

## *November 2007 Newsletter*

### **Condominium Fees Decrease in 2008**

Residential Assessment in the 2008 Budget adopted by the Colecroft Station Board of Directors on 18 October 2007 is lower than in 2007, which means a decrease of residential condominium fees in 2008. The lowered Residential Assessment is compensated in part by \$12,000 more interest earned by the Capital Repair and Replacement Reserve Fund, in part by cost-competitive contracting, and in part by the removal of the Litigation line item from the Budget now that institutional third parties, who have asked not to be identified, are financing the Membership's defense in the lawsuit filed by Thomas Manor and Susan Hayash.

### **11 October 2007 Board Work-session**

Throughout the weeks between bi-monthly formal Board Meetings, Colecroft Station Directors research, discuss and work with contractors on maintenance, repairs and upgrades to services, coming together in public at Board Meetings to vote on those issues that have "ripened" sufficiently for a decision. All votes taken at Board Meetings are memorialized in the Minutes, available for review on-line by our Members. Our Auditors review the Minutes as well, and refer to them during their annual audit of all contracts and invoices.

In order to afford interested Members with a window on their work, the Directors held a public work-session of the whole Board on 11 October 2007. The topics discussed in depth included:

- Upgrading the Association's analog satellite dishes and over-the-air antennas;
- Upgrading the ramps in the lower garage to full ADA (disability) standards;
- Sharing the Association Office with the Alexandria Police as a Satellite Police Office;
- Reviewing the engineer's flashing restoration plans for the 610 and 505 Towers;
- Reviewing a proposal to hydro-jet clogged drain lines as an alternative to snaking; and
- Refining, line by line, the 2008 draft Budget.

The Board hopes that Members who attended the work-session now have a better grasp of the range, depth and manner of its work and will share what they have learned with their neighbors.

### **High Definition TV and Antennas**

On February 17, 2009 all local analog television transmission will cease. All 26" televisions made since March 2006 and all televisions made since March 2007 have internal digital tuners. The Federal Communications Commission will issue two \$400 coupons to each household towards the purchase of converters for households wishing to keep old non-digital televisions. Colecroft Station will need to upgrade our analog over-the-air antennas and satellite dishes to digital in 2008. This poses a technical challenge involving existing wiring, but also raises the question of whether the Membership is interested in a significant upgrade of TV service.

**Over-the-Air Service:** The current over-the-air antennas pick up local broadcasts. It is now possible to install antennas to pick up signals from Baltimore, Fredericksburg, Manassas and

the Goldvein relay station and to watch programming that is blacked-out in the Washington Metropolitan region or that is broadcast elsewhere at different times or days.

**Satellite Service:** DirecTV originally operated one satellite, located in the 101 degree slot, which carries popular general programming. DirecTV has added four additional satellites: in the 99 degree, 103 degree, 110 degree and 119 degree slots. The utility of the DirecTV service expansion was limited because each satellite signal required a dedicated wire and “older” buildings, such as ours, are equipped with only a single wire. To expand customer base, DirecTV is addressing this problem by developing a “single wire multi-switch” that can funnel five satellite signals into a single wire. The invention is now in field-testing and should be in production and available for sale within a few months.

The Colecroft Station Board is committed to converting the existing TV antenna and satellite system to digital. The Board would like to know if the Membership is interested in going beyond digitizing to capturing over-the-air signals from further a-field and upgrading to multi-satellite signals. The upgrade costs are not yet known, but are not likely to be prohibitive. Please complete the attached questionnaire if you are interested in the upgrade options.

## **Braddock Road Area Plan**

On 16, 20 and 29 October 2007, Alexandria Planning and Zoning hosted training workshops on Zoning, Public and Affordable Housing, Retail Development, Neighborhood History, Residential Development and Transportation in the Braddock Road Area. The workshops culminated in an all-day community “Charrette” on 3 November 2007 to identify tracts of land and sites for re-development, community interest in parks and open space and streets with the highest priority for public upgrading of sidewalks, utilities, trees, benches, art and other furnishings.

A number of Association Members joined owners from the Parker-Gray, Braddock and Powhatan neighborhoods who participated in these events and were disconcerted to realize that they were out-numbered by developers, developer architects/lawyers/lobbyists 3:1 at many of the tables during the “Charrette.” There will be follow-up work-sessions on 12 and 29 November 2007, 13 December 2007, 7 and 24 January 2008.

Here are brief summaries of the training workshops and sessions to date, totaling 18 hours, which were delivered and facilitated by nationally known experts in the various subjects.

**Zoning:** Zoning in the Braddock Road Planning Area is controlled by a technique called “Floor Area Ratio,” or FAR. A property entirely covered by a one-storey building is deemed to have a FAR of 1. If half of the same property is covered by a two-storey building, this is also considered to have a FAR of 1. Most of the Planning Area has an allowable FAR of 0.75 but is actually developed in two-storey townhouses with front and rear yards at 0.4 – 0.6 FAR. Colecroft Station was developed at 2.5 FAR. Braddock Place has a FAR of 1.5 because the pool and surface parking “dilute” the FAR of the actual building footprint. The Monarch was developed at 2.5 FAR. The Meridian was developed at 3.0 FAR. Local homeowners interested in maintaining neighborhood historic character prefer to limit development to 0.75 – 1.5 FAR, while those interested in developing rental apartments and condominiums prefer 2.5 – 3.0 FAR.

