

BROOKLAND: A CASE STUDY IN HISTORIC DISTRICT PLANNING

A Thesis

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by

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ABSTRACT

This thesis uses the Brookland neighborhood in Washington, D.C. as a case study to demonstrate that successful preservation and planning initiatives must be designed and executed to reflect the context of individual communities and neighborhoods. The debate over whether to support a historic district nomination in Brookland in 2005 provides an example of how outreach strategies for such initiatives can fail if they do not take into consideration the neighborhood's political and social climate. In Brookland, many long-time residents have lived through years of fighting against outside interventions that do not necessarily put the interests of the existing community as the top priority. First and foremost, the Brookland community is well known throughout the city and beyond for the unified front of residents that fought for several years in the 1960s and 1970s to keep a freeway from running through the neighborhood, displacing residents and cutting off the neighborhood from points west in the city. The success of the Brookland freeway fight has effectively become a creation myth for the progressive, integrated, and unified Brookland, an image of which new and old neighborhood residents are proud. Since the freeway fight, Brookland residents have become known for their tendency to rally together time and again to make their interests known to the city and to demand for increased community involvement in planning and development initiatives. In 2005, a group of residents and non-residents associated with an unpopular community organization sought to propose a historic district nomination for Brookland and initiated outreach efforts for the cause. Opponents of the nomination were able to fight against the historic district and its proponents by preying on well-known sensitivities in the community that developed during and since the freeway fight, including mistrust of the city government and outside interventions. The opponents were also able to take

advantage of underlying racial sensitivities and fears of gentrification, exposing a side of Brookland inconsistent with the image of integration, stability, and solidarity of which many of its residents are so proud. Opponents of the nomination broke from the template of community unification and educated dissidence that drove successful activism in Brookland in the past. The opponents attacked people within their own community, labeling them as outsiders and conspirators, and spread misinformation to confuse and scare their fellow residents. To discuss the implications of the Brookland historic district debate, this thesis: develops the community context that has developed over years of community activism; presents past preservation activity in Brookland and the activities surrounding the proposed historic district nomination; presents the events of the historic district debate in Brookland in 2005; discusses the tactics of the opposition to the historic district; and relates the success and failures of the opponents and proponents to use the community context to develop their respective strategies. This thesis uses extensive primary documentation to develop the stories surrounding Brookland's historic and present activism, including numerous interviews with Brookland and Washington residents, elected city officials, and city government staff, as well as a compilation of online forum postings from the Brookland listserv, meeting minutes, e-mail correspondence, and outreach materials from opponents and proponents of the nomination.

BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

Carrie Barton was born and raised in the City of Maryville in east Tennessee. She graduated from Maryville High School in May 2000 and enrolled at Vanderbilt University in Nashville, Tennessee the following fall. She studied civil engineering with a concentration in structures for four years and graduated from Vanderbilt with a Bachelors of Engineering degree and minor in art history in May 2006. During Carrie's junior year at Vanderbilt, she became interested in the field of historic preservation, and during her senior year, she designed and completed an individual senior project on the rehabilitation of the Bishop Joseph Johnson Black Cultural Center on Vanderbilt University's campus. She enrolled in the Historic Preservation Planning program at Cornell University in the fall of 2004. After finishing her graduate course work in 2006, she started a career at EHT Traceries, Inc., in Washington, DC, where she continues to work as a historic preservation consultant. Carrie currently resides in Arlington, Virginia.

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INTRODUCTION

The subject of historic district designation is met with a variety of reactions from neighborhoods, their communities, and their residents: curiosity, fear, relief, resistance, anger, ambivalence, gratitude, pride, and so on. As such, opposition to formal designation is nothing new to preservation advocates, who have spent decades developing methods for addressing the various questions and concerns that arise when designation is considered. In Washington, D.C., numerous attempts to designate historic districts have failed and succeeded throughout the city, and preservation advocates have seen all types of support for and resistance to formal historic preservation measures. This thesis discusses a single story of resistance to historic district designation that took place in 2005 in Brookland, a neighborhood located in the northeast quadrant of the city.

With so many other communities that have opposed designation throughout Washington, D.C., what makes the opposition to a historic district in the neighborhood of Brookland worth discussing? Is it because Brookland presents a unique architectural landscape, unique socioeconomic character, or unique history of development? No. In fact, many may perceive Brookland as typical rather than unique. Brookland's architecture reflects common patterns and styles seen throughout other 'suburban' neighborhoods in the city. It is a middle-class neighborhood predominantly composed of African American residents, and it is located in a city that is proud of its many middle-class African American communities. Brookland, like much of Washington, D.C., is a neighborhood shaped by a history of transportation development, segregation and integration, economic booms and busts, and generations of long-term residents and newcomers.

What makes Brookland and its resistance to historic district designation worth discussing is not the unique character of the neighborhood or the unique character of such a struggle. It is the typical nature of Brookland's story and its ability to show how a seemingly typical community with a seemingly typical dilemma must still be approached with attention to the community's perception of what makes the situation unique. Although a neighborhood may represent a typical combination of physical, socioeconomic, and historic characteristics, every community presents challenges and opportunities shaped by a unique context in which historic preservation is perceived. In the case of Brookland, there are two primary contexts that must be understood in order to effectively approach the subject of historic district designation: the context of community control and the context of community identity. This thesis uses a single case study in Brookland to illustrate the importance of developing a unique context for a typical dilemma—opposition to formal preservation designation—by analyzing the failures of the outreach strategy for the proposed historic district nomination in Brookland.

The methodology for gathering the information needed to recount and examine the historic district debate in Brookland included archival research, field research, and oral and written interviews. Archival research included both primary and secondary sources including preservation laws and regulations for the District of Columbia, minutes and notes from Advisory Neighborhood Commission (ANC) proceedings and other public meetings, outreach materials created and produced by opponents and proponents of designation, United States Census Bureau data, newspaper articles, historic resource surveys, and various previous studies on the architecture, demographics, and history of Brookland. Numerous interviews were conducted between November 2005 and October 2007 with Brookland residents, elected officials

representing Brookland and surrounding jurisdictions, District of Columbia Historic Preservation Office staff, District of Columbia Historic Preservation Review Board chairman Tersh Boasberg, and other DC residents involved in the Brookland debate.

Throughout this study, one of the most important sources of information about the various angles of the debate was the Brookland Listserv (Yahoo!®), which contained hundreds of postings related to the proposed historic district designation and historic preservation in general over a period of three months in June, July, and August of 2005. These postings provide a relatively new source of information that is invaluable to the examination of people's perceptions about preservation, as well as the various tactics that opponents and proponents use to argue and further their positions. The compilation and analysis of these posts also provides a helpful opportunity to study the role that online communication plays in community discussions and debates, as well as the unique challenges that this form of communication creates related to misinformation, slander, and accountability.

To begin the detailed case study on Brookland, Chapter 1 presents a brief history of the neighborhood to provide a context for the later chapters, as well as background information related to the physical and socioeconomic characteristics of the Brookland neighborhood, both past and present. Chapter 2 provides several examples of the previous struggles that Brookland has gone through as an illustration of the community's history of activism. This includes brief histories related to the Newton Theater, the Brooks Mansion, the North Central Freeway, WMATA development, and struggles related to drugs and crime. Chapter 3 provides brief descriptions of the previous studies that have been conducted on the Brookland neighborhood, including

a 1977 dissertation, a 1979 book, a 1987 Phase I historic resources survey, and the most recent 2001 Phase II historic resources survey. This chapter presents a discussion of these passive preservation activities to provide a foundation for the interest in preservation designation in Brookland. Chapter 4 presents a detailed account of the 2005 historic district debate to illustrate how opponents to preservation designation were able to mobilize residents against the proposed nomination. Primary sources including meeting minutes, listserv postings, and interviews provide perspectives from both sides of the debate. Chapter 5 provides an analysis of the opposition to historic district designation in Brookland by examining the tactics used by opponents as presented in Chapter 4. Chapter 6 provides an analysis of the context of opposition by drawing from the histories presented in Chapters 1 and 2, the events recounted in Chapters 3 and 4, and the successes and failures of tactics as presented in Chapter 5.

CHAPTER 1: AN INTRODUCTION TO BROOKLAND

Introduction

Brookland is a small neighborhood of approximately 5,000 residents located in the northeastern quadrant of the City of Washington in the District of Columbia. Over the last century, the neighborhood has evolved from a predominantly white middle class community into a predominantly African American middle class community while maintaining religious ties to the adjacent Catholic University of America.

Although Brookland is an urban neighborhood in the City of Washington, it has a distinctively small-town feel owing to its spacious development patterns and architectural character. Single-family detached homes aligned along the tree-lined streets with a well-defined commercial strip at the heart of the neighborhood have existed since Brookland's beginnings as an early-twentieth century streetcar neighborhood.

Along with the physical characteristics of Brookland, the neighborhood is also defined by its combination of social characteristics. Since the middle of the twentieth century, Brookland has been a predominantly African American community. The education levels of Brooklanders have always been relatively high, and the neighborhood's average household income reflects a strong middle-class presence. Also, in a city under siege by transients, Brookland has a relatively large senior citizen population and long residency period. Because of these social characteristics and its distinctive atmosphere, Brookland has long been dubbed the "next real estate hot spot" in the city.

Location and Setting

Brookland is an approximately 500-acre area located in the northeastern quadrant of the City of Washington in the District of Columbia. The boundaries for the neighborhood can be approximated as: Rhode Island Avenue, NE, to the south; Michigan Avenue and Randolph Street, NE, to the north; 14th and 18th streets, NE, to the east; and 10th Street, NE, and the B&O railroad tracks to the west. Brookland is composed of United States Census Bureau tracts 93.01 and 93.02 and portions of tracts 95.03 and 95.04.¹ Brookland is surrounded by neighborhoods of Michigan Park to the north, Michigan Park North to the northeast, Woodridge to the east, Langdon to the southeast, and Edgewood to the southwest. The relationships between Brookland and the other neighborhoods around it are shown in Figures 1-1, 1-2, and 1-3. The neighborhood is in close proximity to The Catholic University of America and Trinity University, both of which are located across the railroad tracks to the west. The closest rapid transit station is the Brookland/CUA Metro station, located on the neighborhood's west side. The neighborhood's primary commercial corridor runs along 12th Street, with most commercial activity concentrated between Otis Street to the north and Lawrence Street to the south. The residential character of the neighborhood is defined by single-family dwellings, two-family dwellings, and rowhouses, with few apartment buildings. Most residential lots are spacious, and a majority of the residential blocks are not divided by alleys, resulting in many sizeable front setbacks and rear lawns. Most residential streets accommodate two-way traffic and street parking, adding to the spacious character of the neighborhood.

¹ Using Michigan Avenue and Taylor Street, NE, to form the northern border incorporates part of the original University Heights subdivision into Brookland neighborhood and includes portions of Census tracts 95.04 and 95.03. However, a majority of the land included in those additional Census tracts is now considered part of the Michigan Park neighborhood. Therefore, only tracts 93.01 and 93.02 are included in any demographic analysis of Brookland in this chapter. Most demographics of Census tract 93.01 closely resemble those of both excluded Census tracts. One major exception is the percentage of owner-occupied housing, which differs greatly in tracts 95.04, 95.03, and 93.01 (54.2%, 92.3% and 81.6%, respectively).

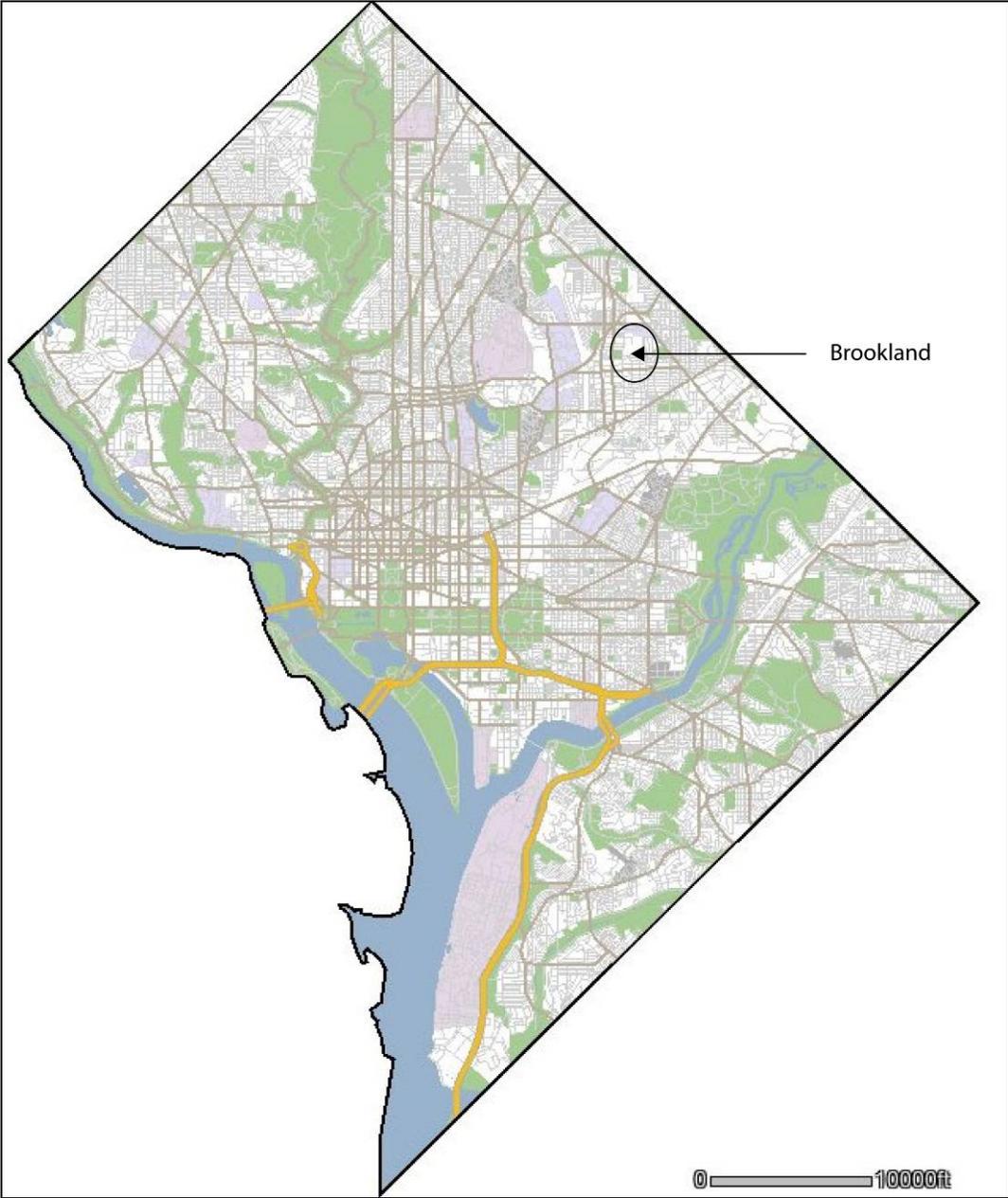


Figure 1-1: Map of Washington, D.C., showing location of Brookland (base image courtesy of DC GIS, www.dc.gov)

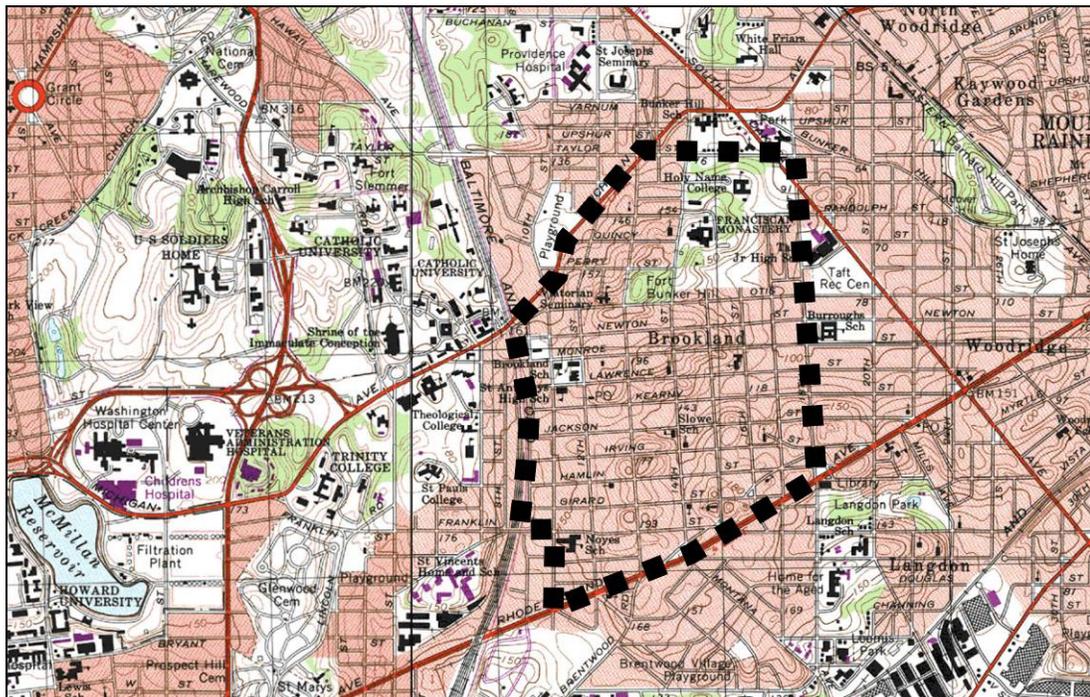


Figure 2-2: Brookland and surrounding areas (base image courtesy of U.S. Geological Survey, Washington West, D.C.-MD-VA, revised 1983)

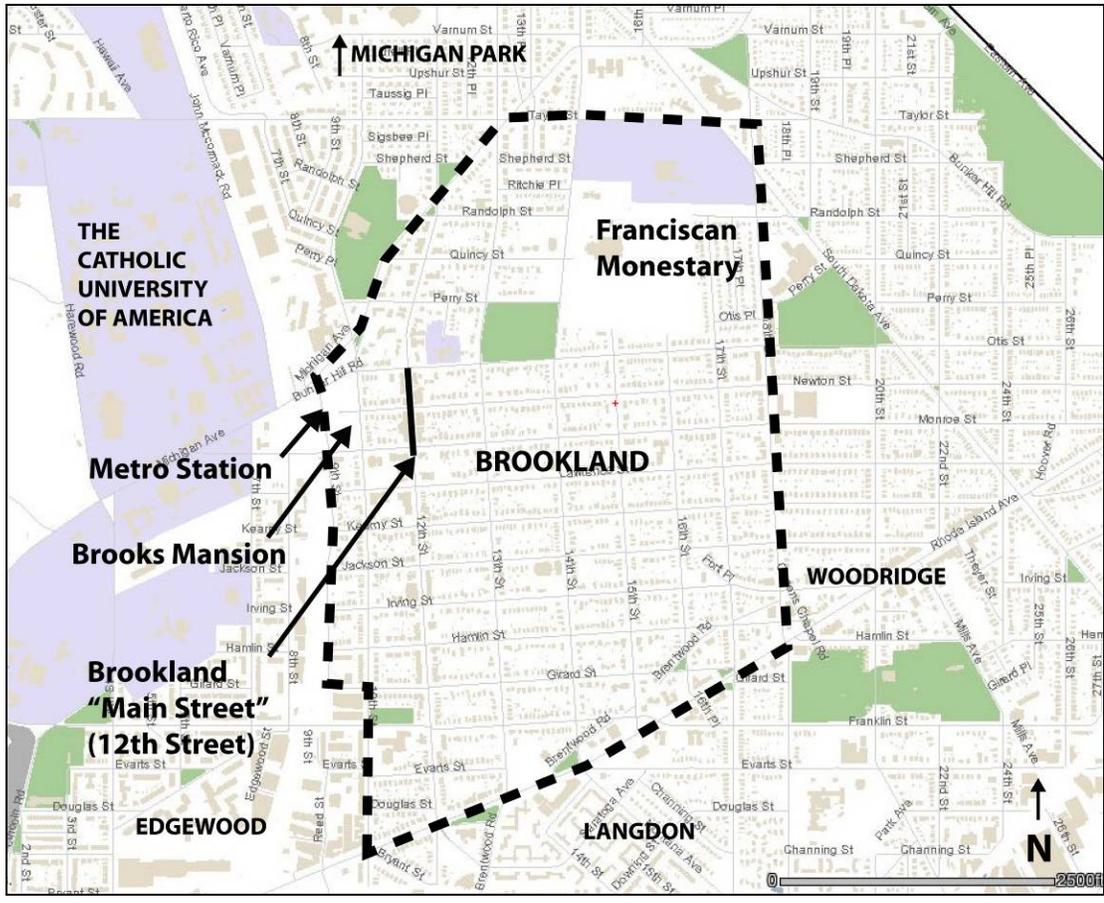


Figure 1-3: Map of Brookland and Surrounding Areas (base image courtesy of DC GIS, www.dc.gov)



Figure 1-4: Brookland Street and Property Map (base image courtesy of DC GIS, www.dc.gov)

A Brief History of Brookland

Present-day Brookland was once part of land granted to George Calvert, the first Lord Baltimore, by King Charles I in the 17th century. Eventually becoming part of the estate of Richard Marsham, the land was cleared and used for agriculture for almost two centuries. In the early 1800s, Nicholas Queen, the owner of Queen's Hotel in the Federal City, married into the family of John M. Wright, the great grandson of Mr. Marsham. Queen inherited a large portion of his family's property and gave 150 acres of his estate to his daughter Anne in the 1830s when she married Colonel Jehiel Brooks, a lawyer, farmer, and veteran of the War of 1812.² Between 1836 and 1840, Colonel Brooks built a modest brick Greek Revival house for his wife, originally named "Bellair." Now known as the Brooks Mansion, the house is located on the present-day intersection of Monroe and 10th Streets, NE, and remains the oldest extant dwelling in Brookland.

After Colonel Brooks' death in 1886, his heirs sold the remaining 134-acre estate to Ida U. Marshall, who granted Benjamin Leighton and Richard Pairo the right to subdivide the property.³ Development of residential properties was gradual until around 1910 when a large number of federal workers were attracted to the rural character and low housing costs in the area. It was also around this time that the Brookland Citizens' Association and other local residents successfully lobbied for streetcar service from Washington City into the center of Brookland. The new streetcar line proved to be a catalyst for residential and commercial development.⁴ As

² George W. McDaniel and John N. Pearce, eds, *Images of Brookland: The History and Architecture of a Washington Suburb*. GW Washington Studies No. 10, Center for Washington Area Studies at George Washington University: 1982.

³ Robert Verrey, Laura Henley, and Judith Capen, "Report of Results of the Brookland Community/Catholic University Historic Resources Survey, Northeast Washington, D.C.," 1987, filed in the District of Columbia Historic Preservation Office, accessed January 12, 2006.

⁴ Street railway service had been available to the area via the City and Suburban Company since the late 19th century, with stations within walking distance of Brookland. However, it was not until between

a result, “Brookland began to function in part as an urban neighborhood” between 1910 and 1920.⁵



Figure 1-5: Brooks Mansion, 2008

Another major factor in the growth of Brookland was the opening of The Catholic University of America (CUA), which began instruction in 1889. The institution brought students and professors to the neighborhood, as well as numerous Catholic orders. These orders were not directly associated with CUA but located in the immediate area to take advantage of the university.⁶ By 1927, at least thirteen

1908 and 1910 that service was extended “into the heart of Brookland.” Tracks were extended across the B&O Railroad tracks on the Monroe Street Bridge to 12th Street and north on 12th Street to Randolph Street. (McDaniel et al., 14).

⁵ McDaniel et al., 3.

⁶ Verrey et al., 197.

Catholic houses of study and religious orders had been established in the greater Brookland area, and the Catholic tone of the neighborhood gave Brookland its historic nickname, “Little Rome.”⁷

Residential development in Brookland reached its peak between 1910 and 1930.

During this time there was also clustered commercial development around the new streetcar line. An area along 12th Street, between Monroe and Newton Streets, became the neighborhood’s primary commercial corridor. Most business owners on 12th Street were Brookland residents who had a role and interest in seeing the commercial center succeed, and were representative of the surrounding ethnically diverse community.⁸

As in the majority of the city, the prominence of federal workers residing in Brookland insulated the area from the financial disinvestment that resulted in most American cities during the Depression due to overall job retention, and commercial growth continued in the neighborhood through the 1930s and 1940s. It was not until the effects of suburbanization after World War II that disinvestment began to plague the 12th Street commercial corridor.⁹

Throughout its early periods of growth, the neighborhood maintained a white, middle-class character: the racial make-up of the neighborhood did not begin to substantially change until after the 1930s. Despite being a predominantly white neighborhood in the first half of the twentieth century, Brookland is known as one of the few historically integrated communities in DC. Other than a few known instances of racially restrictive covenants, it is not apparent whether there were any other overt efforts at racial segregation of residences in Brookland; African American families

⁷ Verrey et al., 199.

