

VILLAGE OF FRIENDSHIP HEIGHTS

VILLAGE COUNCIL

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JULIAN P. MANSFIELD, *Village Manager*
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APPROVED MINUTES

PUBLIC SESSION FRIENDSHIP HEIGHTS VILLAGE COUNCIL MEETING August 19, 2014

ATTENDEES:

Melanie Rose White, Mayor; Robert Schwarzbart, Chairman; Leonard J. Grant, Vice Chairman; Elizabeth Demetra Harris, Secretary; Alvan M. Morris, Treasurer; John Mertens, Parliamentarian; Clara Lovett, Historian; Julian Mansfield, Village Manager; Robert Shapiro, Assistant Village Manager; and 21 residents.

CALL TO ORDER:

At 7:30 p.m. Judge Schwarzbart called the Village Council Meeting to order.

Judge Schwarzbart stated that all comments and questions from the audience are welcomed and appreciated during the Comments/Questions To and From Council part of this meeting. He also noted that under Old Business, the Council would discuss and vote on amendments and other matters concerning the Page Park playground. At that time, the microphones will not be open to the public.

Judge Schwarzbart opened the floor for comments from the audience. Persons representing organizations will have five minutes to speak; individuals will have three minutes to speak.

COMMENTS/QUESTIONS TO AND FROM COUNCIL:

Dr. Alfred Muller (The Elizabeth) congratulated new Council member Clara Lovett, Council Historian.

Dr. Muller stated that Millie Shott, Art Curator, needs to know the plans for next year's art exhibition for the Village Center corridor. Also, he, Millie and Betty

Ardizzone would like to meet with the Council to share their ideas and get the Council's recommendations on the appropriate art exhibition so that the Council can vote on it at the September Council meeting.

Dr. Muller strongly recommended that the Council stick to the Council meeting date of the second Monday night of each month, (instituted over forty years ago) except in extraordinary circumstances. He stated that for the last few months, the meetings have been changed to different days. He also noted that the Villagers deserve stability regarding the meeting dates.

Ms. Cleo Tavani (The Carleton) stated that the third set of plans for the Page Park playground for discussion tonight still presents an overbuilt and cramped place for children. She also noted that the naturalness of the park has been replaced with manmade objects that are unacceptable. Ms. Tavani presented her written Proposal for Page Park (3rd Draft), which is hereby made part of these minutes.

The following are some comments and questions from the audience regarding the proposed Page Park drawings:

- The black four foot high fencing surrounding the two play areas and the tree look like cages or a prison and should be removed.
- The park is too small for a gazebo.
- The gazebo is problematic and a potential trouble spot, especially at night.
- The concrete surface in the children's play area is unsafe and could be a liability to the Council if children are injured.
- The monorail is very dangerous—small rollers could cut off children's fingers.
- Grace Fielder should have presented these concepts in 3-D format for a better visual affect. This playground has not been presented well.
- Grace Fielder should have been present tonight to explain the drawings and to answer questions.
- There are swings in the plan. There were to be no swings in the park.
- Which trees will be cut down?

ANNOUNCEMENTS:

Ms. White made the following announcements:

New Village Council member Clara Lovett is now the Council Historian, filling the vacant Council office, and she assumes the Committee assignments held by Maurice Trebach (Personnel, Capital Improvements, and Health/Human Services).

Please join us for the Taste of Friendship Heights on Saturday, September 27, from 12:00 noon to 4:00 p.m. at the Village Center and in Humphrey Park. Look for more information in the September Village newsletter.

GEICO will have a shredding truck in their parking lot along Friendship Boulevard on Saturday, September 27, from 9:00 a.m. to 12:00 noon. This service is free and open to Village residents.

SECRETARY'S REPORT:

Ms. Harris presented the minutes for the Council public session held on July 14, 2014 and recommended approval.

- (R) Ms. Harris moved; Ms. White seconded, that the Council public session minutes for the meeting held on July 14, 2014 be approved. The motion carried. (7-0-0)**

TREASURER'S REPORT:

Dr. Morris presented the financial summary for the period ending July 31, 2014.