**Public and Affordable Housing:** The Planning Area is home to most of Alexandria’s Public Housing developed years ago with a 0.5 – 0.75 FAR, which is poorly maintained. The recent rise of land values close to Old Town has persuaded developers to offer ARHA, the City’s housing authority, site re-development at 2 – 2.5 FAR in a mix of housing types: (1) Public

Housing (2) Market-rate Housing and (3) Affordable (or subsidized sales price) Housing (for municipal workers such as teachers and firemen). A typical offer would replace 160 old Public Housing units with 130 new Public units, 160 Market-rate units and 30 Affordable units. Existing ARHA residents have mixed feelings since the benefits of a new home would be offset by loss of community and wealthier neighbors with very different expectations.

**Retail:** Retail analysts divide the market into (1) Local Goods and Services (as provided by 7-11, dry-cleaners, hair or nail services and dining), (2) Basic Goods (grocery and drug store) and (3) Shoppers' Goods (such as clothing, shoes, household furnishing and books). The existing inventory of 46,000 square feet of local retail is generally poorly housed and scattered. The Planning Area has the potential to grow by 55,000 square feet if the new space is constructed with at least 12 feet of height, 20 – 30 feet in width and 45 – 80 feet in depth and focused in a few locations. Retail analysts consider that the Planning Area is already served by the two Giants on Monroe Street and Pitt Street, by the Safeway on Royal Street, by Trader Joe's on St. Asaph Street and by Whole Foods on Duke Street. The Planning area is surrounded by strong Basic and Shoppers' Goods competition at Potomac Yard and in Old Town. However the Planning Area can support some unique Shopper Goods stores such as the auction house and specialized furniture stores on Fayette Street.

**Historic Resources and Preservation:** The Braddock Road Planning Area was historically a working community of free blacks that expanded westwards during the 1940s and 1950s. The commercial and cultural focus of this community was Queen Street, where Ella Fitzgerald, Fats Waller and Duke Ellington performed. The employment focus of the community was Fayette Street, whose World War II factories were served by a railroad spur line still visible adjacent to the Post Office.

1960s through 1980s "urban renewal" destroyed many historically significant community buildings and homes, disrupted the social fabric of the community and left a legacy of poorly maintained Public Housing projects. More recent in-migration is slowly altering the ethnic character of the community, as older residents sell their homes. This is a matter of concern to the remaining community, who are witnessing the erasure of familiar landmarks and institutions. The City is now petitioning the Commonwealth of Virginia and the National Park Service to establish a historic district called "Parker Gray." But the preservation initiative is of small comfort to long-time residents who see it as an overly tardy effort to save what will soon be a shell no longer connected to the spirit and culture that gave it form.

**Residential Development:** Today, only 25% of American households need traditional, full-featured dwellings. More than 50% of American households consist of a single person, or a single parent, or an empty-nester couple. Many of these households prefer smaller dwellings, with only a patio or balcony, in a central location. Old Town and the Braddock Road Planning Area fit the needs of these households, hence the sudden rise in value of small townhouses and recent developer interest in the area.

The residential policy question before the City is whether the new demand for housing in the area should be met largely with townhouses at 0.75 – 1.5 FAR (such as The Lofts) or mid-to-high-rise rental apartments and/or condominiums at 2.5 – 3.0 FAR (such as the Monarch). Curiously, the FAR alternative chosen by developers and the City pivots on the issue of underground versus above-ground parking. At 1.5 FAR with above-ground parking a developer can market housing with a 20% profit and still generate an additional \$5.3 million to share with the City in the way of Affordable Housing subsidies and contributions to programs favored by the City Council. But Alexandria development codes require that all parking be underground. The \$4 million needed to build underground parking reduces the money to share. Since the developer and the City have a mutual interest in dividing \$5.3 million rather than \$1.3 million, the developer will ask for 2.5 – 3.0 FAR to recoup the \$4 million invested in underground parking. Note that both the City and the developer treat the

underground parking requirement as cast in concrete. Colecroft Station demonstrates that covered parking can be above-ground without any loss of streetscape amenity thanks to masking with retail and office buildings and eye-catching entrances.

