

VILLAGE OF FRIENDSHIP HEIGHTS

VILLAGE COUNCIL

MELANIE ROSE WHITE, *Mayor*
ROBERT PESTRONK, *Chairman*
MARTHA SOLT, *Secretary*
ROY SCHAEFFER, *Treasurer*
PAULA DURBIN, *Parliamentarian*
CHERYL TYLER
MICHAEL MEZEY
JULIAN P. MANSFIELD, *Village Manager*

4433 SOUTH PARK AVENUE
CHEVY CHASE, MARYLAND 20815

Phone: 301-656-2797
Fax: 301-907-3922
Email: info@friendshipheightsmd.gov
Website: www.friendshipheightsmd.gov



APPROVED MINUTES

PUBLIC SESSION

FRIENDSHIP HEIGHTS VILLAGE COUNCIL

Conducted via Livestream

Monday, September 11, 2023

A video of the meeting can be found at:

<https://www.regionalwebtv.com/village-of-friendship-heights>

ATTENDEES:

Bobby Pestronk, Chairman
Martha Solt, Secretary
Roy Schaeffer, Treasurer
Melanie Rose White, Mayor
Paula Durbin, Parliamentarian
Michael Mezey
Cheryl Tyler
Julian Mansfield, Village Manager
Jason Goldstein, Assistant Village Manager
Atara Margolies, Architect & Urban Planner - Montgomery County Planning Department
Robert Bryant, Recording Secretary

CALL TO ORDER

The September 11, 2023 Council Meeting was called to order at 7:00 p.m. A moment of silence was observed in remembrance of those who passed as a result of the September 11, 2001 terrorist attacks.

CHAIR'S ANNOUNCEMENTS

Chairman Pestronk announced Page Park remained closed. A complete permit application was still anticipated from GreenSweep. Residents were encouraged to check the Village website and newsletter for regular updates. (Please see the Old Business section of these minutes for more on this matter.)

The September 11, 2023 Council Meeting was livestreamed and recorded for later viewing. Chairman Pestronk relayed the Rules of Order for the meeting, and stated any comments raised will become part of the meeting's record.

Several Councilmembers set regular office hours which were posted to the Village website and digital boards.

ADOPTION OF AGENDA

Ms. Durbin moved, Mayor White seconded adoption of the September 11, 2023 Council Meeting agenda as presented. The motion carried unanimously.

COMMENTS/QUESTIONS TO AND FROM THE COUNCIL

- Lenny Berliner offered to form and lead a small committee to liaise with GEICO.
- Dawn Calabia introduced the new West Friendship Association to the Council - an organization that was formed earlier in 2023 to promote the interests of residents in the original West Friendship plat developed in 1870. The organization's membership is mostly comprised of homeowners and renters from single family homes. More information can be found at www.FriendsofWillardAvenuePark.org.
- Dr. Al Muller thanked the Council for having additional trash cans placed in the Village, but asked the Council to consider the placement of a trash can at the curb closest to the Friendship Village Market. (2) Dr. Muller urged the Council to consider additional areas for the installation of speed humps/bumps within the Village. (3) Dr. Muller asked the Council to provide community associations in the Village with information about sprinkler system retrofitting.
- Mike Dorsey thanked Mayor White for standing up for the Village staff during the July 2023 Council Meeting; urged the Council to ensure they discuss personnel matters during Closed Session; and asked the Council to publicize any written correspondence or emails related to personnel issues that were shared among Council members prior to an Open Meeting.
- Emmanuel DaSilva proposed implementing the same three-bin recycling system next to the Village Council office that is in use in the State of California; proposed having the various community associations implement the same system; and informed the Council that the District of Columbia government was considering implementation of the same system.
- Sandra Youla applauded the state of the landscaping. (2) The residents spoke in favor of hiring a land use attorney, and offered to provide advice on the land use proposals that would be coming forward. (3) The owner spoke in favor of moving forward with the Friendship Heights Urban Design Study.
- Roger Cochetti commended the Village staff for implementing technology that allows residents to pay various fees online. (2) Mr. Cochetti expressed the opinion that it is possible to implement remote participation during Council Meetings rather than simply offering one-way live streams; and suggested allowing any written contributions to be posted without being edited. (3) Mr. Cochetti spoke regarding the Urban Design Study; and expressed the opinion that Friendship Heights would benefit from amenities such as a museum, playhouse, movie theater, rooftop forests, soundproofed pickleball courts, tennis courts, and a soccer field.
- Afsaneh Mirfendereski requested a public apology for the Council's handling of Page Park. None of the three firms had a qualified landscape architect on staff. All three options presented to the Council transformed the natural, rustic park into a manmade space with concrete and paving. The bids presented for the project ranged from \$400,000 to \$1.5 million, and the proper permits were not secured. (2) Ms. Mirfendereski again requested a public apology for the hate incident she suffered in 2022 involving a former councilmember in the presence of a witness. The matter

