

The Old Town Crier

The Monthly Newsletter of the Old Town Civic Association

Announcing the December Meeting of the Old Town Civic Association

DATE: Wednesday, December 13, 2006

TIME: 7:00 p.m., Socializing with Neighbors; 7:30 p.m., Program

LOCATION: The Lyceum, 201 South Washington Street

PROGRAM AGENDA: (1) COMMUNITY POLICE REPORT
(2) PREPARING FOR EMERGENCIES

ARE YOU READY?

John Clisbe, the Emergency Planner for Alexandria's Health Department will talk to us about the number of actions we can take to be better prepared for a wide range of potential emergencies. In this day and age, where we have seen a number of both terrorist initiated and natural disasters, we need to be prepared individually as outside help will not reach us immediately. John Clisbe will give you some extremely useful tips in becoming prepared for any eventuality.

HISTORIC PRESERVATION

Alexandria, which is nearly 50 years older than the City of Washington, is one of America's most historic communities. Although much of the charm of the "Old and Historic District" has been lost over the years, much has been preserved by the efforts of dedicated citizens.

The Old Town Civic Association (OTCA) was founded in 1951 to preserve the historical and residential character of Old Town. Although the Association today has broadened its agenda, it remains true to its charter and still serves as a principal protector of the city's remaining architectural treasures.

In order to fulfill its mission, OTCA needs citizen volunteers. The work of protecting our history requires a varied set of skills; research, writing and advocacy are but a few. Anyone who can help, please contact John Johansen at makeadifference@comcast.net or 703-836-5651.

Historic Fact of the Day:

Did you know that the city has never had a streetscape preservation plan for the residential area of Old Town?

Consequently, Old Town's streets have morphed over the years, going from cobblestone to brick to asphalt. Much of the original slate curbing has been replaced by granite and concrete. The slate pavers that once formed the crosswalks at intersections throughout Old Town have been lost or paved over. Streetlights made of cast iron have been superseded by "cobra" lights on telephone poles. Signage has popped up in a smorgasbord of sizes, shapes, materials and purposes. Overhead wires and gas, electric and water meters populate the public "view shed". Carriage steps, public water pumps and other streetscape features common to the 18th and 19th centuries have disappeared.

OTCA has formed a task force to study the issue of streetscape preservation. Included under the umbrella of streetscape preservation is the problem of sidewalk and street trash. To get involved, contact John Johansen at makeadifference@comcast.net or 703-836-5651.

TRASH TALK

A number of citizens have commented on the issue of trash along King Street and the adjoining north and south blocks from the water to the Metro. Old Town Civic has formed a task force to research this issue to determine if current protocols are up to the task or if new plans need to be drawn to tackle this issue. The Civic Association convened a meeting with city officials to "talk trash" and will be preparing a position paper for Old Town Civic on the subject. In the mean time, please feel free to email Old Town Civic on this topic at info@OldTownCivic.org. Both complaints about trash and praise for trash collection are welcome

BEAT COPS

Overall Violent Crime in Alexandria is up 30% over the year 2000. In October the City had two banks robbed during daylight hours, six armed robberies of citizens and one aggravated assault. Every time you see a police car driving our streets, the windows are always rolled up. That means they don't hear a thing. What we really need is police officers actively patrolling our streets. Patrol cars, motor bikes and bicycles are fine but what about the "beat cop" walking our streets? The lame excuse that we would have to pay overtime to officers performing that duty just doesn't play. Until the small petty crimes are harnessed, major crimes will not be brought to an end. No one in this city obeys the traffic laws anymore, because they know they can get away with breaking the law at will. The law is the law and we need to start enforcing it. It's about time we start being "proactive" rather than "reactive".

SAINT PAUL'S APPEAL

St. Paul's is, arguably, the most important historic building in our community. Not only does it have the distinction of being designed by the architect of the U.S. Capitol, but it is the first church in the United States built in the Gothic Revival style. That is significant because every

American church subsequently built in that style was influenced by the design of St. Paul's. No other structure in Old Town can claim that provenance; one that makes St. Paul's a place of worship for devotees of great architectural history as well as for its parishioners.

The proposal to attach a glass enclosure to the north side of the church together with the other proposed changes is being argued on its merits. Some of the rationale in favor of the proposal includes creating a passageway for the handicapped and permitting better drainage. However, the drainage problems can be mitigated with or without the glass enclosure and ADA access already exists and is in use. The proposed glass enclosure does not create ADA access and no code violation exists requiring that this enclosure be built.

Regardless of the merit of any practical considerations, it is important to emphasize that historical and architectural considerations are the basis on which this profound change to St. Paul's must be considered. Practical considerations should not be relevant in this case. Only the historical and architectural merit should be weighed in the balance.

These proposed changes are a blight on the architectural integrity of the building, one of many architectural blights that have been perpetrated on St. Paul's through the years. They have diminished this otherwise grand building and this ill-advised application threatens to further degrade it

WHERE WE HAVE BEEN

Old Town Civic sent a letter to the Council regarding Windmill Hill Park. It has been a number of years since the Windmill Hill Task Force developed a plan to redevelop the park. To date very little has been accomplished as the funds continue to slip into the out-years. The letter asked the Council to give it their immediate attention. Prepared the appeal to Council regarding the BARs decision to approve the renovations to St. Paul's church. Council will hear this case on the 20th of January. Attended a Washington Streetscape meeting which was a "gathering" of ideas to keep Washington Street historic and clean. The City had hired a consultant to take this issue to the next level which will involve the citizens. We provided names to work on the Potomac River Flooding Advisory Committee. Met with the Chief of City Trash Department to elicit his ideas on keeping the King Street corridor clean. An OTCA paper will be forthcoming.

Townsend A. Van Fleet
President