



Virginia-Highland VOICE

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A publication of the Virginia-Highland Civic Association

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PLANNING NEWS

Many of you are aware that Doug Landau purchased the building at 780 North Highland Avenue known as "The Alley" in early June, and that he plans to demolish all or part of it to make a parking structure. The Civic Association's position is that the ingress and egress do not meet current code standards from the front or from the rear of this building to permit the construction of the parking structure. Our District 6 Council Member, Cathy Woolfard, is committed to helping stop the destruction of this lovely old building, and the Civic Association has hired attorney Robert Stein to try to prevent its demolition. Thanks to all of you who made calls to our elected officials asking that the Bureau of Buildings be stopped from issuing the demolition permit for this site.

For several months, the rumor has been circulating that the "Cotton Club" is coming to Virginia-Highland into the old Hilan Theatre building behind Starbucks and Ben and Jerry's. On July 14, this club applied for an alcohol license at that location, so it is no longer just a rumor! Although it is doubtful that the Alcohol License Review Board will hear this case on August 25, that is now the scheduled hearing date given by the License Investigators. If, in fact, this case is heard on that date (or whenever this case is heard) we all need to be present to voice our opposition. The Alcohol License Review Board holds its hearings at City Hall downtown in committee room two, twice monthly, on Wednesdays at 5 pm. For updates call the Planning Committee or check our website, www.vahi.org.

Our Civic Association President, Ruthie Penn-David, has been interviewing attorneys for this case and by the time this article goes to print should have completed that task. The "Cotton Club" will hold about 700 people and has zero (0) parking spaces. A court decision exists on this building which erroneously grandfathered the parking spaces at 128; therefore, the City of Atlanta Bureau of Buildings used that case as legal grounds that the parking requirement had been met and issued a building permit in August of 1998. According to City Code, a building permit must be appealed within 30 days and, because the neighborhood was not aware that such permit had been issued until February 1999, we missed the opportunity to appeal within the time limit. The Civic Association is committed to fighting this nightclub with yard signs, demonstrations at the site and through the courts, if necessary.

All hope for a simple resolution to this problem is not lost, however, and we must pursue the one easy legal option that is still open to us. Before the City Council Zoning Committee, there is legislation that is called the "outdoor dining amendment." Coupled with that amendment is the deletion of the parking requirement from the Alcoholic Beverages Code. The City currently has a parking requirement for eating and drinking establishments (restaurants, bars, etc.) in the City of Atlanta Zoning Code and a separate parking requirement in the Alcoholic Beverages Code for establishments that serve alcohol. The requirements are different with the Zoning Code carrying a parking requirement of one (1) space per 100 feet of floor area of the entire building and the Alcoholic Beverages Code carrying a parking requirement of one (1) space per 50 feet of customer service area. This usually works out to be about the same, give or take a space or two, for any establishment that does not have outdoor dining. However, for restaurants that do have outdoor dining, there is a great difference because in the Zoning Code there is no parking requirement for outdoor dining. The City has never enforced the parking requirement that is stated in the Alcoholic Beverages Code; that is why so many people who come to Virginia-Highland from outside our neighborhood wind up parking in front of our homes.

The key to stopping the "Cotton Club" from coming into Virginia-Highland lies in our efforts to keep the parking requirement for an establishment that serves alcohol from changing. If the outdoor dining amendment passes as it is currently written, the City will interpret the "Cotton Club" building

as having met the parking requirement in the Zoning Code through its grandfathered status and it will have no additional test for meeting parking requirements applied to the building. Under the current code it would still have to meet the additional test. The Planning Committee of the Civic Association has written a substitute amendment which Lee Morris, who is a member of the Zoning Committee, has offered to introduce. Our proposed amendment states that parking is required for buildings that seek an alcohol license and does not recognize that parking requirement as having been met through grandfathered status. Your job is now to call all City Council Members and ask them to vote for the amendment that is proposed by the Civic Association through Lee Morris. It's up to you! We must make the calls, write the letters and send the E-mail. We can stop the "Cotton Club" but it will take effort. Go to our newly created website, www.vahi.org for information on telephone numbers for City Council members and for updates on this issue. Also, call Winnie Currie at 404-876-5101 with questions relating to this article.

Winnie Currie, Chair

PIEDMONT PARK MASTER PLAN UPDATE

FINALLY... there seems to be a resolution to the renovation plan for OAK HILL (the large green space along 10th Street where the Symphony plays).

If you remember, neighborhoods and Friends of Piedmont Park were at odds with the Piedmont Park Conservancy's plan for a granite overlook and an extensive 11-foot wide asphalt path system on Oak Hill. After two years of discussions, (pressure), from the neighbors and Friends and input from the disabled community, the Conservancy, City Parks Department and community groups have a better (not perfect) plan.

