

The Virginia-Highland

VOICE

Winter 2007

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Small Park, Big Fun

In-Fills, Tear-Downs, Density
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Notice

Georgia Power will host an Open House on Monday April 9th at 7 PM to present to the community its plan to build a power sub-station on the land it currently owns on Ponce de Leon Place. The tentative location for the meeting is the YWCA at 857 N. Highland Ave. NE. Please consult the VHCA Web site (www.vahi.org) as the meeting date approaches for final details. All interested residents are encouraged to attend.

The Dust Finally Settles by John Becker



After months of street closings, detours and the sound of heavy equipment rumbling through the neighborhood, Virginia-Highland is getting its streets back. In addition, residents will enjoy the benefits of a new and rehabilitated water/sewer system and a vastly improved streetscape at the intersection of Virginia Ave. and N. Highland Ave. These three major projects, which have been an unavoidable part of our lives for much of the past two and a half years, are nearing completion.

The Va-Hi water main replacement project is part of the city of Atlanta's Water Main Replacement Program. The goal of the program, as undertaken by the city's Bureau of Watershed Management, is to repair or replace the aging, six-inch pipes that were originally installed in our neighborhood in the early 1900's. Although sufficient to meet residents' needs when installed, the size of those pipes does not provide sufficient capacity or volume flow to meet the needs of today's neighborhood.



Also, corrosion and sediment accumulation over the years have decreased the flow rate and caused water discoloration in the area. These issues should go away thanks to installation of approximately 97,000 linear feet of new 8" water mains and 11,700 ft. of 12" water mains. New 3/4" copper pipe was also installed to connect meters with the main. Construction began in September 2005 and is scheduled to be finished this month - 4 months ahead of schedule. Total project cost was \$24 million and the project was funded through inclusion in the Clean Water Atlanta initiative.

Also part of the Clean Water Atlanta initiative, the city's Sewer System Evaluation Survey (SSES) brought about the inspection and, if applicable, rehabilitation of approximately 150,000 linear feet of sewer line in Virginia-Highland. As of December 2006, 94,000 linear feet of line had been rehabilitated with 15,000 feet more to go. According to Diane Badger, public information manager for the project, "We've evaluated roughly 28 miles of sewer line, and we've repaired 18 of those miles. So, we've repaired almost two-thirds of the sewer lines in Virginia-Highland." Work on the sewers in our neighborhood began in the winter of 2004 and is also scheduled for completion this month. Total cost for the project is expected to approach \$10 million.

The process of re-paving streets impacted by water and/or sewer main replacement is in full swing. According to the city, there was a project to re-pave streets in parts of Virginia-Highland that was 'active' at the time the water and sewer projects began. The city says it made great efforts to coordinate the re-paving process with the completion of water/sewer work, but the process was an imperfect one. There were times when streets had recently been re-paved only to be torn up again after completion of water/sewer work as well as cases where streets went or continue to go unpaved for long periods of time after work was completed. The city says they're working hard to catch up on re-paving now that most of the water/sewer work is done, and they estimate that all re-paving will be complete by May.

Heart of the Neighborhood Gets a Facelift

Another recently completed project that will benefit residents for years to come is the streetscape improvement project at the intersection of Virginia Ave. and N. Highland Ave. The project

included approximately 400 ft. of new sidewalk on both sides of N. Highland (from Virginia Ave. to Los Angeles Ave.) and approximately 330 ft. of new sidewalk on the north side of Virginia Ave. (from N. Highland Ave. to Todd Rd.). The sidewalk on the west side of N. Highland Ave. was widened to 12 ft. while the east side sidewalk was widened to 8 ft. Sidewalks were constructed using historically appropriate paving treatments including hexagonal concrete pavers and granite curbs.

Additional improvements include:

- *Curb cuts on the northeast corner of N. Highland Ave. and Virginia Ave.*
- *45 ft. radius curb extension at the northwest corner of N. Highland Ave. and Virginia Ave.*
- *The southbound left turn lane on N. Highland Ave. was shortened to 50 ft. with a 50 ft. taper and all through lanes were tapered from 14 ft. to 12 ft. wide approaching the intersection.*
- *A 100 ft. long left turn lane with a 50 ft. taper was added on Virginia Ave. east of N. Highland Ave. This allowed for 13 ft. travel lanes on this portion of Virginia Ave.*
- *The Bradford pear trees that previously existed were replaced with Chinese Elms.*
- *Historically appropriate pedestrian lighting was added.*
- *8 garbage receptacles, 9 highway signs, 2 mailboxes, 26 parking meters, 15 new benches and 10 bike racks were installed.*

Total price tag for the project was \$550,000 with \$450,000 coming from federal funds and the remainder coming from local Quality of Life funds. Ground was broken for the project in June 2006 and the majority of work completed in January 2007.

In retrospect, a few months of obstructed traffic, temporary lane closures, blocked intersections and interrupted water service doesn't seem like such a huge sacrifice considering the benefits of these projects. In a sense, it's akin to our neighborhood receiving a new heart (the intersection of Virginia Ave. and N. Highland Ave.), a face lift (repaved streets) and a complete replacement of its circulatory and digestive systems (new water mains and rehabilitated sewer system). Going through the process has been a bit of a pain, but having survived the inconveniences, all residents will reap the benefits long into the future.

