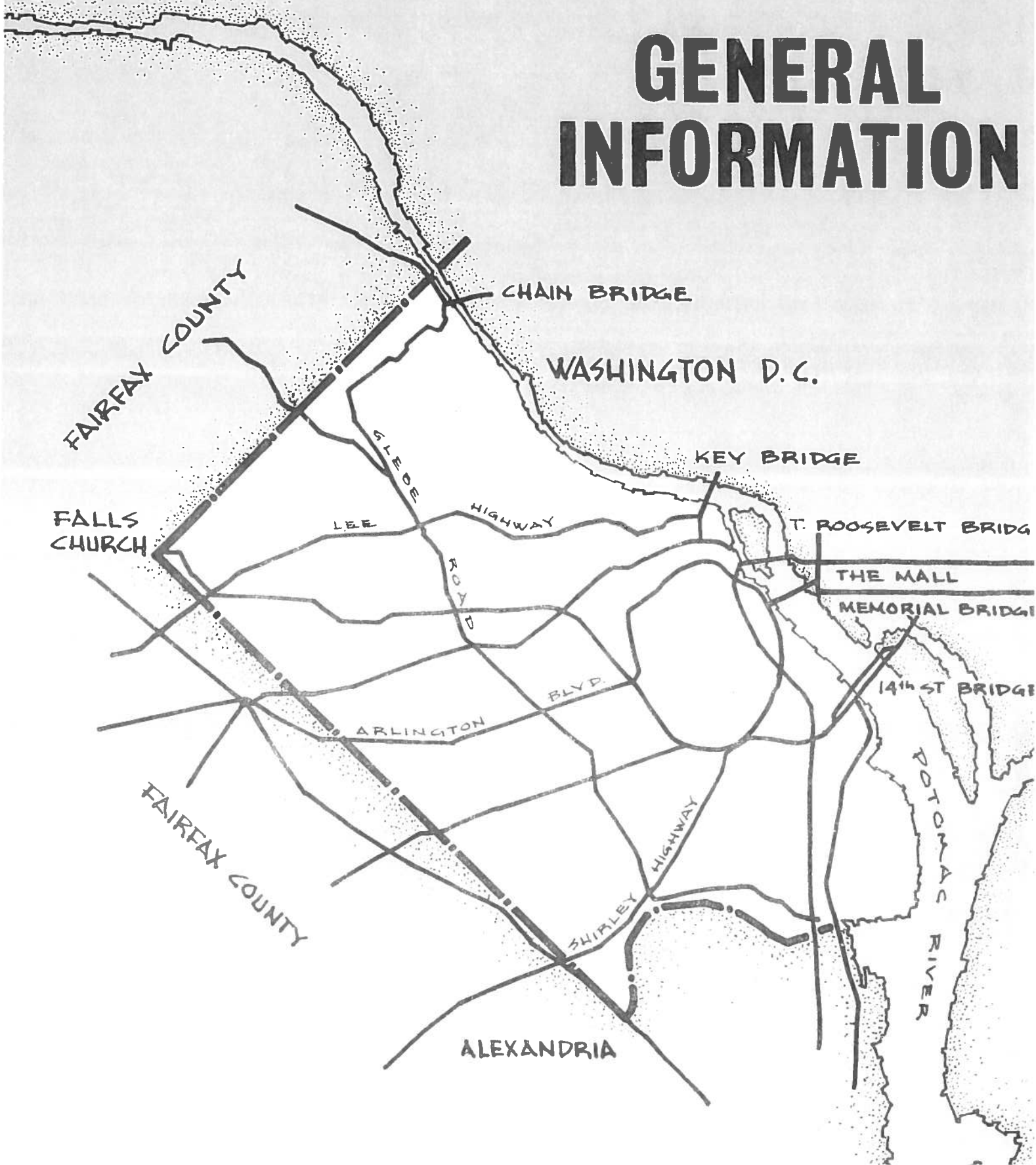


# NEIGHBORHOOD CONSERVATION PROGRAM ARLINGTON COUNTY, VIRGINIA

## GENERAL INFORMATION





## INTRODUCTION

It is becoming increasingly critical for communities to take active measures to maintain urban stability. Within this recognition, it is a widely accepted objective to contain, arrest and eliminate the influences of urban decay at the neighborhood level while they are still controllable.

