

## **Minutes of Parkwood Residents Association Meeting, February 25, 2019**

Jeffrey Griffith, PRA vice president, opened the meeting at 7:30 p.m. Thirty-four members were present. Jeff introduced the speaker, Councilmember Andrew Friedson.

Councilmember Friedson is our newly elected District 1 representative on the Montgomery County Council. Accompanying Mr. Friedson was his staff member, Aaron Kraut. Mr. Kraut is familiar to PRA members from his work on our behalf as staff to former councilmember, Roger Berliner.

### **Presentation, Councilmember Andrew Friedson**

Councilmember Friedson has been a lifelong District 1 resident, having attended Montgomery County Public Schools, kindergarten through high school. He spoke of his background in public service and his commitment to Montgomery County which has strong assets such as its diversity, and also some fiscal challenges. For example, 39.6% of students in MCPS are eligible for Free and Reduced Meals (FARMS)—a number that's higher than the total enrollment of DC public schools.

As senior policy advisor, deputy chief of staff and division director for the comptroller of Maryland, Mr. Friedson scrutinized public agencies and reviewed billions in government contracts to ensure transparency and accountability. He brings his fiscal policy experience to the Council where he serves on the Government Operations & Fiscal Policy committee, and the Planning, Housing, & Economic Development committee. He and the newly elected council will need to work on county challenges such as anemic business growth, a lack of affordable housing, and an aging population. They are working to find ways to grow the tax base without raising taxes on residents, close the gap between available jobs and skills, and ensure that the county has green space and parks. Councilmember Friedson stressed his commitment to constituent service especially focusing on quality of life issues, such as sidewalks, crosswalks, and parks. He encouraged us to reach out to him and his staff with our concerns.

The newly installed County Council has been tasked with preparing a Capital Budget. They are focused on developing a savings plan that centers on budget reality: meeting increasing fiscal needs by growing development and the tax base while keeping the quality and character of Montgomery County.

### **Responses to Questions**

An animated discussion ensued as participants had numerous questions and comments for Councilmember Friedson.

**Parks and Green Space.** Councilmember Friedson agrees on the importance of parks, ball fields, dog parks and green space; the Council is working on this and developers are being required to contribute. Part of the Bethesda sector plan is a fund for \$10 million for parks/green space in downtown Bethesda.

**Accessory Dwelling Units (ADUs),** i.e., a second small dwelling on the grounds of a single-family home. Mr. Friedson agreed that there are pros (affordable housing, possibility of aging-in-place, keeping family units close, etc.) and cons (residents can take advantage—resulting in a proliferation of small dwellings, parking challenges, etc.) The county passed a bill addressing ADUs, but it was too restrictive. Sometimes a resident's home is their only asset. The Council is trying to approach this issue with an open mind: How do we make ADUs work?

Business Development. The question is how to view business development. Is the builder promoting economic and workforce development? We need new businesses and development to grow our tax base and meet MC's needs without raising taxes on residents. We can promote mixed-use building and more entities on behalf of parks. The concern is that we pave more and more of MC until it resembles Northern Virginia. In important ways, MC is attractive to business. We have an educated diverse population and suburban, urban, and rural locales—something for everyone. Amazon seriously considered MC. Honest Tea has established its office here.

Would you support an Independent audit of the public school system? Approximately one-half of the county's budget goes to our public school system, but our schools have limited financial independence under the state. The school system was not included in the inspector general's report. Yes, I would support an independent audit.

Reuse of existing buildings. This is a huge challenge. The main issue is that suburban office parks are less attractive than they used to be. New construction is much more appealing to companies. We have fewer businesses in the county than we did ten years ago. It is incumbent on us to grow the economy, but we can't do this without low- and modest-income housing. We could rezone some of these areas so that the public is invested, e.g., a food hub.

Parks. There is a lack of oversight of parks. Ball fields need not be tied to schools. Locations of green areas can be found on the parks department website.

Adding additional lanes to Rtes. 270 and 495? Councilmember Friedson is opposed to anything that would expand existing right-of-way.

Pedestrian and traffic issues. Mr. Friedson met with the State Secretary of Transportation focusing on pedestrian and bicycling issues. On state roads we need to negotiate cross walks with the state. Pedestrian safety is a major concern. We have traffic challenges and need to think about rapid transit that can be a competitive alternative to getting in a car.