Virginia-Highland Civic Association
2006-07 Board of Directors

Pamela Papner
President, Summerfest (Co-Chair)
ppapner@earthlink.net

Kim Nickels
Vice President, Summerfest (Co-Chair)
Liaison to Virginia-Highland Business Association
kimmickels@yahoo.com

Amy French
Treasurer, Sidewalks
amyrob28@hotmail.com

Allie Coker
Secretary, Communications
alliecoker@aol.com

Doris Betz
Communications, Parks
dorisalbie@earthlink.net

Rob Glancy
Home Tour (Chair), Parks (Co-Chair)
arglancy@ratecapital.com

Bill Herrell
Planning, Finance
bherrell@cordcapital.com

Elizabeth "Betsy" Nicholas
Planning (Co-Chair)
enicholas@ucriverkeeper.org

John Peak
Planning (Co-Chair), Web Site, NPU
jpeak@yahoo.com

Josh Schier
Alternate Board Member, Planning
josh_schier@bellsouth.net

Jack White
Parks (Co-Chair), Planning
ctbold@mindspring.com

John Wolfinger
Public Safety, Sidewalks, NPU
jjonww2@earthlink.net

The Virginia-Highland Voice

Published quarterly, by and for the residents
of Virginia-Highland

Editor: John Becker

Design: Preeti Ayyangar

Business Manager: Kim Nickels

We welcome your feedback on *The Virginia-Highland Voice*.
Please send your comments to editor@vahi.org.

VHCA Calendar

Monthly Board Meetings

When: First Monday of each month, 7 p.m.

Where: Public Library on Ponce de Leon Ave.

Planning Committee Meetings

When: Last Wednesday of each month

Where: Public Library on Ponce de Leon Ave.

Meeting locations subject to change

ING Marathon Coming March 25th

The inaugural ING Georgia Marathon and Half Marathon will be held Sunday March 25, 2007. The race is sponsored by ING, in cooperation with the cities of Atlanta and Decatur and counties of Dekalb and Fulton.

The Start/Finish will be at Underground Atlanta. Virginia-Highland will be impacted by street closures along the race route. From Freedom Parkway runners will proceed down the following streets during the approximate hours listed:

- Right on Ponce de Leon Ave.
- Left on Frederica St.
- Right on St. Charles Pl.
- Left on N. Highland Ave.
- Left on Virginia Ave.
- Right on Park Dr.

Marathon Runners: 8:30 AM to 1 PM

Half Marathon Runners: 7:15 AM to 9:45 AM

For more information, visit www.inggeorgiamarathon.com.



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President's Corner



the Virginia-Highland Tour of Homes 2006
www.vahihometour.org

Pamela Papner

President, Virginia-Highland Civic Association Board

2007 Strategic Plan and Budget: The VHCA adopted its 2007 Strategic Plan and Budget at the General Meeting held February 5th. It outlines goals, objectives and timelines for the Planning, Parks, Fundraising, Communications and Safety/Sidewalk Committees. Both documents are published online at www.vahi.org.

Our primary goals for this year are:

- Attempt to establish Neighborhood Commercial zoning for the 3 key commercial nodes in Va-Hi. This effort is being led by John Peak, our Co-Chair of Planning. Our target goal is to submit newly proposed code to City Council by 12/1/07.
- Research and pursue options to address our residential infill problem through zoning changes, including possible historic designation. Bill Herrell is leading this effort.
- Keep an eye on developments regarding the Mix and Hilan Theater's application for liquor license, and react appropriately, as the matters progress.
- Host a safe and financially successful Summerfest and Tour of Homes.
- Continue efforts to establish a neighborhood watch/street captain program (35 recruited to-date). Zone 6 training was completed for the first group, and weekly crime summaries are being emailed to street captains.
- Continue to promote repair of sidewalks. We have seen a lot of repairs made as the result of the mailing done in October, and the VHCA sidewalk reimbursement program was enhanced to encourage even more repairs.

Indeed, we are off to a fast start! Please keep in mind the VHCA is a volunteer organization, and we need your input, time and support to achieve the results desired. If you have not already done so, please sign up for community emails (at www.vahi.org). We typically send 2 emails per month about what is happening in the neighborhood, and we want to be able to alert you when we need your help.

Summerfest Planning: Summerfest planning has already begun, and we are pleased to have davefm (92.9) as our radio station sponsor this year. Pam Ahern has agreed to serve as volunteer coordinator, which is a big job! Please support her (early on) when she begins to recruit volunteers in the next month or so, online and via email. If you do not have email and wish to volunteer, you can mail your contact information to Co-Chair Kim Nickels at *Knitch*, located at 1052 St. Charles Avenue.

2006 Home Tour Posts Record Ticket Sales

by Rob Glancy

VHCA Home Tour and Parks Committees

The 2006 Virginia-Highland Tour of Homes took place on December 9th and 10th. This year's tour showcased eight wonderful homes and ticket sales were the highest since the event was resurrected three years ago. This year's tour netted over \$14,900 and in the past three years the tour has raised over \$60,000. Proceeds benefit various neighborhood projects such as park improvements and our sidewalk repair initiative.

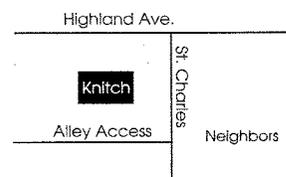
A huge thank-you goes to our very gracious homeowners; our sponsors – including Whole Foods, davefm and Atlanta Intown; and our restaurants – Dish, Sala, LaTavola, Murphy's, Noche, Food 101, Atkins Park, Shorty's and Saga. Special thanks go to Hannah Coker and Charlie LeFort who guided the tour to a very successful year, as well as our volunteers and committee chairs.

