



Chestnut Hill Local

(/)

Wednesday, August 28, 2024

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New Chestnut Hill RCO for housing and pedestrian safety

Grassroots group emerges to address neighborhood growing pains



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A medevac helicopter and multiple emergency responders were called to the scene of a recent fatal car crash at the intersection of Stenton and East Evergreen avenues. A new RCO aims to reduce such accidents, and has asked PennDOT about options for traffic calming in Chestnut Hill.

PHOTO BY JEFF MEADE

Posted Wednesday, August 21, 2024 12:00 am

by Tommy Tucker

A group of Chestnut Hill (<https://chestnuthilllocal.com/chestnut-hill/>) residents has formed a new Registered Community Organization (RCO) covering all of Chestnut Hill, which they say will focus mostly on pedestrian safety and housing accessibility.

Chestnut Hill Forward (CHF) board members Tyler Britten, president, Kathy Krebs, vice president, and Kathleen Ketcha, secretary, established the group early this year after noticing what Britten calls “a few close calls” in crosswalks around Chestnut Hill. Krebs herself was almost hit on Germantown Avenue.

“A lot of times we’ve watched cars roll through stop signs and almost hit people walking their dogs,” said Krebs. “We’ve reached out to the city about putting in speed bumps and the 8300 block of Ardleigh St.”

CHF officially became an RCO in June, the city’s designated month for RCO registration. To qualify as an RCO, any group must hold regularly scheduled open meetings, have leadership chosen by regularly scheduled elections and serve a geographic area with no more than 20,000 parcels. CHF currently has around a dozen members and holds monthly meetings.

RCOs, which are community organizations that are officially registered with the city, get advance notice of development projects that would require a zoning variance. They have the power to conduct and participate in public meetings, and zoning officials typically consider their wishes when making decisions that affect their neighborhood.

Pedestrian safety is a major focus of this new group, which has been in contact with the Pennsylvania Department of Transportation (PennDOT (https://chestnuthilllocal.com/browse.html?search_filter=PennDOT)) and the Streets Department. Two of the main problem areas they see are Stenton and Germantown Avenues.

“We’ve talked to PennDot specifically about Stenton about options for traffic calming,” said Britten. “We just had a fatal accident on Stenton just a couple of weeks ago.”

On Germantown Avenue, their main worry is crosswalk safety. The paint on many of the crosswalks has faded, Britten said, and many do not have signals indicating when to cross.



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“We’ve talked to the Streets Department about repainting the crosswalks on Germantown Avenue because most of them are completely gone,” said Britten. “People drive their cars right into the crosswalk while people are trying to cross.”

And since many local students walk to school, this raises the chances of a child getting hurt.

“It’s quite dangerous and scary to witness and we’ve been very fortunate that there have been no accidents yet,” said Ketcha. “It’s something you really don’t want to see and we hope to help prevent.”

Anne McNiff, executive director of the Chestnut Hill Community Association (https://chestnuthilllocal.com/browse.html?search_filter=Chestnut+Hill+Community+Association), the RCO that typically leads zoning discussions in the neighborhood, said she welcomes the help.

“I would invite the group to join the CHCA, the Chestnut Hill Business District and West Mount Airy Neighbors in our meetings with the Philadelphia Street Department regarding the scheduling of crosswalk re-painting and other traffic calming activities along Germantown Avenue,” McNiff said. “The more we can all join together to address issues in our community, the more successful we will be. Additionally, I am sure that Save the Train (https://chestnuthilllocal.com/browse.html?search_filter=Save+the+Train), the coalition of community organizations and businesses here in northwest Philadelphia who are working with our elected officials at a local and state level to ensure that SEPTA continues to provide public transportation in the northwest and all of Philadelphia would welcome Chestnut Hill Forward’s involvement.”

Britten says that CHF decided to create a new RCO process after attending zoning discussions for the Greylock (https://chestnuthilllocal.com/browse.html?search_filter=Greylock) estate, and noticing that the voices in the meeting were much more negative than those he’d heard outside of it.

“Pretty much everyone else we talked to was like, ‘actually, we think that’s a great idea,’ said Britten. “They (people who could not attend) feel like their voices weren’t heard on some of those zoning-type projects, so we figured, hey, that fits within the kind of things that we care about, so it would make sense to register as an RCO as well.”

The last thing CHF wants to do is slow the zoning process down, Britten said.

“We want to see more housing available in Chestnut Hill,” Britten said. “At worst, we’re not slowing things down. At best, hopefully, (we’re) able to speed the process up by collecting even more feedback.”

Britten said the group, which also supports public transit, believes in “pro-reasonable growth” – and that the best way to maintain the “great” public transit is to have more people living here who need and want to use it.