⁸ McDaniel et al., 21.

⁹ McDaniel et al., 22.

and white families resided on the same blocks and on the same sides of the street. However, there were trends of residential clustering at the time, with more black households concentrated in the south Brookland area below Monroe Street.¹⁰ The most recent housing demographics of Brookland given in Table 1-1 show that this clustering still exists, with the largest African American population residing in Census tract 93.02, located at the southern end of the neighborhood.

Institutional segregation in the neighborhood was much more explicit, primarily in schools and recreation centers as guided by federal Jim Crow laws, but also in local social organizations such as the Brookland Citizens' Association. It was not until the 1960s that the integrated Brookland Neighborhood Civic Association was established to give both white and black residents a forum for dealing with everyday concerns of the community.¹¹

After World War II most of the new residential construction took place on the remaining vacant land. While the racial make-up of the neighborhood became more balanced, other demographics such as education level and class remained stable; as middle-class white families were moving out, upper- and middle-class black families were moving in.¹² Many African Americans moving into Brookland at this time were professionals, including physicians and professors at CUA. Some notable African Americans who lived in Brookland include Nobel Peace Prize winner Ralph J. Bunche, former Secretary of the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development

¹⁰ Verrey et al., 202.

¹¹ McDaniel, et al., 32. This trend of integrated "civic" associations co-existing with or replacing segregated "citizens'" associations was common in DC. Most "citizens'" associations historically did not allow Black participation, and organizations that did allow Black members often had to meet in private homes or in churches since schools and community centers were often segregated, as well.

¹² Verrey et al., 204.

Robert Weaver, singer Pearl Bailey, and former Senator Edward Brooke of Massachusetts.¹³

Since 1960, Brookland has faced several threats to its small-town character and to the quality of life of its residents. These threats include the planned construction of a freeway through the neighborhood, the recurring threat of the demolition of the Brooks Mansion, and the continuous struggles over development around the Brookland-CUA Metro Station.¹⁴ Brookland has fought to maintain control over the fate of the neighborhood for several decades, but has been unable to control effects of other social and economic issues in its communities. For instance, although local advocates were able keep a freeway from dividing Brookland, many business owners and professionals had already moved out of the neighborhood during the time when freeway construction seemed inevitable. This minor exodus, in conjunction with increases in local crime levels, has caused an overall decrease in investment and commercial activity in the neighborhood over the last forty years, making the revitalization of 12th Street a continuing challenge.¹⁵

Housing

A majority of Brookland's housing has existed since the early stages of the neighborhood's development, with 56% of units having been constructed before 1940. Over 90% of units were constructed before 1960, which shows the relatively small amount of change in the neighborhood's physical character in over forty years. Adding to its suburban character, almost two-thirds of residences in Brookland are detached single-family units, and only 15% of housing consists of two or more units.

¹³ McDaniel et al., 27.

¹⁴ These issues will be discussed at length in Chapter 2.

¹⁵ McDaniel et al., 31.

As Table 1-1 shows, most of the multiple-unit housing is concentrated in Census Tract 93.02; only 8% of housing in Census Tract 93.01 consists of more than two units. The median value of housing in Brookland is \$139,809, which is approximately 11% less than the average housing value citywide. Brookland housing also shows relative stability in residency with over 25% of housing units being occupied by the same householder for at least 30 years. One of the most unique characteristics of housing in Brookland is the high percentage of owner-occupied units, which at 75% is almost twice as high as the citywide percentage.

Table 1-1: Comparative Housing Data for Census Tracts in Brookland 16			
	Tract 93.01	Tract 93.02	Brookland Total
Total housing units	1215	567	1782
Median housing value	\$144,200	\$130,400	\$139,809
% one unit detached	73.2	42.0	63.3
% 2 units or more	7.7	31.9	15.4
% built before 1940	57.0	55.2	56.4
% built before 1960	90.1	98.9	92.9
% owner occupied	81.6	61.7	75.3
% of occupied units where householder moved in before 1969	26.3	23.8	25.5

Architecture

The neighborhood’s residential architecture is typical of many late-nineteenth and early-twentieth century neighborhoods and includes a predominance of Victorian cottages, Queen Anne-style frame houses, Craftsman bungalows, and an assortment of American vernacular styles.¹⁷ Mid-twentieth century Colonial Revival residences are

¹⁶ Data for Tracts 93.01 and 93.02 taken from the United States 2000 Census, www.census.gov. Data in the “Brookland Total” column was calculated using a weighted average of the Census data for Tracts 93.01 and 93.02.

¹⁷ McDaniel et al., 36.

scattered throughout the area, illustrative of Brookland's later development patterns. Rowhouses and two-family homes are found throughout the neighborhood, especially in close proximity to the B&O Railroad tracks on the western edge of Brookland, as well as on the eastern side of the neighborhood.¹⁸ Rowhouses and two-family homes are modest in size and stylistic vocabulary.

Brookland's commercial structures are modest in size and ornamentation. Most of these buildings are one story in height and are composed of brick construction with large plate glass storefronts. A few variations in design "render a measure of individuality to the stores," but many of the commercial buildings in Brookland are similar in appearance.¹⁹



Figure 1-6: Housing near Metro Station (2008)

¹⁸ McDaniel et al., 39.

¹⁹ McDaniel et al., 39.



Figure 1-7: Housing on Monroe Street (2008)



Figure 1-8: Housing on Lawrence Street (2008)



Figure 1-9: Housing on Monroe Street (2008)



Figure 1-10: Housing on Lawrence Street (2008)



Figure 1-11: Housing on Lawrence Street (2008)



Figure 1-12: Housing on 10th Street, near Metro station (2008)



Figure 1-13: Housing on Newton Street (2008)



Figure 1-14: Housing on 15th Street (2008)



Figure 1-15: Housing on Newton Street (2008)



Figure 1-16: Housing on Kearney Street (2008)



Figure 1-17: Housing on Newton Street (2008)



Figure 1-18: Housing on 14th Street (2008)



Figure 1-19: Housing on Jackson Street (2008)



Figure 1-20: Housing on 13th Street (2008)



Figure 1-21: Housing on Jackson Street (2008)



Figure 1-22: Corner commercial building on Kearney and 12th Streets (2008)



Figure 1-23: Hardware store and commercial strip on 12th and Monroe streets (2008)



Figure 1-24: Commercial buildings on 12th Street (2008)



Figure 1-25: Newton Theatre on 12th Street (2008)



Figure 1-26: Commercial strip on 12th Street (2008)



Figure 1-27: Commercial building on Monroe Street (2008)



Figure 1-28: Street view looking east on Newton Street from Metro station parking lot (2008)

Employment

The latest employment data from Brookland reflects the middle-class character that the neighborhood has been known for throughout most of its history. Almost half of the workforce in Brookland is classified as management or professional, with the next highest percentage (22%) belonging to those working in sales and office occupations. The neighborhood's early development was due to a rapid influx of federal workers, and the local and federal governments still employed almost a third of Brooklanders in 2000. Regardless of occupation, the majority of residents work outside of the neighborhood, with commute times averaging over thirty minutes.

Table 1-2: Comparative Employment Datas for Census Tracts in Brookland ²⁰			
	Tract 93.01	Tract 93.02	Brookland Total
Management, professional, and related occupations (%)	56.1	34.5	49.7
Sales and office occupations (%)	23.4	18.9	22.1
Service occupations (%)	6.9	22.6	11.5
Construction, extraction, and maintenance (%)	8.1	9.9	8.6
Production, transportation, and material moving (%)	4.8	14.1	7.6
Private workers (%)	65.1	66.4	65.5
Government workers (%)	31.7	28.3	30.7
Self-employed workers (%)	3	5.3	3.7
Mean household earnings	\$58,301	\$49,306	\$55,664
Unemployed in civilian labor force (%) ²¹	11.9	13.6	12.4
Mean travel time (minutes)	31.7	30.6	31.4

²⁰ Data for Census Tracts 93.01 and 93.02 was taken from the United States 2000 Census, www.census.gov. Data from the "Brookland Total" column was calculated using a weighted average of the Census data for Tracts 93.01 and 93.02.

²¹ The United States Census Bureau defines an unemployed citizen as: "All civilians 16 years old and over are classified as unemployed if they (1) were neither 'at work' nor 'with a job but not at work' during the reference week, and (2) were actively looking for work during the last 4 weeks, and (3) were available to accept a job. Also included as unemployed are civilians who did not work at all during the reference week, were waiting to be called back to a job from which they had been laid off, and were available for work except for temporary illness.

Nativity, Ancestry, Race, and Ethnicity

Data on nativity and ancestry differs greatly between the two Census tracts that make up the Brookland neighborhood, and the only common characteristic between the two areas is that approximately 90% of residents were born in the United States. Most of the population did not specify ancestry in either Census Tract in 2000. The highest percentages of reported ancestry in Census Tract 93.01 belong to the Germans (5.3%), the Irish (4.7%), and the sub-Saharan Africans (8%). In Census Tract 93.02, European ancestry belongs mostly to the Greeks and the Dutch, with no one claiming to be German or Irish. Like Census Tract 93.01, most residents who reported their ancestry in Census Tract 93.02 specified sub-Saharan Africa as their place of origin (9%).

Data on race is more dissimilar in the two Brookland census tracts. In Census Tract 93.01, 71.8% are black or African American and 20.4% are white. The Hispanic or Latino population, of any race, accounts for 5.7% of the total population. Of the Hispanic and Latino population, the reported primary points of origin are El Salvador (21.4%), Mexico (11.8%), and Puerto Rico (11.2%). In Census Tract 93.02, 93.9% are black or African American and 2.1% are white. The Hispanic or Latino population, of any race, accounts for 2.6%. Of the Hispanic and Latino population, the reported primary points of origin are Mexico (19.4%), Panama (6.5%), and Puerto Rico (6.5%).

Neighborhood Amenities

Brookland has many amenities that make it a desirable location for different types of residents. The Red Line of the city's rail transit system (Metro) provides the neighborhood's western border, and all Brookland residences are within walking distance or a short bus ride from the Brookland-CUA Metro station. Only two blocks

east of the Metro stop is the neighborhood's 12th Street commercial strip. Although not as thriving as it used to be, there is still an assortment of businesses such as a coffee shop, a pharmacy, apparel stores, a martial arts studio, a hardware store, and small eateries. A United States Post Office is also located on 12th Street.



Figure 1-29: View of The Catholic University of America from the corner of 12th and Newton Streets (2008)



Figure 1-30: Brookland/CUA Metro Station, looking north from Monroe Street bridge (2008)



Figure 1-31: Engine Company No. 17 building on Monroe Street (2008)



Figure 1-32: Brookland School on Monroe Street (2008)



Figure 1-33: Lucy Slowe School on Jackson Street (2008)

The nearby Catholic University of America puts Brooklanders in close proximity to many ongoing cultural events, and the Basilica of the National Shrine of the Immaculate Conception, one of the largest Roman Catholic basilicas in North America, is also located on the CUA campus. Providence Hospital, a major local employer, is located only a few blocks from Brookland on Varnum Street, NE. Providence Hospital was chartered by Abraham Lincoln in 1861 and is the oldest continuously operating hospital in the District.²² Brookland's close proximity to businesses, employers, transit, and various institutions is one reason why this neighborhood is appealing to many current and prospective residents.



Figure 1-34: St. Anthony's on 12th Street (2008)

²² Providence Hospital, "History and Mission," http://www.provhosp.org/history_&_mission.htm, 06/20/2006.

Political Boundaries

Washington, DC, is divided into eight wards. Brookland is located in Ward 5, which makes up the majority of the northeastern quadrant of the city. Each ward is represented on City Council by a single councilmember.

By local legislation, and similar to other areas of the District, the neighborhood is represented by an “Advisory Neighborhood Commission,” which is intended to voice the concerns of residents to the different city agencies, the executive branch, and the City Council.²³ The ANCs can also present testimony to private independent agencies, boards, and commissions, as well as federal agencies. Each Advisory Neighborhood Commission (ANCs) is assigned a letter, and each ANC district is divided into Single Member Districts (SMDs) that are assigned numbers. The ANC’s are composed of elected commissioners representing each SMD. Brookland is located within ANC 5A and ANC 5B and is composed of SMD’s 5A-06, -07, -08, and -10 and 5B-04.

In 2001, a draft of the Citywide Strategic Plan (CWSP) was released as part of Neighborhood Action, an initiative launched by then Mayor Anthony Williams in 1999 “to engage citizens in the development of the government’s FY2001 budget priorities and strategic plan.”²⁴ The CWSP is composed of 39 Strategic Neighborhood Action Plans (SNAP’s), each of which corresponds to a different Neighborhood Cluster. Brookland is part of Neighborhood Cluster 22, which also includes the neighborhoods of Brentwood and Langdon to the south.

²³ The District of Columbia, “Neighborhood Democracy,” <http://anc.dc.gov/anc/site/default.asp>, 06/20/2006.

²⁴ The District of Columbia, “Citywide Strategic Plan,” <http://neighborhoodaction.dc.gov>, 06/20/2006.

The city is divided into seven police districts, which are divided into a total of 46 Police Service Areas (PSA's). Brookland is part of the 5th Police District and is in Police Service Area 5-02. Fire protection is provided by Station 17, located at the center of the neighborhood.

The DC public schools assigned to the neighborhood are Slowe Elementary School, Backus Middle School, and Roosevelt Senior High School. Of all three schools, only Slowe Elementary School is located in Brookland and is on the corner of Jackson and 13th Streets NE.²⁵ The Brookland School, a DC charter school, is also located in Brookland.

Economic development has led the government to designate certain census tracts as federal Enterprise Zones, and businesses within these zones have access to various types of incentives and tax credits. There are two tiers of Enterprise Zones in DC: primary zones are Census tracts with poverty rates of at least 20%; and secondary zones are Census tracts with poverty rates between 10 and 20%. Census Tract 93.02 in South Brookland is designated a secondary Enterprise Zone; therefore, certain businesses within this area are eligible for a capital gains tax exemption.²⁶

The New Economy Transformation Act of 2000 defined High Tech Development Zones (Tech Zones) as areas where “incorporated, qualified high tech companies are eligible for zero franchise tax for five years.”²⁷ All Census tracts designated as federal

²⁵ The District of Columbia, “DC Citizen Atlas Report for 1201 Monroe Street NE,” <http://www.dc.gov>, 06/20/2006.

²⁶ The District of Columbia, “Enterprise Zone Incentives for DC Small Businesses,” <http://www.restoredc.dc.gov>, 06/20/2006.

²⁷ The District of Columbia, “High Tech Development Zones,” <http://www.restoredc.dc.gov>, 06/20/2006.

enterprise zones (such as tract 93.02 in Brookland) are automatically designated as Tech Zones. An area on the western edge of Brookland and along 12th Street is also designated a Tech Zone.

Brookland in the Context of the City

Descriptions of Brookland's character often include some level of comparison between the neighborhood and the rest of Washington, DC. The theme of most of these descriptions is that Brookland's combination of social and physical characteristics is not commonly found in DC neighborhoods, but this assertion is rarely supported quantitatively. Table 1-3 gives a sample of Brookland's demographics compared to those demographics citywide.

It is apparent from this data in Table 1-3 that Brookland is a predominantly African American neighborhood, with a higher percentage of black residents than the rest of the city. The most significant difference between Brookland and Washington shown in Table 1-3 is the percentage of owner-occupied housing units, which is almost twice as high in Brookland as it is citywide. Brookland also shows a greater level of stability in its residency, with significantly more people claiming to have lived in the same residence for at least five years.

The education and income data in Table 1-3 shows less significant differences between Brookland and the rest of the city. Although median household income in 2000 was slightly greater in Brookland, the per capita income is greater citywide. Similarly, more Brooklanders have graduated high school, but citywide a greater percentage of those high school graduates have gone on to receive a bachelor's degree or higher.

Although the data in Table 1-3 is helpful in understanding the neighborhood in context, analyzing the data by race reveals what is truly unique about Brookland’s social character. Table 1-4 includes data that has been isolated by race to compare the differences between the black and white populations in the neighborhood and in the city.

Table 1-3: Comparative Data for Brookland and for the City of Washington, DC ²⁸				
	Brookland (by tract)		Brookland (total)	Washington, DC
	93.01	93.02		
Total population	3,305	1,201	4,506	572,059
White (%)	20.4	2.1	15.5	30.8
Black or African American (%)	71.8	93.9	77.7	60.0
Other (%)	7.8	4.0	6.8	9.2
High school graduate or higher (%) *	83.2	70.2	79.7	77.8
Bachelor's degree or higher (%) *	35.0	16.7	30.1	39.1
Median household income	\$51,125	\$41,875	\$48,660	\$40,127
Per capita income	\$22,608	\$19,676	\$21,827	\$28,659
Individuals below poverty level (%)	14.4	12.1	13.79	16.8
Housing Units	1,215	567	1,782	274,845
Owner-occupied housing (%)	81.6	61.7	75.3	40.8
Renter-occupied housing (%)	18.4	38.3	24.7	59.2
Vacant housing (%)	7.8	12.7	9.4	9.6
Median housing value	\$144,200	\$130,400	\$139,809	\$157,200
Population 18 years and over (%)	79.8	79.4	79.7	79.9
Population 65 years and over (%)	17.1	17.0	17.1	12.2
Residents who lived in same house in 1995 (%)	64.5	68.8	65.6	49.9
Residents who lived outside of DC in 1995 (%)	15.4	13.7	14.9	26.5
Residents who lived in other location in DC in 1995 (%)	20.1	17.5	19.4	23.5
*as % of population over age of 25				

²⁸ All data taken from the United States 2000 Census, www.census.gov. Data in the “Brookland Total” column was calculated using a weighted average of Census Tracts 93.01 and 93.02.

Table 1-4: Comparative Data for Black and White Populations in Brookland and the City of Washington, DC ²⁹		
	Brookland	Washington, DC
Average household income (black only)	\$46,167	\$30,478
Average household income (white only)	\$60,139	\$65,441
Difference between household incomes for black and white populations	\$13,972	\$34,963
% higher income per white household than per income per black household	30.26%	114.72%
Per capita income (black only)	\$22,521	\$17,734
Per capita income (white only)	\$26,239	\$52,552
Difference between per capita income for black and white populations	\$3,718	\$34,818
% higher income per capita in white population than in black population	16.51%	196.33%
High school graduate or higher (% , black Only)	81.35%	70.36%
High school graduate or higher (% , white Only)	88.78%	94.43%
Difference between % of high school graduates in white and black populations	7.43%	24.07%
Bachelor's degree or higher (% , black Only)	26.25%	17.50%
Bachelor's degree or higher (% , white Only)	61.81%	77.30%
Difference between % with bachelor's degree or higher in white and black populations	35.56%	59.80%

The most significant data from Table 1-4 deals with income, both per household and per capita. Although the white population on average receives more income than the black population in both Brookland and DC, the difference is far less in Brookland than it is citywide. Most significantly, in Washington, the per capita income of the white population is three times the per capita income of the black population, whereas

²⁹ United States Census Bureau, www.census.gov, March 20, 2006. Brookland data includes only Census tract 93.01. Data could not be isolated for white population of Census tract 93.02 due to Census data filtering rules that protect the confidentiality of Census respondents when: a geography has a total population of less than 100; the selected race, ethnic or ancestry group has a population of less than 100 within the selected geography; or less than 50 un-weighted sample cases were available for the geography or for the ancestry group.

in Brookland, there is only a fractional difference between the per capita incomes of the two racial groups.³⁰ Therefore, not only is the black population in Brookland earning more per capita than the black population in DC, but the stratification of the races is far less drastic in Brookland than it is citywide. The education data in Table 1-4 is not as staggering as the income data, but again, the difference between the education levels of the white and black populations is significantly less in Brookland than it is throughout DC.

Community Perceptions

Brookland could be described as ‘typical’ when looked at in the context of the whole city: its development patterns are very similar to other neighborhoods in the city that were affected by the streetcar lines; its architecture is similar to neighborhoods on the outskirts of the Federal City; and its socioeconomic landscape is typical of other Washington ‘suburban’ neighborhoods that have been driven by segregation, integration, and economic booms and busts. However, many residents in Brookland see their neighborhood as anything but ‘typical.’ In fact, many Brookland residents perceive the racially integrated, middle-class quality of its neighborhood as unique. To Brooklanders, their neighborhood is a sort of urban oasis—a quiet and stable enclave in the midst of a bustling and rapidly changing city. Newspaper articles written over the last twenty years have used these perceptions to build the neighborhood’s new identity as a real estate hot spot. In 1992, Jeremiah O’Leary, a Brookland resident, stated in a *Washington Post* article: “There was a large racial turnover in the neighborhood, but it has remained interracial and middle class. Many

³⁰ Although per capita income can be greatly affected by the percentage of the total population that is in the labor force, the percentage of the African American population in the labor force is approximately 42% in both Brookland and DC according to the 2000 United States Census. These percentages are not as similar for the white population (61% in Brookland and 69% citywide), but they are close enough to provide an effective comparison in Table 4 (www.census.gov).

of the new arrivals were black professionals, government workers and physicians. Crime is rampant in the many parts of the inner city but it is my estimation that Brookland is still a tranquil, happy place to live.”³¹ In 1997, a *Washington Times* article boasts the same character: “If social scientists are looking for a laboratory to learn how racial and economic integration works in an urban setting, they could do no better than visit [Brookland].”³² In 1991, Richard Nunno, a Brookland resident, is quoted as saying “It’s untypical of most Washington neighborhoods...People have been here for generations. They have a history here.”³³ In 1987, another resident describes Brookland as “one of the District’s unique and most habitable communities.”³⁴ The list of articles goes on, repeating the same descriptions of the ‘unique’ character of Brookland: tree-lined, suburban, quiet, friendly, middle-class, community-minded, close-knit, and stable.

Conclusion

Brookland’s history reveals several themes in development: first, the transition from a pastoral landscape to an urban neighborhood owing to rail and streetcar access and the demands of the increasing government workforce in Washington, DC; second, the influence of The Catholic University of America on the physical, economic, and religious characteristics of the neighborhood; third, racial turnover owing to institutional integration; and finally, the stability of many physical and social characteristics over the last few decades. These developments have led to the community’s current middle-class African American residency. Although Washington

³¹ Jeremiah O’Leary, “Hunting, Farming Land Now a Neighborhood,” *Washington Times*, March 9, 1992.

³² Ann Geracimos, “Neighborhood of Treasures. Racial and Economic Integration Succeeds,” *Washington Times*, August 20, 1997.

³³ Shaun Sutner, “Brookland Celebrates its Community Pride,” *Washington Post*, August 1, 1991.

³⁴ Zachary Smith, “Quiet, Magic Memories of Youth in Brookland,” *Washington Post*, October 1, 1987.

has other middle-class African American communities, Brookland's demographics are in stark contrast to those of the city as a whole, making many Brooklanders feel as though they live in a sort of urban oasis.

While the neighborhood also has a small but noticeable population of Hispanic or Latino residents, the social history of the neighborhood has been more strongly impacted by changes in the ratio of white and black residents. No quantitative information is available on religion in Brookland, but the neighborhood's historic ties with The Catholic University of America are still present. Despite some common perceptions, this institutional relationship has impacted the socioeconomic, architectural, and political landscape in the neighborhood as much as, if not more than, the history of racial segregation and integration. Today, "Small-town," "village-like," and "suburban" are commonly used to describe the neighborhood's character, which has been preserved by continuous ad hoc efforts of several Brookland residents over the years. As a result, Brookland has remained somewhat insulated from many of the physical and social changes that have affected other communities in DC. The following chapter will discuss the events of the recent past that have so strongly contributed to the stability of the neighborhood.

CHAPTER 2: ACTIVISM IN BROOKLAND

Introduction

Although Brookland is known for being a quiet, village-like neighborhood in DC, it is also a community known for its loud voices and history of activism. The ability of a few strong leaders to organize members of this community time and time again has enabled Brookland residents to claim victory in several difficult struggles over the last fifty years. Resistance to rapid, unwanted change has remained the driving force in each and every fight. Activist Brooklanders, more than anything else, want to maintain control over the fate of their neighborhood.

A few key issues have shaped the character of the neighborhoods and brought attention from all over the District: the preservation of the Newton Theater; the saving of the Brooks Mansion; the fight against the proposed North Central Freeway; the struggle to maintain control over Metro development; and the continuous struggle to remain insulated from the violence and drug-related crimes that have plagued Washington, D.C., for decades.