The Tour Steering Committee has already begun organizing this year's tour which will take place on December 8th and 9th, 2007. If you have an interest in volunteering, becoming involved in the planning, have a prospective home or would like to be a sponsor, please contact Rob Glancy at 404-467-9922 or email tour@vahi.org.



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Virginia-Highland Community Survey Results

by Pamela Papner

We received 340 unique responses to the VHCA survey. Thank you to everyone who took the time to respond! The complete results are published at www.vahi.org. Based on the response sample of 340 (out of 8,000 households in Va-Hi), the results reflect a confidence level of 95%, at $\pm 5.2\%$ confidence interval.

The survey results confirmed the VHCA Board is indeed focused on the issues perceived as most important by the majority of the community; however, I believe the results also indicate:

- We need to move faster/more aggressively to address out-of-scale residential infill that is not in keeping with the architectural character of our neighborhood.
- Most people recognize that maintaining the character of the neighborhood (which is what attracts people/enhances property values to begin with) is important, but many voiced a desire for guidelines that relate new construction to existing conditions without going "too far." One example cited by a respondent in favor of historic zoning was, "so long as not overly restrictive... getting approval to change our front door is going too far."
- We should create a VHCA Transportation and Traffic Committee, focused on congestion, parking issues and pedestrian safety (the #1 concern of 12% of residents).

Results for Question 1:

WHAT IS THE MOST IMPORTANT ISSUE FACING THE VA-HI COMMUNITY TODAY?:

86% of respondents answered this unaided (first) question, and the majority (61%) cited "irresponsible infill" (residential and/or commercial) as our #1 issue. Words varied, but of that group:

54% focused on "residential infill – teardowns and out-of-scale replacement," and another 9% cited "residential & commercial infill". Representative verbatims include:

- The continued building of houses that don't fit the neighborhood. The tear down that is now a huge colonial-

looking box two doors down from us makes me sick. When we renovated and expanded our house, we spent a fortune on architect fees to make sure we stayed consistent with the existing house and neighborhood.

- Development consisting of houses that appear to occupy an overly high percentage of lot area as well as tower over existing housing. Many are raised above the street to allow for street level garages and other design features that are more akin to suburban development rather than an appropriate response to the existing character in VH.
- Huge new houses on small lots are killing the character of our lovely neighborhood. I have no problem with larger houses or appropriate additions, just hate the (out of scale) 'mega' houses.

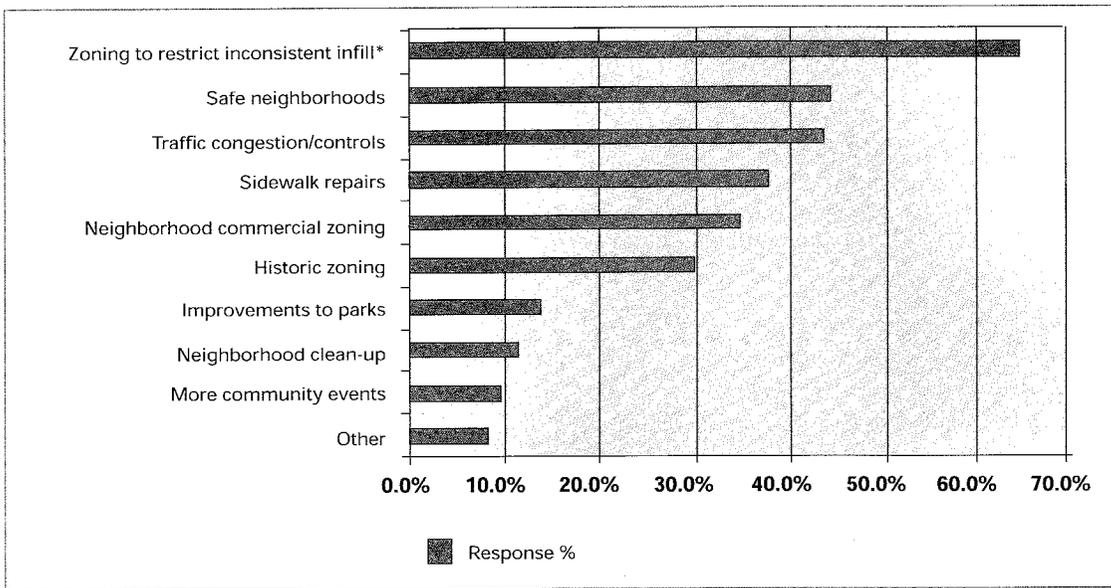
11% of that group cited "inappropriately scaled commercial development" (often specifying the Mix) as the #1 issue, and another 16% cited the need to "protect the character of our neighborhood" and/or "preserve our historic architecture" as the #1 concern. 10% cited the need for "balanced zoning and managed growth/ planning". Representative verbatims include:

- Proliferation of developers' ungoverned destruction of the character, nature and beauty of the neighborhood.
- Threat of changing character of the neighborhood. I'm more worried about architectural style than size and setbacks.
- The neighborhood commercial areas staying quaint and not turning into what they are doing at Emory Village.

A significant number of residents (12%) cited crime prevention/ safety/sidewalks as our top priority, while another 12% cited traffic congestion/speeding/parking as tops. Following these concerns were schools (4%), taxes (2%) and miscellaneous (9%).

Results for Question 2:

SELECT FROM THE LIST BELOW THE TOP 3 ISSUES YOU WANT THE CIVIC ASSOCIATION TO FOCUS ON THIS YEAR.



* Survey option read: "Zoning to Restrict Inconsistent Residential/ Commercial Infill."