OLD BUSINESS:

Discussion/vote on proposed drawings for Page Park playground: Dr. Morris stated that tonight there were many concerns and misconceptions presented regarding the proposed playground drawings. He reiterated that Grace Fielder is the expert hired to design the playground, and we have to accept that she knows the regulations and what is best for the area to be developed. He acknowledged that many of the misconceptions and comments are understandable because the drawings do not reflect changes that have been made in the playground design. He stated that he would attempt to clarify the issues.

Dr. Morris made the following statements regarding the proposed plans for the Page Park playground:

- The surface of the play area is not concrete. It is a soft rubber that is safe and is the industry standard for all children's parks.
- There will be no fence around the tree. This is a misstatement on the drawings.
- There will be no swings in the park for safety reasons.
- There are two separate play areas: Ages 2-5 and 5-12 because it is a Maryland state regulation for the safety of children.
- The fencing around the play areas is to keep the ages separate for the safety of the children. Also, there is a drastic drop off at the back of the park. The fencing protects children from going into this area. The type of fencing was selected because it must be of a certain weight to provide the

protection needed. There are other more attractive options that can be considered.

- There will be signage in the park to indicate the hours of occupancy.
- There will also be lights in the park and closed circuit TV cameras can be installed to monitor after-hours activity. The phone number for the police will be provided so that they can be called if necessary.

Dr. Morris stated that the Council has the best set of proposed drawings for the Page Park playground. However, the Council will not know if the plans can go forward until the engineers start to clear the area. There may be obstructions in the ground that require modifications to the proposed drawings.

Mr. Mertens stated that over the years, Page Park has fallen into disrepair. However, the Park can be an important resource for the community if it is upgraded and repaired. He expressed that his concern regarding the proposed playground in Page Park has been with the process. In his opinion, the project should have proceeded from a committee in order to get community input prior to bringing the project to the Council. He proposed that for future projects of this type, the process should be handled by a committee and then presented to the Council.

Mr. Mertens also stated that he would present some amendments to the proposed plans for the playground at the appropriate time.

Judge Schwarzbart read a statement regarding the proposed drawings for the Page Park playground which is hereby made part of these minutes.

Ms. Harris spoke from a written statement which is hereby made a part of these minutes.

Ms. Lovett stated that the plans for Page Park are very preliminary. In addition to other comments, she encouraged all to look at the proposed plans in the proper context: The demographics of the Village are changing. The plans address the needs of the targeted age groups. We have a tremendous opportunity in the year of our centennial to make major improvements in Page Park; improvements that can be appreciated for years to come. As for green space, the lack of a water supply limits the amount and the type of vegetation that will grow in the Park. Ms. Lovett stated that she believes the proposed plan for the Page Park playground is doable.

Mr. Grant stated that it has been three long years since Dr. Morris first presented the idea of parks for children in the Village. Mr. Grant said that since that time, he has had the opportunity to visit many children's parks in the Washington metropolitan area. He observed that four foot high fencing is very common. In addition to protecting children, the fencing keeps dogs and other animals out of

the parks. The parks also contained rubber and concrete surfaces. Mr. Grant stated that there have been several well-publicized meetings on the proposed playground, and the Council has incorporated many of the ideas from the community into these plans.

- (R) **Mr. Grant moved; Ms. White seconded, that the Friendship Heights Village Council approve the plans submitted by Grace Fielder for the redevelopment of Page Park with a caveat that these plans may be modified if required as a result of unanticipated ground obstructions.**

Ms. White commented that it seems that most of the people present are opposed to the playground in Page Park. She noted that the Council was elected to represent all of the residents of Friendship Heights. She stated that, in her opinion, a poll of the residents with and without children would show a lot of support for this project.

Ms. White reiterated that the plans for Page Park specify two age groups: toddlers and ages 5-12, and the type and amount of equipment is appropriate for the children. She noted that she is pushing for the gazebo. The police informed the Council that one piece of equipment is not more problematic than another. They said that strong signage and good lighting are very important. Ms. White stated that she envisions Page Park as an active park, utilized and enjoyed by all age groups.