The Newton Theater and the Brookland Community Corporation

In 1937, prominent Brookland developer Jesse Sherwood built a modest Art Deco theater at the intersection of Newton and 12th Streets, NE. Designed by noted theater architect John J. Zink and operated by the Louis Bernheimer Theater Group, the building served as the Brookland neighborhood movie house for almost thirty years. The theater remained as an anchor to the 12th Street commercial district until it was

forced to close in the early 1960s due to the demise of small motion picture theaters throughout many American towns and cities.

The property was condemned in 1967 but was bought soon after by The Catholic University of America, located west of the Brookland neighborhood. Called “one of the most acoustically perfect theaters in the District,” the Newton Theater was used by the University’s School of Music until 1971, when the new Hartke Theater opened on the Catholic campus.³⁵ The Newton Theater was boarded up in 1974 and quickly became a neighborhood eyesore.

In the late 1970s, the Washington Metropolitan Transit Authority (WMATA) planned to open a new Metro station (now the Brookland-CUA Red Line Station) two blocks away from the vacant Newton Theater. John Kelly, a long-time Brookland resident and former director of the Upper Northeast Coordinating Council (UNECC), sensed that new development in the area would be soon to follow and brought together various community members to discuss the future of the theater property. As a result, local residents established the Brookland Community Corporation (BCC) in hopes of revitalizing the neighborhood’s commercial corridor from the inside out. The organization was composed of twenty-five area families and was headed by Douglas A. Daiss, a local businessman and Ward 5A Advisory Neighborhood Commissioner. The members of the BCC collectively invested nearly \$50,000 for the renovation of the building and began to lease the property from Catholic University in September of 1976.³⁶ Since the theater’s closing in the 1960s, the building had continued to

³⁵ Joann Stevens, “Planning A Brookland Business Renaissance; Brookland Residents Return to Theater,” *Washington Post*, July 28, 1977.

³⁶ Stevens, 1977.

deteriorate. Daiss reported: “The lobby ceiling was on the floor. All the plumbing in three of the four restrooms had been vandalized, and the auditorium ceiling had a multitude of holes.”³⁷

Renovations took approximately seven months to complete, and on July 8, 1977, the BCC reopened the 550-seat “Brookland-Newton Theater” as a movie house and community entertainment center.³⁸ Because the project was initiated, completed, and funded by local residents, the renovated theater stood “as a symbol of community pride and determination.”³⁹ Despite its initial popularity with many Brooklanders, the business began to show financial distress by the summer of 1978. The theater needed to approximately double its ticket sales in order to remain in business.⁴⁰ The BCC planned a benefit performance for October 1, 1978, with hopes of raising \$3000 in emergency funds to cover operating expenses until a regular clientele could be established. The Brookland-Newton Theater was never able to recover financially and was forced to close its doors once again. The building was converted to a Peoples drugstore, at which time the original interior of the theater was destroyed. However, in an agreement between the community and the new owners, the exterior Art Deco features were saved from demolition. Currently, the building houses a CVS drugstore and still retains much of the original character of its exterior. In April of 2006, the local Historic Preservation Review Board (HPRB) voted to designate the theater as a local historic landmark and listed the property in the DC Inventory of Historic Sites.⁴¹

³⁷ Stevens, 1977.

³⁸ Douglas A. Daiss, letter to Brookland neighbors, February 18, 1978, Brookland vertical file, Washingtoniana Division, Martin Luther King, Jr., Memorial Library, Washington, DC.

³⁹ Stevens, 1977.

⁴⁰ Jorge Lopez, “Financial Troubles May Close Newton Theater,” Brookland vertical file, Washingtoniana Division, Martin Luther King, Jr., Memorial Library, Washington, DC.

⁴¹ Brookland Listserv., Mary Farrel, 4/27/06.

Brooks Mansion and Continued Neighborhood Advocacy

As discussed in Chapter 1, the Brookland neighborhood was developed on the former estate of Colonel Jehiel Brooks. The home of Colonel Brooks, the Brooks Mansion, is the oldest extant structure in Brookland and serves as the community's "psychological center."⁴² The Brooks Mansion has been threatened with demolition several times and stands today only because of the efforts of neighborhood residents.

Colonel Brooks built the large Greek Revival house for his wife, Ann Margaret Queen, sometime between 1836 and 1840. Named Bellair by the Brooks family, the house holds great importance as the only remnant of the original Brooks estate. The structure and its 1894 addition are still located at their original location on the corner of 10th and Monroe Streets, NE, less than a block from the Brookland-CUA Metro station and only two blocks from Brookland's 12th Street commercial corridor.

Major threats to the building started in the 1960s when the city proposed to run a freeway directly through the Brooks Mansion site. However, soon after in 1971, the Brooks Mansion met its second threat of demolition when the property was sold to the Washington Metropolitan Transit Authority (WMATA). WMATA planned to raze the house and develop a 200-car park-and-ride lot for the new Brookland-CUA Metro station, which was being constructed within a block of the Brooks Mansion. For the next three years, neighbors and local politicians worked together to resist WMATA's plans, and in January 1974, the City Council ruled out the idea of commuter parking for the Metro station and "directed that the Brooks Mansion be retained until the District Government and area citizens could identify a use for it."⁴³ After becoming a

⁴² Wolf Von Eckardt, "Killing a Community," *Potomac*, a magazine published by the *Washington Post*, May 21, 1967.

⁴³ The Upper Northeast Coordinating Council, press release, "N.E. Citizens Seek Community Use for Historic Brooks Mansion." May, 8, 1976, courtesy of Thomas Rooney.

surplus property of the city, residents continued to fight possible demolition of the building, and in 1975, the Brooks Mansion was designated a Category Two Landmark in the District's Inventory of Historic Sites.⁴⁴ A few months later in July 1975, the property was listed in the National Register of Historic Places.

On May 8, 1976, the Brookland Neighborhood Civic Association, the Upper Northeast Coordinating Council (UNECC), and the Service Area 2 Bicentennial Committee sponsored a cleanup day at the Brooks Mansion, at which citizens celebrated the averted Metro threat and expressed their desire for the city government to acquire and maintain the historic site.⁴⁵ Negotiations involving the fate of the Brooks Mansion continued for several years among the Office of Planning, WMATA, then Mayor Walter Washington, the Office of General Services, and the Department of Recreation. Finally in 1980, pursuant to the "Brook Mansion and Old Benning School Exchange Authorization Act," then Mayor Marion Berry transferred a site near the Minnesota Avenue Metro station to WMATA "in exchange for the Brook Mansion and basic renovation thereof."⁴⁶ The City then offered the property to the University of the

⁴⁴ Tanya Beauchamp, architectural historian with the District of Columbia Office of Historic Preservation, and Nathan Volkman, Executive Assistant to the Director of that office worked on the landmarks nomination for the Brooks Mansion. (Chronology of the Brooks Mansion, "Bellair", Phillip W. Ogilvie, 1997, page 11, courtesy of Thomas Rooney)

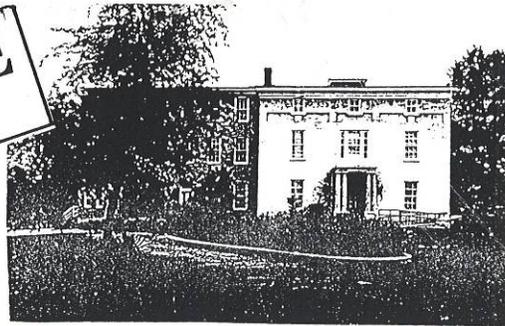
⁴⁵ Chronology of the Brooks Mansion, "Bellair", Phillip W. Ogilvie, 1997, page 12, courtesy of Thomas Rooney. According to a *Washington Post* Article dated May 1, 1976, proponents for the preservation of the Brooks Mansion "have worked out detailed proposals by which the first floor of the mansion would be used as a community center with special provisions for elderly citizens and the two upper floors would serve as a 60- to 100-bed youth hostel." ("Brooks Mansion," *The Washington Post*, May 1, 1976)

⁴⁶ *Brook Mansion and Old Benning School Exchange Authorization Act*, DC City Council Bill 3-272, February 13, 1980. WMATA's contribution to the renovation of the building was meant to be compensation for the greater value of the Old Benning School property. "Such repair, improvement, or renovation of the Brook Mansion, to be performed by WMATA in accordance with a scope of work to be prepared by the Mayor, as will be equal in cost to the excess of value of...the former Benning Road Elementary School, over the...Brook Mansion."

Protect Brookland's Historic Landmark

**BROOKS
MANSION
1837-1997**

for SALE
by UDC and the
Control Board



WE DEMAND FULL COMMUNITY PARTICIPATION IN DETERMINING
THE FUTURE OF THIS BUILDING

MEET WITH THE OFFICIALS INVOLVED:

- **University of the District of Columbia**
- **The City Administrator**
- **Control Board Representative**
- **Ward 5 Councilmember Harry L. Thomas, Sr.**

Monday, April 7, 1997

7:00p.m.

**St. Anthony's Catholic Church - Margot Hall
12th and Monroe Streets, N.E.**

DEMONSTRATE YOUR SUPPORT

**THE EMERGENCY COMMITTEE TO SAVE BROOKS MANSION
THE WARD 5 ADVISORY NEIGHBORHOOD COMMISSIONERS
and COUNCILMEMBER HARRY L. THOMAS, SR.**

*A coalition of community groups, institutions, and unaffiliated citizens dedicated to the preservation
of our historical landmark, the Brooks Mansion, for community use.*

FOR MORE INFORMATION CALL: Cyril Crocker, ANC 5-A-08 (202) 223-8151 or
Thomas Rooney (202) 526-4592 or Councilmember Harry L. Thomas (202) 724-8024

Figure 2-35: Flyer for Brooks Mansion, courtesy of Thomas Rooney

District of Columbia (UDC), which occupied the Mansion after six years and \$4 million of renovation work. UDC Cooperative Extension Service offices occupied a majority of the property, but some space was left open for community use.

In 1997, the Brooks Mansion was once again threatened when UDC abruptly relocated their offices to the northwest quadrant of the city and left the building vacant and unprotected. In response, local residents formed the Emergency Committee to Save Brooks Mansion, which partnered with the Ward 5A Advisory Neighborhood Commission (ANC) to urge the Control Board of the Financial Responsibility and Management Assistance Authority (Control Board) to justify this move and to take measures to protect the abandoned building from vandalism and deterioration. In the ANC Resolution 97-3, adopted March 6, 1997, the Brooks Mansion was stated to be “as important to Ward 5 and the Brookland community as the U.S. Capitol is to downtown D.C.” and as a “keystone building...its loss, neglect or destruction would be a major blow to our Ward 5 and Brookland community heritage.”⁴⁷

On April 27, 2002, the Brooks Mansion had a grand opening to celebrate the occupation of the property by DCTV, a local public television station. The event included DCTV’s first live telecast, as well as speeches by then Ward 5 Councilmember Vincent Orange, then Mayor Anthony Williams, and DCTV Board Chair Kojo Nnamdi. Mayor Williams remarked at the ceremony, “The entire process of making Brooks Mansion functional again is because of the success of a partnership between the community and the city government...I have never been prouder of all of

⁴⁷ Resolution to Save Brooks Mansion, ANC 5A Resolution 97-3, March 6, 1997, Joseph Bowser and Cyril Crocker, courtesy of Thomas Rooney.

you out here in Brookland, [and] all of you in the public access TV community, for this tremendous accomplishment today.”⁴⁸

North Central Freeway and the Emergency Committee on the Transportation Crisis (ECTC)

The most well known struggle to take place in Brookland was the fight over the proposed North Central Freeway. The construction of this leg of the interstate system would have resulted in the demolition of numerous residences in the neighborhood, as well as the creation of a physical boundary between Brookland and the western portions of the District.

Pursuant to the 1956 Federal Aid Highway Act, the DC Highway Department submitted cost estimates on July 1, 1957, to the Bureau of Public Roads for five different sets of interstate and freeway developments in the DC metropolitan area. One of these proposals included a “new route 1” (now called I-95). A leg of this interstate, referred to as the North Central Freeway, was planned to cut through several northeast DC neighborhoods, including Brookland.⁴⁹ Although struggles over highway developments took place all over the District (and all over the United States) in the 1950s, 1960s and 1970s, the activism that was rooted in the northeast quadrant of DC makes the North Central Freeway fight one of the most prominent and complex struggles in the history of the Brookland neighborhood.

⁴⁸ Report on Brooks Mansion Grand Opening, courtesy of Tom Rooney.

⁴⁹ Outline for a history of the Emergency Committee on the Transportation Crisis. Fred Heutte. May 11, 1990. Martin Luther King, Jr. Memorial Library, ECTC Archives collection, Series I, Box 4, Subseries: Rooney.

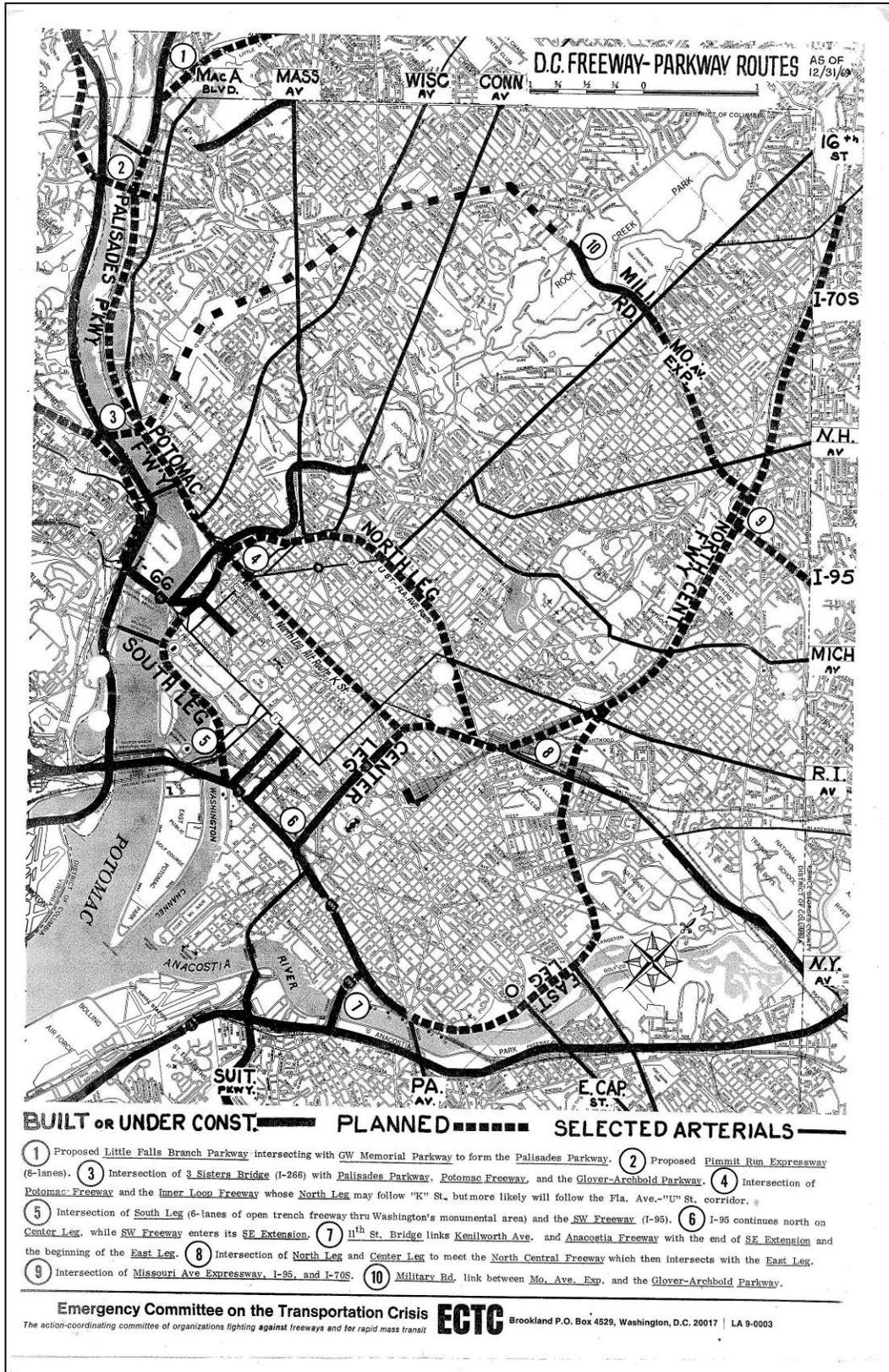


Figure 2-36: Map of DC freeway plan, courtesy of Thomas Rooney

Much of the DC freeway fight focused on three specific proposals—the North Central Freeway, the “East Leg,” and the Three Sisters Bridge.⁵⁰ Independent transportation consultant Arthur D. Little concluded that the DC Highway Department’s development proposals were not justified and required further planning, design, and “social adjustment.”⁵¹ Thereafter, the DC Commissioner’s Policy Advisory Committee unanimously agreed to omit the aforementioned three proposals from immediate plans for construction. However, Representative William Natcher, Chairman of the House Subcommittee on DC Appropriations, refused to recommend funds for rapid transit unless all proposed freeway developments were built.

Despite the threats from Rep. Natcher, the National Capital Planning Commission (NCPC) voted 8-3 to omit the three contested developments from upcoming plans.⁵² However, George Hartzog, the Director of the National Park Service and member of NCPC, changed his position to support the DC and Virginia Highway Departments, and on March 8, 1967, NCPC published its 1985 Comprehensive Plan that incorporated all of the original proposed freeway projects, including the North Central Freeway.⁵³

In response to the freeway struggles in Northeast DC and Maryland, the Emergency Committee on the Transportation Crisis (ECTC) was established as a local grassroots “action-coordinating committee of citizen organizations fighting against freeways and

⁵⁰ The “East Leg” refers to the east leg of the Inner Loop of I-95 on the west bank of the Anacostia river).

⁵¹ “Transportation Planning in the District of Columbia 1955-65: A Review and Critique.”

⁵² May 5, 1966.

⁵³ Outline for a history of the Emergency Committee on the Transportation Crisis, Fred Heutte. May 11, 1990, Martin Luther King, Jr. Memorial Library, ECTC Archives collection, Series I, Box 4, Subseries: Rooney.

for rapid mass-transit.”⁵⁴ The committee was lead by Sam Abbott, a resident from Takoma Park, Maryland, but many of its key players were from the Brookland area, including Bernard and Vera Pryor, Reverend John Mote, Tom and Angela Rooney, Anne and Fred Heutte, and Bernie Cain.⁵⁵ The organization used public demonstrations and lobbying to fight against the expansion of the DC highway system and was active in testifying at hearings before Congress and local government boards.

Much of DC residents’ anger over the North Central Freeway was directed at Walter E. Washington. Washington, who had been appointed by President Lyndon B. Johnson as “Mayor-Commissioner” of DC in 1967, was often dismissed by the black community as a “caretaker of the white power structure,” despite the fact that he was an African American.⁵⁶ He was strongly connected to the Board of Trade and the Washington Urban League, groups that avidly supported the freeway proposals, and many people believe that political pressure eventually resulted in a “secret deal cut by Walter Washington to sell-out to the freeway lobby.”⁵⁷ In a letter written to Washington, Edward L. Maillet, Chairman of the Brookland Area Coordinating Council (BACC), stated the Brookland residents’ opposition to the North-Central Freeway:⁵⁸

⁵⁴ Letter to Walter E. Washington from R.H. Booker, April 24, 1969 Martin Luther King, Jr. Memorial Library, ECTC Archives collection, Series I, Box 3, Subseries: Rooney.

⁵⁵ In June of 1968, the ECTC called a conference in DC, out of which came the National Coalition on the Transportation Crisis (NCTC). Over the next several years, the NCTC played a major role in freeway fights across the United States.

⁵⁶ Harry S. Jaffe and Tom Sherwood, *Dream City: Race, Power, and the Decline of Washington, D.C.* New York: Simon and Schuster, 1994.

⁵⁷ Outline for a history of the Emergency Committee on The Transportation Crisis, Fred Heutte. May 11. 1990, Martin Luther King, Jr. Memorial Library, ECTC Archives collection, Series I, Box 4, Subseries: Rooney.

⁵⁸ The Brookland Area Coordinating Council was a body formed to represent 24 member organizations from the Northeast quadrant including: Brookland Citizens Association, Brookland Civic Association, Michigan Park Citizens Association, North Michigan Park Citizens Association, Northeast Council of Citizens Associations, Brookland Methodist Church, Michigan Park Christian Church, St. Anthony’s Catholic Church, Augustinian College, Catholic University of America, Claretian House of Studies, St. Joseph’s Seminary, Trinity College, Bunker Hill School PTA, Campus School, Crosby-Noyes School

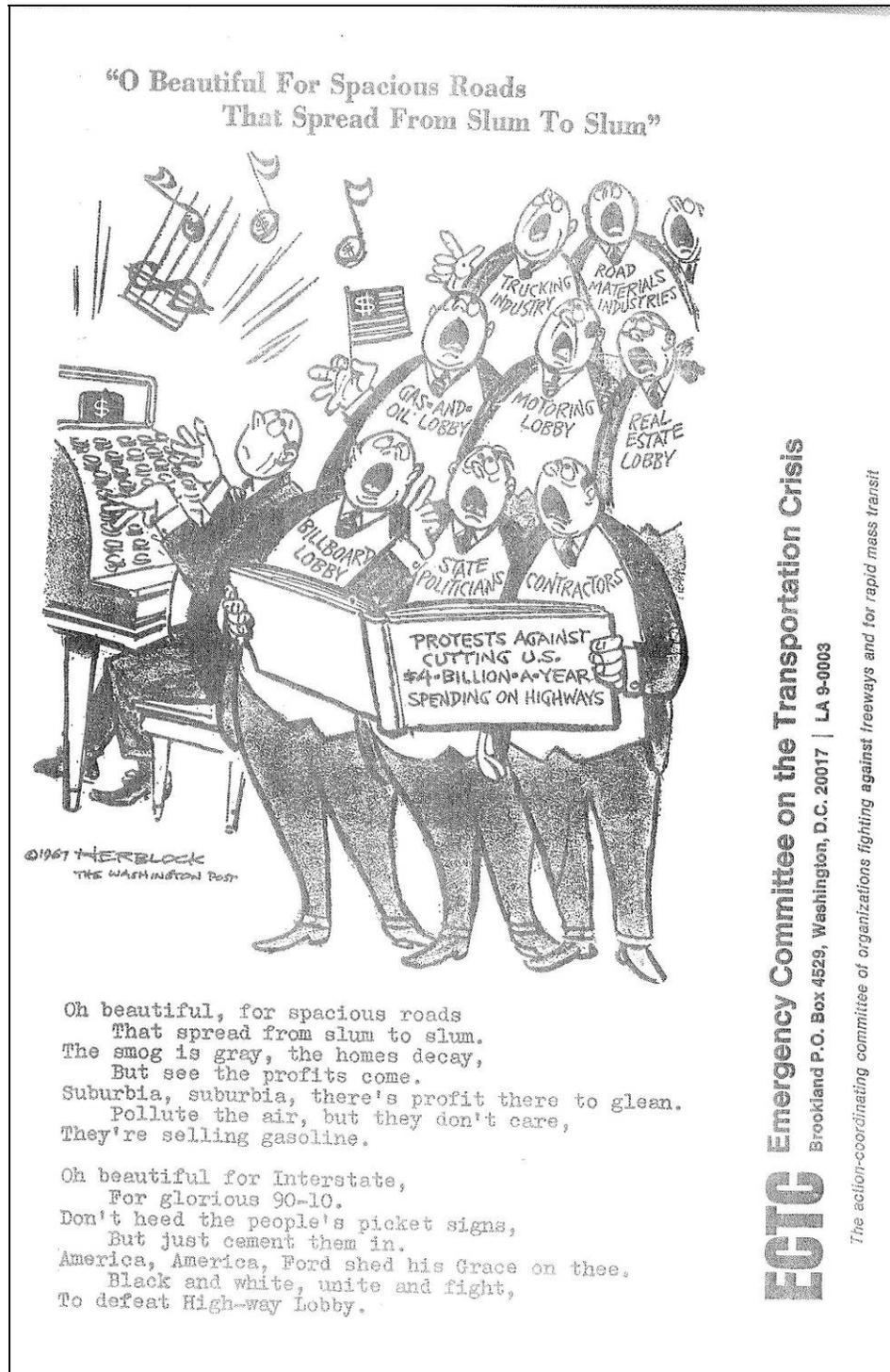


Figure 2-37: ECTC flyer, courtesy of Thomas Rooney

PTA, St. Anthony's Home and School Association, Brookland Merchants Association, The Upper Northeast News, Brookland Better Neighborhood Club, Brookland Folk Dance Group, Brookland Friendly Senior Neighbors, and Michigan Park Garden Club.

