



March 2001

Highlights of the last West End Association meeting on February 6 , 2001 Good news! Membership for this year is already ahead of last year's total membership. Police report: Officer Bryant reported that there have been 13 reported burglaries or break- ins since mid- December, which is very unusual for the West End. However, progress is being made in the case. Pointers: Make sure doors are locked. Keep shrubbery cut low to make it difficult for people to hide. Keep newspapers and mail picked- up. If you have some concerns or see something suspicious, call the police at 727- 2177 (downtown office) or 727- 2184 (non- emergency number). Officer Bryant's email address is: hbryant2@mindspring.com.

The Tise House (Women's Club) is under contract. No details yet about the prospective buyer or intended use.

Robbie King reported on Historic District Commission (HDC) activities. The Zoning Board of Adjustment recently overturned an HDC denial for a parking pad for a West End property. This sets a precedent for parking pads in front yards in the West End that could be harmful to the neighborhood. The HDC and the county- wide Historic Properties Commission (HPC) is set to merge – the resulting organization will be responsible for rewriting guidelines. A committee chaired by David Poythress has been established to review zoning concerns.

Neighbors for Better Neighborhoods is offering a course for board members of nonprofit organizations. If anyone is interested in participating, call Eric Elliot for info.

The following people have been elected to the WEA board. A big welcome to: Co- presidents: George Bryant and Ann Doherty Vice president: Jackie Pittman Board members: Vivian Thompson David Poythress (new term) Linda Kirby Dennis & Jackie Foytz Stuart & Andrea Thomas

THE NEXT MEETING OF THE BOARD WILL BE ON MARCH 8 TH AT 7PM BRUNSON SCHOOL

A word from our new co- presidents The West End is the definition of neighborhood. As the rest of the city seeks to build a "legacy" of communities where one can walk, where land is used efficiently, and parks abound, we in the West End seek to enhance and preserve our beautiful neighborhood

I grew up in Winston- Salem (actually Old Town) and remember the West End from the 50's as where I came to my pediatrician (the Bahnson House), took life saving at the YWCA (then the only Y in the neighborhood), and shopped at Sears (now a part of the Wachovia operation on 4 th Street). After leaving for school in New York City, marriage and a couple of years in Kenya, I returned to Winston- Salem. My wife, Ann, was from the suburbs of Boston and loved the close living and older homes. The West End was just turning around in those later years of the 70's. Many homes could be had for \$50,000 and a few landlords rented majestic homes cut awkwardly into numerous apartments. What really made us appreciate the neighborhood was the people. The West End was diverse with lifestyles, with living arrangements, with races, and with age. In the early 80's we became part of a baby sitting co- op in the West End where we could take our children to another home to be cared for and points were accumulated or expended as we needed child care. Each month the parents came together socially to proclaim the "points" but more importantly to know each

other well and to understand each others' values enough to trust our children to each other.

We are now living in our third West End residence, own another home which we rent, and have watched the West End improve yearly. The West End Association must be its members and we must know each other and appreciate each others' values to build community. We hope that this next year will bring more occasions to socialize, that we can build an email list to tell each other of happenings or concerns, that we can develop a way to welcome others when they come to our neighborhood and that we will make this a neighborhood where our children are cared for by all.

The real story on the proposed demolition of the 4 historic homes on YMCA property The YMCA purchased 3 of the 4 homes on the block it occupies about 10 years ago. In response to neighborhood concerns raised at a Zoning Board meeting on June 2, 1994 the YMCA assured the WEA and the city that it did not intend to tear the houses down, but rather use them as low cost housing for YMCA employees. Over 10 years of ownership, the Y allowed the houses to fall into disrepair and made little attempt to maintain outside appearances. Recently, they announced plans to demolish the houses in order to build a parking lot. This action was strongly opposed by the Historic District Commission (HDC) and the WEA. Last year, the Y acquired the 4 th house on the block and, shortly thereafter, applied to the HDC to tear it down as well. The HDC, having only the authority to delay demolition for one year, delayed this until April 5, 2001.

All 4 houses are listed in the National Registry of Historic Places as "contributing structures" to the historic West End neighborhood. In order to explore the possible solutions to the YMCA's needs as they defined them, but without having to demolish the homes, the WEA met for three months with the CEO and managers of the metro Y, members of the City/ County Planning Department, and Alderwoman Wanda Merschel. The City/ County Planning Department studied the problem and presented 4 plans which maintain all or some of the four houses, while addressing the YMCA's stated needs which included: (1) obtaining additional off- street parking for safety purposes, (2) the need to "get out of the real estate business (i. e. not have residential tenants), (3) the need for a handicapped access to the men's Y entrance on Sunset Drive,(4) relocation of the Metro Y headquarters from Fourth Street, and (5) offices for additional programs at this site. The WEA voted to endorse one of the Planning Department's four proposals which called for, among other things, the rezoning of the property to neighborhood office, the paving of additional parking spaces behind the houses, and changes to the terrain to permit a handicapped access to the men's Y entrance. The WEA presented one additional alternative designed by the nationally recognized architect Jeff Harbinson. This option not only addressed all of the Y's stated needs, but demonstrated how to combine the 4 houses to maximize office and storage space, preserve the architectural elements of the neighborhood, and create a beautiful façade to the back of the houses with elevator access to a scenic walkway connecting the structures. Mr. Harbinson presented a detailed cost analysis of his proposal which included the renovation of the structures which could be implemented in stages if desired.

