

VILLAGE COUNCIL

MELANIE ROSE WHITE, *Mayor*
MICHAEL MEZEY, *Chairman*
BRUCE R. PIRNIE, *Vice Chairman*
ALFRED MULLER, M.D., *Secretary*
PAULA DURBIN, *Treasurer*
CAROLINA ZUMARAN-JONES, *Historian*
MICHAEL J. DORSEY

JULIAN P. MANSFIELD, *Village Manager*

VILLAGE OF FRIENDSHIP HEIGHTS

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APPROVED MINUTES

PUBLIC SESSION

FRIENDSHIP HEIGHTS VILLAGE COUNCIL

Conducted in the Village Center

Monday, April 10, 2023

ATTENDEES:

Michael Mezey, Chairman
Melanie Rose White, Mayor
Bruce Pirnie, Vice Chairman
Alfred Muller, M.D., Secretary
Paula Durbin, Treasurer
Michael Dorsey
Carolina Zumaran-Jones, Historian
Julian Mansfield, Village Manager
Jason Goldstein, Assistant Village Manager
Robert Bryant, Recording Secretary

CALL TO ORDER:

Mr. Mezey called the meeting to order at 7:30 p.m. He then acknowledged the passing of Attorney Norman Knopf, and recognized his various accomplishments and contributions. Several Council members offered remarks in honor of Mr. Knopf. Everyone in attendance recognized Mrs. Barbara Knopf, the wife of Mr. Knopf, who was in attendance.

PRESENTATION - FRIENDSHIP HEIGHTS SELECT SITES ZONING STUDY:

County Councilmember Andrew Friedson recognized the passing of Norman Knopf. Mr. Friedson then presented remarks about the potential for development and revitalization within Friendship Heights. Councilmember Friedson then responded to questions and comments raised by the Council.

Atara Margolies, Planner with the Montgomery County Planning Department, introduced herself along with Larissa Klevan, also with the Planning Department staff. Ms. Margolies then presented information about the work of the Planning Department before presenting on the Friendship Heights Select Sites Zoning Study (previously titled the

Friendship Heights Urban Design Study). The goal of the study is to evaluate the development potential of select sites under the existing zoning and, where appropriate, the 1998 *Friendship Heights Sector Plan* recommendations; and to analyze that potential in the context of recent comparable completed projects elsewhere in Montgomery County and the region. It has been 25 years since an updated sector plan was developed for Friendship Heights. Proposed sites for study include the Saks Fifth Avenue building and parking lot at 5555 Wisconsin Avenue; commercial properties along the western side of Wisconsin Avenue from the intersection of 4407 Willard Avenue and 5424-5432 Wisconsin Avenue; the commercial property at 4451 Willard Avenue; the commercial property at 5550 Friendship Boulevard and the GEICO headquarters at 5260 Western Avenue. The proposed schedule for the study is to submit a scope of work to the Planning Board in April 2023; analyze the proposed development sites from spring 2023 through fall 2023; and to present the findings to the Planning Board and the Montgomery County Council in fall/winter 2023 through early 2024.

Following the presentation, Ms. Margolies responded to questions and comments posed by the Council and the public:

- Asking whether an advisory group will be established. She responded that there will be no advisory group as it is a narrow technical study, not a review of the entire Sector Plan.
- Inquiring when the sector plan will be updated. She did not provide a timeline but indicated this will be up to the Planning Board and County Council.
- Asking whether there will be an opportunity for the public to address the County Council and the Planning Department regarding any proposed development efforts.
- Suggesting the establishment of children’s play areas, ball fields, and dog parks on the current GEICO property.
- Speaking in favor of implementing an urban park.
- Inquiring about the reasons previously proposed developments did not come to fruition.
- In light of the density of Friendship Heights, suggesting the establishment of a playhouse, movie theater, soundproofed pickleball court, arboretum, and botanical garden.
- Speaking in favor of preserving the lines of sight to the skyline.
- Suggesting that the county look into the historic background of the GEICO property.

COMMENTS/QUESTIONS TO AND FROM THE COUNCIL:

- Michael Mezey announced that Michael Dorsey and Carolina Zumaran-Jones will not run for re-election to the Village Council in 2023.
- Bobby Pestronk commented that tree panels are needed on the north side of River Road from Willard Avenue to the Little Falls Parkway to improve safety; and suggested the implementation of a protected bike lane from Willard Avenue to Ridgefield Road.
- Martha Solt spoke in opposition to the Active Network.
- Roger Cochetti urged addressing jurisdictional issues and boundaries sooner rather than later.
- Patricia Kane announced that Montgomery County delayed final action on their proposed 10% property tax increase, with public hearings anticipated on Tuesday, April 11th and Thursday, April 13th.
- Cheryl Tyler asked how Friendship Heights would benefit from the proposed establishment of a Business Improvement District; and encouraged the Council to appoint representatives in addition to legal counsel for all development matters.