Results of Scaled Questions Regarding Zoning (Questions 3 through 7):

A resounding 87% of respondents believe it is Very Important/ Important to obtain Neighborhood Commercial zoning. On the topic of residential infill, 76% of respondents believe it is Very Important/Important that the City adopt zoning options to address this, and 63% believe Historic District zoning is Very Important/Important. These results suggest three things:

- We need to understand the status of the City's zoning rewrite and its response to the Infill Panel's recommendations made over a year ago.

- If the City is not likely to implement desired infill zoning regulations (via zoning code rewrite) within the near future, then Historic Zoning should be pursued. While this process is lengthy, it may be our only option.
- We must focus on developing quantifiable metrics such as lot size, maximum height, setback, floor height above grade, etc. and guidelines that relate new construction to existing conditions/ architecture without going "too far" (without being overly restrictive).

	Very important	Important	Somewhat important	Not important	No opinion	Total respondents	Skipped questions
How important is focus on obtaining Neighborhood commercial zoning?	66%(224)	21%(70)	7%(22)	6%(19)	0%(2)	337	3
How important is focus on city zoning code rewrite to prevent inconsistent residential infill?	61%(207)	19%(50)	11%(36)	12%(39)	1%(4)	336	4
How important is it to tighten "FAR" (Floor Area Ratio) definition in Zoning rewrite?	41%(136)	15%(51)	17%(56)	20%(66)	7%(23)	332	8
How important is it to pursue "Overlay Control" zoning?	51%(169)	20%(66)	12%(40)	15%(50)	2%(8)	333	7
How important is it to obtain historic zoning?	38%(127)	25%(85)	16%(54)	20%(66)	1%(2)	334	6

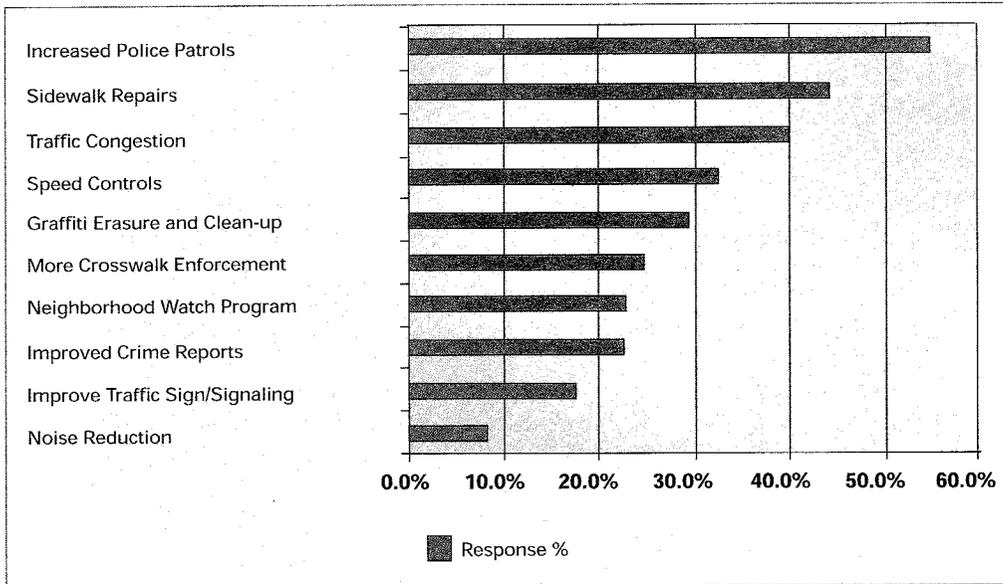
Results for Question 8, PARKING METERS:

Many respondents (43% Strongly Agreed; 19% Somewhat Agreed) favored removal of parking meters within our business district; however, this response was predicated on the assumption that a 2-hour maximum parking limit would be enforced. I have since spoken with the Traffic/Parking Chair in Ansley, who advised their 2-hour chalk enforcement for commercial parking simply does not work – it is too labor intensive.

Kim Nickels also polled business owners through the VHBA, and their concern was that without outside enforcement, shop employees would fill the available spots early and remain all day. The Board has instead asked Council Member Anne Fauver to pursue lower rates (\$.50 to \$1.00 per hour, not the \$2.00/hour that exists today), which both residents and merchants appear to favor.

Results for Question 9:

WHAT ARE THE TOP 3 ISSUES YOU WANT THE VHCA SAFETY COMMITTEE TO FOCUS ON THIS YEAR (SELECT 3)?



Results for Questions 10 through 16:

Open-Ended Questions: We received some excellent ideas and feedback, and all responses are posted online at www.vahi.org.

General results/representative verbatims are:

WEBSITE: People are generally satisfied with the vahi.org site.

Ideas for improvement included:

- More info/links for contacting city departments, resources for home maintenance and repair.
- More consistent updates – post VHCA Voice and meeting minutes.

PARKS: Comments evidenced general satisfaction with our two parks and desire that we continue the work being done to keep them clean and well maintained. Many voiced a desire to restore/improve Orme Park. Ideas for improvement included:

- More lighting.
- Graffiti clean up and playground repair.
- Monitor homeless more closely.

OTHER EVENTS: Many people said Home Tour and Summerfest “are enough!” Many also suggested additional events such as:

- More movie showings or music events in John Howell Park.
- 4th of July picnic, fall festival in park, organized Halloween event, with parade.
- More neighborhood-only or block-based events; more events for children/teens.

