



Green Space Advisor

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Message From The President: Bobby Berg

Greater Sandy Spring Green Space, Inc. held its annual meeting on March 29 at Friends House in Sandy Spring. (Thank you, Friends House!) The short business part included re-election to the board of Steve Berry, Sharon Dooley, and John Spears. It also included a report of the previous year's activities:

- We kept an eye on our conservation easement properties.
- We are considering doing a formal inspection annually instead of every two years.
- We pursued conservation easements with two potential private donors. At present, almost all of our easement property is land owned by homeowner associations. Although the process has been slow, we hope to bring it to completion this year and thereby create a great example for other potential donors.
- The board held a series of strategy discussions, with an emphasis on improving education and outreach.
- We mailed two newsletters, taped a cable TV interview (Upcounty Perspective), and had a table at History Days, National Night Out, and Winterfest.
- **We spent more than we received in donations. (Please remember your \$35 dues!)**
- In keeping with the practice of similar non-profit organizations, the board voted to purchase directors & officers insurance.

The main part of the meeting was a talk by Caren Madsen of Conservation Montgomery.



Conservation Montgomery
Working together to enhance our quality of life

Caren Madsen

This relatively new organization is a coalition of civic and environmental organizations (including GSSGS) that promotes:

- Effective watershed protection and stormwater management.
- Tree-lined streets -- and a tree and forest canopy that will provide environmental, economic and aesthetic benefits.
- Workable solutions dealing with the impacts of climate change.
- Energy-efficient homes, offices and businesses.
- Sustainable transportation.
- Pedestrian and bike-friendly neighborhoods.
- Green public space and lush parks.
- Responsive governance with land use decisions based on input all community stakeholders.

Report of the Executive Director Joli A. McCathran

Greater Sandy Spring Green Space (GSSGS) is growing and continues to perform a valuable mission to the greater Sandy Spring area. We welcome our newest member to the Board of Directors, Barbara Ray. Barbara brings valuable ideas and fresh insight to our organization. The entire Board of Directors works with dedication and proficiency. What a wonderful group of volunteers! Another new change is our monthly meeting date. We are now meeting on the first Tuesday of each month at the Olney Chamber of Commerce office in Olney. If you wish to visit, please feel free to contact me at 301-869-5358 or via e-mail at kmccathran@verizon.net. We welcome your visit.

As you may know, I am a member of the Montgomery County Forest Conservancy Board. This group had recently published the 2011 Register of Champion Trees. Montgomery County currently has 44 State Champion trees, including five national champions. Not only does this list the largest known trees in Montgomery County, but has information about:

- United Nations General Assembly declaration of 2011 as the International Year of the Forest
- Montgomery County's Weed Warriors Program
- Montgomery County's Forest Steward Volunteer Program
- Montgomery County's Urban tree Steward Program.

Much of this information is online but if you wish to receive a hard copy of this document, please contact me at the above address.

GSSGS is here for you. We welcome your participation. However, donations are important to the vitality of this group. Please consider becoming a first-time member or renew your membership. Membership information is on the last page of this edition of the Advisor. We all hope to hear from you soon. Thank you very much for your consideration.

