

SOCIETY HILL CIVIC ASSOCIATION

THE RESIDENT NEWSLETTER

313 Pine Street

Philadelphia, Pennsylvania 19106

November, 1972

THE GREAT BOUNDARY SHOUT-OUT

It was an ideal place for a membership meeting. A hospital. There was emergency oxygen nearby. Blood readily available if transfusions were needed. Doctors on call. Plenty of bandages.

The meeting on the evening of October 4th, at Pennsylvania Hospital, was probably the most raucous in the annals of the Society Hill Civic Association. Tempers were at the breaking point and beyond. The floor was seething.

If you weren't there you've probably heard about it by now. And if you were there, you're probably more than a little confused.

What really happened? What was all the shouting about?

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What it was all about was a change in the by-laws. Unfortunately that change was requested at a time when the neighborhood was torn apart by differences over a federally subsidized housing development. The two issues were on a collision course.

Let's go back to the beginning.

The Society Hill Civic Association is an organization of some 500 members who live in the neighborhood between Front and Eighth Streets, Walnut to Lombard. That area has been subject to massive urban renewal in the last 20 years. There are probably more plans and regulations and bureaucratic decisions required over these 30 blocks than any other district of the city. SHCA represents the interests of the community in the face of all that city, state and federal tinkering.

In the early days, the interests of neighborhood people were seldom taken into consideration by the bureaucrats. But, over the years, government has become more responsive, consults more, and makes more decisions which take into account what the community wants for itself.

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MEETING NOTICE

Wednesday, November 8, 1972

McCall School Auditorium 8:00 p.m.



The instrument for this consultation between government and neighborhood is the Project Area Committee (PAC, for short).

PAC was a creation of Washington -- specifically the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD). PAC groups are associations of residents in "urban renewal areas" formed for the purpose of advising all the planning agencies what the neighborhoods really want. Today, planners must get PAC approval before they tinker.

The Society Hill Civic Association, eager to help influence decisions about its neighborhood, jumped at the chance of being designated the PAC group for this area.

It has meant a lot, too. Since 1968 when the PAC program began, SHCA has been increasingly active in reviewing all the plans introduced by the local renewal agency, the Philadelphia Redevelopment Authority, and the developers it selects. And we've made a number of changes, big and little, from the number of parking spaces in the Denny garage to the design of housing for the Metropolitan Hospital site.

Over the past four years HUD has been developing new guidelines for PAC groups all over the country to be sure they really represent their neighborhoods. For one thing, some PACs included areas larger than the urban renewal area affected by redevelopment so that decisions were being made by people who lived outside the neighborhoods where change was contemplated. In other areas, people who lived in a neighborhood couldn't afford the PAC group's dues and were frozen out of a say on what would happen to their community.

That's why HUD asked SHCA to make two changes in its by-laws.

First, we were asked to waive dues requirements for residents who couldn't afford them.

Second, we were asked to adjust our boundaries to conform with the HUD-designated urban renewal area.

This second requirement meant leaving out three blocks which were not part of the Washington Square East urban renewal area. One of the blocks was the Hopkinson House block of row homes on the north side of Spruce between 6th and 7th (which were built prior to the urban renewal plan). The people who lived there, HUD told us, couldn't vote on matters which affected the rest of the renewal-designated neighborhood. We protested. We have long-time members in the areas that HUD told us we must exclude. But Washington was adamant. In order to continue to have say on what happened to the neighborhood we would have to change our by-laws to modify our boundaries and eliminate those blocks. We could, however, make the people who live there associate members, able to participate in SHCA and express their views but not vote on them.

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BOUNDARY (continued)

To keep our PAC accreditation we notified the membership of a meeting to change our by-laws to comply with HUD standards. That get-together was scheduled for October 4th. It looked like clear sailing, but that was the night the ship hit the span.

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The span, in this case was the Benezet Corporation and the actions of SHCA which spawned it.

We have to flash back to the fall of 1971 when several members of SHCA raised a point of new business at a membership meeting. They reported that seven low-income families who were renting properties on the 600 block of Lombard Street were under eviction notice from the Redevelopment Authority so that their landlord, The Octavia Hill Association, could develop high priced rental units on the site. The families were long-time residents of the neighborhood and a request was made for SHCA to do something.

