

MERION

CIVIC ASSOCIATION

FALL ISSUE 2011 | T: 610.664.0441 | E: mca.secy@merioncivic.org | www.merioncivic.org

CONTROVERSIAL PROPOSED CITY AVENUE REZONING ORDINANCE LACKS VISION

By Brian Gordon, Lower Merion Township Commissioner, 12th Ward and Merion Civic Association Board Member



Many members of our community are justifiably concerned about a proposal to re-zone portions of Bala Cynwyd from the Expressway to

Conshohocken State Road and from City Avenue to Presidential Boulevard and St. Asaph's Road. The new zoning, as amended, will allow the construction of millions of feet of office and residential space and will make the Bala office area more congested and add marginally (about 18%) to an increasing volume of traffic. Those supporting the changes argue that increasing the envelope for new construction will revitalize an area with tired office buildings, increase tax rates, decrease property taxes for the rest of us, and we will wind up with a portion of the Township which is a better place in which to live, work, and play.

As a result of the lobbying by active citizens in Merion, Bala Cynwyd and elsewhere, and the work of the Merion Civic and the Neighborhood Club of Bala Cynwyd, the proposed zoning has been scaled down. Height has been reduced across from homes on St. Asaph's Road. Maximum building height has been reduced from 300 feet to 200 feet and space requirements have been imposed between buildings. However, these piecemeal changes have left us with clunky mid-rise office buildings that are close to the curb line with parking in the rear, and not much else. The current draft ordinance still lacks a vision that is appealing to neighbors, and an opportunity for regional planning is being missed.

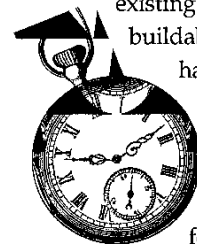
There are several ways to solve this problem. The best would be to start over and hire a planner who can come up with a vision of the district which is compatible with the desires of neighbors and developers. Such a district could contain a better shopping district, public space and open green spaces between buildings that will encourage people to walk or ride between buildings for lunch, dinner or commuting. A second approach would be to free Township staff, to start over and use their skills to create

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a vision for a district we can be proud of. In speaking with staff members, I was impressed that, if unleashed from the current plan, they have the capacity to do just that. In a brainstorming discussion with planning staff members, we discussed a district that would revolve around public green spaces, walking and bike paths and a park. A third, less attractive alternative, would be to simply give existing owners more



buildable space than they have now, but less than what is proposed. A floor-to-area ratio of 1.0 would double the amount of square footage of built-out space a developer could build. In other words, for every building in Bala, subject to parking, the owners could build another one of the same size. The problem with this alternative is that it represents a missed opportunity to plan coherently. Permission to build more will result in a few more nice new buildings and more traffic, but little else. As Commissioners, our obligation is to think and create a vision for the future and then zone to that vision.

PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

By Kevin Murphy



We all enjoy our Merion Community for the quality of life that it represents. Several issues are currently being monitored which

could impact our standard of living. The City Avenue Ordinance, Saint Joseph's University, the Barnes and Symphony Square Assisted Living are just a few of the concerns that have created dialogue and input from our residents. For more information, come to the MCA monthly meetings at the Merion Tribute House or visit our website at merioncivic.org.

MCA meets at 7:45^{PM} (7:30^{PM} in winter months) the fourth Tuesday of each month except July, August and December at the Merion Tribute House. To address the association, please call 610.664.0441 and request to be added to the agenda. Community members are always invited to attend the meetings.