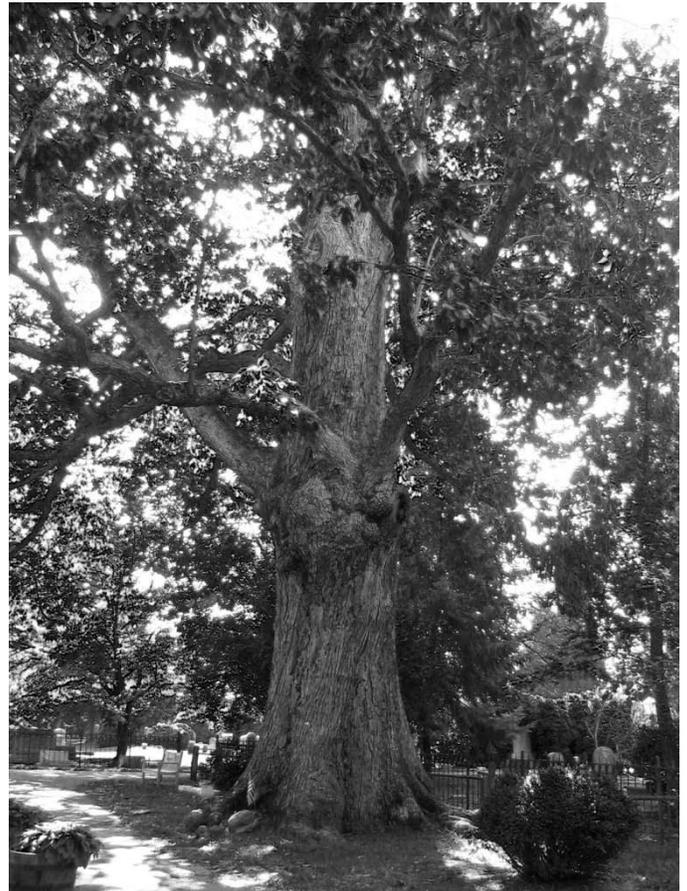


Photo by Dori Murphy

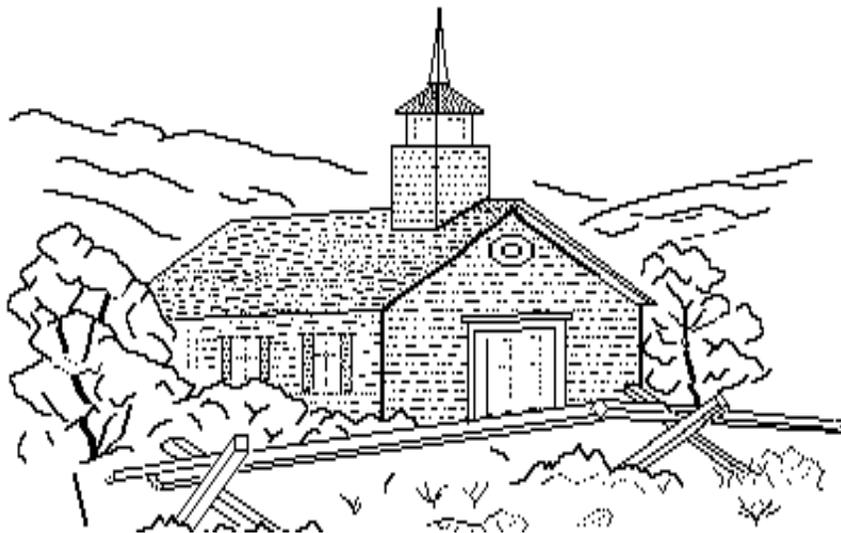
Country roads and city churches – do they mix? Sharon Dooley

Montgomery County has a rich history of tolerance for religious institutions in the upper portions of the

county. The Agricultural Reserve, when created more than 30 years ago, counted more than 75 small

or medium sized church buildings in and around the widespread lands held in its restricted enclave. However, about ten years ago the county was faced with the possibility of several churches requesting permission to build large religious facilities in the Agricultural Reserve. Farmers and landowners were concerned about the limited water resources in the aquifer, the use of required septic fields and the impact of facilities which operated 7 days a week. The county was concerned about the impact of many cars heading to mega-institutions along two-lane roads not meant for large amounts of traffic. (The Ag Reserve generally does not have access to county water and sewer, and roads have purposefully been kept in a rural or rustic state and not expanded.) Many others considered the limits on private institutional facilities (or PIFS as some called them) to be unconstitutional. In 2006 County Council legislation was passed which limited the total gallons of sewage which could be produced by any such facilities within the defined areas of the Ag Reserve. This restriction kept large scale institutions such as mega-churches, temples, and religious schools out of the Ag Reserve.

Against this backdrop, First Baptist Church of Wheaton, which is currently located behind Bally's Health Club in Wheaton near the Westfield Center, placed a contract on a farmhouse lot on Emory Church Road in Olney sometime in 2007. They had plans to sell their church on Georgia Avenue and move to Olney. The council had already approved the ability of an entity to receive a connection to the water/sewer line along Georgia if permission was granted for them to build a church on this lot. Emo-



ry Church Road is a small road settled in the early days of the town. Some historic trees and older homes are found on this narrow scenic roadway. Each of the homes is on well water and uses septic fields. The representatives of the church had several meetings over the last few years with the community and presented several plans for the church buildings and access. The church was described as placed back from the road on a lot which has limited access due to two protected stream valleys which cross the property. More than 200 parking spaces were planned for the building, which was anticipated to be approximately 50,000 square feet. (This is about the size of the Olney Giant.) The representatives originally said they would improve

Emory Church Road from Georgia Avenue to the church driveway in a manner that would protect the older trees which hug the road edge and leave a winding road which would be two cars wide. Due in part to county requirements, later meetings described a

straighter road which did not spare all of the trees. The representatives originally said they would only be in the building on Sundays and had no plans to start a school or rent out their facility. In subsequent discussions it turned out that an indoor basketball court was planned, and mention was made about busing people from far outside Olney as the church became more mission based. Although statements were made about a number of members who lived in Olney, no data were produced to validate this statement. Efforts to get the church directors to come before GOCA and have a discussion with the greater community were rebuffed.