“This project should not and must not be funded, especially while other pressing needs of the City go unmet. Rather, the funds must be directed into housing, schools, increased job opportunities and rapid transit. To do otherwise would reflect gross insensitivity to the disparate human problems and resultant dangerous tensions which beset our City.”⁵⁹

Although the use of national and city funds was a major source of debate, much of the argument presented by DC residents was that the proposed highway developments were specifically targeted at minority and/or low-income neighborhoods. Furthermore, the expanded highway system was planned primarily to serve commuters from what many DC residents refer to as “Ward 9,” or the suburbs of DC, giving the North Central Freeway the name “white man’s road thru a Black man’s home.”⁶⁰ According to an article written in the *Washington Afro-American* newspaper, former Transportation Secretary Alan S. Boyd stated, “[A]ll the traffic surveys say it (the freeway) should be built along the Wisconsin Ave. corridor, but the people who live along Wisconsin Ave. or the businesses there have much more political clout than the people on the other side of town.”⁶¹ The Wisconsin Avenue corridor runs through the Northwest quadrant of the city, which, at that time, was made up mostly of middle- and upper-class white residents.

⁵⁹ Letter from Edward L. Maillet to Walter E. Washington, December 21, 1967, Martin Luther King, Jr. Memorial Library, ECTC Archives collection, Series I, Box 3, Subseries: Rooney.

⁶⁰ Flyer from the ECTC to advertise a rally to reopen the 69 confiscated N.E. Homes. June 28, 1969, Martin Luther King, Jr. Memorial Library, ECTC Archives collection, Series I, Box 8, Subseries: Rooney.

⁶¹ *Washington Afro-American*. “We’ve Had Enough” January 20, 1968.

JANUARY 20, 1968

'They Always Turn To The Right'

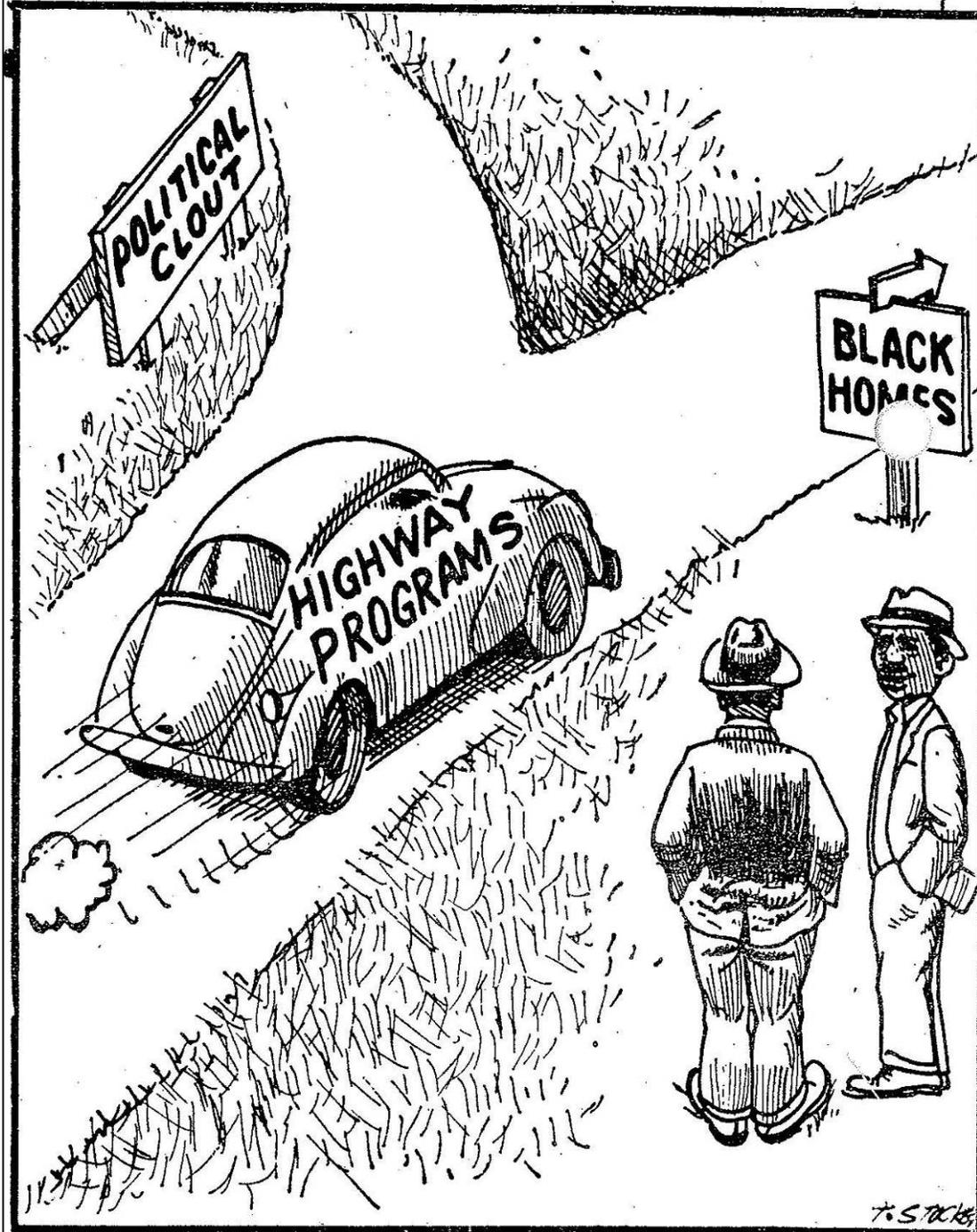


Figure 2-38: "They Always Turn to the Right" cartoon, *Washington Afro-American*, January 20, 1968.

Other than the threat of the North-Central Freeway itself, Brookland was also faced with the taking and boarding up of 69 houses located in the path of the proposed development on 10th Street NE. Appraisal and confiscation of these properties began on March 9, 1967, one day after NCPC published its proposed 1985 Comprehensive Plan. Many of the activities of the ECTC and other local organizations focused on returning these homes to individual ownership and reversing the blight that had occurred after their condemnation. The efforts of the ECTC saved the 69 houses from demolition, and the District government was eventually forced to rehabilitate the properties and return them to the residents of Brookland.⁶²

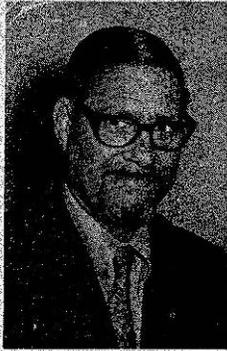
Although the threat of freeway development in the city looms over DC residents to this day, years of “organization, leadership and communication” have kept the North Central Freeway from being built on top of Brookland’s homes.⁶³ In a document dated July 21, 1990, Fred Huette summarizes the victories of the freeway fight in DC:

Communities from all across the city and the metropolitan area, rich, poor, Black, white, put aside differences, got to know each other, learned to work together, learned to distrust established political ‘leadership’ ...and won the fight....a great victory for the people.⁶⁴

⁶² Linda Wheeler, “Brookland: Like Small Town Near Downtown,” *The Washington Post*, June 21, 1986, E1.

⁶³ Wolf Von Eckardt, “Killing a Community,” *Potomac*, A magazine published by the *Washington Post*, May 21, 1967.

⁶⁴ Fred Huette, “Freeway Fight Landmarks,” July 21, 1990, Martin Luther King, Jr. Memorial Library, ECTC Archives collection, Series I, Box 4, Subseries: Rooney.



An appeal to the Brookland Community from
MAURICE A. DAVIS, *President of the Brookland*
Neighborhood Civic Association:

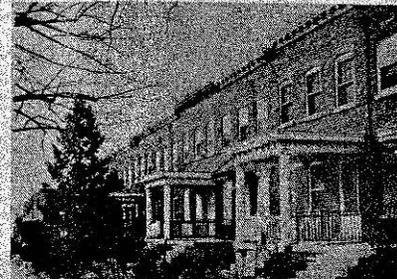
"Since 1967 when the city government illegally confiscated 69 homes on 10th St. n.e., our community has suffered.

" We have been fighting to get these homes fixed up and put back into ownership.
 " We have our committee now meeting with various officials and we will report on these negotiations at a...

**● PRESS CONFERENCE
 & PUBLIC RALLY...
 SAT. SEPT. 30th
 10AM
 2702-10th ST. N.E.**

"If you agree with us that these homes should be fixed up at government expense and then put back into home ownership, then
PLEASE BE THERE ! "

SPONSORED BY Brookland Neighborhood Civic Association and Emergency Committee on the Transportation Crisis (ECTC)



Take the Plywood



off the Windows



Move the People in!

Figure 2-39: Flyer, courtesy of Thomas Rooney

Metro Development and the Nature of the Planning Process

Brookland's close proximity to the Brookland-CUA Metro station is both one of the neighborhood's most valuable assets and greatest sources of conflict. Although Brookland residents fought to receive access to mass transit rather than be bisected by the North Central Freeway, the nature of this transit development has been the subject of several debates over the last thirty years. In 1978, Brookland resident John Kelly stated, "The subway is [a] welcome addition to the community. We're not interested in high density development here. We're concerned about preserving and refining the quality of life that exists."⁶⁵

At the time of the Metro station's construction, the primary concern expressed by local residents was the impact of commuters on the small-town atmosphere of Brookland. For several years members of the surrounding community vehemently fought the Washington Metropolitan Transit Authority's (WMATA's) plans for a park-and-ride facility. Well before the impact of the Brookland-CUA Metro station could be determined, petitions with more than 1,000 signatures were already filed with the DC Department of Transportation to request a residential parking permit program and short-term parking meters on the neighborhood's 12th Street commercial strip, both of which were eventually granted.⁶⁶

Since the Metro station's opening in 1978, most concerns have been directed at development in the area surrounding the station, especially because the Brooks Mansion, the neighborhood's most historic feature, is located on the same block. All over the District, numerous areas surrounding Metro stations have seen high density

⁶⁵ Patricia Camp. "Brookland: can its Commercial Area Survive the Arrival of Metro?" *The Washington Post*, February 2, 1978.

⁶⁶ Camp, 1978.

developments that have changed the character of nearby neighborhoods. Although most Brookland residents do not oppose development around the Brookland-CUA station altogether, they do advocate for controlled and well-planned development. Over the past several years, the neighborhood has struggled to work with the DC Office of Planning (OP), WMATA, and local developers to come to an agreement on what surrounding development should look like.

In 2001, a development plan was “leaked” to neighborhood leaders in Brookland concerning the proposed construction of 118 townhouses on a 4.5 acre section of land adjacent to the Brookland-CUA Metro station. The proposal called for a rezoning of the land from R-2 to R-5-B, which would permit building heights up to fifty feet, an FAR of 1.8, and maximum lot occupancy of 60%, a higher density zoning classification than any surrounding residentially-zoned land in Brookland.⁶⁷ Although many neighbors contested the project as proposed, most opposition focused on the lack of community input in the planning process.⁶⁸ On January 24, 2001, Darcy Flynn, an advisory neighborhood commissioner, was quoted as saying, “[WMATA’s] process is too secretive, and the notification is not adequate.”⁶⁹ A few days later a community meeting was held at Brookland’s St. Anthony’s Church, at which authorities from both WMATA and the Office of Planning were given the chance to present the development proposal to local residents and community leaders. Thomas Rooney, a prominent Brookland resident who attended the meeting, placed the blame

⁶⁷ Currently the land on which the R-5-B rezoning would occur is zoned as R-2, which has a maximum lot occupancy for residential structures of 40% and a maximum building height of 40 feet. (DC Office of Planning, “Summary of Zoning Districts,” <http://dcoz.dc.gov/info/districts.shtm>, June 3, 2006)

⁶⁸ John Drake, “Housing Plans Upset Neighbors; Commissioner Decries Metro’s Tactics,” *The Washington Times*, January 24, 2001. Office of Planning official Derrick Woody claims that the community did have a chance to participate in the planning process at a meeting one month earlier in December 2000. However, residents claimed that the meeting was with the Brookland/Catholic University of America Improvement Partnership, an organization that has no formal role like the Advisory Neighborhood Commissions (ANC). This issue is discussed at length in Chapter 5.

⁶⁹ Drake, 2001.

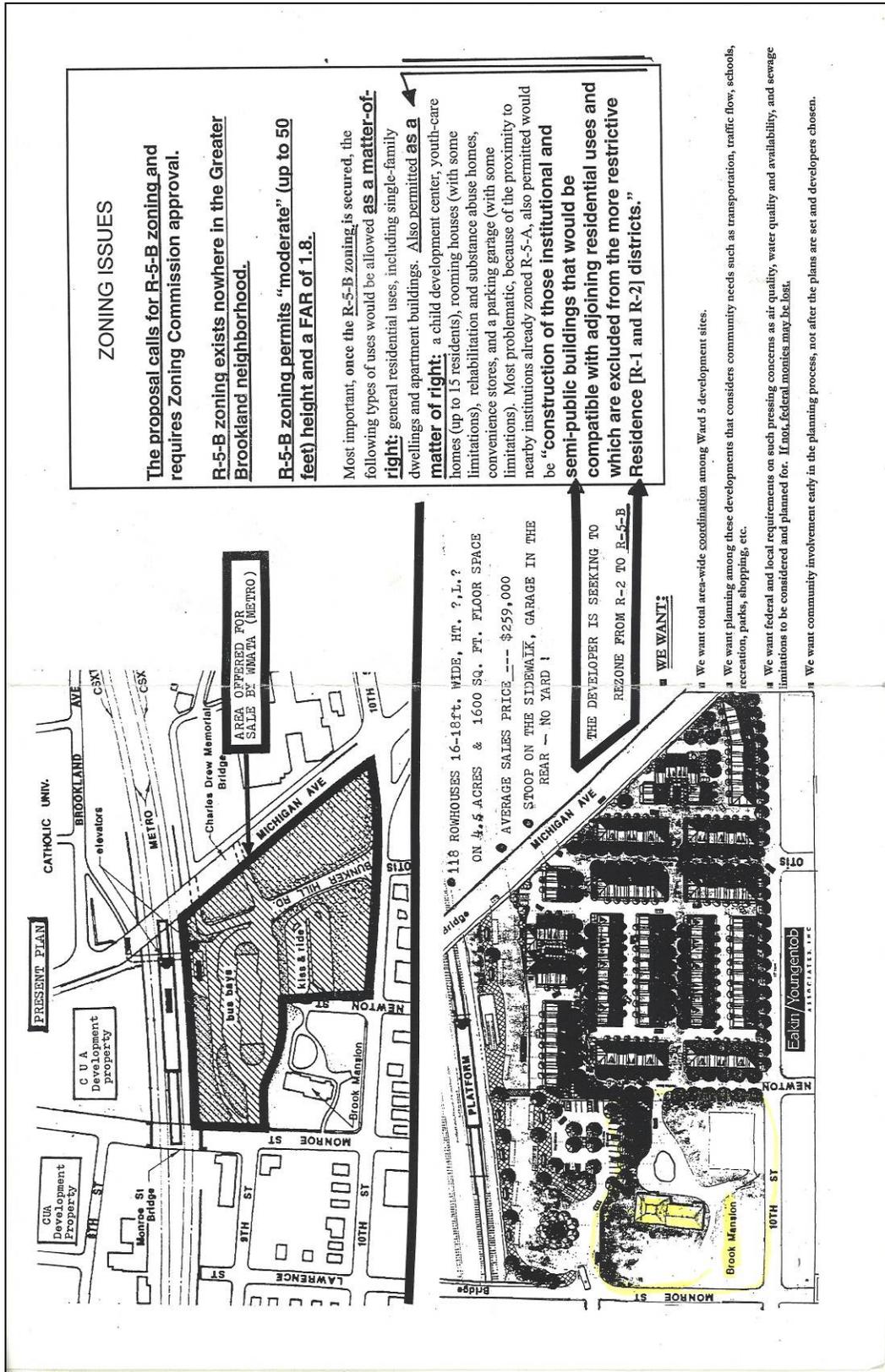


Figure 2-40: Zoning issues flyer for Metro development, courtesy of Thomas Rooney

on the Office of Planning, stating that its officials were “seriously flawed in representing this community to WMATA.”⁷⁰ In order to battle the “secretive development tactics and questionable practices” of the Office of Planning and WMATA, the Coalition for Community Control (CCC) was formed to organize residents from Wards 4 and 5 who live in areas surrounding Metro rail stations.⁷¹ After months of intense opposition to the proposal from the CCC and other residents and community leaders, WMATA halted progress on the plan and “agreed to return to the drawing board to determine ‘how to proceed with involving the community on joint development projects.’”⁷²

In this and other struggles over the lack of community participation in planning, the Office of Planning and WMATA have both claimed to be following routine procedure. Metro spokesman Ray Feldman explained that, “We’re more than happy to share information with them when it’s appropriate in the process to do that,” but proposals are initially kept confidential for “propriety and competitive reasons.”⁷³ However, in residents’ minds, “confidential” means secretive, resulting in an overall mistrust of local authorities. Residents also complain that by the time these agencies come to them for input, plans are far enough along that community participation is no more than a formality.

⁷⁰ Matthew Cella, “Brookland Group Slams Metro Plans,” *The Washington Times*, January 25, 2001.

⁷¹ John Drake, “Resident Group to Battle Secrecy; Questions Metro and Developers,” *The Washington Times*, February 20, 2001. The first meeting of the CCC was held in Thomas Rooney’s home in Brookland.

⁷² John Drake, “Metro Delays Projects to Gather more Input,” *The Washington Times*, April 11, 2001. The article was quoting WMATA spokeswoman Cheryl Johnson.

⁷³ John Drake, “Resident Group to Battle Secrecy; Questions Metro and Developers,” *The Washington Times*, February 20, 2001. The first meeting of the CCC was held in Thomas Rooney’s home in Brookland.

In an effort to revisit the idea of development around the Brookland-CUA Metro station, the Office of Planning approached Brookland residents in 2005 about developing a small area plan. Ward 5 OP official Deborah Craine is currently working to develop a more conscientious planning process this time around and hopes that the result is more reflective of the community's vision of future development.⁷⁴

Crime, Drugs, the Block Action Team and the Local Police Presence

Although Brookland remains fairly insulated from the crime and drugs that have long plagued many of DC's neighborhoods, the area still has to struggle to keep its streets quiet and safe. Jeremiah O'Leary, a journalist for the *Washington Times* and former resident of Brookland, was surprised when drug-related violence began to increase in the early 1990's, claiming that "the loudest sounds we ever heard there in my boyhood were church bells."⁷⁵

In response to the increase in crime, Robert Artis established the Block Action Team, a vigilant neighborhood watch group that acts as the eyes and ears of the neighborhood streets and reports suspicious behavior to police and neighbors. Also known as the "Orange Hat Brigade," the group is best known for the brightly colored headwear volunteers use to identify themselves as team members. The orange hats also act as visible reminders to both residents and visitors that the streets are under surveillance. In the early 1990s when drug-related crimes were at an all-time high in Brookland, the orange hat patrollers helped local police to pinpoint trouble areas in the neighborhood and even held candlelight vigils at various drug trade hotspots to deter crime and increase public awareness.

⁷⁴ Interview with Deborah Craine. 3/2/2006.

⁷⁵ Jeremiah O'Leary, "Crime Gallops into a Once-Placid Neighborhood," *Washington Times*, August 31, 1991

Some Brooklanders have taken an even more public approach to fighting neighborhood disturbances. In 2000, Brookland resident and advisory neighborhood commissioner Darcy Flynn videotaped late night antics at a nearby party thrown by Catholic University students and submitted the tape to local television station Fox Five. Flynn claimed he “saw the power, the effectiveness of the media—its ability to help the local community” and used the party footage to attract police attention to the issue.⁷⁶ Although late-night college partying is far less troublesome than drug-related violence, efforts to keep the streets relatively quiet with a university nearby is a priority for many Brookland residents.

Flynn’s publicity stunt happened to occur during a particularly severe crime wave in surrounding neighborhoods, which had many northeast residents complaining that the police should pay attention to the more pressing issues of violence and drugs than to complaints of loud college parties and underage drinking. When ANC commissioner Bernard Richardson was asked why more severe crime activity in his district received less attention from the police, he attributed the swift police response to Brookland residents’ outspokenness and active participation in their community, characteristics that he claimed were not present in many other surrounding northeast neighborhoods at the time.⁷⁷ In fact, in the summer of 2000, police officers went so far as to distribute their cell phone numbers to residents due to constant complaints from Brooklanders that the 911 emergency system was too slow. Regardless of how outsiders may perceive the amount of police attention given to Brookland relative to that given to surrounding communities, police presence on the streets and

⁷⁶ David A. Fahrenthold, “Community in Northeast Demands Police Attention; Media Savvy Residents Grab the Spotlight During Crime Wave,” *The Washington Post*, October 5, 2000.

⁷⁷ Fahrenthold, 2000.

responsiveness to crime remains a hot issue in the neighborhood, and residents of Brookland continue to voice their complaints.

Conclusion

From all the struggles that Brookland residents have gone through over the years, one thing is obvious: Brooklanders want control over the fate of their neighborhood. To maintain that control, residents of what is known as a “quiet” DC community have developed some of the loudest voices in the city. In the midst of these battles, numerous ad-hoc, grassroots organizations have been established, including, but by no means limited to, the Brookland Community Corporation, the Emergency Committee on the Transportation Crisis, the Coalition for Community Control, the Emergency Committee to Save Brooks Mansion, and the Twelfth Street Community Corporation. Most of these organizations were formed in direct response to specific issues in the neighborhood and existed only temporarily for the duration of their respective struggles. From all of the fights that arise in Brookland, it may appear that Brookland residents are resistant to change in their neighborhood. However, upon closer inspection, it becomes clear that it is the rate and nature of change, not change itself that is most of concern to Brooklanders.

CHAPTER 3: BROOKLAND STUDIES AND CULTURAL RESOURCES SURVEYS

Introduction

Chapter 2 outlines several key events in the history of the Brookland that illustrate the desire of residents to preserve the character of the neighborhood. These events have centered on several reactive measures that have been taken by residents in response to forces that are perceived to be threatening to the character of the neighborhood. In more recent years, there have also been more passive measures that have contributed to the preservation of Brookland's character through study and documentation of the neighborhood's social and physical features. Three key documents resulted from these studies: a 1973 dissertation on the twentieth-century-evolution of Brookland's demographics; a 1979-1980 book published by The George Washington University discussing Brookland's historic physical resources; and a 1987 cultural resources field examination that resulted in the neighborhood's *Report of Results of the Brookland Community/Catholic University Historic Resources Survey*, which concluded that the Brookland neighborhood was not eligible for listing in the National Register of Historic Places as an historic district. In the late 1990s, over a decade after the 1987 survey and report, the idea of an historic district nomination for Brookland was revived. With support from city officials, the Historic Brookland Community Development Corporation sponsored a second phase of the cultural resources survey, concentrating on the neighborhood's local history and significance as an historic middle-class African American neighborhood. This chapter will summarize those initial studies of the character of the Brookland neighborhood, as well as the motivations, events, and findings of the Phase II cultural resources survey.

Initial Studies on Brookland

The first formal study of the Brookland neighborhood was a dissertation written by Stanley Nikkel Royce at the University of Maryland in 1973 entitled *A Study in the Development and Structure of an Interracial Neighborhood in DC*. Nikkel's study examined the evolution of the Brookland's demographics, as well as the contemporary issues faced by the neighborhood in the 1970's. Much of Royce's analysis was based on a community survey conducted by the Bureau of Social Research at Catholic University in February of 1970.⁷⁸ This survey was sent to all households in Census Tract 93 and provided an interesting snapshot of Brookland as an urban community. Many of the survey's questions focused on how residents felt about issues such as crime, development, the proposed freeway project, the possibility of rapid transit, and the role of local community organizations. The survey also examined the residents' perceptions, including why they chose to live in the neighborhood, what part of the neighborhood they enjoyed most, how they defined their neighborhood (name, boundaries, landmarks, etc.), where they go in Brookland for various errands and activities, and how they felt about interaction between their neighbors. There were also more personal questions about residents' income, religion, education, employment, politics, and community participation. Royce used the 1970 survey to provide a framework for his analysis of the neighborhood, and both the results of the survey and Royce's dissertation are invaluable resources to those who wish to study the history of Brookland or the history of DC neighborhoods.

⁷⁸Stanley Nikkel Royce, "A Study in the Development and Structure of an Interracial Neighborhood in DC" (dissertation, University of Maryland, College Park, MD, 1973). The survey was conducted by students of Catholic University, under the supervision of Dr. P. Peachey and Dr. William Pratt. The University worked in cooperation with the Brookland Area Coordinating Council, who acted as the community sponsor of the project.