While the objectives of "neighborhood conservation" are generally similar among communities, the final forms that the respective programs take vary considerably. No single type of program suits all problems. One community, for example, may institute its neighborhood conservation program as one type of treatment in a larger, comprehensive urban renewal program. The other types of treatment in the overall renewal program could include rehabilitation, land clearance and redevelopment.

Another community, or the same community in another neighborhood, may choose a less formal conservation "campaign" which is designed for, and hinges entirely upon, private initiative and participation. Such campaigns urge the residents to upgrade their own properties.

Another community may create a joint public-private conservation effort without formal urban renewal procedure. In such programs, public participation may take the form of technical assistance, financial assistance and other incentives.

There are probably as many variations of neighborhood conservation programs as there are communities claiming to have them. One type is not necessarily better than another and each is only as good as its effectiveness in accomplishing the objectives.

The purpose of this report is to describe the joint public-private neighborhood conservation program which has been established in Arlington County, Virginia. In discussing the function of the program, the following areas will be covered:

1. Pertinent characteristics and problems of Arlington County.
2. Particular objectives of the conservation program, the relationship of those objectives to the community problems, and the resulting criteria.
3. Experience of the program to date.

## COMMUNITY CHARACTERISTICS RELATED TO RESIDENTIAL CONSERVATION

Arlington, an urban Virginia county of twenty-five square miles, lies across the Potomac River and to the southwest of the Nation's Capitol. It is bounded on the south by the City of Alexandria, on the west and north by Fairfax County and the City of Falls Church. Because of its unique geographic position among these jurisdictions, Arlington contains vital access routes and bridges across the Potomac River to the major metropolitan employment center in the District of Columbia.

Primarily a residential community, Arlington offers a wide variety of living conditions from modest single-family and multi-family units to some of the metropolitan area's higher-value homes and luxury high-rise apartments. No large concentrations of dilapidated homes have been found such as might be found near the core of the nation's major cities. The 1960 Census of Population indicated only 309 of the total 56,949 housing units to be dilapidated, though others need attention.

The eight or ten areas of Arlington's lower-value housing, which show some degree of deterioration, can be characterized as older residential neighborhoods with (1) some problems in lot layout such as narrow width, inordinate depth or double frontage; (2) a high percentage of sub-standard streets without curb or gutter and (3) a large percentage of older frame structures. Most of these neighborhoods are zoned predominantly for single-family residential use and are anticipated by the General Land Use Plan to remain in this use.

Arlington's early residential development was largely of frame construction frequently in some proximity to cross-roads type business establishments scattered through the County.

The County's growth to about 180,000 people has been largely the result of migration since 1920 when the population was about 16,000. In 1940 the population was about 57,000 and many brick residences were evident. During the period between 1940 and 1950, a 137 percent increase (78,500 persons) flooded Arlington County with new residences, taking up a good part of the developable vacant land.

This sudden residential boom, resulting in the construction of substantial brick homes and garden apartments on close-in land, tended to halt the process of creeping deterioration which often occurs at the fringe of early commercial development. A 1962 field check of all of the residential structures in Arlington County showed that, of these concentrations having deterioration problems, only two were substantially contiguous to commercial development.

Following this boom, the increased demand to live close-by the District of Columbia and the shortage of developable land caused Arlington's raw land values to skyrocket. Faced with these problems (demand, shortage and high prices), developers turned to higher-value apartments looking first to development on the remaining vacant tracts and then to redevelopment in older residential areas where the owners might be willing to sell and land costs might not be prohibitive.

During the period 1950-1960, the population increased twenty-one percent to 163,000 and the emphasis on the type of living units built began to change from single-family dwellings to apartments. By 1960 nearly fifty percent of Arlington's population was housed in multi-family units.

The demand for suitable land for apartments created a strong pressure to tear down the lower-value homes and replace these with higher density residential development. Yet it was evident that sound, single-family neighborhoods of older, frame residences could also yield to this apartment reuse, often resulting in spotty impacting development.