was reported to the police department, and the individual later apologized. However, there had not yet been a public statement from the Council concerning the matter.

- Cameron Moody spoke as a member of the Advisory Committee for the Friendship Heights Alliance. Community feedback was desired from the Village of Friendship Heights regarding the public realm, and Mr. Moody offered to gather the feedback and submit it to Village management. (2) Mr. Moody spoke favorably about the results of Page Park, and expressed looking forward to using the space once the barricades are removed. (3) Mr. Moody spoke in favor of the Urban Design Study, as he would like to see the continued development of Friendship Heights.
- Prem Garg inquired about the status of the Red House, and about the financial implications of the purchase.
- Martha Solt thanked the public for the comments they provided to the Council in various forms.

MAYOR'S ANNOUNCEMENTS

Mayor White announced the Village Council's monthly Public Meetings would start at 7:00 p.m., effective with the September 2023 Council Meeting.

A business fair will be hosted on Saturday, October 14th from 10:30 a.m. until 1:30 p.m. in Humphrey Park outside the Village Center. The event will run concurrently with the farmer's market at the same location. Residents were encouraged to attend the fair to learn more about the products and services offered by local businesses.

The next scheduled Council Meeting will be held on Monday, October 16th at 7:00 p.m. The meeting was rescheduled to that date to avoid conflicting with the Columbus Day holiday on Monday, October 9th.

SECRETARY'S REPORT

Ms. Solt moved, Ms. Durbin seconded approval of the following sets of minutes as presented:

- **The Council's Public Session held on Monday, July 10, 2023.**
- **The Council's Closed Session held on Thursday, July 13, 2023.**
- **The Council's Closed Session held on Monday, August 21, 2023.**

The motion carried unanimously.

TREASURER'S REPORT

Treasurer Schaeffer reported the surplus projected for the fiscal year was \$133,000 when the budget was passed in March 2023 - an amount that is lower than the prior surpluses. Mr. Schaeffer summarized the reasons for the lower projected budget surplus. The main reason is the police patrol for \$175,000 which was previously unbudgeted and is the third largest budget item. There were two other new line items (maintenance of the Red House and Page Park). As of the September 2023 Council Meeting, the surplus had mostly been used as a result of an unbudgeted invoice of approximately \$35,000 for painting and maintenance of the community center; and actual amounts approved for salaries and increases as opposed to the estimated numbers budgeted. It is likely that the Council will end the fiscal year with a small surplus, or will break even. The Treasurer noted no known expenses that are under budget.

Mr. Schaeffer announced the Finance Committee would hold an Open Meeting on Tuesday, October 17th at 3:00 p.m.

VILLAGE MANAGER'S REPORT

Manager Mansfield reported the prospective tenant for the Red House recently withdrew their application due to the anticipated cost of renovating the kitchen. Therefore, the Village was still working with a broker to identify possible tenants. A Council discussion was held regarding permissible uses of the Red House.

A meeting was recently held with the County's Department of Permitting Services (DPS) to receive an update concerning the permits needed for Page Park. The Council Chair was in attendance along with Mr. Mansfield and Mr. Goldstein.

There is a new feature on the Village website that allows residents to report streetlight outages.

The ActiveNet online class registration portal was launched on the Village's website. The Village's management and staff provide assistance to those who have questions or experience issues when using the system.

