

Activities of the Chevy Chase Citizens Association

A large proportion of the activities in the first century of the association's history have been devoted to perennial local community problems such as trash and leaf collection, street and alley paving and maintenance, water and sewer services, educational and recreational facilities and programs, public transportation and traffic problems, public safety, senior citizen concerns, environmental issues, and zoning. (ANC 3/4G assumed responsibility for zoning issues.). Other activities have involved District-wide problems, generally in conjunction with other organizations, such as taxes, property assessments, the District budget, public utilities, air and noise pollution, downtown planning, historic preservation, and elections. Some of these activities are described here in more detail.

Education and Recreation

Education and recreation for the children of Chevy Chase have received the attention of the association since its founding. The well-being of residents, particularly the youngsters, has been paramount. The Elizabeth V. Brown School stimulated the development of Chevy Chase. As the community grew, the association was instrumental in the expansion of the school, then later in the establishment of the Benjamin W. Murch, Lafayette, Alice Deal, and Woodrow Wilson Schools. Major achievements of the association were the securing of appropriations for walks, retaining walls, and general ground improvement at the Woodrow Wilson High School in 1935 and the inclusion in the 1937 budget of an item for additional classrooms at the Lafayette School. In 1946 the association succeeded in having a large undeveloped portion of the playground at Ben Murch School graded and fenced. In the early 1970s, members of the association were on the modernization committees for Woodrow Wilson and Lafayette Schools: George J. Haley was chairman of the Woodrow Wilson Modernization Committee and Albert E. Gollin was chairman of the Lafayette Modernization Committee. Roberta S. Barnes, Principal of Lafayette School for many years, was helpful to the modernization committee, as was her successor, Rob Webb.

In addition to the bricks and mortar, the quality of education also received attention. The first Home and School Association at E.V. Brown School was sponsored by the association. Many members of the association have served as officers of the Home and School Associations at the local public schools over the years. The association monitored the open classrooms at Lafayette and expressed concern about the large number of students leaving Lafayette for private schools in 1977 and 1978. Overall, students in the area schools have excelled academically, and many graduates have had illustrious careers in the city and the nation.

The Supreme Court decision in 1954 desegregated the schools in the District. This decision was implemented in the schools initially without turmoil. After the third grade children were placed in one of our “tracks” on the basis of their learning ability. The rigidity of the track system led effectively to segregation within schools, particularly for the many children moving to the District who did not have the educational background provided by District schools. As a result of a lawsuit filed by Julius Hobson, Sr., the track system was overturned by Judge Skelly Wright in 1971. As one consequence, when it was proposed to send children living east of Connecticut Avenue to schools east of Rock Creek Park, there was vigorous opposition and a large exodus of families to the suburbs. This proposal was not implemented, but the placement of students with large differences in educational background and ability in the same classes led to considerable turmoil and disciplinary problems in the schools. The student population became more stable, and the schools gradually adjusted to the change resulting from the Wright decision. The assignment of strong principals to the public schools in the Chevy Chase area has had a beneficial effect on the disciplinary and educational quality of these establishments.

The association was equally concerned with the physical development and recreation of neighborhood children and succeeded in having playgrounds built at the schools. After World War II, the association obtained the E.V. Brown School building for a community center.

The struggle to have a public swimming pool in the community extended over several generations. For years the community tried to get an outdoor pool in Fort Reno Park. Residents in the neighborhood of Fort Reno persuaded Congress not to authorize the pool for fear of attracting outsiders, contributing to noise and nuisance. In 1970 community leaders responded to the Board of Education’s invitation to form a committee to plan a pool for Woodrow Wilson High School. The Woodrow Wilson modernization committee was formed and decided to have an enclosed pool that could be used throughout the year for both physical education and recreation. Stiff opposition from nearby residents continued, but the committee was successful in planning a pool and persuading District officials and Congress to appropriate funds for its design and construction. The pool was opened on May 30, 1979. George J. Haley from the Chevy Chase Citizens Association and Barbara Luchs from the Forest Hills Association were largely responsible for this accomplishment. Their contribution was recognized by the D.C. Council in 1979.

In the early 2000s, the Wilson pool was demolished and replaced by the \$26 million Wilson Aquatic Center, which opened in 2009. It is billed as D.C.'s "premier indoor aquatic facility," offering a large swimming pool 50 meters by 25 yards, one leisure pool, one whirlpool, men's and women's locker rooms, and a viewing gallery.

Over a 50-year span, the association has co-sponsored Halloween parties for the youngsters in the area. In 2001, Brigid and Rob Gillette, the proprietors of Pumpernickels Deli on Connecticut Avenue near Livingston Street, started a Halloween “Spooktacular” – a costume parade along the Connecticut Avenue business district. Growing up in The Bronx, New York, Brigid and Rob went trick-or-treating to their neighborhood stores “on a street,” she said, “not unlike ours in Chevy Chase.” The Gillettes credited Erika Hemphill as the driving force behind the 2001 event. “Erika went to all the stores, got them to agree to participate and really organized the entire thing,” Brigid Gillette said.