The membership voted that a committee be formed to make recommendations to keep these seven (now six) families in the area.

The committee named by SHCA finally came up with a single plan. The plan called for the formation of a non-profit community-controlled corporation which would build and own 19 units of federally subsidized low-rental housing on two tracts on Sixth Street.

Before recommending the plan to the membership, the SHCA Board called a special meeting of residents in the blocks immediately surrounding the proposed sites to see how they felt about it. About 100 people attended and voted 56 to 10 in favor of the project.

The proposal then was brought up at a general meeting on June 14th. The committee's proposal was approved by a vote of 161 to 59. One of the conditions of that approval was that directors for the corporation reside in a four-block area surrounding the sites. Directors were chosen and the organization named itself the Benezet Corporation (after a colonial period do-gooder) and proceeded with plans for building the rental units.

Benezet Corporation is not connected with SHCA although it has some members in common. However, since SHCA is the PAC group for this area, it has the final say about which federally-subsidized projects are approved for the neighborhood.

The controversy over the housing proposal continues unabated. Some of the residents who opposed the housing formed the Society Hill West Civic Association. One of its goals is to prevent development of the project. Its members feel that approval of the project came from residents who live in the eastern end of the neighborhood who wouldn't bear the brunt of problems they foresee for themselves arising from the project.

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All of these factors built up the head of steam which exploded at the membership meeting on the night of October 4th.

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That membership meeting was, to understate the case, memorable. Voting on by-law changes is limited to paid-up members. To assure that those voting were bona fide members of SHCA, a plan was devised to give paid-up members pink cards as voting certificates. Members in arrears on their dues could pay up at the door and new people wishing to join SHCA could sign up on the spot. The plan netted the organization 80 new members but confused the devil out of a lot of long-time members who thought there was some sort of hustle taking place.

In any event, the proposed by-law changes were heatedly discussed on the floor. Those opposed to the housing project hoped that if they defeated the by-laws amendments SHCA would lose its PAC accreditation and the housing would not be built. Others simply didn't think boundaries should be suddenly changed to satisfy a distant bureaucracy.

When the votes were finally sorted out, the waiver of dues in hardship cases was approved and the change of boundaries defeated.

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As an aftermath of that evening, a delegation from the SHCA Board had a meeting with HUD to see if it would allow the organization to retain its present boundaries and retain its PAC accreditation. An answer is forthcoming.

"SCREENS" GETS NEIGHBORHOOD STAGING

The Society Hill Playhouse, 507 South Eighth Street opened its 13th season on Wednesday, November 1, with "The Screens" by Jean Genet.

This is the first regional production; the American premiere was in New York last season where it won the New York Critics Award for the best foreign play of the 1971-72 season.

"The Screens" plays Wednesday through Saturday evenings at 8:00 p.m. to December 13.

It will be followed by the American premiere of "Four Little Girls" by Pablo Picasso (yes, he wrote plays, too), which opens January 31.

The Philadelphia Youth Theatre continues in full force at the Society Hill Playhouse with workshop classes on Saturday mornings. You can register now. For further information call the Playhouse at WA 3-0210.

LOW INCOME HOUSING: TWO VIEWS

To shed more light on the low-cost housing controversy, we asked two spokesman from groups concerned with the subject why they favored or opposed building 19 units of "236" housing at Sixth and Lombard and Sixth and Panama for tenants in the neighborhood who need relocation housing.

PRO: Statement by Lewis Reade, 406 S. Sixth Street, President of Benezet Corporation.

This handful of decent, law-abiding neighbors, some of whom have lived here all their lives, should not be forced to relocate when there exists a feasible method of allowing them to remain near their friends, jobs, and the associations of a lifetime. The urban renewal process, as important as it is, should not be allowed to destroy one person's "community" while it builds another's. The "236" government assisted but privately owned and managed program seeks to provide reasonable housing for nineteen designated families presently residing here. These families (many are elderly) manage to conduct their modest lives with dignity on jobs or pensions even while shopping in the local stores and being members of the churches and synagogues in the neighborhood. Every care is being taken in this community controlled program to insure that the housing meets local standards for architecture, materials, construction and continued maintenance. The entire operation is under the control of a Board composed of people residing within the four-block area surrounding the sites. This Board will also conduct intensive screening of prospective tenants to assure that reasonable standards of personal apartment care are achieved and that tenants understand their responsibilities to the community.