It must be noted that Olney is not in the Ag Reserve, and Emory Church Road is not an official

rustic road. Yes, the road is viewed as rustic by many; it is about one and one-half cars wide, with substantial trees. However this view does not negate building on the property, nor does it prohibit a religious institution. Basically, the neighbors have said that they do not oppose the construction of a small country church which would fit quietly into this older neighborhood. They worry about damage to their wells and septic fields and have asked for a surety bond to protect them in case of failure after this large construction is completed; this has not been agreed to by the applicant. The local community also tried to get a Zoning Text Amendment

(ZTA) passed to prohibit a paved parking lot for more than 50 cars so far from an arterial road, but that effort was unsuccessful. One of the tenets of building in any neighborhood is to protect and reflect the character of the neighborhood already in place. Greater Sandy Spring Green Space has been supportive of the neighbors in their efforts to modify these proposed plans, and the board has sent a letter in support of their efforts.

So, to conclude – this situation remains in limbo; the Planning Board has requested that the builders make changes to the original preliminary plans; final plans have not yet been submitted.

Conservation Easement Violations: From *The Washington Post* Bobby Berg

Not all news about conservation easements is good. A few months ago the Washington Post ran a story about homeowners in a subdivision in Silver Spring who discovered, five years after moving in, that part of their yard was protected by a forest conservation easement owned by the county. Such easements are much more common than GSSGS easements: the county has about 2500. In common with the GSSGS open space easements, the county easements are in perpetuity and they include restrictions on what is allowed... no mowing, no garden, no pavement, no swimming pool. However, unlike GSSGS, the county has more easements than it can monitor effectively, and the result is occasionally a homeowner surprised by a letter from the county that stating that a violation has occurred.

The focus of the Feb 20 article by Steve Hendrix was on the homeowner dealing with the unexpected and unpleasant news of the easement's restrictions. Correcting such violations is costly in some cases, and the blame for poor communication and research probably can often be assigned all around: to the buyer, to the seller, and to their agents.

The letters to the editor that followed the article had more positive views. One emphasized *the natural beauty and benefit of unmolested forest*. Another, from an urban conservation specialist in Charlottesville, explained that “such easements are an important means of preventing water pollution, protecting stream channels from destructive erosion and controlling rainwater runoff from development.” He went on to say, “Home buyers can learn about an easement on a property from their deed, but home sellers and real estate agents also have a responsibility to inform buyers about any easements. Furthermore, organizations that hold easements should contact new property owners and inform them of their rights and obligations under an easement, and they should perform an annual inspection to ensure that terms of the easement are being met. This would prevent the kind of ‘bureaucratic tangle’ that the Silver Spring residents face and might help home owners appreciate the role that easements play in good stewardship of our natural resources.”

Well said!

Job One
John Spears

Our mission is to preserve, protect and ensure balanced use of open space and natural resources in the greater Sandy Spring area.

In order to preserve and protect the land covered under the easements we hold, we regularly inspect those lands, and record our findings. Each easement has significantly different requirements, as to what is allowed within the easement boundaries, and what timing we will follow as we steward these properties.

On April 30, 2011, our Board Members gathered at Sherwood High School to begin the process of inspecting, recording, and meeting with our partners in our efforts to protect open space – the property owners. Since Greater Sandy Spring Green Space does not own open space property, we depend upon caring and dedicated owners to participate in the process that will protect these lands for future generations. Our Board Members hiked through the

land under our care, took pictures to record the current state of the easement areas, and when possible, spoke to the owners, to check in, and ensure that they were aware of who to contact in case of any questions or issues that might arise. Happily, as in the past, there were no significant issues to report. Our partners are proud to be stewards of the land, and enjoy the views, and natural beauty provided by living on and near protected open space.

If you are the owner, or know an owner of a property that deserves to be saved for future generations, please contact any Board Member for further information about how Greater Sandy Spring Green Space can be a partner in your efforts. Each easement is specifically tailored to the needs of the person or family granting the easement. You can help our heritage be protected and enjoyed by future residents of the Sandy Spring area.

Cut here and send in

YES! I want to preserve open space in Montgomery County
MAKING GREEN SPACE A REALITY, NOT A MEMORY

_____ Individual Membership - \$35

_____ Family Membership - \$50

Send my Advisor by Email to: _____

Additional Contributions

_____ \$500 _____ \$250 _____ \$100 _____ \$50 _____ Other

Please make your tax-deductible contribution payment to:

Greater Sandy Spring Green Space, Inc.

PO Box 92, Sandy Spring, MD 20860

or donate online at SandySpringGreenSpace.org/donate.htm

Green Space Advisor
P. O. Box 92
Sandy Spring, MD 20860



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