From 1979 to 1980, graduate students in the Urban and Regional Planning Department of The George Washington University (GWU) conducted a study of the history of Brookland and its built resources under the supervision of GWU professors George W. McDaniel and John N. Pearce. The result of the project was a publication entitled *Images of Brookland: A History and Architecture of a Washington Suburb* that provides a “historical sketch” of the neighborhood, an analysis of its typical architectural styles, an examination of its landmarks and unusual architecture, and several case studies of individual squares (neighborhood blocks).⁷⁹ The purpose of this publication was not “to write a full history of Brookland, to complete a comprehensive inventory or to analyze each [square, but to provide] a revealing beginning to encourage further exploration and evaluation of Brookland and its sister neighborhoods in Washington and elsewhere.” The authors also suggested further examination of the “eligibility of specific properties or the neighborhood as a whole for designation as official local and/or national landmarks.”⁸⁰ The authors also discuss the role that studies such as *Images of Brookland* play in the larger preservation movement in DC. Although Royce’s dissertation was the first known published study of the neighborhood’s history, GWU’s publication was the first study of Brookland to be directly associated with the historic preservation.

In response to GWU’s study, the first historic resources survey of Brookland was completed in 1987, one hundred years after the original subdivision of the neighborhood. The resulting study was entitled “Report of Results of the Brookland Community/Catholic University Historic Resources Survey Northeast Washington,

⁷⁹ George W. McDaniel and John N. Pearce, eds, *Images of Brookland: The History and Architecture of a Washington Suburb*. GW Washington Studies No. 10, Center for Washington Area Studies at George Washington University: 1982. John N. Pearce was the Director of the Graduate Program in Historic Preservation and George Washington University at the time.

⁸⁰ McDaniel, 5.

D.C.” and was written by Robert Verrey and Laura Henley, with portions of the report completed by Judith Capen (author of the architecture section and discussion), William Gardner (principal investigator), and Jon Wakelyn (project historian).⁸¹ The survey’s history of the neighborhood was largely taken from the GWU monograph publication, but there was a significant amount of information added by Laura Henley including an archeological investigation and information on the neighborhood’s prehistory. The authors of the 1987 survey concluded that the neighborhood itself was not eligible as a historic district and that only one resource—the grounds of the Brooks Mansion—could be listed in the National Register. The analysis of eligibility was primarily based on architecture (Criterion C), and according to the survey’s authors, the neighborhood’s architecture was “normal” and “typical,” lacked integrity, and had no national significance. The conclusions of the 1987 survey are surprising considering the discussion of the broadening of the preservation movement that is included in the preface of the 1982 edition of GWU’s *Images of Brookland*, the same publication from which the authors of the 1987 survey borrowed significant information related to the neighborhood’s history:

There is a new appreciation for the artifacts of local experience throughout urban America...As the movement for historic preservation has succeeded in broadening its base of support, it has itself been transformed in character...Architectural excellence is no longer the sole or even dominant criterion. The value of structures and neighborhoods and landscapes is determined by far more differentiated calculus, one which gives more weight to the meaning of the human experiences associated with a site or a district.⁸²

⁸¹ Laura Henley is now Laura Henley Dean and is now on the Advisory Council for Historic Preservation.

⁸² McDaniel et al., 1.

Revisiting the Significance of Brookland

As discussed above, the 1987 *Report of Results of the Brookland Community/Catholic University Historic Resources Survey* concludes that the Brookland neighborhood is not eligible for listing in the National Register as an historic district. The report's findings state, "Brookland has not been the residence for 'important' people, or the location of 'significant' events." Instead, the authors find that Brookland's "history, archeology and architecture...are those of a typical suburban community which developed during the late 19th and early 20th century and typical of the cultural and economic forces of Washington county during the 18th and 19th centuries." However, significance does not rely solely on nationally significant people and events. The National Park Service states that the National Register Criteria for Evaluation include assessing a neighborhood's ability to tell a story about local or state history, as well. Significance is given to both high-style architecture and architecture typical of more ethnically and economically diverse communities, and rather than focusing solely on nationally significant people and events, a neighborhood's significance could include its ability to evidence the everyday quality of American communities.

The determination that Brookland was not eligible for the National Register was misleading and based on a seemingly common mistake of overlooking the neighborhood's place in the local and state historic contexts in search of a higher level of significance. However, one sentence in the 1987 report hinted at a different conclusion for those who better understood the evaluation of significance: Brookland "has been, throughout its history, a community more typical of the development of much of the Washington area. And it remains a definable community withstanding the homogenizing pressures of the 20th century city." This statement left the door open

for the revival of the idea of a historic district nomination in Brookland in the late 1990s.

Initiating the Nomination Process

The pursuit of a National Register designation for Brookland was not revisited until almost a decade after the 1987 report. By the late 1990s, the idea of the nomination was strongly supported and encouraged by Tersh Boasberg, the chairman of the District of Columbia Historic Preservation Review Board, who wanted to expand the basis of support for historic preservation on the City Council. Boasberg's efforts were focused on filling holes in the historic district map primarily in Wards 5, 7, and 8, where no historic districts existed at the time. Boasberg saw a nomination in Brookland, an historic Ward 5 neighborhood, as the next step toward growing the preservation constituency in the District of Columbia. The District of Columbia Historic Preservation Division (DCHPD)—now the District of Columbia Historic Preservation Office (DCHPO)—also expressed the opinion that Brookland was a desirable historic district and encouraged the initiation of a historic resources survey of the neighborhood, which would be the first phase of the process. As the 1987 report had included a historic resources survey. DCHPO intended for the new survey to update and supplement the existing 1987 findings. The new survey would include those squares that were not surveyed during the 1987 effort and to provide a wider scope to the discussion of the significance of the neighborhood as a historically African-American community.

The ringleader for the second phase of the historic resources survey became Mary Farrell, who had approached DCHPD about the idea in 1997. Farrell, a resident of Washington's Capitol Hill neighborhood and a self-proclaimed preservation expert, had taken a special interest in Brookland and was volunteering full-time with the then

recently-formed Historic Brookland Community Development Corporation (BCDC). The BCDC is an historic preservation-based non-profit community development corporation formed in 1999 by residents of Greater Brookland to promote the arts and to protect and capitalize on the cultural resources of the neighborhood for the purpose of building community pride and fostering responsible economic development.⁸³

Farrell approached the executive director of BCDC, Lavinia Wohlfarth, to suggest that the survey be conducted with the backing of the organization. Wohlfarth, a long-time resident of northeast D.C., was immediately drawn to the idea of an historic district nomination. Both Farrell and Wohlfarth agreed that the BCDC would be an appropriate sponsor, as historic preservation in Brookland was stated as the primary mission of the organization.

With the backing of DCHPD and BCDC, Farrell approached John Feeley about putting together a survey team. Feeley, another long-time resident of northeast D.C. and one of the founders of the Brookland Historic Society, had conducted work on the 1987 report and had been leading house tours through the neighborhood since the 1980s. With experience in procuring and administering grants for tours, lectures, and exhibits on the neighborhood's history, Feeley was chosen as the grant administrator for the project. The project team also included Carol Hooper, Rosemarie Dempsey, and Laura Henley Dean. Hooper's qualifications included a Master's degree in Architectural History and over ten years of preservation experience with local firms in the Washington metropolitan area. With experience managing large-scale historic resource surveys, Hooper was chosen as the project team manager, as well as the principal architectural historian responsible for writing the final report. Rosemarie

⁸³ District of Columbia City Government, "Office of the Deputy Mayor for Planning and Economic Development Calendar," April 2, 2009.

Dempsey, a Brookland-based public relations consultant, was named the outreach coordinator. Dempsey had served as an organizer of the annual Brookland Day event and was the principal organizer of the Brookland-CUA Neighborhood Improvement Partnership, a town-gown planning effort focused on public space beautification, the creation of a signage system, historic preservation, and community outreach. Laura Henley Dean, an archeologist on the staff of the Advisory Council on Historic Preservation (ACHP), was one of the authors of the 1987 report. As a native Brookland resident, Dean was chosen to be the neighborhood liaison.⁸⁴ Overall, the team included residents of Brookland and Ward 5 who were educated in or had experience with architectural history and/or historic preservation.

As a training component of the project, the project team also included interns from the community, as well as local colleges and universities, were included on the project team. According to project records, an effort was made to select interns who claimed ties to the Washington community and who demonstrated an interest in pursuing a career in historic preservation. The final report gives credit to two interns, Kim Collie and Steve Elder. Collie was a 2000 graduate of the Masters in Architecture program at The Catholic University of America and was active in the Brookland-CUA Neighborhood Improvement Partnership. Elder was a graduate student in Historic Preservation at the George Washington University at the time the survey was conducted. The final report also gives credit to a group of Brookland middle school students who helped with photo labeling and building permit research.

⁸⁴ Historic Brookland Community Development Corporation, A Proposal for Phase II of the Brookland/CUA Cultural Resources Survey, October 6, 2000, courtesy of the project records of John Feeley.

The survey project was designated as a FY2000 Grants-In-Aid project through the Historic Preservation Fund. The Grant-In-Aid program, as administered by the District of Columbia State Historic Preservation Office (DCSHPO), is a preservation survey and planning program providing 60/40 matching grants assistance. The proposal for the Grant-In-Aid funds was submitted to DCHPD on October 6, 2000. The proposal broke the Brookland/CUA Cultural Resource Survey into three phases. Phase I was comprised of 1987 survey and report. Phase II, to be funded by the Grant-In-Aid, would “verify, update, and augment the Phase I survey, provide hands-on training to graduate students in identification and documentation methods, and through public outreach efforts, build a strong constituency for historic preservation in Brookland. Building on the earlier survey, [Phase II] will assess existing survey and historical information on approximately 1,900 buildings and document an estimated 300-500 as yet un-surveyed buildings.”⁸⁵ Phase III would complete any necessary documentation and research, assess the contributing status of each property surveyed, and, depending on the outcome of Phase II, include the drafting of a National Register nomination for a historic district in Brookland.⁸⁶ For the second phase of the Brookland/CUA Cultural Resources Survey, a \$20,000 private grant was to be provided by Citibank to match the \$30,000 of federal monies administered by the DCSHPO.

Executing Phase II

The first documented work on the Phase II Survey took place in March 2001. The Subgrantee Monthly Progress Report (as required by the Historic Preservation Grant-

⁸⁵ Historic Preservation Fund Survey and Planning Grant Subgrant Award – Letter of Agreement, HPF Grant No. 11-0015309, transmittal dated May 4, 2001, courtesy of the project records of John Feeley.

⁸⁶ Historic Brookland Community Development Corporation, A Proposal for Phase II of the Brookland/CUA Cultural Resources Survey, October 6, 2000, courtesy of the project records of John Feeley.

In-Aid program) indicates that the project team used the month of March for project planning, including the completion and submittal of a Work-Action Plan, the preparation of a list of needed photographs, the coordination of interns and volunteers, and the review and reproduction of 1987 survey field photographs.⁸⁷ Field photography was also initiated in March.

The project team continued with project planning through April, focusing primarily on outreach activities. The team prepared an Outreach Plan and organized participation in the Tourism Off the Mall Day, which was scheduled for June 7, 2001. The team also made arrangements with representatives from other historic districts to speak at the advisory board meeting scheduled for May. Initial survey work was conducted in April, including the continuation of field photography and preparation of maps for on-site and permits research.

By the end of April, negotiations over the letter of agreement for the grant were still underway. Without a letter of agreement, grant funds could not be distributed to the project team, and the monthly progress report for April indicates that the lack of funds was causing early delays in survey and administrative work. Feeley finally received a signed letter of agreement on May 5, but the first funds were not dispersed immediately. Therefore, in May, the team decided to accelerate work on those tasks that did not require immediate funds, including map and permit research, preparation of a slide show, creation of a table of stylistic terminology, planning of outreach presentations for the fall, and design of an outreach brochure. The hiring of interns,

⁸⁷ March Subgrantee Monthly Progress Report for the Brookland Cultural Resource Survey, Historic Preservation Grant-In-Aid Program, April 9, 2001, Carol Hooper, courtesy of the project records of John Feeley.

labeling and development of photographs, and procurement of a computer was all delayed until the first funds disbursement on May 26.

Once a computer was available to the team, Hooper attempted to install the Integrated Preservation Software (IPS), the official database software used by the District of Columbia for the documentation of historic resources. Access to the database was necessary to acquire the records from the 1987 survey and to assess the scope of additional survey work. Hooper had no training with IPS and had to consult with the designer of the software, Larry Karr, in order to troubleshoot the installation, causing additional delays. By June, the team was able to access past survey reports from IPS and had acquired funds for the hiring of interns. Substantial survey work then began. According to monthly progress reports, all of the 1987 survey photos were labeled by the end of July, and the 2001 survey photos were labeled by the end of August. Permit research was also completed in August, and archival research was completed in September.

Despite the progress on survey work during the summer of 2001, funding delays, technical problems with IPS, and errors in the 1987 data entry made it clear to Hooper and Feeley that it would be impossible to complete the project by the September 30 deadline. On July 6, 2001, Hooper met with Stanley Onye from DCHPD to request a deadline extension. A letter from Hooper to Onye on July 17, 2001, confirms the extension of the deadline for completion of all work products to November 30, 2001.⁸⁸ Despite the extension, all approved expenditures would still have to be incurred by September 30.

⁸⁸ Letter from Carol Hooper to Stanley Onye, July 17, 2001, courtesy of the project records of John Feeley.

In September, survey work focused on data entry and completing the records entered during the 1987 survey. Hooper once again experienced technical problems with the IPS database and requested technical assistance from DCHPD and Larry Karr during the month of October. September also presented the project team with a major financial obstacle. A letter accompanying the November submission of the survey report explains that the \$20,000 in matching funds that Citibank had committed to the project was not received. Due to the events of September 11, 2001, Citibank had to withdraw its financial commitment in order to “direct its resources to the victims of the terrorist attacks and their families.”⁸⁹ Because \$20,000 of matching funds was required to receive the \$30,000 federal share provided through the Historic Preservation Fund, BCDC had to look elsewhere for private donations. The remaining monies were provided by BCDC operating funds, gifts from the Wohlfarth Galleries, as well as from fundraisers, such as a spaghetti dinner and 5-K race.

Despite further setbacks in September, the project team met the extended deadline, and Part 1 of Phase II of the Brookland Cultural Resources Survey was submitted to DCHPD on November 30, 2001. The submittal included a final report, presenting the findings and recommendations made by the project team. Appendix 1 of the submittal included photographs, permit research, and survey data for Squares not included in the 1987 survey, as well as photographs and permit research for incomplete records from the 1987 survey. A slide show presenting the survey findings was also created and included as Appendix 2 to the report.

⁸⁹ Letter from Lavinia Wohlfarth, Brookland CDC, to Stanley Onye, DCSHPO Grants Administrator, November 30, 2001, courtesy of the project records of John Feeley.

Findings of the Phase II Survey

The final report presented two distinct areas of significance that support the neighborhood's eligibility for listing in the National Register:

- Brookland's long and multifaceted connections with the Catholic Church; and
- Brookland's role as the neighborhood of choice in the 1930s to 1950s for middle-class African-American families seeking a suburban home.⁹⁰

The proposed boundaries for the historic district were based on historic city and neighborhood boundaries, visual changes to the area over time, visual barriers, and clearly differentiated patterns of development. The proposed boundaries were defined by the final report as: "Michigan Avenue, to Randolph Street, to 14th Street, to Otis to 18th Street to Brentwood Road/Rhode Island Avenue, to 10th Street to Franklin Street to the B&O Railroad tracks."⁹¹ The proposed boundaries did not include areas occupied by the Catholic University of America, the Franciscan Monastery, or the Holy Name College (Howard University Divinity School), despite the fact that one of the defined areas of significance was the neighborhood's historic relationship with these religious and academic institutions. The boundaries also did not include an area of the neighborhood to the west of the visual barrier of the B&O railroad tracks, despite the area's association with the Brookland neighborhood and inclusion in the original subdivision boundaries. A discussion of these excluded areas was included in the report.

⁹⁰ Historic Brookland Community Development Corporation, "Final Report: Phase II Brookland Cultural Resources Survey," November 30, 2001, 11, courtesy of the project records of John Feeley.

⁹¹ Historic Brookland Community Development Corporation, "Final Report: Phase II Brookland Cultural Resources Survey," November 30, 2001, 15, courtesy of the project records of John Feeley.

The report also made several recommendations, including further research at several local repositories, as well as additional oral history. The report also suggested that in the future, DCHPD should provide installation of and training in the IPS software that is used as the official cultural resource database by the District of Columbia.

Outreach Plan for the Phase II Survey

In April 2001, Rosemarie Dempsey, the outreach coordinator, developed a community outreach plan, which is a requirement for all Grant-In-Aid projects. The plan was to be implemented by a separate outreach team led by Dempsey. In addition to the members of the Phase II project team, the outreach team included Allen Robinson, a public service administrator for Montgomery County, Brookland small-business owner, and former ANC commissioner, as well as Ronnie McGhee, a preservation architect and resident of the Shaw Historic District in the District of Columbia.

In order to develop the outreach plan, team members consulted with residents from other Washington neighborhoods who had experience in the historic district nomination process. At the May 5, 2001, Brookland Historic Resources Survey Advisory Committee Meeting, Mike Wilkinson and Paul Williams, representatives from the Cardoza/Shaw/U Street Historic District, presented their experiences in establishing an historic district. They suggested distributing a flyer to every home in the neighborhood and holding a community forum. They also suggested taking a year after the completion of the historic resources survey to focus on outreach efforts before starting the National Register nomination.

The final outreach plan was organized as a Work/Action timeline, presenting deliverables and milestones with their responsible parties and respective start and

finish dates. After development of the outreach plan in April, Robinson and Feeley would build an outreach database, taking contact information from sign-in sheets and response cards from community meetings and the Brookland Day event. As part of the effort to collect contact information, they would create a volunteer recruitment announcement and project flyer, as well as a brochure introducing the cultural resources survey and promoting Brookland history. A majority of the outreach plan focused on presenting the survey efforts and possible historic designation at public meetings, events, and forums. During the summer of 2001, Robinson, Feeley, and Hooper were responsible for creating a presentation that would be shown to several groups, including:

- Brookland Garden Club;
- St. John Grand Lodge AFAM;
- Knights of Columbus;
- Brookland Business and Professionals Association;
- Brookland Civic Association;
- Partnership for Problem Solving/Brookland Safety;
- Woodridge Civic Association;
- St. Anthony's Catholic Church;
- DCTV;
- Michigan Park Citizen Association;
- Edgewood Civic Association;
- Ward 5 Neighborhood Planner (District of Columbia Office of Planning);
- Ward 5 City Council Representative; and
- Advisory Neighborhood Commission 5A, 5B, and 5C.

The plan also included press releases and articles for local newspapers, along with ongoing outreach with key media contacts. The first press release would report that the survey project was underway and would be written by Dempsey and Robinson for May 31, 2001. The first newspaper article was scheduled for the end of July in the *Common Denominator* and would discuss the beginning of the survey efforts. The second newspaper article, to be titled “Survey Winding Up,” was scheduled for the end of September. A major outreach effort was also scheduled to take place during the Brookland Festival on September 22, 2001, where the outreach team would host an exhibit and distribute brochures and handouts advertising the survey efforts. They would also host an oral history workshop at the event.

Completion of many of the proposed outreach efforts was documented in the monthly progress reports submitted to DCHPD. In March 2001, the first community meeting was scheduled for August, and notice of the meeting was sent to thirteen “community advisors.”⁹² In April, the team led three tours of Brookland and organized participation in Tourism Off the Mall Day, scheduled for June 7. The outreach brochure, entitled “From Farmland to Trolley Car Suburb: An Investigation of Brookland’s History,” was created in May. The brochure gave a summary history of the neighborhood, described the Brookland Cultural Resources Survey project, and advertised for volunteers to assist with research and survey work for Phase II. The outreach team also contacted twenty community advisors concerning the May community meeting, but only nine people were recorded in attendance, five of which were directly involved with the project.⁹³ Reports from May and June also indicate

⁹² March Subgrantee Monthly Progress Report for the Brookland Cultural Resource Survey, Historic Preservation Grant-In-Aid Program, April 9, 2001, courtesy of the project records of John Feeley. The names of the thirteen community advisors were not documented in the monthly report.

⁹³ Minutes of the Brookland Historic Resources Survey Advisory Committee Meeting, May 5, 2001, courtesy of the project records of John Feeley.

that the outreach team formulated a strategy for outreach events to be held in the fall of 2001. A letter dated June 6, 2001, indicates that the project team participated in DC Heritage Day on June 2 by hosting two walking tours through Brookland. No other major outreach items were mentioned in the monthly progress reports or are documented in the project records between July and November, 2001.

Conclusion

Over a decade after the Phase I report concluded that Brookland was not eligible for listing in the National Register because it lacked sufficient national significance, the idea of an historic district nomination was revived. With the support of the DCHPD, the BCDC put together a team of preservation professionals, volunteers, community leaders, and preservation students to revisit the historic resources of the neighborhood and reassess the significance of the neighborhood. Despite numerous obstacles, Phase II of the Brookland Cultural Resources Survey was completed in November 2001 as the first step toward reviving the idea of an historic district nomination for the neighborhood. The Phase II report presented findings that focused on the local history of the neighborhood within the context of Washington and found that the neighborhood had significance both in its strong relationship with adjacent religious and academic institutions, as well as for its history as a middle-class, African-American community. Although outreach materials and presentations for Phase II mentioned the idea of a potential historic district, a National Register nomination was not the focus of outreach; instead, outreach efforts involved contacting members of the community and publicizing the Phase II project, while soliciting for volunteers to participate in the research and survey efforts. As the next chapter will discuss, future outreach activities that specifically addressed the nomination would explode into a

community debate that would once again silence the advocates for an historic district nomination for Brookland.

CHAPTER 4: CHRONOLOGY OF THE 2005 BROOKLAND HISTORIC DISTRICT DEBATE

Introduction

Members of the Brookland community have a successful history of ad hoc efforts to protect their neighborhood. In 2005, many Brookland residents mobilized for yet another cause—to stop the proposed nomination of Brookland as an historic district. Although an historic district nomination may seem unthreatening to preservation advocates, some residents may view this type of designation as a Trojan horse for gentrification. Chapter 1 presents the demographic character of the Brookland community as being a middle-class neighborhood, with many long-time neighborhood residents. This character is valued by many Brooklanders and is considered a selling point for potential newcomers to the neighborhood. Hence, the idea of rapid development and possible gentrification causes anxiety for many people in Brookland, especially as the demographics of several neighborhoods throughout the city are experiencing rapid change.

Chapter 3 presents the events surrounding the Phase II survey of Brookland's historic resources, an effort that many people in the neighborhood hoped would resurrect the idea of an historic district designation in Brookland. Three years after the completion of the survey, members of the Brookland community began outreach activities for a proposed National Register of Historic Places nomination for the neighborhood, igniting a heated debate over the meaning of an historic district designation. This chapter will recount the events surrounding that debate.

Initial Outreach for the Proposed Nomination – Feeley, Farrell, and Fletcher

On November 30, 2001, Phase II of the Brookland Historic Resources Survey was submitted to the District of Columbia Historic Preservation Office (DCHPO). The outreach portion of the project was not complete at that time and continued for several months after the grant period ended in December. During the spring of 2002, Mary Farrell and John Feeley presented the survey results and the idea of an historic district nomination to the Brookland Garden Club, the Brookland Civic Association, the Michigan Park Citizen Association, and the relevant Advisory Neighborhood Commissions (ANC) including 5A, 5B, and 5C.⁹⁴ By May 2002, both the survey and outreach portions of the Phase II project were considered complete.

Although the intention of Phase II was to eventually pursue an historic district designation, the idea of a nomination for the designation was not revisited until 2005. According to Feeley and Farrell, this three-year hiatus was due to a general lack of organization and a need to come up with sufficient funding.

In early spring of 2005, John Feeley and Mary Farrell approached Patsy Fletcher, the public outreach liaison at DCHPO, about formulating an outreach plan for the proposed historic district. Fletcher recalls that she immediately began to contact community leaders, including the ANC commissioners in the Brookland area, and Vincent Orange, the City Council representative for Ward 5 at that time. However, according to Fletcher, a representative from Historic Brookland Community Development Corporation (BCDC) told her that he or she was nervous about developers rushing to acquire and demolish properties if they learned of the historic

⁹⁴ Feeley and Farrell did not present to St. John Grand Lodge, Knights of Columbus, Brookland Business and Professionals Association, Partnership for Problem Solving/Brookland Safety, Woodridge Civic Association, St. Anthony's Catholic Church, or DCTV, all of which were proposed in the draft outreach plan for Phase II (see Chapter 3).

district discussion.⁹⁵ In response to those concerns, Fletcher began a “soft outreach approach;” she only attended public meetings to which she was invited and did not continue to pursue discussions with community leaders or residents. It appeared to Fletcher that the three-year hiatus since the intense survey and outreach work for Phase II may have caused a decrease in momentum.