Manager Mansfield stated that the intent is to use the Red House as a food establishment, but other options will be considered. Ms. Tyler questioned how long we should wait before adopting another plan.

COMMITTEE REPORTS

Community Advisory Committee (CAC): The CAC held meetings on Wednesday, August 9, 2023 and Thursday, September 7, 2023. Reports from those meetings were included in the Council Meeting packet.

OLD BUSINESS

Update - Friendship Heights Urban Design Study: Atara Margolies presented a brief history and update regarding the status of the design study. A community engagement event would be held as an open house on Tuesday, October 24, 2023 from 5:30 p.m. until 8:30 p.m. at the Wisconsin Place Recreation Center (the facility near Bloomingdale's and Whole Foods). A similar presentation will then be offered on Monday, October 30, 2023 at the Village Center from 5:30 p.m. until 8:30 p.m. Both events will be interactive, and will give residents the opportunity to speak with staff. Additionally, an online survey will be developed to give residents the chance to offer feedback in the beginning of October. Updates regarding the Friendship Heights Urban Design Study are provided via an electronic newsletter from the county (<https://montgomeryplanning.org/planning/communities/downcounty/friendship-heights/friendship-heights-urban-design-study>). Ms. Margolies will provide information for the Village staff to also include in the Village newsletter.

Request from GreenSweep - Payment for Page Park Project: GreenSweep previously requested the receipt of a progress payment of \$200,000 in relation to the Page Park project. A negotiating team was later established and met to prepare language for an addendum with input from the Council's attorney. **Mr. Mezey moved, Ms. Tyler seconded adopting the proposed addendum to the GreenSweep contract as submitted. The motion carried by a vote of four in favor, two opposed (Ms. Durbin and Mr. Schaeffer), and one abstained (Mr. Pestronk).**

NEW BUSINESS

Montgomery County Pedestrian Master Plan: Mr. Pestronk summarized the county's Pedestrian Master Plan - particularly those portions that relate to the Village. Mr. Pestronk presented comments relating to the plan (attached), and would like to refer them to the County Council for consideration. **Ms. Solt moved, Mr. Schaeffer seconded adopting the comments presented by Mr. Pestronk; and to discuss the comments amongst the members of the Council. The motion carried by a vote of four in favor, three opposed (Mayor White, Ms. Durbin, and Mr. Mezey), and zero abstained. Mr. Mansfield will communicate the comments to the appropriate individuals, but will first forward his proposed communication to the Council for review and approval.**

Maryland Department of Transportation (MDOT) River Road Corridor Safety Study: Mr. Pestronk summarized the safety study being conducted by MDOT regarding the River Road corridor. Mr. Pestronk presented comments concerning the safety study (see attachment), and would like to refer them to the appropriate individuals within MDOT, the County Council, and the State legislature. **Ms. Solt moved, Ms. Durbin seconded adopting the comments presented by Mr. Pestronk concerning MD's River Road Corridor Safety Study; and to discuss the comments amongst the members of the Council. Mayor White amended the motion concerning Item 6 as follows: a) recommendation that the light at River and Willard be programmed for a dedicated green and red for vehicles turning left on Willard from River and b) recommendation that the light at River and Willard/Greenway Dr be programmed so that vehicles turning left onto River from Green Acres (Greenway Dr.) be offered a dedicated green arrow. The motion (with revision) carried unanimously. Mr. Mansfield will communicate the comments to the appropriate individuals, but will first forward his proposed communication to the Council for review and approval.**

Community Survey on Village Quality of Life: Council members discussed whether to circulate the quality of life survey drafted by Mr. Pestronk to gather the interests and priorities of Village residents. **Ms. Solt moved, Mayor White seconded moving forward with conducting a quality of life survey to be circulated to Village residents, with the materials developed to be forwarded to the Community Advisory Committee - and other committees as needed - for input. A sum of \$2,000 will be made available to cover payments to one student from George Washington University and to promote resident participation. The results of the survey will be due by a December 2023 date to be determined. The motion carried unanimously.**

