



Breaking News from the Mt. Washington Improvement Association

MWIA Sponsors Tax Assessment Meeting

On January 18th, the MWIA held an informational meeting on the new property tax assessments. Over 140 Mt. Washington home owners attended to hear more about the process. The MWIA and its volunteers worked hard to bring this kind of event to the neighborhood and it is another reason to consider your \$25 annual dues payment the best investment you can make in your home and your neighborhood. (A dues form can be found within the newsletter.)

The meeting was constructive and the good news is that anyone who has owned his home for six months or more has his City property assessment capped at 4% per year. So no matter how large the numbers become on your assessment, long-time homeowners can rest assured that their Baltimore City property taxes will not increase any more than the 4% cap.

There are a few important items that you should know if you were unable to attend the meeting.

1) In looking at your Assessment Notice, your OLD value is in box 4. Your NEW value is in box 7. But be aware that the assessment goes up in three yearly increments during the 3-year cycle. So you won't jump to the box 7 value until 2009. The City taxable assessment for 2007 is shown in box 1 (up 4%) and the State taxable assessment for 2007 is shown in box 2 (up 10%).

2) There are caps in place that will prevent your tax bill from rising too rapidly. The City caps the increase at 4% per annum; the State assessment base is capped at 10%. So if you had a box 4 value of \$100,000, this number will only rise to \$104,000 in 2007. Bear in mind that the box 1 value is only for 2007. It will go up each year by 4. A 4% increase compounds to an increase of 48% over ten years.

3) The City tax rate is probably the most important issue. Currently the City taxes are \$2.28 per \$100 in assessed value; whereas the State property tax rate is only \$0.112 per \$100. For example, a home with a box 1 value of \$150,000 will be hit with a City property tax of \$3,420

(\$150,000 times \$0.0228 is the easy way to figure it).

4) If you bought your house within six months of January 1, 2007, you do not get the benefit of the caps and will be required to pay the tax against the new assessed value seen in box 8.

5) When you sell your house, the new owner will be required to pay taxes at the full new assessed value seen in box 10. This is a large number and may very well lead to lower selling prices as monthly costs (principal, interest, and taxes combined) increase significantly for the new owner.

The assessment figures were gathered during an inflated real estate cycle. This has since passed and according to local appraiser and Mt. Washington neighbor, Bob Cushner, average selling prices fell 12.7% in the one year ending September 30, 2006. (Fourth quarter data is not yet available.) It is possible that we were all over-appraised by this 12.7%. However, the process is defined by law without much flexibility.

You can appeal your assessment by turning to the back page of the Assessment Notice. Submit a written request for your "Property Worksheet" and the "Sales Analysis/Listing." Ask for a "Personal Hearing with an Assessor" (option #2) at an "alternate location" on a Saturday. If enough people do this, perhaps the City will handle all the appeals in our own neighborhood.

Talk to your neighbors living in similar homes. You may find that there are some disparities. You can also pay \$1 and get a worksheet for any comparable property that you specify.

Lastly, the City tax issue is an important one and is under the jurisdiction of the Mayor and the City Council. You can email Councilwoman Rikki Spector at rspector@baltimorecitycouncil.com or email Mayor Sheila Dixon at Mayor@BaltimoreCity.gov.

Western Run Greenway Update

After more than three years of public meetings, the City presented its final proposals for a hiking/biking trail along the Western Run stream. The trail was originally proposed as part of the Strategic Neighborhood Action Plan (SNAP) which stated:

“The Western Run Greenway is a proposed path system that will link the Mt. Washington, Cheswolde, Cross Country, Glen, and Fallstaff communities with important neighborhood assets such as Northwestern High School, Luckman Park, Mt. Washington Village commercial district, Mt. Washington Elementary School, Mt. Washington Arboretum, Mt. Washington Light Rail, and the planned Jones Falls Trail system. The Western Run Greenway will improve an existing linear park from a visual and environmental asset into an important recreational system for communities in northwestern Baltimore. The Greenway will be a unifying element for the entire cluster that creates an image and identity for the area and has a favorable impact on the desirability of the area.”

After many public meetings, the Department of Parks presented three options:

- Option 1 - Major repair and refurbishment of existing sidewalks between Fallstaff Road and the “5-way intersection” of Greenspring, Cross Country, and Pimlico Roads. Under Option 1, a sidewalk would be built from the Firehouse to the intersection where none currently exists.
- Option 2 - Build a five foot wide walkway along the stream on the north side of Cross Country Boulevard from Fallstaff to the 5-way intersection.
- Option 3 – Create an eight foot wide hiking/biking trail along Western Run and Kelly Avenue from the 5-way intersection to Mt. Washington Village.

Details of the proposals are available at: <http://www.ci.baltimore.md.us/government/planning/images/WesternRunGreenwayStudy.pdf>

The City has worked diligently with the MWIA and the surrounding neighborhoods to overcome concerns and create a plan which addresses the broader needs of the community and allow the vision of SNAP to move forward. The Board of the MWIA voted the following resolution:

“The Mount Washington Improvement Association endorses Option 3 of the Western Run Greenway plan as described by the (Baltimore) City (representatives) at the January 16, 2007 meeting at Cross Country Elementary School. We also support Options 1 and 2, recognizing that the local neighborhoods input must be respected.”

Jones Falls Trail and Universal Playground Project Update

On January 10, neighbors from all over the community met with City Parks planners to discuss the Jones Falls Trail segment and Universal Playground project proposed for Mt. Washington. This was the third public meeting hosted by MWIA on this project.

The proposed trail would come up Rogers Avenue from Northern Parkway, cut through the woods of the Mt. Washington Pediatric Hospital, and terminate at the Village. A “universal playground” would be sited in the woods near the Hospital and would be available to both neighbors and hospital residents. (A “universal playground” is one designed for kids with disabilities or limited ranges of motion.) The Hospital has offered to add 8-10 parking spaces for use by playground visitors and to have their security staff monitor the playground with video cameras. The trail would be closed at night. One proposal calls for a pedestrian bridge across Northern Parkway to connect Mount Washington to the Cylburn Arboretum. The route and design of the proposed pedestrian bridge is not yet available.

The Jones Falls Trail is part of the Baltimore City Master Plan, the Strategic Neighborhood Action Plan (SNAP), and the Baltimore Bicycle Master Plan. It is intended to provide a safe, attractive link for bikers and pedestrians traveling between downtown and Lake Roland and serve the needs of both recreational users and bicycle commuters. The Trail is partially constructed and is currently funded as far north as the Cylburn Arboretum. The proposed section through Mt. Washington would provide recreational opportunities and create an easy way for pedestrians to access the light rail stop.

The City needs to complete 30% of the design before it can seek federal grants for the Mt. Washington section. Grant funding would provide the money for a full environmental impact statement, final design drawings, and construction. The City has said that it will not seek funding until it has community agreement on the conceptual design. The Hospital is very interested in completing the project and has said it will not consider alternative development of the land while this project is alive.

At the MWIA’s January board meeting, the following position was adopted by the Board:

“The MWIA supports the concept of the Jones Falls Trail section through Mt. Washington and will continue to seek, with our partners, an option that meets the needs of the City, the Pediatric Hospital, and the community.”