Also in the spring of 2005, John Feeley was leading his own outreach activities for the proposed nomination in response to what he felt was an increase in development and real estate interests in Brookland. Feeley first mobilized a group of ten Brookland residents who were interested in helping with the outreach effort: Phil Blair, Mary Pat Rowan, Gwen Kosten, Sarah Woodhead, Wendy Zwick, Ed Lazere, Susanne Griffith, Tara Tappert, Julie Martinez, and Maria Salvadore. In early spring of 2005, Feeley organized a small meeting held at Lazere and Griffith’s house on Jackson Street to discuss the possibility of a nomination. The meeting was attended by all but two of the aforementioned residents (Martinez and Salvadore), as well as by Tersh Boasberg, chairman of the Historic Preservation Review Board (HPRB) for the District of Columbia. At this first meeting, the volunteers expressed interest in handing out flyers and talking to neighbors but explicitly told Feeley that they did not want the effort to be associated with BCDC. Rowan and Tappert were former board members of BCDC and had been discouraged by the organization’s handling of the Brookland Main Street program, which had been established in 2003. Several of the aforementioned volunteers were also heavily involved with the Brookland Garden Club, which had disassociated itself financially from BCDC after the latter was accused of mismanaging funds. Because the participation of these volunteers was crucial to

⁹⁵ Mary Farrell and John Feeley do not know who approached Fletcher about quieting the outreach efforts and Patsy Fletcher does not recall who it was.

Feeley's outreach effort, he agreed to proceed with the nomination outside the aegis of BCDC. After the initial house meeting, he held a second meeting at Sheila Kelly's house on Newton Street, at which there were only three people in attendance other than himself.⁹⁶

Although Feeley did not schedule an ANC meeting as part of his initial outreach efforts in the spring of 2005, he did talk with different community leaders and ANC commissioners about the idea of a nomination early in the outreach process, particularly Mary Baird-Currie, ANC commissioner for 5A-06.⁹⁷ Currie had informed Feeley that there were people in the community who were not interested in a historic district and wanted to discuss other measures that could be taken to preserve the character of the neighborhood.

The first ANC meeting at which Feeley presented the idea of the historic district nomination was the May 2005 meeting of ANC single member district 5A-07 held at the Slowe School in Brookland. Although commissioner William Boston represents 5A-07, Feeley recalls that Boston was not in attendance at the meeting and that Rudy Knott, the ANC commissioner for single member district 5A-10, led the meeting.⁹⁸ Feeley and Patsy Fletcher from DCHPO presented information about historic districts and the proposed nomination to the small group of residents who were in attendance. Despite the volunteers' request to disassociate the nomination from BCDC, Mary Farrell was also at the meeting to answer questions about the involvement of BCDC in

⁹⁶ Two different sets of residents attended the meetings; however, Feeley could not recall specifically who was in attendance at the second meeting.

⁹⁷ 5A-06 is directly adjacent to 5A-07 to the north and was included in the proposed historic district boundaries for Brookland. Currie is still ANC commissioner for this single member district.

⁹⁸ 5A-10 is directly adjacent to 5A-07 to the east and was included in the proposed historic district boundaries for Brookland. Knott is no longer the commissioner for this single member district. There are no meeting minutes required for single member district meetings to confirm attendance or agenda.

the nomination process. ANC Commissioner Mary Baird-Currie was also in attendance. Feeley recalls that the meeting was not well attended but that the few residents who were at the meeting seemed sympathetic to the pursuit of the designation. However, it was at the ANC 5A-07 meeting that Feeley remembers first receiving a comment related to the perception that Feeley and the BCDC would profit from the designation of the neighborhood as an historic district, an idea that would become important to the campaign of the historic district opponents in the months to come. The resident's argument for this idea was that property owners would be required to pay Feeley or members of BCDC to approve or rubber-stamp renovation plans before they were presented to HPRB. Feeley disputed the claim, explaining that neither BCDC nor he would monetarily profit from the designation and that HPRB and the staff of DCHPO would be the only parties to require a review of the plans.

The second publicly advertised meeting was held on May 31, 2005, at the cafeteria at St. Anthony's Parish. John Feeley advertised for the meeting on the Brookland Listserv one week prior to the meeting. Although Feeley signed his name at the end of the posting, the posting source is identified as "BrooklandCDC@yahoo.com," which was again in conflict with his previous attempts to disassociate the effort from BCDC. At the meeting, Feeley presented the process and results of the 2001-2002 Phase II survey project, as well as the options for an historic district nomination based on those results. Patsy Fletcher from DCHPO was also present at this meeting and was available to answer questions about the historic district nomination process. Fletcher recalls that there were several questions posed by the attendees about the proposed boundaries for the historic district but that the attendees again expressed general support for the nomination.

The Emergence of the Opposition

After the presentation at the ANC meeting at St. Anthony's Parish on May 31, 2005, Brookland resident Carolyn Steptoe ignited a heated debate over the subject of historic preservation and the possible historic district designation of Brookland. Steptoe, a middle-aged native Washingtonian, had been a resident of Brookland since 1998 and was a relative newcomer to the neighborhood. She had not been involved in any activities related to historic resources survey and had never attended any of the past public meetings on the subject of historic district designation. Up to this point, she had not presented herself as a community activist or leader and appears to have not been directly involved in any of the community struggles of the past decades. To some, she was an unknown character in the neighborhood. As such, Steptoe's sudden and intense involvement came very much as a surprise to the proponents of the nomination. Steptoe, who claims to "have a very strong sense of duty to give voice those unable to speak for themselves," took it upon herself to stop the nomination process in its tracks.⁹⁹

The stage for the debate was initially set on the Brookland Listserv, an online forum that was created by residents as a vehicle to share community news and concerns. Steptoe, who did not attend the meeting at St. Anthony's Parish, stated in her first listserv posting (June 2, 2005) that she was vehemently opposed to historic district designation in Brookland. She also claimed that she and many of her neighbors were unaware of the meeting that was held at St. Anthony's and the efforts to create an historic district nomination and that she resented the efforts of the "Brookland Historical Development Commission" to make such a proposal without input or discussion from Brookland homeowners. Steptoe's posting prompted numerous

⁹⁹ "Carolyn Steptoe Speaks on Issues Affecting Ward 5 and the City at Large." <http://electsteptoe2006.blogspot.com/2006/08/about-herself.html>, accessed February 6, 2009.

threads of conversation on the listserv during the following weeks that involved both opponents and advocates of the historic district nomination and historic preservation in general. Feeley and Farrell both recall being surprised by the intense backlash by Steptoe and others on the listserv, saying that it was the first time they had received any indication that the community was opposed to their pursuit of the designation.

Patsy Fletcher was also surprised by the sudden negative reaction. Fletcher recalls that on June 6, 2005, she received a call from Steptoe to discuss the activities surrounding the proposed nomination. Prior to her discussion with Steptoe, Fletcher had the impression from ANC members that there was general support for proposing an historic district nomination in Brookland; however, Steptoe informed Fletcher that some ANC commissioners were expressing contradictory opinions to residents.

Listserv Discussion

After Carolyn Steptoe's first posting on the Brookland Listserv, much of the historic district debate took place within this online forum. As a relatively recent medium for community discussion, the impact the listserv had on the Brookland debate indicates the increasing importance of electronic mediums of communication in outreach efforts. In the case of Brookland, neither the opponents nor the proponents of the designation were able to manage the listserv activity in a constructive manner throughout most of the debate. Many listserv members and other neighborhood residents claimed that the listserv postings were dominated by rhetoric and inappropriate personal attacks, and several attempts were made by members of the listserv to both moderate the discussion and to encourage the use of a separate forum for the debate.

In the beginning of the outreach effort for the proposed nomination, Feeley had used the listserv to advertise meetings. Although other efforts were made by Feeley to notify people of meeting times and places, some objections were voiced concerning the use of the listserv as a primary means of communication because many of Brookland's numerous elderly residents or less internet-savvy residents could be left out of the loop. As the historic district discussion became heated, the listserv proved to attract numerous residents of different backgrounds, ages, and residencies. During the months of June and July of 2005, approximately 245 messages relevant to the historic district debate were posted on the listserv. Of these postings, there were approximately 80 individual authors, and over 95% of them identified themselves as Brookland residents.



Figure 4-41: Opposition sign at 1257 Lawrence Street (Steptoe residence), 2006

Among the many Brookland residents who participated in the listserv communications, a few non-Brookland residents also posted their opinions and questions on the subject. The most outspoken non-Brookland resident to take part in the discussion was Richard Layman. Layman, a resident of another northeast neighborhood in Washington, D.C., labels himself an “historic preservation-centric urban revitalization advocate and consultant.”¹⁰⁰ Of the total listserv postings in June and July of 2005, Layman authored approximately 37 (~15%), many of which were lengthy discussions advocating preservation. Layman often quoted both academic and non-academic sources about the subject of preservation, suggested readings to the other listserv members, and continuously referred to postings on his own website entitled “Rebuilding Place in the Urban Space.” Some listserv members responded positively to his postings, even thanking Layman for providing much-needed information on the subject of historic districts and preservation; Layman claims that he had received personal e-mails asking him to continue his postings. However, some responses to his postings indicated that his approach to the subject was patronizing and arrogant, describing his postings as “patriarchial,” “quasi intellectual,” and “self indulgent.” This was exacerbated by the fact that he was not a Brookland resident or property owner and, according to some Brooklanders, had no place in the discussion. Although Layman was attempting to provide what he saw as logic and rationality to the conversation, his postings were used as ammunition against historic preservation. The frequency, length, and tone of Layman’s postings, along with his non-Brookland residency, was used by Steptoe and other opponents as evidence that the historic preservation movement in Brookland was being lead by elitist outsiders who insisted upon forcing their ideals upon other communities. Throughout the heat of the historic district debate, Layman appears to have failed to see the possible damage his

¹⁰⁰ Richard Layman, Rebuilding Place in the Urban Space, <http://urbanplacesandspaces.blogspot.com/>.

involvement could cause to the efforts of the designation proponents and did not relent on his Brookland Listserv postings, despite his claiming several times that he would no longer participate in the discussion. Layman also continued to post numerous Brookland-related postings on his own website.

On the opposing side of the debate, Carolyn Steptoe's listserv involvement appears to have been just as damaging to her cause as Layman's appear to have been to his. Her postings were accused of starting conflict rather than discussion because of her use of "inflammatory, personal comments," "petty insults," and "vicious and slanderous" attacks. Some residents, even those who labeled themselves as opponents of the proposed nomination, criticized Steptoe's tactics and claimed that her attacks worked against her cause. In addition to her hostile tone, Steptoe was also criticized for repeatedly speaking on behalf of Brookland residents who are elderly or on a fixed income. In one particular instance, an elderly Brookland resident criticized Steptoe over the listserv for using the "senior citizen straw man argument."¹⁰¹

On June 7, 2005, after being criticized for the tone of her first few listserv postings, Steptoe posted a message that recounted the aforementioned phone conversation she had with Patsy Fletcher from DCHPO the day before. This posting attempted to be more informational than emotional, providing questions she asked to Fletcher along with Fletcher's candid answers. From this posting, it is unclear as to whether Fletcher's side of the conversation was incorrectly documented or interpreted by Steptoe, as there are some false or questionable statements within Fletcher's supposed answers such as:

¹⁰¹ "Alex on Monroe," Brookland Listserv posting, September 28, 2006.

- STEPTOE: Tell me whether I need approval to do repairs on house if historic.
FLETCHER: Anything involving the exterior of your house, you will need approval.
- STEPTOE: Will historic affect how I landscape?
FLETCHER: Yes, it could.
- STEPTOE: Brookland is a working class, median income neighborhood full of elderly on fixed income. They cannot afford nor should any us have to spend money on specialized, historic materials because a small group of people want the label historic.
FLETCHER: Well, for the seniors, I'll have sympathy on them if they can't afford to do repairs. Maybe your neighbors can help them out.

Regardless of the validity of the posting, many listserv members praised Steptoe for her perseverance and her efforts to provide concrete information about the subject of historic district designation. However, her later postings continued her previous hostile tone, for which she was adamantly unapologetic.

Although Layman and Steptoe were the key players in the initiation of the listserv debate, several other listserv members were outspoken about the subject for months to come. Some opponents of the historic district continued attacks on the advocates of the proposed nomination, and proponents of the designation responded mostly in defensive tones. Numerous postings were simply requests for more information on the subject. Both opponents and proponents of the proposed nomination continued to spread and perpetuate misinformation through their listserv postings, and although many postings referenced official city websites and city regulations to clarify specific issues, the interpretation of the information was often incorrect. The ease of spreading misinformation through the listserv made it difficult for DCHPO and the advocates of

the nomination to conduct effective outreach activities. As such, the Brookland listserv postings provide rich information about the misconceptions and lack of education many communities have on the subject of historic districts and convey a typical spectrum of views and opinions on the subject of historic preservation in general. As such, these postings are a valuable tool for developing future outreach strategies and approaches in similar communities.

Flyers

Days after Steptoe's first conversation with Patsy Fletcher, Steptoe created an anonymous flyer that was distributed to residents and property owners in Brookland and surrounding communities. The top of the flyer reads, "Brookland Residents & Property Owners: Warning...Warning...Warning!!! This is an Emergency!!!" The flyer describes the efforts being taken to designate the neighborhood as an historic district, as well as the impact that such a designation would have on the neighborhood and on property owners. The flyer also provides instructions for what Brooklanders should do to stop the process, and included contact information for elected representatives for Ward 5 and for Patsy Fletcher at DCHPO. Steptoe's flyer also encouraged placing signs of protests in yards, a measure that Steptoe and a few other residents took to visibly represent their opposition to passers-by.

Steptoe used the flyer to create an image of the proposed historic district and its proponents as imminent threats to the community. The flyer focuses on the following points to build this argument:

- The proponents of the nomination are a small group of non-Brookland residents;
- No ANC commissioners or elected Ward 5 officials knew of the efforts to pursue a nomination;
- An historic designation would increase property values and turn Brookland into an elite neighborhood;
- Historic district designation would require the removal of previous alterations to properties if they do not meet historic standards;
- Historic district designation would require approval of all exterior repairs, renovations, and landscaping; and
- Repairs and alterations to properties in historic districts cost more and can only be done by specialized contractors.

Within the flyer, Steptoe made several assertions about the proposed nomination and the historic district regulations that are false, proliferating misinformation about the subject throughout the neighborhood (will address in the next Chapter). Steptoe also used provocative words or phrases to qualify otherwise true statements. For instance, the flyer emphasizes the greater cost of repairs to properties in historic district with phrases like “regardless of your budget,” and “regardless how expensive.” There are also several references to fines and investigations that residents will be subject to if their property is in an historic district. In conjunction with the use of misinformation and slanted language, Steptoe also used typographical emphasis to communicate that a swift reaction from the neighborhood would be required to oppose the threat of the proposed nomination, such as all capitals, numerous exclamation points, and several instances of protest-like repetition. The flyer became a driving force in building an

opposition against the proposed historic district nomination, and the misinformation and scare tactics used in the flyer would prove to be difficult to correct by designation proponents during the upcoming debate.

John Feeley also created several flyers to provide general information about the benefits and restrictions of historic preservation designations. The tone of Feeley's flyers remained positive despite the negative backlash from other residents, and the flyers do not directly respond to or acknowledge any particular party or any comment from the opposition. Two of the flyers list both Feeley and BCDC as contacts for any questions about the nomination, once again associating the nomination effort with BCDC.

DCHPO also created an informational handout that was distributed at community meetings in July. DCHPO's flyer was an explicit and direct response to Steptoe and was an attempt to provide accurate information about the nomination process and historic district regulations. However, as future community discussions would prove, many of the statements in the DCHPO handout were either misinterpreted or ignored.

ANC 5A Meeting, June 22, 2005

In response to the heated listserv debate over historic preservation in Brookland, the agenda for the June 22, 2005 ANC 5A meeting was set to focus on the proposed historic district nomination. These ANC meetings are held monthly to give residents the opportunity to discuss a wide range of policies and programs affecting their neighborhoods directly with their respective commissioners, making the ANC the body of government with the closest official ties to the citizens of DC. One week

prior to the June meeting, Commissioner Bowser contacted Patsy Fletcher to inform her of the agenda and to request her attendance at the meeting. Fletcher informed Bowser that she would not be in town and that, because of such late notice, DCHPO would not be able to send a representative to the meeting. According to Fletcher, no senior DCHPO staff members were available to attend the meeting, and Lisa Burcham, the State Historic Preservation Officer for the District of Columbia at that time, did not want less experienced staff members to attend unprepared. Burcham wrote a letter to Bowser on June 21, 2005, explaining that the office was not in receipt of a nomination for the historic district and had not been consulted about proper outreach procedures that should be followed prior to the submission of a nomination, leaving the staff unprepared to answer any questions regarding the historical significance of the neighborhood. Burcham also stated that the forum postings and Steptoe's flyer had "heightened the emotions and passions of community members in such a way that a 'cooling off' period seems a reasonable response to the discussion of possible historic district designation."¹⁰² Burcham suggested that the office would be more prepared to give a formal presentation at the July ANC meeting and emphasized the fact that to her knowledge the survey and nomination had not progressed to a point to require attention from DCHPO. However, Bowser insisted that the historic district discussion remain on the agenda and that a representative from DCHPO attend the meeting. Emily Paulus, a staff preservation planner for the city, and Toni Cherry, senior preservation inspector for the city, attended the meeting but did not make a formal presentation.

According to attendees, the June 2005 ANC meeting was the largest community meeting held in Brookland since the 1960s freeway fight (see Chapter 2). Although

¹⁰² Letter from Lisa Burcham to Joseph Bowser, June 21, 2005, courtesy of records of DCHPO.

the sign-in sheet records only 161 attendees, the meeting minutes report that approximately 300 people were in attendance and notes that many attendees had not had the opportunity to sign in due to the large crowd. Some attendees account that close to 400 people were at the meeting. To initiate the discussion of an historic district, John Feeley presented basic information on the survey work that had been completed and the proposed nomination. After Feeley's presentation, the matter was opened for discussion. Carolyn Steptoe spoke in opposition, and the official ANC meeting minutes report that Steptoe responded directly to Feeley's presentation: "Ms. Carolyn Steptoe informed...that much of the information that had been presented was in error and she had done the research to justify her conclusion." Then Ward 5 City Council representative Vincent Orange also spoke, emphasizing the importance of educating the neighborhood on the regulations and rules that come with historic district designation. The minutes also record a summary of the residents' comments on the historic district:

"Several residents spoke of their concerns with the historical designation such as being able to afford to continue to live in their homes, rising taxes, the lack of information on historical preservation, the requirement of getting approval for renovations, and wanting to maintain homes as they had purchased them many years ago."

Although the minutes record that there were several residents in support of designation, the majority was reported to be in opposition.

Although no nomination for the historic district had been submitted to the ANC, a vote was held on the "historical designation" of Brookland. The motion to support the community's opposition to designation was passed by an 11-0 vote (one commissioner abstained).

According to the Brookland listserv and accounts from several Brookland residents, the June ANC meeting was considered a “blood bath,” “chaotic,” and a “free-for-all,” and many attendees, regardless of their views on the proposed designation, were disappointed in the manner in which the debate was handled. The discussion of an historic district turned into a shouting match, full of angry accusations and personal attacks on nomination proponents. Carolyn Steptoe, the most outspoken opponent of the proposed nomination at the meeting, came prepared with “mounds of documents in tow” that she claimed supported her opposition by “corroborating the statements made in this [the aforementioned] flyer and also addressing...statements made by the Brookland CDC representative...about [their] unbeknownst efforts and the financial and property ownership implications.”¹⁰³ Many attendees also felt that the vote taken by the ANC was inappropriate considering that there was no nomination yet submitted to the ANC for review. Some people also expressed that the matter of historic designation should not have been put to a vote by the ANC prior to proper education about the meaning and substance of the proposed nomination, and many claimed that they were unsure about what the vote was about or what the ramifications of the vote would be. Within hours after the June ANC meeting concluded, several comments had been posted on the Brookland online forum condemning the behavior exhibited at the ANC meeting and requesting that a more informative and constructive discussion be initiated about the idea of an historic district in Brookland.

Town Hall Meeting, July 12, 2005

In response to the explosive ANC meeting in June 2005, a group called the Coalition of Concerned Neighbors organized a “Town Hall Meeting” for July 12, 2001. The

¹⁰³ Carolyn C. Steptoe, Brookland ListServ posting, September 28, 2006.

meeting was held at Trinity University and was moderated by Sam Ford, a news anchor from MJLA Channel 7 News in D.C. The purpose of the meeting was to engage residents in a discussion about the designation process and to answer residents' questions concerning a district's impacts on citizens and the community. The meeting was structured around a panel of experts including: Deborah Crain, Neighborhood Planner for Ward 5 from the District of Columbia Office of Planning; Patsy Fletcher, Community Liaison from DCHPO; David Maloney, Deputy Director of DCHPO; and Kathy Henderson, member of the Historic Preservation Review Board for the District of Columbia.¹⁰⁴ Accounts from attendees report that approximately 200 people were in attendance at the meeting.

To avoid the chaos of the previous ANC meeting, no oral questions were allowed, and all questions had to be submitted to the panel on note cards. During the course of the meeting, over sixty different questions and comments were submitted that provide a revealing snapshot of the community's varying levels of knowledge about historic district designation and different views and opinions on historic preservation in general. Recurring themes included questions about the nomination process, the review process, and historic districts, as well as comments and questions about the relationship between gentrification and historic preservation. Some of the underlying themes included displacement, types of property owners and residents, race, and economic issues. Many people expressed mistrust, anger, and confusion, while other comments and questions seemed less emotionally charged.

¹⁰⁴ The names of the panelists were recorded in the set of questions and comments from the July 12 meeting. The flyer advertising for the meeting lists the panelists to be: Stanley Jackson, Deputy Mayor for Planning and Economic Development; Ellen McCarthy, Interim Director of the Office of Planning; Corey Buffo, Interim Zoning Administrator; David Maloney; and Kathy Henderson.

Almost half of the questions related to the nomination process, such as how historic district boundaries are defined, who decides which buildings are to be included and what criteria used to make that decision, and how public input plays a role in the writing of and decision to submit a nomination. There were also three specific questions about the impact of the ANC vote from June 22 on the nomination process.

Several questions related to the review process for historic district properties, primarily focusing on what changes property owners are allowed to make without review, how much time review will take, and what the review process entails. There were also several general questions about historic districts, such as how designation impacts property values, what types of protection a historic district would provide (protection against Metro development, real estate developers, eminent domain, etc.), whether or not there are any additional benefits to being in an historic district (more attention from the city to the condition of streets and sidewalks, lower crime rates, etc.), and whether there is any additional financial assistance for home improvement work in historic districts.

One recurring word used by people was “regret,” reflecting two different ideas: (1) is it possible to reverse a decision to designate the neighborhood an historic district if the nomination was put through without the community’s consent; and (2) is it possible to reverse a decision to designate the neighborhood an historic district if the community regrets the decision in years to come.

Several questions and comments reflected a sense of mistrust. Some people hinted that a historic district designation was a vehicle for some other agenda, either political or “elitist.” Others commented that they felt the nomination would go forward despite

community opposition, with one person describing the attitude of the pro-historic district constituency as “It’s coming so shut up.” Another person asked, “How in the world did this process circumvent the democratic process,” and wanted to know how “community voice” is defined.

There were several comments and questions related to the fear of gentrification in the neighborhood, with some specific references to displacement. One person asked whether displacement was the hidden agenda of the nomination, while another person approached the subject of gentrification as an inevitable force in an historic district, asking for exact figures related to the percentage of displaced residents after designation. Another comment stated that some areas of the country had suffered greatly from historic preservation due to race and economic disparity. Fear of gentrification could have also been the motivation for other more technical questions about property values in historic districts that did not specifically mention the words ‘gentrification’ or ‘displacement.’

There were a few questions that specifically related to the purpose of an historic district. Two people were under the impression that a historic district designation meant that properties had to revert to their historic character, and they wondered who would pay for the restoration. Another question reflected the belief that historic district designation was meant to bring back the character of past residents, as well:

“One of the aims of historic preservation was said to be to ‘reclaim neighborhood identity.’ However, my block, from 1929 to about 1980, was almost entirely Irish Catholic; one of my neighbors who is African-Pacific Islander-American, discovered that her property originally had a restrictive covenant stating that the property could never be sold to Jews or Negroes, nor could it be used to raise pigs. Is this

the sort of reclaiming of neighborhood identity you are talking about? And if not, then why not?"

Some comments stemmed from residents' issues with other government processes. Two separate questions asked about tax credits, one asking whether or not it was true that the "District of Columbia hasn't funded any of the alleged tax credits for historic preservation for low-income homeowners for the past 3 years." Another person wondered whether the D.C. government would be able to keep up with the demand for permits.

