

Columbia Heights West

Neighborhood Conservation Plan

January 2000

INTRODUCTION

The Columbia Heights West Neighborhood Improvement Action Plan represents a collaboration and partnership between Arlington County, the Columbia Heights West Civic Association, residents, community organizations, and other non-profit groups to address the priority needs of this neighborhood. In 1995, the Arlington County Board designated Columbia Heights West a Neighborhood Strategy Area (NSA). This designation reaffirmed the Board's commitment to neighborhood preservation and improvement, especially in low and moderate-income areas. Neighborhood residents, brought together during this effort, are now seeking to use sections of the plan to allow them to participate in Arlington County's Neighborhood Conservation Program. The complete NSA Plan is attached to this document and should always be considered in conjunction with these NC recommendations.

Columbia Heights West is able to participate in two county programs: NSA and Neighborhood Conservation (NC). The designation of NSAs established a new approach to planning and community development in targeted areas. The new approach seeks to concentrate Community Development Block Grant and other community resources on the highest priority neighborhood issues in order to maximize the impact and effectiveness of individual programs. The outgrowth of a Columbia Heights West NC Plan from the NSA plan is a natural transition. Issues identified in the NSA plan with the potential for a capital improvement component, the focus of the NC program, are highlighted in this document summary.

PROCESS

Residents in Columbia Heights West, under the auspices of the Columbia Heights West Civic Association, were a critical part of the planning process to develop this comprehensive improvement strategy. Specific capital improvement projects can be used to meet these goals. Below is a description of the various ways residents participated in the planning process.

Columbia Heights West Civic Association – This has been the established voice of the Columbia Heights West neighborhood for over 25 years. The Association is open to all residents within its borders – including both tenants and owners. It also has no membership dues. Association meetings provided a continuous monthly forum for resident discussion about needed improvements, strategies and programs, and how to get more residents involved in the planning process. Association members were also represented on the Planning Committee and Columbia Heights West Task Force described below. The Columbia Heights West Civic Association was the lead organization for this planning effort, and was actively involved in every aspect of plan production from the initial discussions to the final product.

Neighborhood Forums - This was a series of meetings held throughout the neighborhood at the beginning and end of the planning process. These meetings solicited input from residents on issues and priorities and their response to neighborhood improvement recommendations. Meetings were held with the Columbia Heights West Civic Association, condominium associations, teens through the Teen Connection Program, residents in English as a Second Language (ESL) classes, and residents living in apartment complexes. Throughout the process and in the various venues at least 75 to 100 residents/citizens participated. The Columbia Heights West Task Force that comprised residents and service providers also met monthly.

Planning Committee – This citizen advisory group of 8 to 12 volunteers was established to work directly with the County Planning Staff to develop the Neighborhood Vision Statement and goals, objectives and strategies, and provide input on the Implementation Program. The committee consisted of property owners and tenants.

Survey of Businesses – Surveys completed by 40 area businesses provided a means for them to participate in the planning process. The survey was distributed to businesses in and adjacent to the neighborhood. They spoke about their needs and conditions in the neighborhood that are a priority to them.

Interactive Survey – A human scale survey was used to present recommendations to residents and solicit their response on priorities and resident responsibilities. The annual Pride Day celebration in Columbia Heights West provided the first setting for use of the multi-lingual survey; the Neighborhood Forums, the second. The Vision Statement, Goals and Objectives were presented in both these venues, translated into Spanish and Vietnamese. Strategies were added and residents were asked to identify their top ten priority activities and where they would play a lead role.

Columbia Heights West Task Force Meetings – This is an interagency community task force that has served the neighborhood for over 10 years. The group comprised a range of County agencies

including schools, local housing providers and service organizations. Neighborhood residents were also invited to participate. The Task Force provided information on needs and services and served as a technical advisory group on improvement strategies.

Youth Activity Books – A children’s coloring book and teen activity book were used to attract the interest of neighborhood residents in both age groups in the neighborhood planning process, and to explain their role in creating a stable neighborhood.

Resource Groups – These are groups of County Staff and community organizations that were convened to give feedback on whether the proposed Neighborhood Vision, neighborhood improvement goals, and objectives and program strategies were achievable and fully addressed each of the priority areas.