Actions of two unrelated groups have bearing on this redevelopment: (1) the individual property owners who might decide to sell (more frequently absentee-owners) and (2) the County Board who would decide, through Land Use Plan modification and rezoning, whether the proposed use was appropriate. It seems equally evident that the expressed consensus of a neighborhood which is adjacent to the proposed land re-use could be an influential third force related to the question.

A strong, properly organized neighborhood organization, then, becomes a positive factor in residential conservation in older areas which are threatened with deterioration.

Aside from this neighborhood self-determining influence, Arlington, as a community, possesses strong feelings of individual responsibility. Private citizens, through special committees, have been involved in community affairs dealing with varied problems such as welfare, government, housing and education. Business has established its voice through such organizations as the Chamber of Commerce and the Apartment Owners Association.

The County Board, as a result of this citizen stimulation and of prudent management, has been able to establish an enviable national record in their educational system, dramatic growth in high quality office and apartment buildings and a notable increase in public services without a major increase in taxes. In 1958, one facet of this independent responsibility was demonstrated when the question of activating an urban renewal authority was defeated at the polls. It appeared that Arlington people wanted to take care of their housing problems within the framework of their own County Government.

These are a few of Arlington's characteristics which appear related to the problems of deterioration; no one characteristic seems decisive in suggesting the path a corrective program should take. Rapid population expansion affected the character of the physical growth and deterioration of Arlington. The fact that the major employment is centered in adjacent Washington, D. C. offers a partial explanation for the lack of industrial development and the increasing demand on Arlington's major routes of transportation, but offers little positive guidance for residential conservation.

The economic viability of the community along with a strong spirit of individualism have more tangible bearing on the course of Arlington's conservation efforts. These, together with the continued demand for living units close to the metropolitan core, the shortage of vacant land, the increase in land values, and the subsequent pressure for apartments in lower-value areas, form some foundation on which to build a residential conservation program acceptable to Arlington County.

## OBJECTIVES AND THEIR APPLICATION TO THE PROBLEM

In 1963 the Arlington County Planning Commission created a special committee to review the problem of deterioration in some of the older residential areas, and to present proposals for a positive program to help conserve those areas.

The committee recognized at the outset that the immediate situation in Arlington warranted a conservation effort, not formal urban renewal, as indicated in 1958 when the proposal to activate an urban renewal authority was defeated at the polls and in 1961 when the County Board considered and rejected the proposal to place the issue again before the voters.

In their consideration of the problem, the committee was greatly influenced by characteristics of the community and, within this framework, attempted to establish realistic objectives. The broad objective of the conservation program was to stop deterioration in older residential areas where the citizenry within that neighborhood indicated sufficient desire to assure private maintenance and to achieve an improved neighborhood living environment through private and public works.

It was the committee's feeling that any successful conservation effort in Arlington would have to be initiated by representative citizens in the neighborhood involved and supported by some commitment on their part. This, in the committee's view, would have several important results.

First, the time and effort expended by the neighborhood on initiating this program would provide evidence that they had a high degree of interest in conserving the single-family residential character of their area. This evidence of interest would be substantiated further by a neighborhood commitment to participate in private and public improvements.

Second, this citizen participation, which would involve some inventory and evaluation of neighborhood characteristics and desires, would provide complimentary benefits to both the neighborhood and the County in terms of identity, cohesiveness and purpose.

It was the consensus of the committee that part of the neighborhood commitment would involve the preparation and presentation of a plan which would inventory the neighborhood and propose changes for its improvement. The County commitment, in addition to staff help in plan preparation, would be a response to the neighborhood proposals involving public improvements, such as curb, gutter and paving, and participation in costs.

To create incentive for the conservation program, it was felt that this share of public improvement costs allocated to the individual property owners in the neighborhood should be as favorable as any of the other County programs providing the same improvements.

In addition to the broad objective, many less tangible benefits accruing from the conservation program could be termed objectives when related to the development of human resources. For example, the participation of the individuals within a neighborhood, a key to the program's success, would develop responsible leadership, an awareness of the neighborhood and its problems, an increased knowledge of County government and some understanding of community growth. In this respect, the ultimate product of improved physical conditions would be improved citizen action. This would be demonstrated in the citizens' collective attempt to achieve a more stable and desirable living environment, and thus better homes.