“Talking to a lot of neighbors and friends in the community about some of the projects that have come up to add more housing to Chestnut Hill, most people are very supportive,” said Britten. “When we see (proposed housing) get in front of some of the processes you don’t hear as many of those voices. People don’t always have time to call into a zoning board hearing.”

The new RCO differs from all three of the other RCOs that serve the neighborhood – the Chestnut Hill Community Association, the Chestnut Hill Conservancy (https://chestnuthilllocal.com/browse.html?search_filter=Chestnut+Hill+Conservancy) and the Chestnut Hill Business District – in that it is not formed as a regular non-profit. Rather, it is a 501 C4, which is not considered a charitable organization and is allowed to engage in political activity and support specific candidates.

This will allow the group to lobby for candidates who are trying to support and save public transit throughout Northwest Philadelphia, Britten said.

“We set up an online fundraiser through Act Blue for a total of 10 candidates that are running for House and Senate in the legislature,” Britten said “If all 10 win, the Democrats will control both the House and the Senate for the first time in a long time. If we can flip the State Senate, that will give much more likelihood that SEPTA will receive the funding it deserves from the state.”

However, Britten said, CHF is not a party-aligned organization. Its priority is the “livability” of Chestnut Hill.

Chestnut Hill Forward will hold its next public meeting at Char & Stave on Sept. 17 at 6 p.m.

OTHER ITEMS THAT MAY INTEREST YOU

[A local ‘living legend’ celebrates 100 years \(/stories/a-local-living-legend-celebrates-100-years,33375\)](#)

[New CHH leadership charts ambitious plan for growth \(/stories/new-chh-leadership-charts-ambitious-plan-for-growth,33376\)](#)

[More trains, better times: SEPTA expands regional rail \(/stories/more-trains-better-times-septa-expands-regional-rail,33377\)](#)

[PRA under fire for YWCA redevelopment delays \(/stories/pr-a-under-fire-for-ywca-redevelopment-delays,33322\)](#)



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LOCAL CALENDAR

Calendar grid showing events for Thu, Aug 29 and Sun, Sep 01. Events include 'Read, Baby, Read...', 'American Political...', 'Paint and Sip and Socializ...', 'Harmony Summer Camp for ages 3-8 years', 'The Riverlink Ferry System on the Delaware River Waterfront', and 'Jill Dougherty- Glass and Petals: A Still Life Exploration'.

All Events (https://chestnuthilllocal.com/events/)

THE LATEST

CHCA Agenda (/stories/chca-agenda,33388)

To register for any of the Zoom meetings go to: https://www.chestnuthill.org/meetings.php



Heat wave forces some NW Philly schools to close (/stories/heat-wave-forces-some-nw-philly-schools-to-close,33387)

As Philadelphia braces for a short but intense heatwave, the city's school district has announced early dismissals for dozens of schools.

(/stories/heat-wave-forces-some-nw-philly-schools-to-close,33387)



More trains, better times: SEPTA expands regional rail (/stories/more-trains-better-times-septa-expands-regional-rail,33377)

In the face of a \$240 million budget deficit, SEPTA announced that it plans to add trains to its regional rail service starting Sept. 8.

(/stories/more-trains-better-times-septa-expands-

regional-rail,33377)



New CHH leadership charts ambitious plan for growth (/stories/new-chh-leadership-charts-ambitious-plan-for-growth,33376)

If you want to know what a hospital means to a community, just consider the impact when one is suddenly closed.

(/stories/new-chh-leadership-charts-ambitious-plan-for-growth,33376)



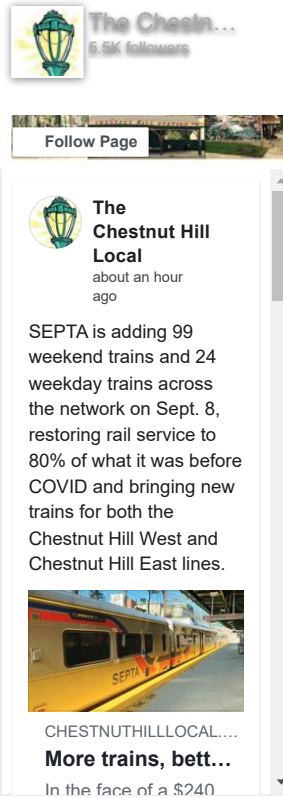
A local 'living legend' celebrates 100 years (/stories/a-local-living-legend-celebrates-100-years,33375)

Tom Fitzpatrick's life "is a tapestry of bravery, knowledge, humor and deep faith," said a close friend.

(/stories/a-local-living-legend-celebrates-100-years,33375)



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SEPTA is adding 99 weekend trains and 24 weekday trains across the network on Sept. 8, restoring rail service to 80% of what it was before COVID and bringing new trains for both the Chestnut Hill West and Chestnut Hill East lines.



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