What’s next after the Visionaries Roundtable? A call to involvement from the Chestnut Hill Conservancy

by Lori Salganicoff

Chestnut Hill is distinct, in the deep connection between the built environment and neighboring natural resources. Topographically rising above the rest of the city, bordered by the Crohns and Wissahickon Valleys, and graced with a stylized variety of thoughtfully designed buildings, Chestnut Hill evolved to seamlessly combine the built and natural environment.

Last Friday evening, the Chestnut Hill Conservancy and Historical Society hosted more than 300 community members to a vigorous discussion of balancing preservation and development in Chestnut Hill in the wake of strong urban expansion here and throughout Philadelphia. It is the quality of architecture, the rhythms of built and open space, and the green “lungs of the park” that permeate the area and provide space alike that define our streetscapes. Public transportation, retail, and other amenities add to our distinctive village character. These are also the qualities that attract development — development that could enhance, or could destroy, the very qualities that bring $6.5 million. How do we protect Chestnut Hill’s uniqueness while fostering our long-held desire for careful, thoughtful development? Where might development reach the most sensitive parts of our community? The question of how to manage this pressure is a matter of aesthetics, tradition, health, and economics. It is a question the Conservancy hopes to help all of us to answer.

Chestnut Hill is unusual, not just for the significant architecture and greenspace we have retained, but also for the fact that WE HAVE NOT SURVEYED AND EVALUATED most of it. By the Conservancy, the Chestnut Hill Community Association, Friends of the Wissahickon and others put ahead of every other Philadelphia neighborhood in planning our future. But, as currently served, the community is shockingly vulnerable to top-down changes that could greatly diminish its character.

The Roundtable and our related Residential Conservation, Preservation, and Development Strategy will ready the community to truly engage in the Philadelphia Planning Commission’s Upper North and Northwest Philadelphia District Plan the City, one of the final elements of the city’s Philadelphia2035 Comprehensive Plan.

The Chestnut Hill Conservancy and Historical Society has spent the last 50 years celebrating and protecting the area’s significant historical, cultural and natural resources. Join us! Please visit the www.CHConservancy.org to learn how to support and remain engaged with these efforts.

Lori Salganicoff is executive director of the Chestnut Hill Conservancy and Historical Society.

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New construction squeezing neighborhood

In response to a letter to the editor from last week’s issue by Cheryl Donahue regarding new townhouse construction on Lavina Lane, I am horrified at the new construction in the 120 block of Greens Lane. This large, tall, vacant house has been raised by these builders. I’d also like to include the gigantic townhouse recently built on Arlegh Street where Collette had been and the atrocious construction on East Abington Ave. I’ll also mention the vacant building above Fresh Market right up the middle of Chestnut Hill. Ms. Donahue is on target requesting editorial and perhaps the Chestnut Hill Conservancy’s support to prevent our unique neighborhood’s destruction by greedy developers.

Helen Amsden Chestnut Hill

Where have all the equestrians gone?

Inspired by the local front-page article, 94th Annual Wissahickon Valley Horse Show Sunday, I took some visiting friends to see the parade, of which I have many fond memories. I was not disappointed when I witnessed a crowd of 8,000, but still, it was much smaller than anticipated.

What happened to the once-festive parade, this special day? Where are the riders of the Wissahickon? Have the mountain bikers driven all of the equestrians out of the Valley?

Jim Harris Germantown

Ralph Snowden (right) addresses the audience. To the left: David Delong (photo by Sue Ann Rybak)