HOME TOUR IMPROVEMENTS: Most voiced strong satisfaction with the Home Tour, as it exists today. Many enjoy the food tastings. Suggestions for improvement included:

- Consider another time of year.

- Consider adding gardens, holiday decorations.
- Lower ticket prices.
- Consider walking tour or use shuttles to reduce parking problems.

SUMMERFEST IMPROVEMENTS: Like Home Tour, most people love Summerfest. Suggestions for improvement included:

- Alleviate congestion by spreading out the booths (mentioned by many).
- Offer better-quality/healthy food options.
- Find ways to promote local Va-Hi businesses.
- Off-site parking with shuttles.

COMMUNICATIONS: Overall, we seem to be doing well on this front!

Other issues to address not mentioned: Many people repeated the importance of staying focused on issues already mentioned, particularly zoning issues, safety, traffic and sidewalks. Some unique concerns were mentioned, but none repeated to any significant degree. Unique concerns included:

- Too many signs making the neighborhood look “junky” in spots.
- Taxes are skyrocketing making it difficult for residents with fixed incomes.
- Keep an eye on evolving school districting to be sure we keep Morningside.
- Dilapidated homes that are “eye sores”.
- Noise ordinance enforcement.
- Homeless shelter and nuisance crimes committed by homeless.

Fast Start for Neighborhood Watch

This year's safety goals should make a difference.

by John Wolfinger
VHCA Safety Chair

Our neighborhood watch/street captain system is really gaining momentum, with more and more neighbors getting involved. To-date, we have 36 street captains, and we thank each of them! The overall goal is to establish a network of street captains throughout Virginia-Highland. Each captain will distribute safety-related news (I send weekly alerts to captains), compile neighborhood directories, and promote other relevant information and activities to enhance the safety and security of homeowners on their particular street.

Another benefit of the program is that participating neighbors get to know each other and become more alert and aware of their surroundings. The theory is that neighbors who know each other look out for each other. To qualify for a "Neighborhood Watch" street sign, your street group must organize and conduct a group session with Inspector Ruby Naylor from Zone 6. These signs can be a significant deterrent to crime on your street.

If you would like to be the lead person to organize your block, condo or apartment building, e-mail me at safety@vahi.org. You will need to canvas your street(s)/area to gather a list of neighbor's names, e-mail addresses, and phone numbers. You will distribute weekly alerts; provide concerns and suggestions back to other captains; initiate appropriate safety reminders/education to your street; and generally help facilitate communication among participating neighbors to promote a safer street and more alert neighbors.

An enthusiastic group of street captains met on Saturday January 27th at Druid Hills Presbyterian Church to learn about

neighborhood policing tactics from Inspector Ruby Naylor and Officer Apoian from Zone 6. We learned that a lot of the crime in this neighborhood can be attributed to homeless persons, and that our officers are restricted as to their handling of certain situations by "probable cause" rules. We were joined by residents from Cabbagetown and Morningside who are organizing groups in their neighborhoods. A Kirkwood resident spoke on how reassuring a neighborhood watch can be to a person who lives alone. Thanks to Joe Page for providing a computer and projector for Inspector Naylor, to Ray Carlton for making coffee, and to the church for providing the meeting room. We all left knowing that it is our responsibility to work closely with our police and to help them by calling 911 – not only for specific emergencies – but also when we see something that is "just not right".

2007 Goals for the Safety Committee:

In addition to organizing a solid Street Watch network – and continuing our efforts to promote sidewalk repair - as VHCA Safety Chair, I would like to achieve the following goals this year:

1. Have a backup person to send out e-mail alerts when I am away. Thanks to Eleanor Barrineau for stepping in here.
2. Conduct a street light survey to identify dark spots that need more lighting, and work to achieve improved lighting in areas identified.
3. Obtain supplies and have them available for graffiti eradication and general clean-ups. This has been proposed for inclusion in the 2007 budget.
4. Procure more in-street pedestrian crossing signs.
5. Partner with the parks committee for clean-up sessions.
6. Promote a "National Night Out" event in August.
7. Conduct an ACERT training class with the Fire Department.
8. Build a rapport and communication path with the Fight Back Against Crime (FBAC) patrol in the neighborhood.
9. Build a rapport and communication path with the VHCA-funded off-duty police patrol in the neighborhood.

We need volunteers to step forward and take responsibility for items 2 through 7, with my help and assistance. Together, I think we can do a lot to make this a safer neighborhood and improve the quality of life for all our neighbors and visitors.

Please contact me at safety@vahi.org if you are willing to take on a safety initiative!



Suzuki Violin - Now in Your Neighborhood!

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Orme Park: Small Park, Big Fun

by Jonathan Wexler

Orme Park is a wonderful wooded green space located in the heart of Virginia-Highland between Amsterdam and Virginia Avenues, and it offers more than your average 6.6-acre park. The park dates from 1926 and was incorporated into the original design of its neighborhood which came about with the expansion of trolley lines in the area - although clearly the beautiful trees were here well before that.

The park received a major renovation in 1998. Over the past two years, Friends of Orme Park (FOOP) - a grass-roots group of local residents who have taken on stewardship of the park - has worked to control erosion and establish a riparian corridor for Orme Creek which runs through the park.

In fact, there are really two parks, or at least two separate park experiences. The northwest side is geared towards children. The playground was replaced in 2001, with support from the community, according to Park Pride. It has plenty of places for kids to hide and make merry. There are picnic tables, swings and a sandbox with toys which are left out for common use. The south side has a wide, flat walking path and grassy areas. Sparsely-planted trees along the perimeter allow plenty of light and a view of the surrounding homes; most times it's quiet enough to hear the gentle trickle of the creek which divides the park. At the northwest end, be sure to see the once-grand facade of the Elmont Drive Bridge, built in 1934.