What about autonomous vehicles that can move more people in less space. In a few years we may have enough capacity. I think we're a long way from implementation at present though a dedicated lane for buses and autonomous vehicles may be possible. We'll move to ride-sharing sooner. A major grant could move the industry more quickly but there are problems to be overcome. For example, autonomous vehicles "see" by using light. But light is absorbed by the color black so autonomous vehicles can't see black cars.

It is important to move away from cars. Parking garages take up a lot of space that could be better purposed.

5G—small cell phone towers. New cell phones present a technology challenge. The FCC's (Federal Communications Commission) policy regarding infrastructure makes state and local actions difficult. We may still have some leverage, however, and we are addressing the issue.

Councilmember Friedson reiterated that we should not hesitate to contact him and his team. They will be at the Kensington Town Hall on April 4, 7:30 p.m. Many other events are being planned

throughout the district, including “Fridays with Friedson” at various restaurants and other locales. Constituents can also keep in touch through Facebook.

In parting, Councilmember Friedson affirmed: This is just the beginning of the discussion; we need more parks and more businesses.

### **Treasurer’s Report for 2018 and Discussion of Proposed Budget for 2019**

PRA Treasurer Gerald Sharp presented the Treasurer’s Report with a table: 2017-2018 Budgeted and Actual Expenses and Budgeted Amounts for 2018/2019. The table which was printed in the Winter Newsletter was also projected on a screen and given as a handout. Three hundred, forty-two members paid membership dues of \$10 each in 2018, the highest number ever.

Beautification donations (\$4236) exceeded dues. Expenses included MC Civic Federation fees, administrative expenses, newsletter printing costs, beautification projects, doggy potty bags, the Little Library and its dedication, and meeting room and projector expenses.

Because of a projected budget surplus for 2019, additional projects can be contemplated. PRA members suggested the following activities and neighborhood enhancements: Another Little Library, this one focusing on children’s books; another “Maypole” celebration; and plantings on other islands. (There’s a map of Parkwood islands-with names—on the website). Members can make additional suggestions to the beautification committee or executive committee.

### **Update on Development Projects in Kensington**

Jeff Griffith, Chair of the Development Committee, brought us up to date on the status of new development in Kensington.

Knowles Station, next to Strosnidars, now has a prominent sign, “Wine & Co.” The restaurant/wine bar is slated to open in the near future. A gelato place and Verizon store will share the building.

Knowles Manor on Knowles (formerly called Kensington Manor), a rental property for low- and moderate-income seniors, has received approval from the MC Planning Board. Parking will be provided for residents at a 1:2 ratio. Jeff noted that pedestrian safety at the intersection of Connecticut and Knowles must be a focus due to the age of the residents, their likelihood to shop at Safeway and nearby businesses, and heavy traffic at the Connecticut/Knowles intersection.

The Town of Kensington has stated its support for Solera Reserve, a 5-story residence for independent living, assisted living, and memory care on Metropolitan Ave. in the location of the former Mizell Lumber property. The design will incorporate some of the old Mizell building features.

The Town of Kensington has refused to approve Kensington Storage Facility which was proposed for the site of the closed gas station at Plyers Mill and Connecticut.

Proposed Kensington projects are headed by different developers but many are represented by the same law firm.

The PRA website has additional information on proposed developments in Kensington.

There was some discussion of a State Hwy. proposal to narrow the lanes of Knowles Ave. This could slow traffic on Knowles. Several members expressed disapproval of the plan.

Jeff stated that PRA does not have a procedural mechanism empowering development committee members or PRA officers to speak for the PRA. Liz Brennan made a motion to empower the President and Vice President to speak for the PRA in testimony to the council and planning board opposing the narrowing of Knowles Ave. and to emphasize the need to improve pedestrian safety. The motion further asked that a letter be sent from the PRA to Councilmember Friedson regarding these concerns and that the Councilmember communicate these concerns to the Planning Board, County Department of Transportation, and the State Highway Commission. The motion passed with one dissenting vote.

The meeting was adjourned at 9:15 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Judith Dighe, secretary