noise ordinance and make revisions if necessary to handle problems of this nature.

Jeff Reed, 1106 Station Drive, advised he was having the same problems described by Mr. Webb.

Art Audley, 846 Holly Drive, advised he had the same concerns as those expressed by the residents of Kent Square. Mr. Audley advised that his home, which he bought in 1986, has dropped in value by \$20,000. He noted the need to improve the street lights as the neighborhood is too dark, and noted that the park on Caroline Drive, which abuts Kent Square, has many trees which provide hiding places. He also asked for more frequent police patrols. Mr. Audley also pointed out he has not seen anything on the Hot Spots designation for the neighborhood since the kick-off meeting in August. Mr. Audley advised that he and his neighbors are very concerned, and noted his dismay that the neighborhood has been allowed to fall into such disrepair and dereliction. He issued an open invitation to the Mayor and Council to visit his home to witness the problems.

Councilman Winkler pointed out he had attended meetings with Mr. Audley, Mr. Murphy and Chief Gittings regarding forming a task force, and agreed that the Mayor and Council need to devise and carry out a plan to clean up the neighborhood. Councilman Ambrogio remarked that the Mayor and Council need to begin taking steps now, noting that discussions have been held regarding moving the police station to be a substation in that neighborhood.

Paula Winkler praised the efforts of Carl and Bobbie Baldus, who are temporarily storing the crepe myrtles removed from Rt. 301.

There being no further business, Councilman Fritz made a motion to adjourn at 8:33 PM. Councilman Hale seconded the motion and it carried.

Respectfully submitted,

Judith T. Frazier
Town Clerk