After nearly twelve months study, including numerous conferences with the Planning Commission and with neighborhood groups vitally interested in residential conservation, a proposed program was presented to the County Board for their approval. On July 25, 1964, following public hearings, the County Board adopted criteria for conservation projects which formulated legislative policy for Arlington's Residential Conservation Program. The criteria generally followed the guidelines recommended by the Planning Commission. In this document the County Board established restrictive minimums in acreage and participation, general procedures, and a financing policy for street improvements. To implement the program, the Board established a budget item of \$150,000 for the Conservation Program for the fiscal year 1964-1965 (subsequently increased by \$250,000 for the following fiscal year).

Criteria as adopted in 1964, and revised in 1965, are as follows:

### CRITERIA FOR NEIGHBORHOOD CONSERVATION PROJECTS

Conservation of residential areas in Arlington is essential to the realization of comprehensive planning goals for our community. This is especially true for older maturing neighborhoods. Success requires a coordinated cooperative effort between owners of private property and public agencies. Concern for the good health of an entire neighborhood is the focus of the program. Aggressive development of homemaker skills, home improvement plans, neighborhood cohesiveness, and public facilities, executed together, create an attractive living environment.

Each neighborhood, a minimum of about 25 acres with defined features, in the County is eligible to participate. It qualifies by demonstrating its wish to engage in a program of self-improvement. County staff will assist citizens to prepare a Neighborhood Plan. After the County Board has approved the Neighborhood Plan it will share in financing.

**NEIGHBORHOOD PARTICIPATION.** Evidence of neighborhood efforts to improve maintenance standards include:

1. Initiative in securing sound maintenance standards for private property,
2. Efforts to establish neighborhood cleanliness and attractiveness,
3. Activity of a citizen neighborhood organization to achieve these ends and help them endure.

**APPROVED NEIGHBORHOOD PLAN.** The County will participate in financing the improvements following the adoption of a Neighborhood Plan. Cost estimates for improvements will be developed by the County staff. Such a plan should, at a minimum, consist of:

1. Detailed land use, including public lands and facilities, consistent with approved Land Use Plan,
2. Local street and right of way alignment and width,
3. Public utilities and drainage,
4. Plan of private neighborhood improvement.

Following County Board adoption of a Neighborhood Plan, the County will accept petitions for curb and gutter representing the owners of 75% or more of the frontage without curb and gutter of both sides of any given block, or of not less than a 500' length of longer blocks, with the understanding that the entire block or 500' length of the curb and gutter and or sidewalk will be constructed as a single project.

#### FINANCING POLICY FOR STREET IMPROVEMENTS

1. The cost of grading the sidewalk right of way, curb and gutter construction, and incidental work such as driveway entrances, will be shared; 50% by the owner and 50% by the County. On corner lots the County will assume 75% of the cost of the long lot line construction not to exceed 150 feet. The County pays 100% of the cost of all repair work on the street side of the curb and drainage as well as landscape restoration.
2. If the owners of logical associated frontage desire sidewalk as a part of the program, it can be included at the cost of the property owners.
3. Where it is determined by the County Board, sidewalk may be added as a part of the plan, financed as in #1 above.
4. Assessment projects will be considered by the County Board to permit payment, of the owner-share, in cash within 60 days or in four equal annual payments with interest at 6%, as under the February 8, 1962 policy.
5. Property owners will furnish at no cost, the right of way needed to provide approved street widths slope and drainage easments as required. The owner shall be compensated if this required street right-of-way depth exceeds 8 feet.
6. The financing policy does not change policy for other programs of County street improvements.



## PROGRAMS IN PROGRESS

The first neighborhood to become involved in this conservation program was Arlington View, a small community located in the southern sector of Arlington County. This 62-acre neighborhood consists of about 300 dwelling units housing about 1,000 residents and is somewhat isolated from other residential development. Bounded on the north by heavily traveled Columbia Pike and Washington Boulevard, on the east by the broad right-of-way for Shirley Highway, on the south by Army-Navy Country Club, the neighborhood's only association with other residential properties is on the west, where relatively new apartment construction has been developed.