If you take one of the footbridges - or the one provided for vehicles - over the creek, you discover an older-growth area that alludes to the fertile farmland that originally drew settlers to this area. Thick networks of gnarled roots grow out of rich soil. Since the park is below street level here and the trees grow densely, sunlight is at a premium. There are several opportunities to explore the areas around the basin and along the treeline, but be careful and considerate of the environment if you do so. The creekbed offers a prime example of urban erosion in the form of a large tree whose root system is substantially exposed. *For safety's sake and in order to minimize further erosion, visitors to the park should not venture into the creek.* Also on this side of the park: a long, hollowed-out birch tree, three feet in diameter



with its corresponding stump; several other large fallen trees; a swinging bench; and other amenities.

According to FOOP board member Alice Gepp, the group is developing a master plan for the park that will focus on issues such as historical restoration of the Elmont Drive Bridge as well as erosion and eradication of invasive, non-native plants. The group will gather input on the plan through a series of public meetings and, following plan adoption, begin fund-raising efforts.

Orme Park has something for everyone, young and old, sitters, walkers and swingers. It's a great way to lose yourself in your own neighborhood. Check this gem out if you haven't already and watch for more information on efforts to finalize the park master plan in upcoming issues of the Voice!



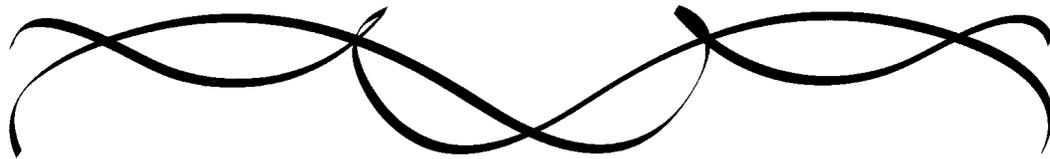
FREE CONE DAY APRIL 17TH -- NOON - 8 PM.

Don't forget Free Cone Day at Ben & Jerry's on N. Highland Ave. from Noon to 8 PM on Earth Day, April 17th. This is the 7th consecutive year in which all tips collected on Free Cone Day will go to the benefit of Orme Park. Please contact Dawn Shipp at dawnshipp@pobox.com if you can volunteer to scoop ice cream.

by Kim Nickels

VHCA Liaison to Virginia-Highland
Business Association

VHCA Welcomes
New Businesses
to the Neighborhood



One of the fantastic things about living in Virginia-Highland is the diverse assortment of businesses that we, as residents, can frequent without ever getting into our cars. As Atlanta's traffic dilemma reaches epic proportions, we can simply park and choose not to leave our neighborhood. We have access to most everything we need... great books, fantastic restaurants, unique gift shops, distinctive clothing, locally roasted coffee, a pharmacy, several grocery stores (and Trader Joe's on the way!), dry cleaners, banking, multiple places for a haircut, a post office and several choices for doctors - all within healthy walking distance. So many of our local businesses have been thriving for years: *Atkins Park, Intown Hardware, Murphy's, George's, Moes and Joes, Key Lime Pie, and Mitzi and Romano*, to name a few. Here's a look at some new faces in the Va-Hi business community that opened during 2006.

Eco-Bella, located at 1046 N. Highland Avenue (across from George's), was founded by 5 moms who were fueled by their interest in the environment; the impact of chemicals on our children and the earth; fair trade; and the sheer comfort, beauty and style of organic fabric. Since opening in April of 2006, Eco-Bella has led the market in great quality products that support a healthy environment. Eco-Bella carries clothing for adults, infants and children as well as an interesting and beautifully packaged selection of eco-friendly bath, bedding and home goods - a treat for yourself or great as gifts.

Armour & Co., located at 1198 N. Highland, opened in September of 2006. Armour & Co. offers a fresh look in home furnishings with a large selection of beautiful items for your home from sofas and chairs in fabrics ranging from luxurious to practically beautiful as well as great gifts like fragrant candles and luxurious bath products. Armour & Co. offers a warm, welcoming yet sophisticated environment along with friendly help and expert design advice.

Knitch, located at 1052 St. Charles Avenue in the alley behind Belly General Store, is a full service yarn shop for knitters and those who want to learn to knit. Knitch offers the southeast's best selection of natural, luxury fibers such as alpaca, merino wool, cashmere and high quality cottons as well as an extensive class and event schedule. This summer Knitch will be offering Fiber Camp for children ages 7 to 11 and Learn to Knit Baby and Bridal Showers.

Bill Hallman Alternative, located at 776 N. Highland Avenue, was recently cited by Atlanta Magazine as the best place for "hipster tees". Alternative is the fifth foray into fashion by Atlanta style maker Bill Hallman. Alternative offers comfortable, vintage-inspired knitwear designed by Bill Hallman and manufactured by Alternative. These designs can only be found at Alternative.

Blabla L'atelier, located at 1189 Virginia Avenue (next to Cortex Salon), opened in November of 2006. Blabla features unique knitwear and toys designed by the Blabla owners and hand-knit by artisans in Peru. All designs are unique and created exclusively for Blabla. Products range from colorful knit toys and pajama cozies to beautiful and unique clothing for children. This shop is tucked out of the way on Virginia Ave. but definitely worth a visit.

The next time you are out and about in the neighborhood, make a point to stop in, check out, and welcome these new arrivals to our neighborhood.