In addition, she stated the Council and our very conscientious staff always takes great pride in all of the Village projects. All projects are held to a high standard of execution and with the highest quality material and equipment. Only "top notch" is acceptable for Friendship Heights. She offered the residents of 4620 the assurance that the Page Park redevelopment will be kept to that same standard of excellence.

Mr. Mertens stated that he has a series of motions to modify the current plan for the redevelopment of Page Park. He asked the Council to vote on each amendment individually.

- (R) **Mr. Mertens moved; Ms. Harris seconded, to remove the gazebo.**
The pro gazebo comments included: The gazebo would not be any more of a trouble spot than the other areas of the park. It is an open structure and would have adequate lighting. The gazebo would be a great sitting area and shelter from the hot sun. It is not necessary to make an amendment to take the gazebo out of the plan at this time. If it is determined during construction that the gazebo does not fit, it will not be put in.

The con gazebo comments included: The gazebo is a potential location for illicit activities—a trouble spot especially at night. The park is not large enough for the

gazebo, and it would only add to the clutter in the park. **The motion carried. (4-3-0)**

- (R) Mr. Mertens moved; Ms. Harris seconded, to reconfigure the two play areas into a single play area that is contained in the back right hand quarter of the Park.**

The pro comments to this amendment included: The reconfiguration would move all of the children's activities to the back right hand side of the Park. The children could then be separated within that right side. This would leave more open space. The con comments to this amendment included: The State mandates that the age groups be separate. Ms. Fielder has designed this park according to the State regulations. **The motion did not carry. (3-4-0)**

- (R) Mr. Mertens moved; Ms. Harris seconded, to place an appropriate hedge/fence along the back of the park to keep children from falling down the hill.**

Con statements included: It is not necessary to make this amendment until the contractors move the soil around to try to flatten the surface. Fencing is already included in the design to take care of that area. The pro comments were that there should be some type of fencing along the back of the park to prevent the children from falling down the hill. **The motion carried. (6-1-0)**

- (R) Mr. Mertens moved; Ms. Harris seconded, to remove fencing from around the tree and the two children's play areas.** Comments included: The fencing around the tree was a misprint on the drawings. Ms. Fielder designed the play ground based on the State regulations. **The motion carried. (4-3-0)**

- (R) Mr. Mertens moved to fix up the stone enclosure in the rear of the park, fill in the open grill areas, creating a serving ledge, and place a picnic table on the stone floor. The motion was not seconded.**

- (R) Mr. Mertens moved to retain the two green metal picnic tables in or near the current location. The motion was not seconded.**

- (R) Mr. Mertens moved to leave the various benches in their current locations. The motion was not seconded.**

The original motion carried. (4-3-0)

NEW BUSINESS:

- (R) Mr. Mertens moved; Ms. Lovett seconded, to as much as possible restrict the the monthly Council meeting date to the second Monday of the month. The motion carried. (5-2-0)**

ADJOURNMENT:

There being no further business before the Council, Mr. Mertens moved, Ms. Harris seconded, to adjourn the meeting at 9:45 p.m. The motion carried. (7-0-0)

Respectfully submitted,



Elizabeth Demetra Harris
Secretary

PLAYGROUNDS STATEMENT--FHVC MEETING--
AUGUST 19, 2014

Regrettably, I must state a different vision for Page Park. In a 32 acre community where about 5,000 people are densely crowded into a series of high-rise buildings of brick, concrete and steel, there are structures enough. It is a bit of open green space that is required. Otherwise, apart from Page Park, there would no such respite down the length of our Village's main street, North Park Avenue. For those of us, like myself, who look forward to living here for the foreseeable future, we will have a long time to contemplate what we do here tonight. So, that park's ultimate appearance is of real personal importance.