NEIGHBORHOOD HISTORY

The original owner of the eastern half of the neighborhood was Stephen Gray, who acquired the land in 1724 through a grant from Lord Fairfax. Ownership of the land passed to his sons who sold it to George Washington in 1774, who personally surveyed the tract on at least four occasions. Captain Simon Pearson acquired a tract north of what is now 7th Road South in 1729. William Gladdin acquired the western section of the neighborhood in 1744.

While Four Mile Run serves, approximately, as a natural boundary for the eastern and northern edges of the neighborhood, the other boundaries came about later. The western edge of the neighborhood, the County line, was part of the original boundary of the District of Columbia that was surveyed in 1790. This boundary was approximated by Carlin Springs Road. Carlyn is the last name of another early landowner whose property was developed as "Glencarlynn Park" in 1887 as the County's first pre-planned residential community.

The location of early roads served as a facilitator of future development. The southern edge of the neighborhood, Columbia Pike, was financed by Washington merchants and was intended to connect the Long Bridge crossing the Potomac with the Little River Turnpike in Fairfax County. Construction began in 1808 and the Arlington County portion of Columbia Pike was completed in 1812 allowing farmers to transport their produce to Washington. The Arlington Mill was established in 1836 on Four Mile Run at Columbia Pike. This intersection continued to evolve as a site for commercial development.

Armstrong's Road (Armstrong was another landowner) corresponds closely with today's South Dinwiddie Street and the eastern end of 7th Road South, and appears on a map recorded in 1900. There were only eight landowners in the neighborhood at the same time. These properties were most likely farms, including at least one dairy farm on the George Klein property, a large tract that covered most of the western section. There were several small tracts along Columbia Pike. At this point, the pattern of future development began to emerge.

In 1938 there was as few as 21 separated properties with only a few structures, mostly concentrated along Columbia Pike. Arlington Ice and Fuel was located where Four Mile Run crosses Columbia Pike, near where the Arlington Mill had been, and is now part of Glencarlynn Park. Armstrong's Road remained the only through street in the neighborhood.

By 1952 a great deal of changes had occurred. The commercial areas of the neighborhood were established by then, and the housing boom following the end of World War II resulted in a growing number of new housing in the neighborhood. In 1947 two large apartment complexes were constructed: Magnolia Gardens (now Magnolia Commons) and Park Glen. Columbia Gardens and Columbia Heights Apartments were added in 1948 and the Greenbrier Apartments in 1949. The duplex development in the western end of the neighborhood and the Tyroll Hills Apartments were built in 1950. Almost half (46%) of the housing units in Columbia Heights West were built between 1947 and 1950.

Additional streets appeared by 1952 also, including South Greenbrier Street, but many of these streets have been altered since 1952 by subsequent development. The Safeway store was built in

1952 near where the Arlington Mill had stood. Construction of housing continued in Columbia Heights West until 1964. By that year, 94% of the neighborhood's housing had been built. No new housing was added until 1984, but a number of apartment buildings were renovated and converted to condominiums or cooperatives between 1972 and 1982.

Over the past fifty years, Columbia Heights West has been transformed from farmland dotted with a few scattered houses to an established neighborhood, with commercial and recreational opportunities, and characterized by diverse housing options and an increasingly diverse population.

NEIGHBORHOOD DESCRIPTION

Location

Columbia Heights West is located on the central western edge of Arlington County. South Carlin Springs Road establishes the western border of the neighborhood and is a dividing line between Arlington and Fairfax counties. The southern boundary is defined by Columbia Pike. Four Mile Run serves as a natural boundary for the eastern edge of the neighborhood. The northern boundary (between South Carlin Springs Road and South Florida Street) is 7th Road South.

Neighborhood Features

The predominant character of the neighborhood is mixed residential. The westernmost section of the neighborhood is relatively flat and features an enclave of duplex houses. Southward from that point, the topography of the neighborhood slopes steeply downward to Columbia Pike. Several mid-rise apartments, condominium buildings, and several small commercial areas line this major east-west corridor. Garden style apartment complexes characterize the interior portion of the neighborhood. The eastern end of the neighborhood slopes downward toward Four Mile Run and features a variety of mid-rise apartments, townhouses, duplexes, and garden-style multi-family housing units.

Neighborhood Assets

Neighborhood assets include natural areas and community facilities and services in and adjacent to the neighborhood. One of the most visible assets of the Columbia Heights West neighborhood is the greenbelt that extends northward from the point where Columbia Pike and crosses Four Mile Run to the point where Long Branch joins the stream. The recreational area offers picnic facilities, fishing, biking and hiking trails. Tyrol Hills Park is the only public park located within the neighborhood. It is a 1.5 acre neighborhood park with picnic tables, a playground, multi-use fields, and a lighted basketball court.