The entire program will be undertaken at no cost to the community. Indeed, the development of the now vacant sites will add to local ratables, as the housing units are taxed as any other private venture.

Society Hill is a community which incorporates all types of people -- barber and banker, black and white, lawyer and musician, straight and gay, realtor and writer, affluent and needy, architect and ad-man, Jew and Gentile. This diversity is what makes this area the most exciting in the city. To drive out any group is to make this neighborhood poorer and to diminish its potential for further growth.

CON: Statement by George Axilbund, 526 Spruce Street, President of Society Hill West Civic Association.

Prior to the development of Society Hill, center city was a dying area. The remaining prosperous residents were moving in ever-increasing numbers to the suburbs. This, in turn, adversely affected center city stores, restaurants, and shops which gave employment to many low-income families. In order to retain and attract higher-income residents to center city, the planners envisioned Society Hill as an area of new homes, apartments and quality shops and restaurants. That this plan has been successful is

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beyond question, and in fact, the Society Hill development has gained national renown.

In the accomplishment of this project, the planners of Society Hill did not make any provisions for low-income housing of any type. As the present head of the Planning Commission, Mr. Bernard Meltzer, stated in a newspaper article in 1968, "nowhere is there an example of success for mixing of low and high-cost housing cheek-by-jowl... if this happens to Society Hill, then all the economic gains which have come from a decade and a half of urban renewal will be gone."

Aside from this fact, it would be palpably unfair after inducing investment of over 70 million dollars on the promise of Society Hill being what it is today, to inject low-income housing in the area. This is particularly true since the number of families involved is so small that the project would merely be a "symbol" to salve the conscience of a few liberal social theorists. And what about the 500 original residents of the area who were displaced? They are in the position of now seeing a portion of their tax dollars used to give housing to others in the very area where they themselves could not afford to remain! We believe this is not only unfair, but immoral in its concept. As to the families involved, how comfortable will they and their children be when they cannot "keep up" economically and socially with their neighbors?

The 600 Society Hill residents who have signed petitions opposing this project sincerely feel that it represents a betrayal of the original plan and those who have worked so hard to make Society Hill what it is today. We urge the support of our position and hope you will make your views known to all concerned.

UNTANGLING THE TRANSPORTATION MESS

The Society Hill Civic Association has joined together with three other center city civic associations in support of the newly formed Transportation Action Group. TAG's aims are to improve mass transit, encourage alternatives to the private car, find solutions to city parking problems and give the private citizen a voice in transportation planning for the city and region.

The three other downtown civic groups are the Center City Residents' Association, the Logan Circle Civic Association and the Washington Square West Civic Association.

As its first public event, TAG is planning a forum on or about November 21 at a central location to be announced. Present plans call for a panel of professionals in transportation, planning and public agencies to discuss the nature of the problem and possible solutions. The meeting will provide open discussions with interested center city residents.

The exact date, place and program will be announced through posters, newsletters and the press. For additional information, contact Transportation Action Group, 3733 Walnut Street, Phila., 19104 (BA 2-5247).

DECK THE HILL

This promises to be the neighborhood's comeliest Christmas, thanks to a joint effort by SHCA and the Pennsylvania Horticultural Society. They are sponsoring a decorating program for the holidays and offering prizes for the best-trimmed houses on the Hill. Take note of these events and come join the festivities.