It is an area characterized by mixed conditions. Roughly ten percent of its area is developed in apartments, forty percent in substantial single-family residences (not including an additional 20 percent which is sparsely developed with less desirable houses), and about thirty percent is taken by street right-of-way and schools. Street right-of-way width in the area varies from a sub-marginal 16.5 feet to an acceptable fifty feet and approximately eighty percent of existing street frontage has no curb or gutter. Values of improved residential properties in the area range from virtually nothing to roughly \$30,000 and family incomes range from less than \$1,000 per family to more than \$20,000.

This Arlington View area had been left undetermined on the General Land Use Plan prior to the initiation of the conservation program pending the results of a more detailed study. At that time, there had been some indication of interest for apartment development on the marginally developed ten acres facing Washington Boulevard.

Arlington View involvement in the neighborhood conservation program started before the program became established. This community was eager to retain its predominant single-family character and demonstrated this desire by working closely with the special committee of the Planning Commission in developing a community conservation program. Their willingness to participate in such a program was substantiated not only by the many hours spent supporting the Planning Commission effort but also by tangible improvements of remodeling, rehabilitation and new construction apparent throughout their community.

During the hearing scheduled by the County Board for adoption of criteria for neighborhood projects, the Arlington View community presented a plan to the Board for neighborhood improvement. This plan requested a land use determination for single family residences on the greatest portion of their area, for apartment use on those tracts already developed for apartments, and open space for publicly owned land, leaving undetermined only the ten-acre tract along Washington Boulevard. In addition, the plan proposed street widening, development of cul-de-sacs for dead-end streets, and curb, gutter and sidewalk in most of the area. In their objective, they commented that continuous progress relies heavily upon two factors: physical environment and human resources, and that one contributes to the other.

Following the approval of the Arlington View plan, the County Board authorized a revision of the General Land Use Plan to reflect the essence of the neighborhood proposal. The neighborhood then proceeded to develop specific projects within their area for subsequent County Board review. The first project approved by the County Board included street widening and curb, gutter and sidewalk construction and on June 26, 1965, a ground-breaking ceremony was held at Arlington View to herald the beginning of Arlington County's first neighborhood conservation project under this program.

Following the County Board adoption of the criteria for neighborhood projects, two other neighborhoods developed plans under the Neighborhood Conservation Program: Hall's Hill and Maywood, both of which are located in north Arlington adjacent to Lee Highway.

The Hall's Hill neighborhood inventoried their area covering such items as use of land, zoning, population characteristics, housing, and street conditions. Working with the Committee for Conservation of Residential areas and with Arlington County staff members, Hall's Hill developed their neighborhood plan showing the existing situation and proposing major zoning changes in the area, new street construction, development of a highway park, and curb, gutter and sidewalk improvements throughout the area. Following County Board approval of their plan on February 13, 1965, zoning proposals were scheduled for public hearings. The first construction project requested by Hall's Hill involved one street relocation and construction to connect two segments of a disconnected street. At this time, after working with a developer in the area, the County Board has authorized the requested street relocation and staff work is proceeding on developing street alignment and acquisition of property to accomplish the street connection.

A carefully prepared neighborhood plan for the Maywood area was approved by the County Board on March 20, 1965. A tangible value of the plan was established soon after its approval when a rezoning request, conflicting with the neighborhood plan, was denied by the County Board. The first project proposed by the neighborhood for street widening, curb, gutter and sidewalk involves the construction of a major storm sewer in the area. After the County receives the necessary easements for this storm sewer construction and the required neighborhood signatures for street improvement, Maywood will be ready for its first neighborhood improvement project.

In general, the results of the Neighborhood Conservation Program to date have proved most successful. Older residential areas, pressured by apartment encroachment and structural deterioration, have been able to organize and establish a consensus that their basic single-family character should be retained. In doing this, the people within these neighborhoods have developed a stronger identity with their community, have learned much about their own neighborhood and about the workings of County government and have come to grips with the essential element of successful neighborhood conservation—the individual's neighborhood and community responsibility.

Several additional neighborhoods have indicated their interest in this program and it is anticipated that they will become actively involved at an early date. To date it appears that the concept and mechanics of the Neighborhood Conservation Program are developing a high degree of private-public cooperation, a vital ingredient in modern complex community government.

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