The association has sponsored programs for senior citizens. In 2008, for example, CCCA held a “Senior Expo” on a Saturday afternoon to bring together information and Service providers to discuss issues like home health care, Medicare, dementia, and moving to smaller quarters.

CCCA cooperates with Northwest Neighbors Village, an organization formed in 2007 to help provide services that allow Chevy Chase, D.C., residents to grow old in familiar surroundings, the so-called “aging in place” concept. Organizers said there were nearly 3,500 residents over 65 years old in zip code 20015, which includes Chevy Chase. More information on the organization, which also serves the Tenleytown and American University Park areas, can be seen at its website, <http://nwnv.org>.

The Chevy Chase Community Councils and the Community Centers

There were two Chevy Chase Community Councils: one active during the late 1940s and the other active during the late 1960s. The association sponsored both Councils in connection with the Chevy Chase Community Center. The first council secured the E.V. Brown School Building for a recreational center and public library when it was no longer needed for a school. The idea was conceived by H.V. Schreiber and carried out by an energetic council, of which S.F. Higger was chairman. Residents of Chevy Chase generously contributed \$5,500 for furnishing and equipping the center. About 500 youngsters, parents, teachers, friends, and invited guests filled the schoolyard on November 16, 1948, to witness the formal dedication of the old building at Connecticut Avenue and McKinley Street to its new use as the Chevy Chase Community Center. Among others, special salutes were given to Mrs. Henry Gratton Doyle and Miriam Ottenberg of the

Evening Star for their effective work. Albert W. Atwood, on behalf of the Board of Library Trustees, said, “We have here a graphic demonstration of a community’s contribution to a democratic society.” On the steps of the building, a group of teenagers sang of their new center, “Many thanks we give to you.”

Thousands of young people and adults used these facilities for arts and crafts and physical recreations. Over the years, the association spent considerable sums in refurbishing the canteen room and other parts of the building, installing lights for the outside basketball courts, and other projects. The auditorium was redecorated and reopened for the community largely through the efforts of the association’s James E. Schwab. The association held its monthly meetings here, after being housed in the basement for many years, until the building was razed in the late 1960s.

In the 1956 D.C. budget, the Department of Recreation found planning funds for a new Chevy Chase Library to be built on the property occupied by the Chevy Chase Community Center, in which the library occupied two rooms. The D.C. Recreation Department asked the association to revive the Chevy Chase Community Council and plan a new recreation center building. The reactivated council consisted of forty-two organizational members, representing the area churches, home and school associations, civic associations, and clubs using the Center. The council was successively chaired by Joseph Kaufmann, Barbara Luchs, John F. Healy, Frank Ferguson, and Carol Maudlin. The utilization of the property as both a library and recreation center was planned and followed through the Congress in a period of less than four years by the Chevy Chase Community Council, making it one of the quickest projects to receive congressional approval. Construction of the Chevy Chase Library was started in 1966. When the old center building was razed in 1968, many groups using the center met in area churches. After the new library was occupied in March 1968, the association held meetings there during the construction of the new Chevy Chase Community Center. The new Community Center building was the first prestressed and preformed concrete structure built in the District. It was to be constructed within 90 days, but problems with the original contractor caused delays, and three years elapsed before the building was completed. The interest and dedication to the project from Joseph Cole, then director of the Recreation Department, was noteworthy. His consideration of the community wishes helped make the building that stands there today a reality.

Government funds were not sufficient to construct and furnish the building. Over \$50,000 was raised by the Chevy Chase Community Council from neighborhood groups and individuals to furnish the building. The Association donated \$2,500 to furnish the children’s room. All contributions were listed on a plaque in the lobby of the building. Besides furnishing the building, residents of the community painted it.

The association has met in the new building since it opened in 1971. The association has also continued to monitor the building's condition. By 1998, the center was in need of renovation, including the installation of new heating and air conditioning. What originally was scheduled to be a six-month closure that began in November 1998 stretched through 1999 and into 2000. The center finally was reopened in February 2000 with some work still uncompleted. The \$1.8 million project was to include a renovation of the "commons" area between the center and the library, work that eventually was not finished until 2007.

Association leaders had been discussing the commons with D.C. officials since the mid-1990s. The name was coined by our members Bill Hopper and David Feske, who helped plan the project. A major element was redoing a basketball court on the site that had fallen into disrepair. A key reason for the delay was that drainage problems that had plagued the site for many years, some of them dating at least to the razing of the old E. V. Brown School, had to be fixed. Once that was done, the basketball court was finished, concrete sidewalks were laid, the parking lot was repaved, children's playground equipment was installed, and greenery was planted. An outside reading area was created in front of the library, a project that was done with funds given to the Friends of the Chevy Chase, D.C., library by a private donor.

More than 250 people attended a community ice cream social on September 20, 2007, to celebrate the project's conclusion. Then-CCCA president Edward Hayes commended executive committee member Nancy Wilson for many years' work serving as liaison to the D.C. government on the project.

The community center sponsors a large variety of courses in arts, crafts, dance, and physical fitness. A modest fee is charged for these courses to defray some of the expenses for D.C. recreation programs. The center also offers free activities, such as juggling, and a weekly Scrabble club for the Washington, D.C., area.