Community facilities include the Glencarlyn Elementary School, two Bilingual Outreach Centers, Greenbrier Learning Center and Church, and the new Arlington Mills Community Center. In addition to serving as a school and daycare center, the Arlington Mill Community Center provides a meeting place for ESL classes and community meetings. Planned improvements under the County's Business Conservation Program will make the area around Arlington Mill more attractive. A Bilingual Center is located in Harvey Hall and Magnolia Commons apartment complexes. They offer unique services to recent immigrants and long-term bilingual residents that acclimate them to the community, develop skills and self-esteem, and direct them to other needed services. The Urban Alternative, a George Mason University program, offers a variety of training opportunities geared to the needs of residents and the development of neighborhood leaders. Community services include a variety of programs aimed at families and youths, job training and employment, home ownership and tenant assistance, and apartment maintenance.

GOALS, OBJECTIVES, AND STRATEGIES

Residents have identified six priority neighborhood issues that form the foundation of the NSA plan, three of which are used to identify projects in this Neighborhood Conservation Plan: *Neighborhood Participation, Neighborhood Appearance, and Public Safety*. Brief descriptions of these priorities are provided below, including the goals for each area as well as specific projects to help meet those goals. In addition to these specific recommendations, The neighborhood supports the installation of curb, gutters, sidewalks and street lighting in any location where it is supported by residents through submission of a qualifying petition (or compliance with Neighborhood Conservation procedures).

Neighborhood Participation

In the Columbia Heights West neighborhood, one of the most notable characteristics is cultural diversity. While diversity is considered an asset, it presents a challenge in making sure that residents feel a part of the neighborhood. Improving the lines of communication is another approach to improve the level of participation. While it is generally regarded that neighborhood residents need to be more willing and able to participate in the community, there are other means of improving how residents feel about the neighborhood. Creating a positive identity for Columbia Heights West for residents to rally around is one such approach. Promoting positive features in the neighborhood that exists now, such as cultural diversity, and creating new ways to enhance the identity of the neighborhood will help residents feel they are a part of the neighborhood and give them pride in Columbia Heights West.

Goals

- **Foster an active and informed community**
- **Promote neighborhood identity and pride**
- **Build a distinctive, positive image for the neighborhood**

Strategies

- Identify neighborhood boundaries through landscaping and neighborhood signs, especially at major entryways into the community (for example, Columbia Pike and Carlin Springs Road, S. Dinwiddie Street and Columbia Pike).
- Use the neighborhood logo in neighborhood publications, neighborhood signs, throughout open space areas, and in community facilities.

Specific Project Recommendations include but are not limited to:

- 1) Neighborhood Signs at the Corners of (a) Columbia Pike and South Dinwiddie Street, (b) Columbia Pike and South Carlin Springs Road, and (c) Columbia Pike and South Greenbrier St.
- 2) Trashcans with the Arlington County Logo or other identifying feature at all bus stops in CHW and at major intersections within CHW (e.g., 7th Road South and South Greenbrier St., 8th Road South and South Greenbrier St., 8th Road South and South Florida Street, South Carlin Springs and 8th Street South).

- 3) Benches at Bus Stops within CHW.
- 4) Tree plantings around Bus Stops within CHW.
- 5) Tree plantings along South Carlin Springs Road and Columbia Pike.
- 6) Improve landscape along Columbia Pike at the Arlington Mill Community Center.

Neighborhood Appearance

A well-maintained neighborhood provides a healthy environment for investment, attracts new families to the area, maintains property values, and encourages good property maintenance among residents who live there and citizens who visit. Poor property maintenance negatively affects these elements. Residents in Columbia Heights West have made neighborhood appearance one of their top priorities. Neighborhood appearance covers a full range of issues: how the public infrastructure and public facilities are maintained, the upkeep and care of exterior private properties, littering, graffiti, and urban design.