MAYOR’S ANNOUNCEMENTS:

Mayor White announced that the annual Community Day will be held on Saturday, April 15th at 1:00 p.m. to celebrate the anniversary of the Village Center’s opening in 1986.

An audio/visual system is currently being installed to broadcast and record Council Meetings, and should be ready for use in time for the Candidates Forum to be held on Thursday, April 20th as well as the Monday, May 15th Council Meeting.

The Council’s Parks & Grounds Committee will meet on Monday, April 17th at 7:00 p.m. in the Village Center to discuss the options for toddler play equipment in Page Park. The meeting will be open to the public.

The League of Women Voters will hold a Candidates’ Forum for the Village Council candidates on Thursday, April 20th at 7:00 p.m. at the Village Center with a connection via Zoom and livestreaming. Residents may submit questions in advance to the League’s representative. Mr. Mansfield added the Council’s election will take place on Monday, May 8th. The ballots are being printed and will be picked up by The League of Women Voters. Ballots will then be mailed to those residents who requested absentee ballots. Residents will be able to place their completed ballots in the drop box in front of the Village Center, or can mail in their ballots. A voter’s guide is being prepared by The League of Women Voters, with copies to be distributed to the various buildings and posted to the Friendship Heights Village website.

Mr. Mansfield announced that one of the buses has been wrapped with a logo and color scheme to match the identity sign. A second bus will be wrapped by Friday, April 14th. Additionally, the Village identity sign will be installed in Humphrey Park by Friday, April 14th.

SECRETARY’S REPORT:

Dr. Muller moved, Ms. Zumaran-Jones seconded approval of the minutes as distributed from the Council’s Public Session held on Monday, March 13, 2023. The motion carried unanimously.

Dr. Muller moved, Ms. Zumaran-Jones seconded approval of the minutes as distributed from the Council’s Special Public Session held on Tuesday, March 21, 2023. The purpose of the session was to discuss retaining a financial advisor to provide guidance on Village investments. The motion carried unanimously.

TREASURER’S REPORT:

Treasurer Durbin presented a summary of the Council’s financial standing as of Friday, March 31, 2023. Cash on hand in the General Fund totaled \$3,094,251.42. The Capital Improvements Fund totaled \$11,561.69. The OPEB reserves totaled \$1,366.10. The expenditure for the Village’s police patrols will begin appearing on the April 2023 financial statement.

Interest budgeted for the month of March 2023 was \$834. However, actual interest earned for the month totaled \$10,238.35. Also, a total of \$7,498 was budgeted for the nine-month period of July 2022 through March 2023. However, actual interest earned during that period totaled \$74,490.86.

COMMITTEE REPORTS:

Report from the Community Advisory Committee (CAC):

Dr. Muller reported the following topics were discussed during the Wednesday, April 5, 2023 CAC meeting:

- Suggested uniformity of color and wording with signage throughout the Village, with possible additional signs similar to the new community identity sign.
- Later discussion for possible use of the second floor of the Red House once a food establishment has been selected for the ground level.
- Need for issuing a Dog Policy for Page Park – prohibiting dogs around the children’s play area and prohibiting unleashed dogs in the entire park.
- Further review of the safety report; and suggestions to install additional speed bumps within the Village, particularly on North Park Avenue near the Gourmet Market.
- Various exterior Village observations.
- Continued safety issues with the dumpsters on Willard Avenue.

OLD BUSINESS:

Village’s Off Duty Montgomery County Police Officer Program: Officer Jason Cokinos presented an update on the new patrol arrangement for Friendship Heights Village that began on Thursday, March 16, 2023. The officers serving the Village have been assigned mainly from the 2nd District in Bethesda, Maryland. The hours of service are presently from 8:00 a.m. to 4:00 p.m., Monday through Friday but can be changed as needed. The eight hours may be served all at one time by the officer, or via a split shift. An activity log is completed for each date of service. Officer Cokinos summarized some of the activities noted in the log, the services performed within the Village, and any crimes that were reported since March 16th.