Appointments to the Community Advisory Committee (CAC): **Mayor White moved, Mr. Mezey seconded appointing Stephanie Clipper and Al Muller to the Community Advisory Committee. Following a discussion, the motion was rescinded. Ms. Solt then moved, Ms. Durbin seconded postponing the decision concerning the CAC appointments until the October 2023 Council Meeting. The motion carried by a vote of four in favor, two opposed (Mayor White and Mr. Mezey), and one abstained (Mr. Pestronk).**

Proposal to Retain Land Use Attorney: **Ms. Solt moved, Mr. Mezey seconded retaining the services of Land Use Attorney Michelle Rosenfeld. An initial payment of \$1,500 will be made to Attorney Rosenfeld, and additional payments will be made only as her services are utilized. The motion carried by a vote of six in favor, one opposed (Ms. Durbin), and zero abstained.**

Hosting a Battery Recycling Program at the Village Center: **Mayor White moved, Mr. Mezey seconded having the Village staff look into the proper procedures and best**

practices for establishing a battery collection program for the Village. The motion carried by a vote of six in favor, zero opposed, and one abstained (Mr. Pestronk).

ADJOURNMENT

Ms. Tyler moved, Mr. Mezey seconded adjourning the September 11, 2023 Council Meeting at 9:41 p.m. The motion carried unanimously.

Respectfully Submitted:



Martha Solt, Council Secretary

September 7, 2023

Memo

From: Bobby Pestronk, Council Chairman

To: Village Council members and Village Manager

Re: **Adoption and referral of comments** from the Village of Friendship Heights to the **Maryland Department of Transportation (MDOT)** regarding MDOT's **MD190 (River Road) Corridor Safety Study** Virtual Public Meeting

Background

MDOT State Highway Administration has initiated a safety study along River Road from Springfield Drive to Little Falls Parkway in Montgomery County. The purpose of the study is to improve pedestrians' and bicyclists' safety along approximately 4,000 linear feet of River Road, which currently includes multiple driveways and nine intersections. The study is expected to be completed summer 2023.

The public is encouraged to leave comments and ask questions about the safety study before and after the September 21, 2023 virtual meeting from 6:30-8:00 p.m. at this email address:

MD190corridor@mdot.maryland.gov. The public may participate in the virtual meeting. Details about the virtual meeting are available on the State Highway Administration website, <https://bit.ly/MDOTSHA-D3> or calling 1-433-409-5228 by phone, Conference ID: ID: 302-157-731#.

Village residents experience their lives both within and outside the jurisdictional boundaries of the Village itself. That experience is influenced by the design of roadways, sidewalks, and other paths within and outside the Village. River Road is a major, important, and useful but dangerous and unpleasant thoroughfare used regularly by many Village residents. Efforts to address its redesign and safety are important to Village residents.

Proposal

I recommend the Village Council **adopt the following comments and recommendations and forward them to the appropriate individuals at Maryland Department of Transportation, County Council, and State legislature.**

- 1) Amend the boundaries of the study so its southeastern terminus is Western Avenue not Little Falls Parkway. Bicyclists are unsafe on River Road from Western Avenue to Little Falls Parkway, too. There is no bicycle lane on this stretch of roadway.
- 2) Perform regular maintenance cutting weeds and invasive shrubbery along the right-of-way from 4925 to 5001 River Road on the north side of River Road. Overgrowth narrows the sidewalk placing pedestrians too close to traffic in the right-hand lanes.
- 3) Change the alignment of the pedestrian crossing from American Plant to Whole Foods Shopping Center. It should be orthogonal rather than diagonal. It is currently awkward for pedestrians to use. As configured now it also ends next to the driveway into American Plant which is dangerous.

- 4) Better design the crossing under the Capital Crescent Trail to make it more visible to motorists. Perhaps add a traffic light. Suggesting pedestrians cross River Road there now and assuming motor vehicles will yield the right-of-way places pedestrians in a dangerous situation.
- 5) Regularly clear trees and trash from the conduit on the north side of River Road where Little Falls' Willard branch creek passes under River Road. An accumulation of these items now obstructs Creek flow. Heavy rains may lead to flooding of River Road.
- 6) Reprogram the signal sequence for cars exiting Greenacres subdivision onto west bound River Road. A brief left turn signal arrow is needed. Presently cars exiting the subdivision do not yield to drivers turning right from Willard Avenue onto River Road and instead force their way onto westbound River Road.