**Transportation and Parking:** While transportation encompasses all modes of travel (be these walking, biking, buses and Metro), the underlying regional transportation issue in the Braddock Road Planning Area is outsider-traffic moving north-south on Patrick and Henry Streets and east-west on Braddock Road. These routes long ago reached their maximum flow capacity per hour – Patrick and Henry Streets can funnel 1,000 vehicles per hour. Though traffic engineers and City Councilors talk of encouraging alternative modes of transportation (e.g. car-pooling, buses and expanded use of the Metro) the reality is that workplaces and residences today are widely scattered. Single-occupancy work-related car trips will be the norm for the foreseeable future. Patrick and Henry Streets can only accommodate more traffic through lengthening the peak period by an hour on either side, e.g. from 4:30 – 6:30 pm to 3:30 – 7:30 pm. As driver frustration on Patrick and Henry Streets increases, savvy motorists are beginning to use Columbus, Alfred, Fayette and West Streets.

Quite apart from the dangers associated with outsider-traffic on our residential neighborhood streets, the existing 2-hour and projected 4-hour “wall” of regional outsider-traffic on Patrick and Henry Streets is complicating local movements in an east-west direction on Montgomery, Madison, Wythe, Pendleton, Queen and Cameron Streets. To cope with the “wall” created by north-south through traffic, the City will need to program longer traffic light times for east-west traffic.

Meanwhile on-street parking in the Planning Area is becoming ever more scarce as the owners of existing narrow frontage townhouses and new rental and condominium units acquire additional cars. Though many local residents at the planning workshops have complimented the Colecroft Station contingent about the appearance of our buildings, sooner or later they note that our single-vehicle off-street parking is creating an on-street parking issue for them. It should surprise no one that developer talk of reducing existing off-street parking mandates finds little favor among those actually living in the Planning Area.

**Re-development Sites:** At the 29 October 2007 meeting, participants were broken into small groups and asked to identify resources to be saved and sites appropriate for re-development. There was general consensus that Queen Street should be enhanced with contextual investments and that the view of the Washington Monument from Fayette Street should be preserved. There was general, if less, consensus that ARHA Public Housing sites and the warehouses along Fayette should be redeveloped – with appropriate FAR to be decided at future meetings. There was a definite split of opinion about re-developing the open space in front of the Braddock Road Metro Station, some believing that the space needed high-rise development and a vocal contingent from Colecroft Station urging creation of a landscaped plaza/park with retail and restaurants on West Street between Madison and Wythe Streets.

**Questionnaire:** If you wish to participate in the Braddock Road Area Plan process, but do not have the time to attend a new round of meetings on 12 and 29 November 2007, 13 December 2007, 7 and 24 January 2008, please fill out the attached questionnaire. The results of the questionnaire will be shared with City Planners in these forthcoming meetings.

### **Miscellaneous Housekeeping:**

The recent power outage generated 23 phone calls to the Site Engineer. Multiple calls after hours are very disruptive to his wife and baby. Call our emergency number at 703-912-7055 and the emergency operator will alert the Site Engineer or Site Manager on duty that night.

# ***November 2007 Questionnaire***

## ***Television Reception Upgrade***

- 1. Should Colecroft Station seek to install an over-the-air antenna system to pull in signals from Baltimore, Fredericksburg, Manassas and Goldvein?***  
Yes [    ]      No [    ]      Don't know [    ]
- 2. Should Colecroft Station seek to install a satellite system capable of receiving signals from all five satellites?***  
Yes [    ]      No [    ]      Don't know [    ]

## ***Braddock Road Area Plan***

- 1. Should re-development of warehouse sites along Fayette Street be largely 3 or 4 storey townhouses (like The Lofts) or largely 6 to 12 storey buildings (like the Monarch and the Potomac Club)?***  
Largely 3 – 4 storey townhouses [    ]  
Largely 6 – 12 storey buildings [    ]  
Don't know [    ]
- 2. Should the open space in front of the Braddock Metro Station be a Plaza/Park or should the area be developed with 6 to 12 storey buildings and parking structures?***  
Plaza/Park [    ]  
6 – 12 storey buildings [    ]  
Don't know [    ]
- 3. Should additional local retail and dining be located along the east side of West Street, between Wythe and Madison Street facing the Metro Station?***  
Yes [    ]      No [    ]      Don't know [    ]
- 4. Should additional local retail and dining be located on Madison Street between Henry and Fayette Streets?***  
Yes [    ]      No [    ]      Don't know [    ]

5. *Should additional local retail and dining be located on Fayette Street between Madison and Wythe Streets?*  
 Yes [    ]      No [    ]      Don't know [    ]
6. *Should the following east-west streets be significantly upgraded with underground utilities, new sidewalks, trees and furniture?*  
 Choose three:    Madison Street [    ]  
                             Wythe Street [    ]  
                             Pendleton Street [    ]  
                             Oronoco Street [    ]  
                             Princess Street [    ]
7. *Should the following north-south streets be significantly upgraded with underground utilities, new sidewalks, trees and furniture?*  
 Choose two:      Fayette Street [    ]  
                             Payne Street [    ]  
                             West Street [    ]
8. **If you wish to become more involved in the Braddock Road Area Plan development process, please fill in below:**

**Name:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Address:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Phone:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Please submit the completed questionnaire to the Association Office, at 505 East Braddock Road # 805, Alexandria, Virginia 22314.**