Unlike Grace Fielder and Dr. Morris, I can claim no expertise in playground or park design/landscaping which is why I deferentially got out of the way for so long while park matters were being discussed. However, with these, the third set of Grace Fielder's drawings, plus some from another source, this playground/park project has become a bit tortured, emotional, expensive and, in my view, a bit overdone. It appears, then, that a bit of objectivity might usefully be added to the mix. In this regard, we all are the victims and, at the same time, the beneficiaries of our experience. Having lived my whole life in high-rise buildings located in tightly populated neighborhoods, whether in New York City, Chicago or here,, I have

come to appreciate the the vital importance of having an attractive, relatively open green refuge maximumly available to those who live in the surrounding cheerless towers. Consistent with this view, I favor installing modest, color consonant playground equipment in the rear of Page Park, directed to the the 2 to 5 year age group, as part of an effort to generally improve and spruce up that park. Older children have recreational options, whether in school or in organized sports, etc., that the younger children do not and may be less interested in using the designated equipment. My own strong sense is that if Grace Fielder's most recent designs for Page Park, while an improvement from the past, were to be fully adopted, with the larger equipment for the older age group, the gazebo and who knows what else, the structures would overwhelm the park and change its character. While, as stated, the children should be considered, they are not the only ones who live here.

VILLAGE COUNCIL MEETING 8-19-2014, PROPOSAL FOR PAGE PARK (3RD DRAFT)

At your August 19, 2014 meeting you will consider the third set of proposals for Page Park. You have now spent thousands of dollars on architect fees for still another plan which fails to respond to the concerns and comments of the citizenry regarding the two previous proposals.

No one knows this property better than me. Yet it took several hours and two site visits to figure out the confusing and obfuscatory presentation of the plan. It is still overbuilt and crammed with so many manmade objects that its purpose of serving as "green relief" among three high rise buildings is obliterated. When we community leaders in the 1980s worked with the County Council to acquire the property for "green relief", we meant natural plant matter not green colored concrete or earth tone playground equipment.

The major elements (gazebo, playground for children ages 2-5, playground for children ages 5-12 and even the large purple beech tree) march across the middle of the park in a series of fenced-in and gated enclosures. They extend from the path to Somerset to near the boundary of 4701 Willard (former Irene). Their footprints are huge: the playground for children is 44 feet in diameter. The gazebo is in a 20 foot wide circle. Except for the tree, all these manmade structures are located on manmade materials covering grass and other natural materials.

With the four-foot high fences and series of enclosures, the first impression of visitors is the look of a prison or military compound or a zoo. Who is being fenced in and who is being fenced out? In a recent visit to the park, the only animals I encountered were mosquitos. And mosquitos will always limit summer use for this tiny space located adjacent to the naturally landscaped Somerset Park with a stream running through it.

All these enclosed areas will require considerable regrading and retaining walls affecting the delicate ecological and environmental balance between the tiny park and the very large park which drops down precipitously behind it.

Unfortunate location and bulk of gazebo – This 20-foot diameter by at least 12 feet tall structure located adjacent to the Somerset path looks like the gatehouse for the prison or zoo or whatever. It hardly seems a pleasant place for using its picnic tables. Everybody --whether visiting the park or going to or from Somerset -- will be using the adjacent pathway and virtually be another guest at the picnic. Has the Council forgotten all the previous concern for a gazebo in a public park serving as a magnet for public nuisance?

Intruding on 4701 Willard Avenue residents. The very large proposed playground for small children, with its numerous pieces of equipment, will take up all the space between the large beech tree and the boundary of the former Irene – right under the windows of the many overlooking apartments. This new playground not only means that kiddies will now be heard but also seen because some of the bushes and trees which currently shield residents' views of park activity will be removed.

Little concern for adult usage There are two picnic table in good condition in the back of the park perfectly sited in relation to the original and still best location for play equipment in the back right hand corner of the park. However, it is proposed to cram these two tables into the sliver of land between the Somerset Path and the wall of 4615

North Park. Nor is there any indication that the four benches in the front of the park will be replaced but kept in their same pleasant locations.