Following his presentation, he responded to questions and comments from Council members regarding drivers running STOP signs; inquiring whether speed bumps or humps with STOP signs would be an effective deterrent against speeding; asking whether Montgomery County allows the use of speed cameras for traffic calming; suggesting the installation of a speed bump at Willard Avenue and 4701; and inquiring whether police officers are required to enforce the ordinance that requires dog owners to keep their dogs on a leash when in public spaces. Officer Cokinos encouraged residents to report suspicious or criminal activity by calling either 9-1-1 or (301) 279-8000.

Page Park: Mr. Mansfield reported, per Montgomery County, that GreenSweep must submit a building permit application for the pergola structure, as the pergola is considered a building according to the county’s interpretation. GreenSweep is in the final stages of preparing that application, and expects to submit it soon. One item that must be included in the application is a survey of the pergola that measures the distance between the pergola and the property line. The Council’s contractual engineer performed the survey during the week of April 3, 2023, with the resulting report anticipated shortly. It is anticipated that review and completion of the application will take 30 to 45 days. Additionally, GreenSweep will begin planting later during the month of April 2023, and will remove some of the fencing to open up the park.

Mr. Pirnie reported that, on Monday, April 17th at 7:00 p.m., a meeting will be held to consider the items that will be included in the children’s play area. He encouraged all residents to attend the meeting. Discussions then ensued about dogs in the play area within Page Park; whether the permitting delays associated with the pergola will cost the

Council additional money; and the planned installation of additional handrails in the Park to satisfy ADA-requirements.

NEW BUSINESS

Appointing Resident Judges - Upcoming Village Council Election: The Council is required by its charter to appoint judges for the Council election. **Ms. Durbin moved, Mr. Pirnie seconded appointing Bill Corey of 4620 North Park and Phyllis Meltzer of The Carleton as judges for the 2023 Council election, with County Councilmember Andrew Friedson to serve as Chief Judge. The motion carried unanimously.**

Town of Chevy Chase's Resolution in Response to Rise of Anti-Semitic Activities in Montgomery County: Todd Hoffman, Town Manager at the Town of Chevy Chase, informed all neighboring towns and villages that the Town drafted a resolution in response to the rise in anti-Semitic activity in Montgomery County. The Town Council approved the draft resolution in early March 2023, and they sought an endorsement from all neighboring municipalities. The Town of Chevy Chase is also asking municipalities to host anti-Semitic awareness events. **Ms. Durbin moved, Mr. Pirnie seconded endorsing the resolution drafted by the Town Council of Chevy Chase in response to the rise in anti-Semitic activities. The motion carried unanimously.**

Hiring Active Network to Provide an Online Registration and Payment Platform for Classes and Activities: The Village management team would like to begin offering Friendship Heights residents an online option for reviewing, registering, and paying for classes and activities. After months of research, holding discussions with online providers, and receiving demonstrations, the team recommended that the Council approve a contract with Active Network at an annual cost of \$4,688, plus a one-time implementation fee of \$7,175. If the online system was approved, the Village would still offer residents the opportunity to pay for classes and activities in person. **Ms. Zumaran-Jones moved, Mr. Dorsey seconded contracting with Active Network at an annual cost of \$4,688, plus a one-time implementation fee of \$7,175. The motion carried unanimously.**

Retaining Another Attorney to Represent the Village - 5500 Wisconsin Avenue Development Project: As a result of the unfortunate passing of Attorney Norman Knopf, Mr. Mansfield confirmed the availability of David Brown, Mr. Knopf's partner from Knopf & Brown. Since the Montgomery County Planning Board will hold a hearing regarding the site plan on Thursday, April 13th, the Council agreed by majority electronic consent to have Attorney Brown begin preparing for the meeting. Attorney Brown has already prepared and sent a letter of support for the development project as required by the settlement agreement with Donohoe. Attorney Brown will also attend the public hearing. **Ms. Durbin moved, Mr. Pirnie seconded ratification of the Council's electronic decision to retain the services of Attorney David Brown to represent the Village for the 5500 Wisconsin Avenue development project. The motion carried unanimously.**

Community Service Awards to be Presented on Community Day: **Dr. Muller moved, Mayor White seconded awarding the members of the Community Advisory Committee with Community Service Awards during the upcoming Community Day event. The motion carried unanimously.**

FINAL COMMENTS - OUTGOING COUNCIL MEMBERS

Carolina Zumaran-Jones and Michael Dorsey each made final statements to the Council as the outgoing members of the Council and were thanked again for their service to the community.

ADJOURNMENT:

The meeting was adjourned at 9:43 p.m. with the unanimous consent of the Council.

Respectfully submitted,

A handwritten signature in cursive script, appearing to read "Alfred Muller MD".

Alfred Muller, MD
Secretary