



East Silver Spring Citizens' Association, Inc.

September 2012

Karen Roper and Steve Knight with ESSCA

will speak at our next

EAST SILVER SPRING CITIZENS ASSOCIATION (ESSCA) MEETING

MEETING DATE: Monday, September 17, 2012

REGULAR MEETING PLACE--SLIGO URBAN RECREATION BUILDING

500 Sligo Avenue, at corner of Piney Branch Road; parking lot entrance is on Valley Street

REGULAR MEETING DATE: Third Monday of month (September – May)

Doors open 7:00 pm—Meeting starts 7:30 pm

JOIN ESSCA'S LIST-SERVE: <http://groups.yahoo.com/group/eastsilverspringcivic>

(Include your name and street name when you send your “join request”)

ESSCA Board Members, Karen Roper and Steve Knight will be our speakers at our first meeting of the year and will report to us on the scope and details of the various new development projects planned for Fenton Village. Be sure to attend our meeting on September 17.

AGENDA FOR SEPT. 17 MEETING: 7:30-7:45: introductions/news items; 7:45-8:30: Karen and Steve, followed by questions/answers; 8:30-8:45: new business/issues; 8:45: adjournment.

WE ARE TAKING THIS OPPORTUNITY to write about ESSCA’s work with County officials and others responsible for new development in the area that is in various stages of planning, approval and construction. While most of these projects are not new and several of them have been reported on in past issues of The Advocate, we have noticed in conversations with some of our neighbors that many of us are either unaware or have only scant knowledge of some of them. Part of the issue is that most of these projects were initiated before the start of the recession, so many of us may have forgotten about them, or in the case of those of us new to the community, may not have heard about them. Some of these projects are now starting back up again. Standing back and looking at the overall quantity of development planned one thing is clear: whether we are pro-development or not, these projects, when complete, will have a definite impact on the character of our community. ESSCA has been working very hard to create a forum for developers to hear the concerns of affected neighbors and the community, to report the facts of new developments and to assist as best we can in shaping and influencing these projects for the betterment of our community. If you do not know Karen Roper, she serves as Chair of ESSCA’s Standing Committee on Planning, Zoning, & Public Works. Karen and other volunteers have been working tirelessly for some time now as our community liaison with county planning staff and private developers.

This subject requires a little bit of background so you understand why ESSCA’s efforts to date have involved so much work and represent such a huge undertaking. To start, there are nearly 1,500 new residential units on the way for Fenton Village of which we are aware. If you are not clear on the area we are talking about, this is the area bounded by Georgia, Wayne and Sligo Avenues plus the frontage on the east side of Fenton Street. What we are talking about are large- and medium-scale mixed use projects, all in various stages of planning and procurement. All of this development is in essence allowed as a matter of right, by both the 2000 County Masterplan and what is known as the County’s Fenton Village Overlay Zone, which allows for a 60’ building only 10 feet from the single-family houses along the eastern edge of the commercial district from Bonifant Street to Sligo Avenue plus buildings

several stories taller in the blocks between Fenton Street and Georgia Avenue. Again, while we may each have differing views of growth and development in the community, we think one thing we can all agree on is that efforts should be made to make development as compatible as possible with the existing residential and commercial fabric of our community. And while the County is now working on a new zoning code rewrite that among other things will include a step-down in density that will be more compatible with adjacent established residential communities, it will be some time before this is enacted and will most likely not have an effect on the development that is already on the way for Fenton Village. Another important piece of background information is that the usual course of community review and input for this sort of development is for a developer to present their project to the local civic association, the County-appointed Advisory Board and additionally in our case, the Urban District Committee, both made up of community volunteers. While citizens can give their views and concerns in these meetings, they are largely perfunctory and developers are not required to address any of the issues raised.

Since we could not get the Fenton Village Overlay Zone changed to provide a more compatible transition nor did we feel affected neighbors had a meaningful voice, we took matters into our own hands and developed a process that included sitting down with developers and immediate neighbors to see what it would take to create appropriate transitions with some of these projects. We also had to convince the Advisory Board and the Urban District to hold off voting on these developments until we finished our negotiations with developers. We also had to convince the Planning Board and the County Council to support our negotiations, which called for appropriate disposition of development density, better quality and more appropriate architecture and more considered placement of loading and vehicular access, all in an effort to make some of these projects more compatible with their neighbors. This has taken hundreds of hours of volunteer time from people like Karen, ESSCA's Treasurer, Steve Knight, ESSCA members Dan Morales and Karen Burditt and more than a dozen affected neighbors. This has included attending an average of 3 to 5 meetings a month over the past 4 years, not to mention countless phone calls and emails plus time spent reviewing plans to ensure that we are getting the best we can for the affected neighbors and the community from new development. So far, we have gone through this process successfully on two projects, are finishing up on a third and currently working on two more.

In Montgomery County this kind of process and this level of citizen negotiation with developers are unheard of. ESSCA is the first Civic Association to do this! We have been so successful with our efforts that the likes of the Montgomery County Civic Federation believes ESSCA is one of the most effective negotiators with developers of all the civic associations in the County. The Civic Federation furthermore has asked Karen Roper to write an article explaining our process as a model for other civic associations to follow. The Planning Board is impressed with our success; furthermore, the Silver Spring Advisory Board and the Urban District also support our efforts. We have created a whole new way of really including the impacted neighbors. Chairwoman Françoise Carrier of the Planning Board complemented us and said that she hopes the community appreciates what we are doing for them here. Even the developers we have worked with are pleased with this process, because it is a much more ordered way to include concerns of both the Planning Staff and neighborhood.

DO YOU WANT TO LEARN MORE about these projects and ESSCA's involvement with them? Do you have questions or concerns about its effect on our street parking, county services, parks and open space? Do you have an opinion on any of this coming development? If so, we hope you will join us for our next meeting on September 17th. And if you have comments, suggestions, or better yet, if you have skills or interests to share and are able to volunteer a bit of your time, we would love to hear from you as well! ESSCA's efforts are only as good as those of us who participate.

WE NEED YOUR SUPPORT. While you already know us through the newsletter which we deliver without fail to over 1,000 households in our community, whether they be dues-paying or not, we really do need the financial support of more of you by joining ESSCA. We hope that, in addition to The Advocate, and especially from what we have shared with you in this issue, you will realize your ESSCA board and other volunteers do a lot to effect positive change in the community. Needless to say we are all volunteers and do this in our free time. We do hope you will show your support not only by participating and joining us for meetings, but also by joining or renewing your membership with ESSCA. Annual dues are only \$10 per household. Dues are payable by check to ESSCA and should be sent to Steve Knight, Treasurer, 808 Violet Place, Silver Spring, MD 20910.