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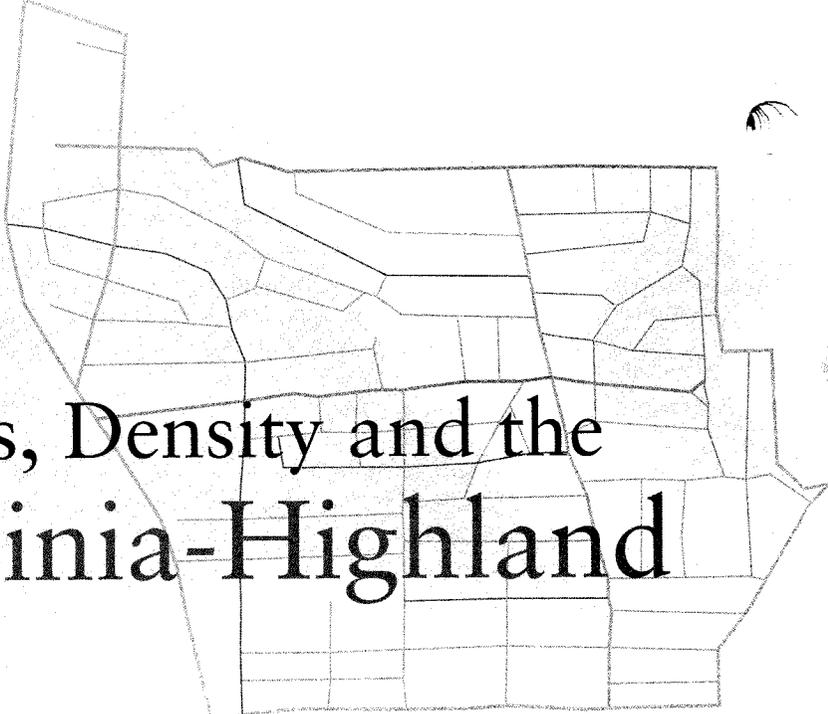


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by Chip Gallagher

In-Fills, Tear-Downs, Density and the Future of Virginia-Highland



THE GEORGIA TRUST FOR HISTORICAL PRESERVATION RECENTLY DESIGNATED VIRGINIA-HIGHLAND AS ONE OF SEVERAL COMMUNITIES “IN PERIL” OF LOSING ITS HISTORIC CHARACTER AND AESTHETIC CHARM DUE TO A RAPIDLY CHANGING HOUSING STOCK. ACCORDING TO THE TRUST’S ANALYSIS, THE MAIN CULPRITS ARE ‘TEAR-DOWNS’ AND ‘IN-FILLS’.

Tear-downs are older, smaller, sometimes cheaply built homes from the 1930s that often sit on sizable lots. These homes usually lack the amenities that today’s affluent homeowners expect in a residence and are often torn down and replaced with houses featuring attached two-car garages, media rooms and chef’s kitchens. Also, because zoning allows individuals to build on 49.99% of their property, these tear-downs are often replaced with comparatively large structures.

To put this in perspective, the size of the average single-family detached house in 1950 was 983 sq. ft. In 2005 that same house had grown to 2,553 square feet. Many of the new houses that have replaced tear-downs in our neighborhood are well over 4000 square feet and are derisively referred to as ‘McMansions’. This perception is largely inaccurate, however, because although many such homes in the suburbs are prefabricated, factory-built structures that are snapped together on-site much like a McDonald’s hamburger or a model T Ford, the houses built in our neighborhood are, for the most part, well-constructed. One might argue that more space is needed for growing families but, in fact, the size of the average household has shrunk from 3.4 members in 1970 to 2.6 members today. The main factors driving the growth in tear-downs and replacement with much bigger homes are affluence, conspicuous consumption, new housing norms, and the desire to live in a pedestrian-friendly neighborhood that is close to job centers and has easy access to the cultural amenities that make our city great.

Commenting on the Trust’s report, the AJC added that tear-downs and in-fills, as well as “demolition, neglect, and lack of maintenance, inappropriate development and insensitive public policy” all contribute to making a neighborhood “ugly, homogeneous or aesthetically schizophrenic”. However, this both oversimplifies and overstates what’s taking place in our community. During my time as a VHCA board member I frequently heard people say that our neighborhood was becoming too dense: specifically, too many people per acre. In fact, our neighborhood is not dense by whatever metric you wish to use. New York City (with 26,429 people per square mile compared to Atlanta’s 1,543) and Tokyo are dense, as are row house communities in Philadelphia and Baltimore. Since the overwhelming majority of households in our neighborhood contain 3-4 people and sit on lots that are 50-100+ feet deep, we are not a dense community (unless your density reference point is Montana or the upper peninsula of Michigan). This too may change as the specter of “vertical density” arrives in our neighborhood. If we start to see twenty-five story high rise buildings go up in Virginia-Highland, the population density will change as thousands of households are stacked on land that had been unused. Schools, roads, water lines and city services will all have to accommodate this population increase.

Perhaps what really bothers people about the tear-down/in-fill issue is not the actual tearing down of existing homes. Many of the houses I’ve seen torn-down on my block lacked any historic value

whatsoever and were quite frankly an eyesore. I believe most folks aren't concerned about tearing down an old, small, dilapidated house that has no historic value or redeeming architectural story. The issue that most people seem to be concerned about is proper "scale" and "fit" of the new home. One would hope a developer would be sensitive to and incorporate into their architectural design the houses that surround their project. Some builders do a beautiful job balancing the scale of the new home with the aesthetic 'feel' of the houses surrounding it, but many do not. Some new houses look like the developer literally transported a mansion from Alpharetta and dumped it on a concrete slab in Virginia Highland. It's sad, but when it comes right down to it, smart design - like smart growth - is expensive. The easiest and most profitable course of action is to do what has been done before.