Race was mentioned three times in the questions and comments. Two of these questions were related to gentrification. The third question asked, "Have any other predominantly African American neighborhoods that are now 'historic' resist[ed] like some people are doing here?" There was also a recurring theme of different types of property owners and residents—business owners, renters, homeowners, and institutions—related to both the weight given to the input of these different groups in the nomination process, as well as the effects of an historic district on these different groups.

ANC 5A Meeting, July 27, 2005

Following the town hall meeting, the agenda for the regularly scheduled ANC 5A meeting for July was set to again include the historic district discussion. As Burcham had told chairman Joseph Bowser in June, DCHPO senior staff prepared for a formal presentation at the July meeting to address the concerns and questions of the community. However, DCHPO was still not in receipt of a draft nomination for the historic district.

Prior to the July ANC meeting, the commission had written a letter to Lisa Burcham referencing the vote taken by the ANC in June to oppose the historic district nomination. On the day of the July meeting, Edward Johnson, president of the Greater Brookland Business Association, sent written communication to HPRB chairman Tersh Boasberg stating that the Association had also voted to oppose all efforts toward pursuing historic district designation for the neighborhood at a meeting on July 25, 2005. Johnson demanded Boasberg's recommendation on how the neighborhood could immediately terminate all activities associated with the pursuit of the designation.¹⁰⁵ The votes taken by the ANC in June and by the Greater Brookland Business Association in July were premature, but these correspondences to DCHPO prior to the July ANC meeting served to emphasize the opposition to the nomination effort prior to DCHPO's presentation.

Lisa Burcham submitted an official response to Bowser and ANC 5A on July 27, 2005, reiterating that the office had not yet received and was not yet considering a historic district nomination for Brookland. Burcham stated that DCHPO did not believe it was appropriate to move forward with the nomination process until and unless broad community support could be gained for historic district designation.¹⁰⁶ Burcham also expresses DCHPO's appreciation and support of community organizations that pursue efforts to recognize and protect the cultural heritage of Washington, D.C., but does not identify any particular community member or group involved in the Brookland nomination process.

¹⁰⁵ Letter from Edward M. Johnson to Tersh Boasberg, July 27, 2005, courtesy of records of DCHPO.

¹⁰⁶ Letter from Lisa M. Burcham to Joseph L. Bowser, July 27, 2005, courtesy of records of DCHPO.

To initiate the historic district discussion at the July 27, 2005, ANC 5A meeting, commissioner William Boston read excerpts from Burcham's letter stating that DCHPO would not pursue designation of an historic district without broad community support. Boston did not, however, read the portion of the letter that expressed support of community organizations that pursue historic preservation goals. David Maloney from DCHPO was present at the meeting and answered questions concerning the nomination process. According to messages posted on the listserv after the meeting concluded, the July ANC meeting repeated much of the chaos of the June ANC meeting, and David Maloney was verbally attacked and booed by several attendees. Because a quorum was not present at the meeting, no additional votes were taken on the future of the historic district designation. However, it was clear that the nomination process was coming to an end.

Conclusion

After Phase II of the Brookland Historic Resources Survey was submitted to the city in 2001, efforts to get the historic district nomination process underway were delayed for years while proponents gathered resources and began to organize an outreach program; in late spring of 2005, after holding small meetings with limited groups of people, the proponents had just started to cast their net wider when an intense opposition to the nomination arose within the Brookland community. The proponents of the historic district designation took years and several small meetings to organize outreach for the proposed nomination; however, it took opponents only a few weeks, a single flyer, and some dramatic listserv postings to mobilize enough residents to derail the proponents' efforts. In an attempt to resolve the heated debate that had exploded between the proponents and the opponents of the nomination, public meetings were held to discuss historic district designation and the impacts it could have on the

community and its residents.. Opponents were able to take control of these meetings and to effectively label the nomination and its proponents as threats to the Brookland community. Without a nomination yet written, the ANC voted against a historic district in Brookland, and the city's historic preservation office advised the proponents to abandon their efforts.

The events surrounding the historic district debate during June and July of 2005 are not unique to the Brookland community. Although the Brookland story has its own cast of characters and its own distinctive history, the Brookland story is a well-documented account of the pitfalls of the designation process, including the numerous misconceptions and the misinformation associated with historic preservation.

These pitfalls, however, are made unique to Brookland because of the history presented in Chapter 2. In a community that has fought numerous battles to preserve the historic character of its neighborhood, why are many of its residents so resistant to formal means of preservation? The following chapter will explore the themes that arise from this chronology in an attempt to explain the reasons why this preservation-minded community chose to reject the most effective form of historic preservation available in Washington, D.C.

CHAPTER 5: ANALYSIS OF THE 2005 BROOKLAND HISTORIC DISTRICT DEBATE

Introduction

The efforts to pursue an historic district designation for Brookland were halted by the end of July 2005, when outspoken Brookland residents were able to organize and prepare an effective campaign against the designation in a relatively short amount of time. Those pursuing the designation were only in the early stages of the outreach process by the time the debate began in June 2005, leaving them vulnerable to criticism about insufficient attempts to seek community participation and support.

Opposition to the Brookland designation can be broken down into three major categories: (1) opposition to the regulations associated with historic district designation; (2) opposition to the process undertaken to pursue the designation; and (3) opposition to the proponents of the designation. The opposition was partially rooted in an effective use of misconceptions and misinformation to present historic district designation as a threat. This tactic was especially effective due to the ineffectiveness of the proponents' outreach efforts, partially because they had been cut short in the process and partially because those participating in the outreach activities were labeled as outsiders. These tactics also exposed an underlying fear of racial and economic gentrification of the Brookland neighborhood.

Opposition to Regulations – Use of Misconceptions, Misinformation, and Truths

The most explicit opposition to historic district designation in Brookland was rooted in beliefs related to the rights of property owners. The questions asked at the Town Hall

Meeting in July and the claims made in listserv postings are evidence of the degree of misconceptions that many residents had about historic preservation and historic districts in Washington, D.C. As part of her campaign against the designation, Brookland resident Carolyn Steptoe used the mantra “My house, my property, my money, my choice!!!” which was seen in variations on her flyer, her protest signs, and her listserv postings. The topic of property rights is usually a major subject of debate when considering an historic district designation for a neighborhood. Throughout Washington, D.C., as in most other major municipalities in the United States, property is regulated through zoning ordinances that control such things as land use, height, and density. In the District of Columbia, historic district designation, places additional restrictions on property owners. Properties in designated areas are subject to an additional layer of review for any demolition or construction or exterior repair or alteration that already requires a permit from the city.

The most common misconception illustrated by the discussion of the Brookland historic district debate was related to what type of work requires historic preservation review. Opponents claimed that residents would suddenly need to have all work on their properties approved by the city once they were in a historic district. However, historic district designation does not change what types of work require a permit. Historic preservation review is simply an additional layer to the existing permit review process, and the D.C. Historic Preservation Office (DCHPO) does not review any work that does not already require standard permit review. For instance, the city must approve any rear addition, regardless of whether the property is located in a historic district; however, if the property is located within an historic district, DCHPO must also review the permit application to ensure that the addition does not have an adverse impact on the appearance of the property from a public right-of-way. What is actually

occurring in many situations is that residents have not been submitting permit application for work that legally requires review by the city, thus making their work illegal. In some cases historic district designation may change the amount of attention is paid to illegal work, but it does not change whether the work requires a permit.

Opponents to the historic district designation in Brookland, including Carolyn Steptoe, made several claims stemming from this common misconception, stating that homeowners cannot paint or decorate their houses or landscape their property without approval in an historic district. However, such work does not require a permit regardless of where the property is located, and is, therefore, not subject to review by DCHPO. As such, these claims are in conflict with the historic district regulations in the city and have been verified as false by DCHPO.

Similarly, the opposition outreach materials also used the misconception that special contractors are required by the city for work performed on properties located in an historic district. This misinformation led to debates over the intentions of the historic district proponents: did they want an historic district so that their services or those of someone else they knew were required in Brookland? In reality, some types of repairs and alterations to properties in Washington, D.C. already require the use of a licensed contractor, regardless of whether the property is located in an historic district. However, historic district regulations do not add any additional restrictions or requirements related to who performs the work.

One of the most effective pieces of misinformation used to build opposition to historic district designation in Brookland was the claim that previous work and alterations made to properties in historic districts must be retroactively removed or mitigated to

make the property compatible with the historic character of the neighborhood once designation of the property took place. This claim was included in Steptoe's flyer and was discussed on the listserv and in public meetings. Many residents who were led to believe this claim were opposed to historic district designation because of the financial implications associated with such a requirement. However, this requirement is not stipulated in the historic district regulations in Washington, D.C., and has been verified as false by DCHPO.

Steptoe's flyer also claims that historic districts have restrictions on boats, off-street parking, and the number of vehicles allowed on a property. Like the previous claim, this piece of misinformation prompted strong resistance to the designation from residents, who labeled such restrictions as intolerable. Again, these restrictions are not part of the historic district regulations in the city and have been verified as false by DCHPO.

It is unclear whether Steptoe and other residents in opposition of the historic district were aware of the errors in their claims. The wording used in the flyers indicates that some research was done on the regulations associated with preservation designation; either these regulations were misinterpreted, or opposing residents were able to manipulate the truth. Regardless of their intentions, the use of this type of misinformation was very effective in presenting historic district designation as a burden on homeowners.¹⁰⁷

¹⁰⁷ Carolyn Steptoe was elected as an ANC commissioner for single member district ANC 5A-07 in November 2006.

The opposition's arguments also included several true statements about regulations in historic districts that made people wary of the nomination effort. As with most other conflicts over historic district designation, the cost associated with window preservation and replacement in historic districts was the topic of much discussion in Brookland. Window replacement requires a permit in Washington, D.C., and is, therefore, subject to review by DCHPO if the property is located within an historic district. Window replacement is viewed as a major alteration by DCHPO because windows are considered to be a key character-defining feature of an historic property. As stated by many designation opponents in Brookland, the cost associated with window replacement can be greater in historic districts because the new windows must be considered compatible with the historic character of the property. This also applies to the replacement of front doors, which requires a permit and also must be reviewed by DCHPO. Steptoe's flyer takes the claim one step further by stating that window replacement in historic districts is more than Brookland residents can afford, a conclusion that is misleading and that would have to be verified for each individual property owner. DCHPO responded to this claim by stating that staff members take a property owner's budget into account, use common sense in their decision making, and attempt to be as reasonable as possible.¹⁰⁸

The claim that property owners can be fined for inappropriate work on a property located in an historic district was also a key issue with the designation opponents in Brookland. In Washington, D.C., fines are used to discourage property owners and residents from doing work that has not been approved by the city. However, all work done in violation of, or without an approved permit is subject to fine, regardless of whether the property is located within an historic district. Although the claim that

¹⁰⁸ E-mail from David Maloney, DCSHPO, October 18, 2007.

property owners can be fined is true, the implication that investigation and fines are unique to historic district properties is misleading. Opponents used this misconception to convey historic districts as police states. Steptoe’s flyer states, “Your neighbors can report to DC Historic Preservation. No matter why your neighbors call (they can make up anything), DC Historic will come investigate your house. If your house needs ANY repair work, You might be fined. You will be required to fix, repair, maintain your property according to the standards set by Historic Preservation – and at whatever cost it takes, regardless of your budget.”¹⁰⁹ DCHPO states that the office has never fined or cited anyone for simple repair issues and, as policy, only deals with lack of repairs on historic properties when it results in demolition by neglect.¹¹⁰

Although there is usually some degree of opposition to the restrictions associated with historic districts in Washington, D.C., most of the objections related to regulations in the Brookland debate were the result of false statements or misleading qualifiers used by outspoken opponents in their campaign against the designation. Regardless, the restrictions on property rights remains a major issue that must be dealt with through education and outreach efforts.

Opposition to the Process – Pitfalls of Outreach Efforts

ANC commissioner William Boston stated that the biggest downfall of the historic district campaign in Brookland was the manner in which Feeley, Farrell, and Wholfarth proceeded:

If it was truly a person who lived in Brookland who was
invested and included the community and the

¹⁰⁹ Flyer, Carolyn Steptoe, 2005, courtesy of records of DCHPO.

¹¹⁰ Email from David Maloney to Carrie Barton, October 18, 2007.

organization had transparency and they came through the established mechanisms, then the community might have been more open. We could have had several sessions of educating, and people could have made informed decisions. But they didn't do any of it. It looked very underhanded and very sneaky, and it was.¹¹¹

The “established mechanism” that Boston refers to is the Advisory Neighborhood Commission (ANC). In the spring of 2005, Fletcher advised Feeley to begin his outreach activity by contacting the ANC commissioners and presenting at the monthly ANC meetings. Although Feeley did speak privately with ANC commissioner Mary Baird-Currie (5A-06), the first public meeting scheduled by Feeley was held at the Brookland Garden Club rather than with the ANC. Although the Brookland Garden Club is a well-respected organization in the neighborhood, some Brookland residents perceive it as “elitist.” Feeley also spoke about the efforts to pursue a nomination at a meeting of the Michigan Park Citizen’s Association, which Feeley admits did not include people who would be in the proposed historic district.

Advocates of the nomination should have learned lessons from past experiences where the ANC has not been used as the primary means by which to propose ideas to the community. In 2001, during WMATA’s most recent attempt to consider development around the Brookland/CUA station, city planner Derrick Woody defended accusations that they had indeed involved the community in the planning process by referencing a public meeting that was held with the Brookland/Catholic University of American Neighborhood Improvement Partnership. ANC Commissioner Mary Baird-Currie responded to Woody’s claim in a *Washington Post* article, stating that “In no way

¹¹¹ Interview with William Boston, March 22, 2006.

could that be identified as a community meeting” because the host organization, unlike the ANC, had no formal role in community issues.¹¹² Feeley admits that not using the ANC as the initial conduit for his outreach activities was one of the biggest factors in the failure of the proponents’ outreach campaign.

Feeley also spoke with Jeff Wilson of the Brookland Garden Club, who suggested that the former begin his outreach with a door-to-door mailing that introduced the idea of a nomination to the residents. Feeley recalls, however, that he wanted to gauge the residents’ interest in a nomination at several small public meetings before beginning a neighborhood-wide outreach effort and now admits that this was an enormous mistake. Not only should Feeley have understood the political climate of his own neighborhood and the dangers of only reaching out to select groups of people, but his strategy was even less effective because of the people and groups Feeley targeted: the organizations Feeley started with, many of which had overlapping membership or involvement, were either already proponents of the historic district campaign or had already expressed interest hearing more about the nomination. Feeley’s efforts looked even more selective because the explosion of the historic district debate in June 2005 came at such an early stage in his outreach efforts. Therefore, Feeley was never able to fully expand his outreach activities to larger neighborhood groups, making his efforts appear to be targeted only at a small section of the community.

Some residents and observers remarked that the outreach from proponents relied too heavily on the discussing what could happen if Brookland was not designated an historic district rather than focusing on the merits of an historic district designation.

¹¹² John Drake, “Housing Plans Upset Neighbors; Commissioner Decries Metro’s Tactics,” *The Washington Post*, January 24, 2001.

Presentations by Feeley and Farrell often included pictures of the “McMansion” developments popping up in similar neighborhoods in Washington and surrounding suburbs. Although fears of uncontrolled development and teardowns are often motivations for pursuing preservation designations, residents did not see these threats as relevant to Brookland and perceived this approach as a scare tactic. Many proponents of the designation continued to discuss these threats in listserv postings, which prompted backlash from opponents, as well as from ambivalent residents. One listserv member wrote, “Come to me in a year and point out the condos going up where the historic homes used to be and I might support it. Until then, my vote is no.”¹¹³

In general, those people who pursued the nomination for historic designation in Brookland did not execute a successful outreach campaign, whether because of a faulty strategy or because their efforts were halted prematurely. Because of this lack of proper outreach, many residents perceived that the proponents never intended to gain community input or support for the designation, and their efforts appeared to be secretive and underhanded.

Opposition to the Players – Perception of Outsiders

Opponents also focused on the character of those players pursuing the designation, and the theme of “outsiders” played a key role in the Brookland historic district debate. In the case of Brookland, this idea of “outsiders” was based on the residency, race, and association of the historic district advocates.

¹¹³ John Daggett, Brookland Listserv posting, July 15, 2005.

One of the most common criticisms voiced by residents was that no person directly associated with the nomination lived within the proposed boundaries for the Brookland Historic District: John Feeley, although a life-long resident of the greater Brookland area, lives one block north of the proposed historic district boundaries; Lavinia Wholfarth is a resident of Michigan Park, which is on the north side of the greater Brookland area; and Mary Farrell is a resident of Capitol Hill in southeast D.C. Although Richard Layman did not have an official role in the proposed nomination, many Brooklanders felt that his residency in another neighborhood of Washington, D.C., did not warrant the high degree of participation he had in the debate through the Brookland listserv.

Because Wholfarth and Farrell were not residents of the neighborhood, they were labeled as outsiders who should not be deciding what happens to properties in Brookland. The residency issue was more complicated for John Feeley, who was chosen to spearhead the nomination effort because he had been the most intensely involved with the legwork necessary for the nomination; he had participated in both survey efforts and was the grant administrator for the 2001 survey. Feeley also conducted walking tours of the historic neighborhood and was known by many residents to be interested in the preservation of the neighborhood's historic resources. Although Feeley was a longtime Brookland resident, born and raised in the neighborhood, the proposed boundaries for the historic district did not include his house on Sigsby Place. In an interview with William Boston, ANC commissioner for single member district 5A-07, he states that "John Feeley's house is right outside the lines...that right there will kill you every time. It's not about the truth, it's about the image." The boundaries were drawn to reflect the original 1887 plat of the neighborhood. However, those unfamiliar with the rationale saw the boundaries in

terms of who would be affected by the regulations associated with the designation. Feeley quickly learned during the June ANC meeting that many residents now viewed him as an outsider who had drawn the boundaries one block from his own street for one reason only: to exclude himself from regulations associated with the historic district while increasing the value of his property through the designation of adjacent properties to the south.. Opponents of the nomination, namely Carolyn Steptoe, effectively used this argument to discredit Feeley's efforts, despite his attempts to explain the rationale behind the proposed boundaries both in public forums and in written outreach materials. Although some listserv postings attempted to validate Feeley as a Brookland resident, he was repeatedly labeled as an outsider throughout the debate.

Richard Layman, another outspoken advocate of the efforts to pursue designation, also lived in a different neighborhood in Washington, D.C. His high degree of involvement in the listserv debate (he had the most frequent and longest posting of any listserv participant) raised suspicion in Brookland as to the intentions associated with the designation. Although Layman tried to explain to residents that his interest in the subject was based on his passion for preservation and planning issues throughout the city, his insistence on remaining an active participant in the debate was criticized for the possible impact it had on residents' perceptions of the efforts of preservation advocates.

Although some people claim that the historic district debate was not a racial issue, the fact that Farrell, Feeley, and Wholfarth are white inevitably played a role in the perception of the historic district proponents as outsiders to a predominantly African-American community. Although Richard Layman, another white non-resident, was

not directly associated with the proposed nomination, his outspokenness in the historic district debate further exacerbated this perception. In a *City Paper* article published in August 2005 about the historic district issue in Brookland, Bob Artisst, a former ANC commissioner and former president of the Brookland Civic Association, was quoted as saying: “They’ll get a group of people together and call it a neighborhood coalition when really it’s a coalition of die-hard crackers.” He went on to say that the Irish and Italians were trying to “buy back” the neighborhood, and if the BCDC had its way, “this would be a quaint college town, nice houses and nice people, 90 percent white with a few blacks living in it.”¹¹⁴ The questions presented in the July community meeting also addressed gentrification and race as issues, with allusions to the idea that an historic district designation had an underlying agenda to “reclaim” the identity of the former white neighborhood. The case of white, non-residents representing the effort to designate a predominantly African-American neighborhood as an historic district was an affirmation to some people that historic preservation was a vehicle for displacement.

At the July 2005 ANC 5A meeting, William Boston is quoted as saying, “We have to go after renegade organizations in the community – that’s where the head of the snake is.”¹¹⁵ It is unclear what “snake” Boston is referring to, but the “head” is BCDC, who he and several other residents in Brookland feel is a corrupt organization that mismanages funds that would otherwise go to the improvement of the neighborhood. The association of the designation efforts with BCDC was seen by many as a power play against the ANC. Boston said in a later interview:

¹¹⁴ Jeff Horwitz, “Battle of the Vinyl Windows,” *The Washington City Paper*, August 5-11, 2005.

¹¹⁵ Horwitz, 2005.

[If the neighborhood is designated an historic district] Lavinia Wholfarth and the CDC will be getting all this money through the feds and all these grants and they will basically control the neighborhood. And the ANC will be deleted. And the CDC will be the powerbroker and that is the fear.¹¹⁶

The power struggle between BCDC and the ANC precedes the historic district debate. Since the establishment of BCDC, the organization has applied for and received various grants related to community development and the revitalization of 12th Street. Although community development corporations are common conduits for such funds, some residents feel that BCDC is using these funds to harness all control over community development issues, leaving the ANC and the neighborhood's residents powerless. Although it is not intended or appropriate for an ANC to administer community development grants, some people want the commission to have more involvement in the distribution of the funds. This is primarily because the ANC is made up of elected officials, whereas the BCDC and other community development groups are not. Furthermore, another similar organization, the Greater Brookland Business Association, had long been established in the neighborhood before BCDC and is now in competition with the newer organization for grant money intended for neighborhood and streetscape improvement projects. Some residents do not trust the BCDC to administer the funds in a way that represents the interests of the neighborhood. This sentiment stems from accusations that the organization has mismanaged grants that they began to collect in 2003 as part of the D.C. Main Street program.

According to Patsy Fletcher, some Brookland residents also think that BCDC has created an image of exclusivity by appearing as though they are a predominantly white

¹¹⁶ Interview with William Boston, March 22, 2006.

organization.¹¹⁷ Fletcher says that the board of BCDC is diverse, but its staff and volunteers are not. Furthermore, Lavinia Wholfarth's status as a white resident of Michigan Park, not Brookland, makes many people in the neighborhood wary of the organization's intentions.

As stated in the previous chapter, the mistrust surrounding BCDC led members of the community who were interested in helping John Feeley with outreach activities to request that their efforts not be associated with the organization. While Feeley agreed to keep his role as a BCDC board member separate from the proposed historic district nomination, Mary Farrell's role as a BCDC volunteer and Wholfarth's public interest in a Brookland historic district maintained the relationship between the nomination and the organization. Opponents used this association to discredit efforts to pursue historic district designation.

Conclusion

The opposition to the historic district was multi-faceted. The opponents were able to paint historic districts as unnecessary bureaucratic burdens on property owners because of misinformation and truths related to the regulations associated with local designation. They were also able to take advantage of the lack of effective outreach from the proponents and to make the proponents' efforts appear secretive and suspicious. Residency and race were used against some of the most outspoken proponents in order to reinforce residents' suspicions of their motives, and for some Brooklanders, it was simply the association of the nomination with the seemingly unpopular BCDC that was enough to make the idea of historic district designation

¹¹⁷ Interview with Patsy Fletcher, January 17, 2006.

unappealing. The historic district debate may appear as a fight among just a few outspoken residents, but the results of the story show that, in the midst of a few voices shouting, the opposing side of the debate was able to gather enough general support to derail the nomination process. As the next chapter will show, the opponents of the designation were more effective because of their ability to tap into an underlying context formed through the neighborhood's recent history of struggles and fights.

CHAPTER 6: DEVELOPING A COMMUNITY CONTEXT

Introduction:

The stories of other neighborhoods opposing historic district designation may look very similar to the one in Brookland; a few outspoken residents, a flood of misinformation, heated discussions about property rights, worries over regulatory burdens, and so on; however common this story may be, the opposition to historic district designation in Brookland arose from a context unique to its community. This context is crucial to developing appropriate and effective outreach strategies when pursuing designation and to understanding the impact an historic district designation could have on the community.

Over the last few decades, the Brookland community has come to define itself through its ability to fight against threats to the neighborhood- through the numerous instances when the neighborhood has joined together for a common purpose. Throughout these various struggles, each with its own cast of characters and its own specific objective, two major themes are evident: (1) the need to preserve control over what takes place in the neighborhood, and (2) the sensitivity of the community to its identity. Together, these two themes form the context for the emergence of the opposition to the historic district in Brookland. This chapter will discuss Brookland's context for opposition, the implication it has on historic district designation in Brookland, and its ability to inform future planning and preservation efforts in the neighborhood.

Preservation of Community Control

In the recent past, Brooklanders have fought several threats in order to preserve the character of their neighborhood, painting a picture of a preservation-minded community. Why, then, would many Brookland residents fight tooth and nail to oppose the most effective tool for preservation available in Washington, D.C.?