Goals

- **Create and maintain a clean and attractive neighborhood**

Strategies:

- Encourage all property owners and tenants to help maintain a clean and attractive neighborhood.
- Expand the annual neighborhood clean-up to include litter pick-up by area residents around major pedestrian areas.
- Look for new ways to discourage littering. For example, establish "litter-free zones" through signage, or provide trashcans in high pedestrian areas with the neighborhood or other identifying logo to stimulate a sense of responsibility and pride.
- Describe County code inspection services in neighborhood publications; place signs to encourage residents to report property maintenance violations to the code enforcement officers.
- Create and distribute a "good neighbors guide" to educate tenants and homeowners about the importance of neighborhood appearance, and how to identify and report violations.
- Conduct quarterly code enforcement inspections in problem areas.
- Maintain public facilities in a safe and attractive manner through a scheduled maintenance program; and encourage users through signage and public announcements to help keep public facilities safe and attractive.

Specific Project Recommendations include but are not limited to:

- 7) Installation of county-maintained trashcans where they are most needed.
- 8) Tyrol Hills Park improvements and signage.
- 9) New Bus Poles for each of the Bus Stops within CHW.

Public Safety

Public safety issues of concern in the neighborhood include those related to both traffic safety and crime prevention and protection. Recognizing behaviors and conditions that compromise safety, and correcting them, is crucial. This requires having residents communicating openly and regularly with those responsible for law enforcement and taking an active role in neighborhood improvement efforts. Helping neighborhood residents understand the nature and breadth of criminal activity in Columbia Heights West is the first step in improving safety and improving resident's perceptions about safety in the neighborhood.

The impact of vehicular traffic on pedestrian safety is one of the primary issues that concern neighborhood residents, particularly in crossing Columbia Pike. Teaching children and adults how to move about safely through the neighborhood and improving physical conditions that may negatively affect traffic safety have been identified as approaches that improve pedestrian safety.

Goals

- **Ensure a safe environment in which to live**

Strategies

- Establish safe circulation patterns and achieve harmony between pedestrian and vehicular traffic within and around the neighborhood.
- Educate neighborhood children about traffic safety through the schools, churches, Bilingual Outreach Centers, etc.
- Inspect and provide adequate lighting along major pedestrian ways.
- Work with the Traffic Division to identify areas with traffic hazards, identify solutions to traffic safety problems and implement appropriate "traffic calming" measures.
 - Look for opportunities to place medians or bollards in strategic locations to channel pedestrian crossing and thereby improve pedestrian safety at major street crossings.
 - Use streetscape improvements to better delineate and separate pedestrian and vehicular traffic.
 - Use crosswalk signs along major arterial streets to warn motorists of high pedestrian areas.
- Correct and improve physical conditions that negatively affect resident perceptions of personal safety.

- Identify opportunities for improved lighting in areas considered unsafe and where appropriate.
- Provide regular pruning and maintenance of trees and vegetation areas to avoid dark spots.
- Survey residents about areas in the neighborhood that make them feel unsafe and explore alternative approaches to improve the perception and appearance of these places.
- Identify and improve areas where people feel unsafe.
- Use code enforcement and neighborhood clean up activities to improve the physical environment and thereby improve how residents feel when moving through the neighborhood.
- Improve the maintenance and appearance of Tyrol Hills Park to encourage use of the park by families.
- Work with apartment owners to improve lighting and create defensible spaces to improve resident safety.

Specific Project Recommendations include but are not limited to:

- 10) Improve pedestrian safety along 8th Road South (between South Florida Street and South Dinwiddie Street), 7th Road South where it turns into South Dinwiddie Street, and on South Greenbrier Street in front of Harvey Hall (just north of Columbia Pike) by implementing appropriate measures.
- 11) Implement appropriate traffic calming measures along 7th Road South, South Dinwiddie Street, and/or 8th Road South.
- 12) Improve lighting and landscape in Tyrol Hills Park.
- 13) Improve lighting throughout the neighborhood where appropriate
- 14) Install new lighting throughout the neighborhood where appropriate.
 - a) 7th Road South and South Florida Street
 - b) 7th Road South and South Greenbrier Street
 - c) 7th Road South, near South Jefferson Street
 - d) 8th Street South, near South Jefferson Street
- 15) Sidewalk on Southwest side of 7th Road South/South Dinwiddie Street.
- 16) Crosswalks – South Florida Street and 7th Road South, at the Arlington Mill Community Center (across Dinwiddie), 8th Road South and South Carlin Springs
- 17) Flashing lights for crosswalk at Tyrol Hills Park.
- 18) Continue to identify other projects as plan is implemented.**