Tavani continued

By now the Village Council is sufficiently knowledgeable about all the possible elements for this park. They should start the planning process that should have been used in the first place. They should identify the major elements and vote on them individually. They should turn oversight of implementing these decisions to Council members -- with the assistance of citizens -- who do not have such strong personal views and, even, self-proclaimed "obsessions". AND do not spend money on professional landscape architects or other professionals until this Council/citizen group has developed a consensus, brought it to the community with a fulsome explanation and *then* acted upon by the Village Council.

Here is some suggested language for concepts you might vote on:

- 1. Retain as much as possible of the minimalist concept, design, openness, grading, pathways, outdoor furniture including amount and location of playground equipment of the original plan for this park BUT with rigorous standards for regular maintenance and timely replacement of deteriorated manmade and horticultural materials.**
- 2. There shall be no gazebo or similar shelter/structure.**
- 3. The only fence will be across most of the back boundary of the park where Somerset Park has a steep decline.**
- 4. Playground equipment will be in earth tones and geared to children ages two to five with a lot of open grassy area for people of all ages to pursue recreation.**
- 5. Retain the two green picnic tables in their present locations; discard the deteriorated picnic table near 4701 Willard Avenue.**
- 6. Replace the four deteriorated benches in the front of the park keeping their current locations.**
- 7. There shall be no playground equipment between the beech tree and 4701 Willard Avenue.**
- 8. As finally and newly proposed, make the grade of the Somerset path compliant with the Americans with Disabilities Act.**

A final personal note ...

Do not forget that the Friendship Heights Sector Plan approved by the Montgomery County government calls for new park and open space in the land known as "Parcel Six". This is the area bounded by North Park Avenue, Shoemaker Farm Lane, Willard Avenue and the 4620 North Park Avenue Condominium. In preparation for this development, the Village of Friendship Heights began the acquisition of land for park and open space uses by purchasing the property located at 4602 North Park Avenue. With its \$5 million in reserves, the Village has the resources to be a full participant in the negotiations with the County government and the individual property owners. We do not have to cram our needs and desires for playgrounds into the precious natural landscaping of Page Park.

ELIZABETH DEMETRA HARRIS STATEMENT
Friendship Heights Village Council Meeting
August 19, 2014

I envision the Page Park Improvement Project to present a green, naturalistic garden-like space flowing as much as possible with the natural contours of the land which, within its scope, integrates a modest amount of playground equipment in a play area for young children. A plethora of plastic and man-made materials for the structures, ground cover, pavers, etc. overwhelm the natural setting of plants, trees, grass, shrubs, and rocks. Such usage would also disrupt the root systems or eliminate the existence of many of the trees.

Of course, whatever equipment and changes are initiated would have to be compliant with Federal and State requirements for safety and with the Americans with Disabilities Act. I suggest that we may wish to work with the Maryland National Park and Planning Commission on this project.

Our neighbor, Chevy Chase Village, has done an excellent job of developing an Open Space Urban Plan for a park of 1.9 acres which I would recommend as a resource for our own ideas for Friendship Heights. I would like to enter the link to the information on the Chevy Chase Village website into the minutes so that it is available to those who are interested:

<http://www.chevychasevillagemd.gov/c/266/chevychaseopenspace>

In the best of all possible worlds we would have more space. As it is, we must take into account a range of amenities that will appeal to the several generations of people who live and work in Friendship Heights, but with some special attention to the needs of very young children, two to five years old, and their parents. I feel the set-aside area with playground equipment for very small children could be accomplished using a strip of land approximately 25 feet in width extending from where the swings used to be at the very back of the park and reaching half-way toward the 4701 Willard Avenue building. There would have to be a fence and/or a thick hedge at the very back of the park to protect children from the steep descent leading to Somerset Stream. I believe the park should be left as open as possible—open space allows for imaginative play for all children, whatever the age.

Native plantings geared to the fact that there is no facility for irrigation, landscaping, new tables and benches, signage, perhaps some entrance feature and a small sculpture would be considered.

Specifications, details, etc. would have to be worked out by the designated committee. I believe that whatever plan is finally decided upon, the Council should have a ballpark figure, in as much as possible, of cost estimates for landscaping, for installation, for equipment, and for overall maintenance before going ahead with implementation.