WA 2 4801
Wreath-making Workshop at the Horticultural Society on Monday, December 4 at 7:30 in the evening. \$5 covers all materials and instruction. Class size will be limited to 20, so reserve promptly. *Rancy Salgado*

House Decorating Contest - join the competition by filling in the entry blank below and following these simple rules:

1. Categories are (1) Wreaths, (2) Doorways - swags, garlands, sprays (3) Windows - inside or out, candles desirable. First, Second and Third prizes will be awarded in each category.
2. Use fresh, dried or treated natural plant materials. No plastic or other artificial foliage permitted.
3. Tasteful accents, real or artificial, such as candy, ornaments or ribbon can be used, but are not required.
4. Entries will be judged for originality, design, skill in handling of materials and appropriateness to setting.
5. Qualified non-resident judges will be selected by the Pennsylvania Horticultural Society. Judging will take place some time between 9 a.m. Monday, December 18 and 5 p.m. Wednesday, December 20.

Wassail and open house at PHS Headquarters at 7 p.m., December 20. Start the evening by lighting a candle in each of your windows after 5 p.m. Tour the neighborhood for a look-see at the festive decorations and come join neighbors for a cup of cheer at PHS and the awards presentation.

Children's Tree-trimming in Delancey Park on Thursday, December 21. Children are invited to bring an ornament (waterproof and unbreakable) at 8 p.m. Expect some fun and surprises.

Co-chairmen of all festivities are Deborah Latta and Ellen Miller. They'd welcome any help you can give. Call WA 2-1273 or WA 5-2871

DON'T FORGET

The next membership meeting will be held Wednesday, November 8, at McCall School Auditorium at 8:00 p.m.

On the agenda is the question whether to change current zoning to allow a movie theatre/restaurant complex to be built at Front and Delancey.

Also scheduled is an informal look at the revised plans for Head House East a report on the formation of a nominating committee to choose next year's officers and directors; and an opportunity to discuss what sort of functions and activities should take place on the Delaware expressway cover

DARTS AND LAURELS

Laurel: To Pier 30 Tennis Club which opened on schedule in Mid-October providing indoor tennis at our waterfront.

Dart: To the new Pantry Pride at 6th and Federal for not including Society Hill on its free shoppers special bus loop.

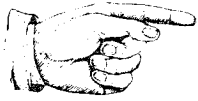
Laurel: To Head House Tavern for putting Pat Tancredi in charge and his promise to make a decent restaurant out of the place. "Give me a few weeks", he asked. Right on!

Laurel: To the Sugar Cone which has a nostalgia juke box, complete with Artie Shaw and Fats Waller records.

Dart: To the State Store which never seems to have number 491 (our favorite wine) in stock, forcing local oenologists to bootleg from New Jersey.

Laurel: To Ristorante de Gaetano for the best cioppino in town. The room on Walnut between 7th and 8th, is a most attractive new addition to the local eating scene by Tom and Inez of "Little Den" fame. The cioppino is a chowder of lobster, clams, mussels, squid and shrimp in tomato gravy. It costs \$9 and feeds two admirably.

Dart: To State Highway engineers who promise to make the Delaware Expressway cover a design monstrosity. It won't be a lid -- it will be a top hat. And the auto exhaust system will make Front Street unbreathable.



CAN YOU PASS THIS SIMPLE TEST?



- I can't find a place to park my car.
- Society Hill needs a few go-go bars.
- There aren't enough cheap apartments.
- The streets aren't clean enough.
- We need four methadone clinics on Pine Street.
- We need a movie house on Second Street.
- There's nothing for the kids to do.
- The dogs are doing too much. On my sidewalk.
- I'd like a gas station nearby.
- It's very hard to meet people down here.

Whether your concerns are serious or frivolous, pressing or subliminal, if you live in Society Hill you care about what happens to your neighborhood.

You can shape the direction by meeting with your neighbors and putting your views on the record.

That's what the Society Hill Civic Association is all about.

If you've been wondering how to join, the answer is simple. Fill in the form below, enclose the appropriate dues and drop it in the mail.

THE SOCIETY HILL CIVIC ASSOCIATION
Membership Application



Name _____	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes, I want to join.
Address _____	<input type="checkbox"/> \$4 single membership enclosed.
Zip Code _____	<input type="checkbox"/> \$6 family membership enclosed.
Telephone _____	<input type="checkbox"/> I request waiver of dues because of financial hardship.

(Membership paid now will extend through December 1973)

Send to: Mr. George Schall, Treasurer
518 Spruce Street
Philadelphia 19106