Although many of Brookland's struggles have arisen from threats to the neighborhood's historic resources, the preservation of these resources seems secondary to the underlying, yet primary objective of preserving residents' control over the fate of their community.

In the case of the historic district debate, many outspoken residents were effective in presenting designation as an attempt by outsiders to take control of the neighborhood from the outside. As has been expressed throughout the documented accounts of Brookland's previous struggles, the residents of Brookland have focused on taking control of neighborhood issues from the inside out—by demanding community participation in decision-making processes affecting Brookland: “We want development from within the community rather than without... to keep Brookland as much of a community controlled area as possible.”¹¹⁸ Although many of the opponents of the historic district nomination were not involved in the neighborhood causes of past decades, the fight to control the fate of the neighborhood was passed down and became an important part of the opponents' argument against designation.

This sentiment of fighting for community control has its roots in an entrenched mistrust of the intentions of government officials and other persons and groups

¹¹⁸ Joann Stevens, “Planning a Brookland Business Renaissance; Brookland Residents Return to Theater,” *The Washington Post*, July 28, 1977.

perceived as outsiders who may or may not have the interests of the Brookland community as their first priority. Much of this mistrust was born out of North Central Freeway fight of the 1960s, when Brookland residents witnessed the government's attempts to meet the needs of commuting suburbanites at the cost of Northeast D.C. neighborhoods. The freeway, which was proposed to correspond to the path of the B&O railroad tracks, threatened to create an imposing physical barrier between Brookland and points west.¹¹⁹ The reaction of the Brookland community to fight the freeway plan was due to an unwillingness to succumb to the fate that was already ripping apart less fortunate communities in the southeast and southwest quadrants of the city, where other legs of the freeway were already under construction: one resident stated, "There is a lot of free-floating unrest in this city...In the slums it is disorganized. But the higher-income communities that are hurt by this freeway have a strong organizational capacity. They know the ropes."¹²⁰ Citizen groups vehemently criticized the freeway plan as "clearly not the work of the community," and a U.S. Court of Appeals confirmed this sentiment in a 1968 finding that public hearings on the freeway had been insufficient.¹²¹ The Emergency Committee on the Transportation Crisis (ECTC) and other community organizations demanded that hearings be held at night and in more than one location to make meetings more accessible to residents who wanted to participate in the process.

In the case of the 2005 historic district debate in Brookland, opponents of the proposed district were able to tap into the mistrust that was born out of the freeway fight,

¹¹⁹ ¹¹⁹ Wolf Von Eckardt, "New North Central Freeway Design Fails to Solve Problems it Creates," *Washington Post*, February 5, 1967. The revised freeway plan consolidated the freeway, the proposed rapid transit, and the existing railroad tracks. A previous design located the freeway farther from the tracks, sacrificing homes rather than the industrial plants that line the railroad path.

¹²⁰ Wolf Von Eckardt, "New North Central Freeway Design Fails to Solve Problems it Creates," *Washington Post*, February 5, 1967.

¹²¹ *Washington Post*, "New NE Freeway Plan Takes 54 Fewer Homes," January 14, 1970.

claiming that the proponents' outreach efforts purposely avoided meaningful community participation. Opponents claimed that there was an intentional lack of notification about meetings and that the few meetings that were held were targeted toward a select audience that did not represent the community as a whole. Further, opponents made several accusations that city officials and the proponents of the nomination had already made up their minds about the historic district, which was not well accepted by some residents. Such accusations appear to be very effective in Brookland, where past struggles show that residents will passionately respond to any claim that the right to voice their opinions has been denied.

Repeatedly over the last thirty-five years, Brookland residents have also seen the city and WMATA attempt to demolish buildings, including the Brooks Mansion and several residents' homes, in order to construct townhouses and commuter parking lots adjacent to the Brookland Metro station. Brookland residents have continuously fought for their right to participate in the decision making process for these projects, claiming that Metro's planning process is too secretive. During one such Metro project in 2001, a Brookland resident expressed his frustration with the planning process, claiming that community participation is actually just a request for residents to provide a "wish list" to the city, WMATA, or the selected developer only after the initial decision to develop has been made.¹²² Brookland residents want to be consulted about whether the development is appropriate at all before any resources have been spent on plans or designs, especially if those resources involve public moneys. A similar criticism was made during the 2005 Brookland historic district debate; opponents claimed that residents should have been asked whether or not they wanted a historic district before the BCDC proceeded with the nomination. Although

¹²² Matthew Cella, "Brookland Group Slams Metro Plans," *Washington Times*, January 25, 2001.

opponents' criticism was based on misinformation that the nomination was already written and submitted, it was true that time and money had already been spent on the historic resource surveys and outreach efforts that are necessary parts of the nomination process. Perhaps proponents of the historic district nomination should have learned lessons from the fights with WMATA, especially considering that the area proposed for demolition and development is located within the proposed historic district boundaries. In Brookland, there appears to be little difference in controlling the decision over whether new development is appropriate and controlling the decision over whether to restrict the demolition of resources necessary for that development. The preservation of those resources is not the primary concern.

Community Participation and Respect

In each of these cases, residents organized campaigns to make sure the voices and interests of the community were heard and recognized. Bob Artisst, the same Brookland civic leader who called proponents of the historic district designation “crackers” in 2005 (see Chapter 5), told the *Washington Post* in 1978, “[Brookland is] not as quiet as some people would like to believe. You have residents here who will come forward when there’s an issue. You’ve got a good fighting group here.”¹²³ The fights that the Brookland community has put up against these different forces show the strong association Brooklanders have created between community participation and respect. During the 2001 conflict between WMATA and Brookland, ANC commissioner Darcy Flynn stated, “It took this effort from the community to get Metro to treat the community with the respect it deserves.” This “respect” was conveyed to the neighborhood when WMATA and the D.C. Office of Planning agreed

¹²³ Patricia Camp, “Brookland: Can Its Commercial Area Survive the Arrival of Metro?” *The Washington Post*, February 2, 1978.

to halt all planning efforts until a proper procedure for involving the community could be developed. The association between community participation and respect was made once again in 2005 by Carolyn Steptoe: “I believe it...was a lack of demonstrated regard and the lack of respect for the community and its residents that caused the furor...the lack of community knowledge or participation assert a tenor of disregard and disrespect.”¹²⁴ ANC commissioner William Boston later acknowledged the power play to which Feeley and the other designation proponents fell victim: “We had to put the city on notice that Brookland is not going to take anymore games. We’re not going to let anyone come here and do anything without letting the community know and getting our input.”¹²⁵ Regardless of opponents’ true perceptions of John Feeley and his intentions, his reputation and efforts were sacrificed to make the point that the proper community process must be recognized in Brookland. Residents must be involved early in the decision making process and their participation must be taken seriously. It is ownership of the process that they seek.

Consistency of Opposition

As stable and unchanging as Brookland is perceived, its social, political, and economic landscape has consistently changed over the last half century. As the years go on, new community leaders arise, new ANC commissioners are elected, new city council representatives are elected, and new residents arrive. The way in which residents engage in community issues has also evolved. Although citizen groups and community-based organizations still play an important role in maintaining community connections, issues and concerns are now also communicated through online forums and e-mail notifications. Despite these changes, the themes of opposition have been

¹²⁴ Carolyn C. Steptoe, Brookland Listerv posting, September 28, 2006.

¹²⁵ Interview with William Boston, March 22, 2006.

noticeably consistent throughout the years, and the desire to have meaningful community participation in decision-making processes affecting Brookland has been expressed explicitly by residents, from the 1960s through the first decade of the twenty-first century. Quotes in newspaper articles and from interviews seem to repeat, almost verbatim, the same sentiments, demands, and complaints, regardless of the specific subject of the struggle or the people involved.

This consistency in community sentiments may indicate that Brookland has a strong cache of social capital, a concept that is loosely defined by Robert Putnam in his book *Bowling Alone* as the value created by social networks.¹²⁶ According to Putnam, a community rich in social capital would have a strong sense of mutual support, cooperation, trust, and institutional effectiveness.¹²⁷ The social capital in Brookland could grow from the community's various formal and informal sources of civic and social engagement. The stories of community struggle discussed in Chapter 2 reveal the involvement of numerous different community groups (some of which are no longer active), including the Brookland Neighborhood Civic Association, the Greater Brookland Garden Club, the Upper Northeast Coordinating Council (UNECC), the Brookland Community Corporation (BCC), the Historic Brookland Community Development Corporation (BCDC), the Emergency Committee to Save Brooks Mansion, the Brookland Orange Hats, and the Brookland Area Coordinating Council (BACC). More recently formed community groups include the Brookland Area Writers and Artists (BAWA), the Brookland Sustainable Transition Network (BSTN), and the Better Brookland Development Group (BBDG). Various organizations

¹²⁶ Robert Putnam, *Bowling Alone*, Simon and Schuster: New York, 2000, 9.

¹²⁷ Putnam, 22.

associated with the neighborhood's numerous religious and educational institutions also provide avenues for communication and civic engagement.

As could be true in other communities, the relationship between formal gatherings of people and social capital is a bit of a chicken and the egg scenario in Brookland. Civic engagement through participation in community organizations is a way to build social capital; however, social capital and feeling of common purpose is the driving force behind the birth of many of these various community organizations. The BACC, BCC, and Emergency Committee to Save Brooks Mansion, as well as the more recent BBDG, were all formed in response to common concerns related to development in the Brookland neighborhood, showing how Brookland community groups and organizations are both the root and result of social capital. It appears then that one of the values of social capital in Brookland is that it provides a conduit for quick and effective mobilization around social issues. As the landscape of Brookland continues to change and evolve, it appears as though the fight for control over the fate of Brookland will continue as a central drive for community engagement—almost as if the cause had its own supply of social capital.

Preservation of Community Identity

One of the most effective aspects of the opposition to historic district designation in Brookland was a perceived threat to the community's identity. The struggle to preserve identity was not a new fight for Brookland. In 1967, Wolf Von Eckardt, urban affairs columnist for the *Washington Post*, wrote an article about Brookland's fight against the North Central Freeway and its struggle to preserve identity in the face of uncontrolled development. The article, entitled "Killing a Community," was one of the many stories written about Brookland as a result of the intense attention the

neighborhood received during the freeway fight; but Eckardt, a journalist who was focusing on the issues of transportation and development that were gripping Washington during the 1960s, was able to place Brookland's plight in the context of the citywide struggle over the loss of community identity: "Our neighborhood communities must constantly fight for their identity, which is their life. 'Progress,' indifference, and greed are constantly pulling and pushing to tear them apart, pushing and pulling to make the city an anonymous, indistinct, nebulous nothing. Brookland is one example."¹²⁸ Eckardt's article ends with somber pessimism about the future of Brookland's fight against the freeway, advising the reader not to "hold your breath" for a plan to save Brookland from the various forces pushing and pulling the community apart. However, history shows that he grossly underestimated Brookland's ability to mobilize and its determination to preserve its distinct identity.

Geographic Identity

The proposed freeway, as redesigned in 1967, would have been a depressed superstructure of six to eight lanes, severing Brookland from points west of 10th Street and widening "the swath that the B&O already cuts into the city's fabric."¹²⁹ This inevitable effect was thought to be "particularly tragic" in Brookland, as it would further separate the community from Catholic University, the institution to the west that has had such a strong influence over the community's development and character. In no way helping the cause for the historic district, the western boundary of the proposed district roughly corresponds to the path of the proposed freeway—the B&O railroad tracks; although the historic district did not pose the same physical threat to the cohesiveness of this area of Ward 5 as did the freeway, the historic district

¹²⁸ Wolf Von Eckardt, "Killing a Community," *Washington Post: Potomac*, May 21, 1967.

¹²⁹ Wolf Von Eckardt, "New North Central Freeway Design Fails to Solve Problems it Creates," *Washington Post*, February 5, 1967.

boundaries did pose a more abstract separation of Brookland from its neighboring geographic communities. Questions about control over the boundaries flooded the listserv and community meetings, most likely due to concerns over who would be affected by the regulations of the proposed district; however, defining the boundaries of Brookland through the nomination process could have also had the unintended consequence of reviving fears of community severance.

Gentrification

The most commonly claimed threat to Brookland's identity during the historic district debate was the perception that the designation would result in gentrification, the "process by which higher income households displace lower income residents of a neighborhood, changing the essential character and flavor of that neighborhood."¹³⁰ Although income and class are the primary targets of gentrification, the common understanding of the term has a racial component, as well. Outspoken opponents to the historic district debate in Brookland were able to tap into an apparent pre-existing fear of economic and racial gentrification and were able to make a case that the displacement of residents was both an intentional and inevitable outcome of designation in Brookland. Because the preservation of the community's identity has been a long-standing cause in Brookland, any catalyst for gentrification is perceived as a major threat to its residents. Opponents to the proposed historic district designation easily made the case for gentrification: proponents of the designation were labeled as white outsiders, their efforts were labeled as sneaky and underhanded, and the regulations associated with the designation were claimed to be too financially onerous for the existing Brookland demographic.

¹³⁰ Maureen Kennedy and Paul Leonard, "Dealing with Neighborhood Change: A Primer on Gentrification and Policy Choices: A discussion paper written for the Brookings Institution Center on Urban and Metropolitan Policy," April 2001.

So where did the fear of gentrification come from in Brookland? The historic district debate was not the first time that displacement of residents was an issue for this community. During the 1960s, many Brooklanders were forced to leave the neighborhood when their properties were taken to make way for the proposed freeway. Although displacement for a road is quite different than that of long-time residents for new residents, many Brooklanders are likely sensitive to the threat of being forced from their homes by outsiders for any type of development, physical or economic.

Although many residents tout Brookland as a stable and racially integrated neighborhood, there is also still a history of racial divisions within the community. In a 1991 *Washington Post* article about the 50th anniversary of the Brookland Civic Association, long-time association president Bob Artisst remarked, “Beneath the surface harmony on a friendly, personal level...the community has had its share of racial turbulence...There was no hostility, but there was division.”¹³¹ Although stories of racial harmony between households are abundant in residents’ recollections, schools, recreation centers, and even community organizations were still segregated at one time. Angela Rooney, a prominent longtime Brookland resident stated in the same *Post* article, “This neighborhood has the distinction of having worked hard and successfully at integration...If people [in other neighborhoods] committed themselves and worked hard instead of running away, we’d have a much better urban situation.” Brookland is still the home to many longtime residents, including Rooney, who remember the efforts it took to make institutional integration work in Brookland. To these residents, gentrification is more than an urban buzzword; gentrification is a threat to the tight-knit community that many of them worked so hard to build. Some

¹³¹ Shaun Sutner, “Brookland Celebrates Its Community Pride,” *Washington Post*, August 1, 1991.

people in the community intensely argue against claims that the historic designation debate had anything to do with race. However, discrediting the designation efforts by pointing out the race of the designation proponents would not have been so effective a strategy if underlying racial tensions did not still exist in the community on some level. The questions asked at the Town Hall meeting in July 2005 are evidence that many residents were clearly concerned that the intentions of designation were to return Brookland to the predominantly white community that existed for the first half of the neighborhood's history. The community identity that Brookland wants to preserve is that of a racially integrated neighborhood.

Of course, gentrification is not simply a racial issue. Opponents of the historic district designation were also able to tap into the economic side of the gentrification threat, as well, by convincing many in the Brookland community that compliance with associated regulations would be more than many existing residents could afford. Residents would, therefore, be displaced once the repairs to their historic properties became too much a financial burden for them to bear. Steptoe repeatedly tapped into this perception through various public statements and her own outreach activities for the opposition. In one listserv posting, Steptoe explicitly asserts, "These seniors, retirees and persons on fixed incomes would also likely lose their property because of the financial burdens attributable to historic designation compliance."¹³² Some residents responded asking for proof or even a single example to prove that this was possible. Others took heed of her warning.

To emphasize the economic side of the threat of gentrification, the opponents formulated a conspiracy theory that would convince some Brooklanders that

¹³²Carolyn Steptoe, Brookland Listserv Posting, September 25, 2006.

displacement of fixed- and low-income residents was an intended outcome of the historic district designation. Opponents of the designation, including an elected official, spread this theory to residents to discredit the designation proponents and their efforts without regard to the feasibility of their claims. ANC commissioner William Boston outlined in an interview the details of this conspiracy:

BCDC wants to buy more property, and they know through historic districting that they can take some more houses. If you go and do renovations...they send out the inspector. Say you didn't construct whatever you were trying to do properly according to the historic designation guidelines; they will come out and it for you if you can't afford to redo it yourself. Then they will put a lien on your house if you can't pay them the money and they will end up taking your house from you. I know that is what Lavinia Wholfarth was trying to do...Lavinia Wholfarth and the CDC will be getting all this money through the feds and all these grants, and they will basically control the neighborhood.

The District of Columbia Historic Preservation Office (DCHPO) has since debunked this theory. According to DCHPO, the city will only intervene on a property in condemnation cases that are unrelated to historic preservation; DCHPO claims that these cases are rare, even when a building is in danger of imminent collapse.¹³³ Despite its falseness, Steptoe, Boston, and other opponents of the designation spread this theory, which some residents labeled as slander in an effort to defend Feeley and Wholfarth.

Carolyn Steptoe continued to make a correlation between historic district designation and gentrification even during her 2006 campaign for DC City Council. In one of her campaign releases to the constituents of Ward 5, Steptoe states, "My continued opposition to historic designation as the primary strategy used for urban revitalization

¹³³ E-mail from Steve Callcott to Carrie Barton, October 16, 2007.

is based on the displacement of residents.”¹³⁴ As the demographics of neighborhoods in other parts of the city continue to experience various degrees of change, displacement will continue to be a hot-button issue for Brookland and should be handled in a sensitive manner in any future outreach efforts for historic preservation.

Preservation of Perceived Identity

The fight to preserve identity during the historic district debate was also evident on a more abstract level: many residents take pride in the perception that Brookland is unique in its identity as a racially integrated, middle-class neighborhood in Washington, D.C. Its houses are old, its lots are large, and it exists as a quiet, suburban-like enclave in the midst of a rapidly changing city. This is the perception used to describe the neighborhood in numerous newspaper articles and by many residents who see Brookland as special. Historic district designation threatens to take the community’s ability to define itself away, challenging the community’s own perception of itself. It becomes a historic district, just like the other historic districts in the city, subject to the same regulations, subject to the same review, and subject to the same scrutiny as the rest. Brookland has a perception of autonomy: a perception that they have control over development and planning efforts in their neighborhood. The same can be said for their perception that they have control over how their community is defined. Who says that DCHPO or the Historic Preservation Review Board knows what makes their community special or what aspects of their neighborhood are worth preserving? Historic district designation would be a sort of annexation of their neighborhood into the company of the other historic districts. On some level, the

¹³⁴ Carolyn Steptoe, “Carolyn Steptoe speaks on issues affecting Ward 5 and the city at large,” <http://www.vote-usa.org/Intro.asp?Id=DCSteptoeCarolynC>, accessed February 6, 2009.

opposition to an historic district may be a desire to keep Brookland independent, with the ability to define and preserve its own identity.

Lessons Learned

The community context created by these past struggles and evident in the more recent historic district debate should be used to inform future planning and outreach efforts in the neighborhood. The complaints and demands made by Brookland residents throughout the years are unwavering, and there is no sign that the community will change the value it has for community participation and preservation of community identity. These sentiments should be taken seriously by the city and other groups wishing to engage in planning or development efforts in the neighborhood if they wish to avoid continued resistance. Although the city has a responsibility to look at planning, development, and preservation holistically in the context of the conditions and needs of the city, the needs and wishes of the individual community must also be given high priority. In Brookland residents want:

- (a) to be included in any process from the beginning;
- (b) to have their participation be more than just providing planners and developers with a “wish list” for a project that has already been initiated or approved;
- (c) to have the needs and values of their community take precedence when discussing projects or efforts taking place in their neighborhood; and
- (d) to have responsible development and preservation that honors the unique identity of their community, not the identity that outsiders want their community to assume.

Some planners or developers may feel that they know what the community wants and needs. However, it seems as though any effort to address those wants and needs without first consulting the community runs the risk of being rejected, regardless of how residents feel about the proposed direction or solution. The community's first priority is the process.

Conclusion

The Brookland story is most likely one of a few loud voices taking control of a community discussion, and it is not known how many residents would have supported the historic district nomination in the end. However, whether residents actually wanted a historic district was not the primary issue: it was the way in which the idea of a designation was presented that was the proponents' downfall. Opponents of the designation understood the community's concern over proper process and were able to take advantage of the vulnerabilities and sensitivities created by the community context. In the end, they were able to use this context to rally enough opposition and halt all efforts to pursue the designation. Brookland's story shows that successful outreach efforts are those planned with proper knowledge and consideration of the specific community in which they are working. Although the preservation of the Brookland's historic resources is important to many residents, the preservation of community control and identity takes precedence.

CONCLUSION

For many residents of Brookland, the value of this study lies in the examination of the extensive documentation of the events surrounding the historic district debate and the effort to provide a comprehensive account of what occurred. For many residents and non-residents, the story of the historic district debate is one that exploded over a period of weeks. However, preservation-related activities have been in place in Brookland for decades, and the idea of a historic district has been discussed since the 1980s. Although the years and events leading up to the historic district proposal are unknown by some residents, the debate itself seem unclear to many, most likely because of the intensity of the opposition and the immense amount of information that was thrown at residents through mailings, listserv postings, and public meetings in such a short amount of time. Once pieced together, the story of the historic district debate is one of intense opposition and failures and successes in outreach and communication strategies. The Brookland debate is also a story of the influence of online forms of communication and the challenges and opportunities they provide in the arena of community activity and discussion.

This study would benefit from the ability to further gather information from the residents of the Brookland neighborhood, either through a survey or through a broader selection of interviews. Although the listserv postings and meeting questions discussed in Chapter 4 provide valuable information about the questions and concerns residents had concerning historic district designation, the number of residents represented by these sources is limited. Although several opponents were interviewed for this study or were represented by the documentation sources discussed in Chapters 4 and 5, further representation of the opposing side is needed to more thoroughly

examine the range of concerns that existed amongst the community. This study also does not benefit from an interview with Carolyn Steptoe, the leading opponent of the historic district nomination, who did not wish to participate in this effort.

This study would also be strengthened by a comparison with other neighborhoods in the District of Columbia who have objected to a historic district nomination. Although this was initially not completed due to time and resource constraints, the focus on a single case study proved to provide the amount of detail needed to develop a sufficient context for the thesis.

The debate over the proposed historic district nomination in Brookland will now join the many other stories that collectively portray the history of activism in that neighborhood. Although presenting new variables such as the listserv and the Brookland Community Development Corporation (BCDC), the historic district debate continues the themes presented in the histories provided in Chapter 2 and further builds the contexts presented in Chapter 6. In theory, this story and the previous stories of community activism in Brookland should provide the foundation for formulating effective future outreach strategies for preservation, planning, or any other community-based efforts.

However, one must ask whether it will ever be possible to bring up the idea of a historic district nomination in Brookland again or even whether any city-initiated planning or preservation effort will ever be met without resistance.

As described in Chapter 1, many Brookland residents pride themselves on the “unique” character of their neighborhood, and this perception is reinforced by

newspaper articles and publicity materials hoping to promote Brookland as a real estate hot spot. In reality, however, Brookland is like many other neighborhoods that grew from the railroad and streetcar lines on the outskirts of the original city boundaries: similar in architecture, similar in development patterns, and similar in demographic evolution. As such, there may be another, less observable piece to the contexts presented in Chapter 6, one that combines the contexts of community control and community identity: the context of identity perception. This context could stem from a broader study of place distinction, often referred to as ‘sense of place.’ For many communities, historic district designation is an honorary title, one that places a neighborhood in the ranks of other historically significant neighborhoods in the same city, state, or country. However, for a community such as Brookland that prides itself on a perception of being an anomaly, evaluating the significance of Brooklanders’ place based on criteria and contexts used to evaluate other places may somehow threaten a community’s ability to control its own perception of itself. Once the history is told, the boundaries are drawn, and the descriptions are written, what power does the community have over its own image and how it defines itself? Will the identity described in the historic district nomination challenge the identity perceived by residents? Through historic district designation, will Brookland be effectively annexed into the company of the many historic districts that already exist throughout the city, protected by the same regulations, listed in the same inventory, subject to the same review, and part of the same history? Does the context of community control not only mean control over physical and demographic changes to one’s environment but also changes to the perception and definition of one’s environment? Through evaluation of the neighborhood’s historical significance, would the aspects of community identity perceived as significant by residents be protected or threatened? Would historic district designation challenge Brooklanders’ perception of autonomy, the perception

that they have control over the planning and development of their neighborhood?
These questions would require much further study in how the character of place is defined, how residents of Brookland perceive place, and what aspects of place residents deem worthy of preservation.

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