September 7, 2023

Memo

From: Bobby Pestronk, Council Chairperson

To: Village Council members and Village Manager

Re: Adoption **and referral of comments** from the Village of Friendship Heights regarding the County **Planning Department's Draft Pedestrian Master Plan** as proposed to Montgomery County Council

Overview

Village residents experience their lives within a larger context than that within the boundaries of the Village itself. Our access as pedestrians to shopping, recreation, and exercise is influenced by the design of the Village and its surrounding communities, roads, sidewalks, and neighborhoods. We also experience our lives as pedestrians dependent upon at which "end" of the Village we reside and whether we mostly drive, bike, or walk.

The Village of Friendship Heights is a densely populated jurisdiction which borders the Brookdale Neighborhood and West Friendship Association. Easing "cross-border" pedestrian access will heighten the pedestrian experience, improve safety, improve access to County parks in these neighboring areas.

Montgomery County's Planning Department has recently drafted and proposed to County Council a novel and comprehensive Pedestrian Master Plan to heighten and improve the pedestrian experience and complement other County goals and planning documents.

The Plan currently references the Village, and it should. Intersections along Willard Avenue with Village streets are dangerous. Residents often cite the intersection at North Park Avenue and Friendship Boulevard as risky with cars failing to stop. Cars travel along Willard Avenue from Friendship Boulevard to River Road at well over the posted limit of 25 mph. Sidewalks are unshaded. The Pedestrian Level of Comfort Map rates this section of Willard Avenue as Uncomfortable. As one approaches River Road, the sidewalk is narrow. In addition, pedestrian access from the western end of the Village to Brookdale Neighborhood Park with its amenities and grounds is obstructed by GEICO and homeowner fencing, the route indirect, unlit, and hazardous along the southern edge of the GEICO property line.

Request

I propose that the Village Council **adopt these comments** about the draft Pedestrian Master Plan and **forward them to County Council members, the County Planning Department, and others** (as recommended by the Village Manager).

The Village supports:

- the goals of the Plan, specifically objectives 1.1, 1.2, 1.3, 1.5, 1.7, 2.2, 2.3, 3.1, 3.2, 4.1, and 4.4 and with key actions: B-2, B-3, B-4 (f, g, h), B-6, B-7, B-8a, B-9, B-10, MA-2, P2 (a, d, e), P-7b, P8, EA-1 (a, b, c), EA-2, EA-3, EA-5, EA-8.

The Village specifically recommends:

- Raising the priority of recommendations addressing the pedestrian experience of Friendship Heights residents in the Master Plan.
- Opening a trail creating a full pedestrian short cut from Sherrill, Baltimore, and Saratoga Avenues to the Willard Avenue Path enabling better access between Western Avenue, Brookdale and Willard Avenue Neighborhood Parks, and River Road.
- Adopting the Willard Avenue Path as a future bike path from Western Avenue to Willard Avenue.
- Establishing a safe pedestrian crossing across Willard Avenue to improve access to Willard Avenue Neighborhood Park between North Park Avenue and the traffic light at River Road.
- Using a “road diet” to narrow Willard Avenue thereby slowing traffic from North Park Avenue to River Road. Drivers are more likely to meet the posted speed limit.
- Planting trees along Willard Avenue and widening the sidewalk west of North Park Avenue.
- Creating bicycle sidepaths from Western Avenue at River Road to Little Falls Parkway.
- Collaborating with the Maryland Department of Transportation to establish a regular maintenance schedule for the right-of-way on River Road from Willard Avenue Neighborhood Park to 5001 River Road. This stretch contains a bus stop whose access is limited and dangerous to those with physical challenges due to overgrowth.
- Considering speed and stop sign cameras at the intersections at North Park Avenue, Shoemaker Lane, and Friendship Boulevard with Willard Road. While drivers know they should stop at stop signs and yield to pedestrians, they turn into and out of Willard Avenue in front of and behind pedestrians unyielding to those in crosswalks.
- Coordinating the Pedestrian Master Plan with the Bicycle Master Plan⁶) We ask that downtown Friendship Heights be made a Tier 1 BiPPA.