Gone is the overlook and the diagonal path that cut the hill in half. The paths are now to be 9 feet wide and made from pervious material (tree friendly and roller blade unfriendly). Still up in the air is the route of the westernmost path. A living sculpture of a circle of trees commissioned by Piedmont Park Arts Festival in 1985 and designed by then local artist Maren Hassenger (presently Chair of sculpture at Maryland Art Institute) was scheduled to be cut down under the original proposal. Friends commissioned an outside consultant to design a less intrusive western path that so far has not been agreed to, but leaves the "Circle of Trees."

This whole struggle could have been avoided had the Master Plan Advisory Committee been in place as called for in the Master Plan. This committee, representing the City Parks Department, the Conservancy, and citizens is to have input into the projects implementing the Master Plan. This committee was not in place and is basically inactive at present.

*J.D. Christy
VAHI Board Member*

**THE VIRGINIA HIGHLAND CIVIC
ASSOCIATION HAS A NEW WEBSITE!**

<http://www.vahi.org>

PRESIDENT'S CORNER

Since other articles in this issue go into detail about what is going on in Virginia-Highland on a number of specific issues, I will just mention the highlights and a few important dates to note on your calendars.

The issue of the most immediate concern is the alcohol application for the proposed Cotton Club. The Virginia-Highland Civic Association's position is to support the residents of that section of the neighborhood by opposing the alcohol application and opposing the use of that property as a nightclub/lounge. A grassroots effort to stop the club is underway. The club will have a devastating effect on the entire neighborhood as well as the immediate neighbors. What adversely affects one part of the neighborhood adversely affects the whole neighborhood. Visit the new Virginia-Highland website to get current details and important dates and to find out how you can help: www.vahi.org or call the Virginia-Highland phone line (404) 222-8244 option #5 for the Cotton Club opposition.

The neighborhood presentation of the proposed urban design changes to the intersection of Virginia Avenue and N. Highland Avenue will be on **Saturday, September 18, from 10:00 AM until Noon**, at Inman Middle School in the cafeteria. This is a result of input from the community workshop held in January and from the North Highland Avenue Study Task Force. The proposed design is supposed to be posted on a website by the City for preview prior to the presentation, but the website address is not yet available.

On **Saturday, October 16, from 10:00 AM until Noon**, at Inman Middle School in the cafeteria, there will be a presentation on having Virginia-Highland added to the National Register of Historic Places. This is not a presentation on "historic districts" and the restrictions that go with them. Rather, this is to explain the criteria and tax benefits of being added to the National Register. Please attend to find out more about it and to give your feedback on whether we should pursue this. The Atkin's Park portion of the neighborhood is already on the National Register, and those residents might want to attend to find out how they can benefit from that status.

It is important that you attend the VHCA Annual Meeting on **Wednesday, September 1, at 7:30 pm** at Inman Middle School. We will be making donations from the Summerfest proceeds, electing Board members, presenting awards for outstanding community service, and several of our elected officials will be present.

Ruthie Penn-David, President
404-875-2942



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PARKS NEWS

Maintaining Street Tree Diversity

Tree diversity is an issue to which urban foresters and city planners are now paying increasing attention. Monocultures (the planting of only one kind of tree) are dangerous because of species-specific insects and other diseases. In order to avoid sudden and catastrophic tree loss, planting a variety of trees is recommended. According to plant geneticist Frank Santamour, Jr., the "rule of thumb" for biodiversity is no more than 30% of one family (like Rosaceae, which includes many well-known ornamentals such as apple, pear, cherry, and hawthorne); no more than 20% of one genus (like Rosaceae *pyrus* or pear); and no more than 10% of one species (like Rosaceae *pyrus calleryana* or Bradford pear).

What are the most common street trees in our neighborhood? In the absence of a scientific tree survey, a casual observation indicates that dogwoods, redbuds, crepe myrtles, and red maples are the most common. In the last two years, the Parks Committee with the tree contributions from Trees Atlanta has begun to add new species to the neighborhood's mix of street trees. These include Golden Rain trees, Autumnalis cherry trees, Smoke trees, Carolina Silverbells and a few others. We need to continue to diversify the trees that we plant in our neighborhood.

Fortunately, from the calls I get from people wanting to know what kind of tree to plant, many people are already interested in extending tree diversity. The following are some trees that will add both interest and variety.

Street trees under power lines: Trident maple, chalk maple, serviceberry, fringe tree, Kousa dogwood (more drought tolerant), hawthornes, and lilac chaste tree.

Street trees with no power lines: Florida maple, Chinese Pistachio, Lacebark Elm and bald cypress (highly recommended by Atlanta City Arborist Frank Mobley).

Of course, tree planting decisions should also include factors such as sun, shade, and drought tolerance. Our branch library has several good books on trees. If I can help you, call me at 404-874-0523.

Trees and Piedmont Park

Dead trees, dying trees, and trees with dead and/or broken branches dot Piedmont Park, and many people have commented on the poor condition of trees in the park. This unsatisfactory situation has been developing for several years.