Outside of amending zoning regulations or adopting historic district zoning, there is little that can be done to address this trend legally. A neighbor pointed out one up-side of what's taking place - "there are very few tear downs left and when you add up all the new 'McMansions' they are a tiny part of our housing stock." Yes, these houses do represent a tiny proportion of our housing stock, but one with disproportionate visibility. Think about how you tend to remember the 7' tall man you saw at a Christmas party. Virginia-Highland is known as a village, a pedestrian-friendly neighborhood and an urban community. Perhaps in the near future we will add "aesthetically schizophrenic housing stock" to that list.

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Colonel Mustard in the Kitchen With a Knife

In this issue of Voice we resume a column that used to appear regularly in the newsletter. Colonel Mustard - referring to the character from the board game Clue - is a pseudonym for a neighborhood resident who enjoys dining at the many wonderful restaurants in Virginia-Highland and sharing thoughts on the dining experience with others. In this issue the Colonel reviews one of the neighborhood's oldest and most treasured establishments: Highland Tap.

**Highland Tap
1026 N. Highland Avenue
404-875-3673**

My first impression of Highland Tap: warm, cozy, and comfortable. This was a pleasant surprise since the restaurant is located in a basement with old rock walls and speakeasy-like access. We arrived about 8:45 on a Saturday night with no reservation. It was busy, but the hostess said we could be seated at 9:00. Sure enough, our table was ready for us at 9:00. This is a sign that these service people know their room well. We were in the middle front of the dining room, so we asked if we could have a booth, and one emptied right then, so we sat exactly where we wanted.

The Tap has a reputation as a steak house, so it was unexpected that one member of our group ordered the special grouper. The rest of us had steaks of various cuts. There were salads to start that seemed ordinary, except the greens were exceptionally crisp and tender with a very good dressing - if you ordered blue cheese. I had a rib-eye that was big and good enough to provide 3 meals for me. And the onion rings were delicious. I may go back for just a couple of orders of them.

I'm not a big grouper fan, but the unexpected grouper was good, lightly battered and flakey, and served with mushroom risotto. The steak sandwich was huge and gobbled up by my companion. We were all too full to try dessert.

In the back of the dining room, there is a sunken area that gives the feel of privacy and can seat 15. Behind that, there is an enclosed patio area with a fireplace that seats 24 very privately. Both would be great for meetings or parties.

The only negative was that our server didn't tell us there were some other specials (besides the grouper), although I doubt if we would have ordered any of them because we were set on steak. We all enjoyed our meals in a room with pleasant ambiance and want to go again soon.

The Colonel gives Highland Tap 4 1/2 hotdogs (out of 5).

Time

A chronic complaint, or maybe it's just an observation, of people is how fast time goes by. Most sentences referring to this phenomenon usually begin with, "I can't believe...", with endings like, "it's 2007," "our child is a senior," "taxes are due again." It seems we live in a constant state of "I can't believe." But it wasn't always like that. And I don't think it has that much to do with growing older because I hear young people echoing the same refrain. Here's my two cents as to the possible reason why this happens: there are no tick-tocks in our lives anymore. No wind-up watches, no Grandfather or Grandmother clocks, no bedside Big Bens. With all those tickings and chimings gone, we're not aware of the moments, the times of our lives anymore. Like a silently flowing river, our digitally marked time just slips by us, hardly noticed. So I say buy a vintage watch, a cuckoo clock, a clock with a pendulum, and see— or should I say hear — if time doesn't slow down, just a little.

Phone Messages

What is it about leaving a message on someone's machine that makes it easier to say things than if you were talking with the person? Think about it. What we say to a machine is different. What got me on this train of thought was this. One day I was reflecting about my feelings of appreciation and thankfulness for a certain friend's being in my life. And though I immediately thought about calling and telling that person what was on my mind, I stopped from doing it because I thought that the person might actually answer. How lame is that? Turning it around, if one of my friends called me just to tell me I'm great, I'd be floored, touched, and it would probably make my whole day, if not week. So if you have a lovely thought about someone, be brave and make sure they hear about it, one way or the other.

by Doris **Betz**

Hilan Theater: The owner of this property has filed suit against the City of Atlanta alleging that his application for a liquor license was improperly denied. VHCA is exploring with legal counsel a number of ways to actively support the City's decision to deny the application.

Historic Designation: The Historic District Steering Committee began meeting in February to define a comprehensive work plan for pursuing this initiative. We expect a long process and welcome involvement from as many neighbors as possible. Anyone interested in volunteering in this effort is encouraged to contact Bill Herrell (404.964.3267, bherrell@cordcapital.com) or any other member of the VHCA Board or Planning Committee. The goal is to complete the work plan and communication plan for this effort by early March.

Neighborhood Commercial Zoning: We selected Lord, Aeck & Sargent as the consulting firm that will assist in the Neighborhood Commercial effort for Va-Hi. Representatives were at the February 5th VHCA meeting to discuss the initiative, a timeline and activities that comprise this effort. For more details, an overview/timeline is published on <http://vahi.org/planning/nc.html>. Our target goal is to submit newly proposed code to the City Council by 12/1/07.

by John **Peak**

VHCA Planning, Web Site and NPU Committees