All of the alternatives presented to the Y managers met their stated needs, All provided for more off- street parking than any of the plans presented by the Y. However, the Y rejected all of the proposals and came back with their own plan to demolish all of the houses (or possibly leave the houses for the time being, but with nothing to prevent demolition as soon as the Y obtained the needed rezoning) and either leave an empty lot (if rezoning is denied), pave the lot for parking, or put up some new structures and pave some of the lot.

None of the Y's proposals show any cost analysis. As an organization that relies on public funds and donations from the United Way, we argue that the Y needs to be accountable to taxpayers and the United Way for financial decision of this size.

West End residents have worked and invested for decades to renovate, beautify the streetscape and landscape, and improve the safety of the neighborhood. The very fact that the Y membership has grown so large is a function of the fact that West End residents have succeeded in making their neighborhood a safe and desirable place to live and play. Demolition of these houses is in direct opposition to their hard- won goals. Replacing a block of homes with a parking lot is socially irresponsible from both an aesthetic and safety standpoint. Parking lots have long been associated with high rates of theft, vandalism and assault. Demolishing these homes, that have housed as many as 20 people as a time, will remove many pairs of eyes from the street.

Despite the fact that parking and space in a residential neighborhood is limited, the Central Y maintains an unlimited membership at this facility. Despite this, the WEA has photo documentation that surplus on- street parking can be found

on the streets bordering the Y on virtually every night during their peak hours. Nevertheless, the Y insists that they lack parking and that this is a “safety issue. And regardless of how much off- street parking the Y gains by tearing down the houses, it has no plans to discontinue on- street parking – which could eventually usurp all of the parking in its vicinity through lack of membership planning. Related to lack of planning is the fact that the Y has already abandoned two downtown facilities and has admitted that there are no guarantees that this one can supply their long- range needs. The West End attracts over 600 people to the city for its biennial Tour of Homes. Its status as a local historic district is relatively new by comparison to Old Salem, but no less

significant. The homes are from a different period and representative of what is defined throughout the country as being of historical value. Winston- Salem is fortunate to have three such neighborhoods, with Bethabara being the third. If Winston- Salem is to compete with cities rich in cultural and economic amenities, it would do well to build upon the strength of its long- standing resources. What the YMCA proposes threatens the integrity of not only the West End neighborhood, but every residential neighborhood – by sacrificing blocks of homes and vintage trees to short-sightedness. The significant increase in West End property values in recent years affirms the revitalization of this “streetcar” neighborhood, once plagued by absentee landlords and a high crime rate. Replacing houses with block- long parking lots discourages would- be residents. As our city planners work to bring more residents back downtown, let’s not support in the West End the very things that drove people out of town in the first place!

One Last Gasp from the editor You all thought you were rid of me by now, didn’t you? But no such luck.

The new WEA editor, Eric Elliot, will start taking over the newsletter beginning next month. I must say that I agreed to this task with much trepidation – and only agreed to do so temporarily until a more permanent arrangement could be made. My career involves a significant amount of writing, and writing even more was the very last thing I wanted to do with my spare time – or so I thought. Much to my surprise, I found that I really enjoyed this. It was great fun searching the web and old house journals to find resources for people living in Arts and Crafts and Victorian homes. I loved hearing from my neighbors who had concerns they wanted to share. I am a bit sad that this is my last issue, and I do hope you all enjoyed reading this as much as I enjoyed writing it.

Tomorrow, Nick and I leave to close on our house in the South Side of Pittsburgh. We learned last week that an engineering inspection revealed no major structural problems with the house. We will have to do a bit of repointing, and relocate the angry raccoon that occupies the attic (the inspector noted in the report that the raccoon actually hissed at him!) Everything else is essentially cosmetic – if you consider collapsed ceilings, and rotted windows and doors (to name a few things) to be cosmetic.

We are hoping that there is an active neighborhood association in the South Side. (We were excited to learn recently that they do have house tours). Nick and I have learned a lot of lessons from the WEA – and have some ideas for our new neighborhood (historic signage, planting trees, maybe they need a newsletter). It has been our pleasure to live and work with all of you – and I look forward to hearing great things about the West End. Bye!!!