In August 1996, arborist Dudley Hartel began a tree survey of the park for the Piedmont Park Conservancy. The survey, completed in December 1996, includes an evaluation of every tree over 12" in diameter, listing the condition of each tree and giving specific timely recommendations for pruning and tree care. The survey is a large and admirable piece of work. Unfortunately since that time, it has simply sat on a shelf. The Piedmont Park Conservancy chose instead to remodel buildings and build fences and gates and other "hardscape" projects. They have ignored the trees and the recommendations for care.

Fortunately there is now renewed interest in saving and maintaining the big trees in the park. The Piedmont Park Conservancy met with Trees Atlanta and Mr. Hartel in July to begin a program of immediate assistance for all the trees in Piedmont Park. Let's hope this signals a new attitude toward the value of trees on the part of the Conservancy.

Fall Planting

If you have ideas for fall tree plantings, give me a call. The civic association supports street tree plantings with a healthy budget. Call me if you are interested in planting trees in the median or in the front of your house.

Correction: The photos of volunteers replacing the Bradford pears with Trident maples on St. Charles appearing in the last issue of the newsletter were taken by Joe Page.

Stephanie Coffin, Co-Chair

VHCA ANNUAL MEETING

Wednesday, September 1st, 7:30 pm

Auditorium, Inman Middle School on Virginia Ave.

- Donations will be made from Summerfest proceeds
- Awards will be presented for community service
- Election of VHCA Board members
- Elected officials will attend

SUMMERFEST NEWS

The weather was perfect, just a little too hot on Sunday, but the crowds returned for the annual Virginia-Highland Summerfest. With good, lively music at John Howell Park and Virginia Avenue lined with artists booths, there was something for everyone. KidsFest had new games and activities, there was a rock climbing wall, as well as an Elvis look-alike.

Thanks to the hard work of Jill Gossett, there were plenty of volunteers. Unfortunately, Jill couldn't make it herself—she had been hospitalized due to a collapsed lung. She's home, doing fine, and making plans to complete some unfinished Summerfest business. We all look forward to seeing her repeat her stellar performance in 2000.

There were other "stars". Pierce Pape took the 5K Fun Run to new heights by designing a new route and signing up over 600 participants. Some runners were turned away because running supplies were exhausted. In our wildest dreams Pierce and I never expected this kind of response. The Tot Trot was triple the size of last year, and many additional heats had to be run to accommodate all the kids who turned out. In the background was another stellar performer, Susan Kraham, who must have taken more than a thousand messages off the Va-Hi hotline, and delivered them to the appropriate people.

With the lessons learned from previous festivals, this year's Summerfest went smoother than ever. There were no problems in the beer truck area as Beermeister Tom Penn-David took a proprietary stance, managing the beer pouring tables. There was no repeat this year of beer running into the gutter. The food was varied and predictably good. The setup of the Artists Market went much smoother as Kathy Barkley and her team directed that effort. Even the artists seemed to be mellowed this year. New artists were present, and the crowds responded by making many purchases. My personal favorite was "Missionary Mary", a friend of Jule Gold. Mary's "Ten Commandments" art was more than I could resist. I have my piece of the Artists Market in our living room.

Next year will be a challenge in many ways. There will be some new faces and new ideas. That's healthy and certainly manifested itself at this year's event. The final profit tally? That will have to wait until the annual meeting in September. By then, all the bills will have been paid and we will get to celebrate our success.

My personal thanks go once again to all the volunteers who made this event possible, and to our cherished neighbors who were, with few exceptions, very supportive of this event. All of our pre-event publicity about safe driving and parking apparently was heard as there was a minimum of traffic violations. Our visitors came to enjoy the festival, see our neighborhood, shop at our businesses and enjoy the cuisine of "The Tastes of Virginia-Highland". It was a great weekend. I thank you all very much for your support. Stay tuned for Summerfest 2000. It's going to be wonderful.

Arnold Gross, Chair

CIVIC ASSOCIATION MEETINGS

When: 1st Wed. of the month 7:30 p.m.
Where: Ponce de Leon Branch Library

JOIN THE CIVIC ASSOCIATION

- Dues are just \$10 per year!
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If you did not receive this newsletter through the mail, then you are not a dues-paying member. Call 404-222-8244, listen for "membership," leave your name and address and we will send you an application. Or send \$10 to P.O. Box 8401, Station F, Atlanta, GA 31106, with your name, address and phone number.

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VOLUNTEER OPPORTUNITY Piedmont Park Conservancy "Park Guides"

The PPC is currently recruiting volunteers to serve as Park Guides to conduct tours, greet visitors in the Visitors' Center and assist with environmental education programs. Park Guides are needed weekdays and weekends and are asked to commit to at least 3 hours per week per month. Experience in facilitating, environmental education, or leading tour groups is helpful.

Volunteers must be:

- At least 18 years of age.
- Available to attend required training sessions.
- Willing to commit to program time requirements.

Contact Ron Welcome at 404/875-7275
for more information or to apply.

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6:30-10:00 p.m.
Silent art and merchant auction; 6:30-9 p.m.
Tickets: \$25 before October 1;
\$35 on or after October 1

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