Lafayette Park, the public park area north of Lafayette Elementary School, is one of our neighborhood's finest assets. A group called Friends of Lafayette Park (FOLP), formed in 1999 by Jeff Stoiber and Beth Pierce, is an organization of neighbors dedicated to preserving and improving the park. In its first ten years, working with the D.C. Department of Parks and Recreation, it succeeded in adding gardens, playgrounds, a tot lot, an amphitheater, a gazebo, and it upgraded tennis courts and ball fields, benches, and much more. In the future the group hopes to add such improvements as a running track, better lighting, and a new recreational center. (The D.C. Department of Parks and Recreation maintains a small rec center on site.) The group sponsors clean-up days in the park every spring and fall.

CCCA also works with Friends of the Chevy Chase, D.C., Library, whose website can be visited at <http://www.ccdclibraryfriends.org/TikiWiki/tiki-index.php> The group holds periodic book sales and sponsors activities such as the "Bookshelf Project" to provide students at projects such as Woodrow Wilson High School with needed required reading books.

Street and Park Beautification and the Chevy Chase Foundation

In commemoration of the 200th anniversary of the birth of George Washington, a national project to plant 10,000,000 trees was undertaken in 1931. The allotment for Chevy Chase was 2,000 trees. The Federal Government provided the trees and each family was encouraged to plant one tree. The Chevy Chase Citizens Association organized the planting of trees in the Chevy Chase area. In 1975 the Environmental Committee of the association, under the leadership of Herbert M. Franklin, undertook a special bicentennial project to beautify the Metrobus terminal at Chevy Chase Circle. The association and merchants of Connecticut Avenue contributed funds, and the District government contributed dozens of rose bushes. A neighborhood architect planned the site. In the spring of 1976, neighborhood residents prepared and planted the rose bed (later replanted with hollies) and two Bradford pear trees in the turnaround area of the terminal.

The success of this project led to a proposal to beautify Connecticut Avenue generally. The Chevy Chase Foundation was established in 1982 to receive tax deductible contributions from residents and merchants to finance the project. The board of the Foundation consisted of association members James H. Molloy, Jr. (president), Herbert M. Franklin, Donald Lief, Karl F. Mautner, and Joan M. Nicholson. The D.C. Department of Transportation placed boxes around the trees on upper Connecticut Avenue in which members, merchants, and residents planted flowers. Advisory Neighborhood Commission 3G, the Chevy Chase Citizens Association, and the Chevy Chase Foundation financed the purchase and installation of 32 concrete and wooden benches and additional waste receptacles for the avenue.

The D.C. government has encouraged residents to take major responsibility for the small parks in the community. In 1983 the association persuaded Boy Scout Troop 90 from Blessed Sacrament to take care of the park at the Chevy Chase Circle. The association, with Advisory Neighborhood Commission 3G, also sponsored the clearing and improvement of the azalea triangle at the junction of Reno Road, Huntington Street, and 38th Street.

In 1990 the Chevy Chase Foundation gave \$1900, and two young carpenters, Bob Nehri and Frank Kaesser, built wooden tree boxes on McKinley Street, and on the west side of Connecticut from Chevy Chase Circle to Morrison Street. The boxes were planted with annuals by volunteers and paid for with donations. In 1996 the Chevy Chase Foundation, Chevy Chase Citizens Association and Main Street Chevy Chase [founded by Historic Chevy Chase DC] developed plans to replace benches on Connecticut Avenue. Main Street organizers included Bill Hopper and David Feske, and Colleen Giourard served as the contact for the bench project. Ursula McManus oversaw the planting and maintaining of the tree boxes.

During April and May of 1996, two sample benches on loan from Park Place and Victor Stanley Companies were displayed in the Connecticut Avenue and McKinley St. business area and residents were asked to express a preference. After a choice was made by the organizers, with input from residents, individuals and organizations were given an opportunity to purchase a bench, along with a plaque designating the person(s) or organization or other beneficiary of recognition. In addition to replacing existing wood benches, additional benches were placed along Connecticut Avenue, as well as along close-in parts of Livingston Street. Barbara Tufty used some leftover money from a tree planting fund to place five rod iron tree enclosures to replace deteriorating wooden enclosures.

During the 1990s, the District was in a budget crisis. Not only were no new trees being planted but no dead trees and stumps were being removed. Through the work of the association's Tree Committee, chaired by George Smith, 190 trees were planted in the CCCA area. Leading up to the planting was a block-by-block survey of trees, negotiations with a nursery for purchasing trees; obtaining permits from the D.C. government for each tree, raising about \$10,000 to pay for the effort, communicating with the city about the need to remove dead trees and stumps, and follow-up on the care of newly planted trees.

In 1997 the Garden Club, an initiative of Barbara Baldwin, took over the Connecticut Ave. tree planting. The Casey Foundation provided some funds for perennials around the trees. The garden club holds monthly meetings during the fall, winter, and spring to discuss subjects such as composting, watering techniques and growing roses. The club helps plan an annual "green meeting" of CCCA each April to discuss environmental concerns.