

THE *Cobbham Courier* GAZETTE

Containing the freshest Advices

Occasional Newsletter of the Historic Cobbham District
December 2004

HCF Election/Meeting Set for 4 p.m. Sunday, Dec. 12th

The nominating committee will present a slate of new HCF officers at a meeting to be held at Carson Advisory at 470 Hill St. Among the issues on the agenda are procedures for taking collective positions, traffic calming plus your concerns of the moment.

Annual Holiday Bash Set at 2 p.m. Sunday, Dec. 19th

The season's neighborhood party will be held in the home of Anna Dondero and Andrew Pearson, at 498 Franklin St., on the corner of Cobb and Franklin. The potluck affair will begin at 2 p.m. and wind down at 5 p.m. Anna is planning organized activities for children, including making gingerbread houses out of milk cartons. Parents who want their children to participate should bring a tub of frosting and a bag of hard candy.

Luminaires this year? If you'd like to volunteer to be among the hard-core crew to assemble, distribute, light and clean-up, call Mimi Elliott-Gower at 543-3199 or 207-0936.

Welcome to the 'hood...

- June and Milner Ball, who renovated and enlarged 445 N. Pope St.
- Melissa Clegg and Todd Frizzelle, who continue to renovate 889 Hill St.
- Maren and Peter Spiro, who moved to 825 Hill St. from NYC
- Kathy Kirbo, who now lives at 890 Hill St.
- Kathryn and Mike Edmunds, who moved into the Fuller House at 685 Cobb St.

Fire Ravages 535 Prince Ave

Early Sunday morning, Nov. 7th, at 1:30 a.m. Virginia Ball and Connell McCormack heard a roar outside their Hill Street residence and opened their curtains to see a wall of fire at the back of the adjacent two-story house owned by Sonia and Robert Jahn. They called the ACC Fire Department and three trucks were on the scene in an astounding four minutes. While the fire did extensive damage to the interior of the house, no one was injured from the blaze. The house was unoccupied at the time, because Sonia and her father were renovating it. Speculation on the cause of the fire was focused on the hot water heater and electrical box, which were under the central staircase. Robert, who grew up in the house, said he planned to restore the property. The cottage next door, owned by

Michael Stipe, had some fire damage at the rear, but the other closeby properties were shielded by the fire department and had negligible damage.

Evelyn Reece, the city's historic planner, said the Jahn's newest restoration of the house would be eligible for both state tax incentives and a local property tax freeze, since it was a contributing structure in the historic district. The Historic Cobbham Foundation, under the late Phinizy Spalding, sold the property in the late 1970s to Roy Jahn, Robert's late father, along with a \$7000 state grant to renew the roof. The HCF sales contract included the right-of-first-refusal when the Jahns decide to sell, an agreement that Spalding routinely insisted on.

Update on the proposed Prince Avenue development

Last February, the HCF executive committee met to consider a development project proposed for 1140 Prince Avenue, between the Eckard Drugs and McDonalds and including the Rondavel apartments. At that time, the HCF position was to oppose the re-zoning of the land because the scale of the project was too big. The Atlanta developers had proposed a non-descript, four-story building of 86,000 square feet. Some street-level retail was included with the medical offices. In November, the developers presented a smaller building plan of 77,000 square feet over three stories with a much-improved exterior design. The zoning variance they are seeking (30,000 square feet is currently allowed) is still 236 per cent more than permitted. Acting in concert with the Boulevard Neighborhood Association and others, HCF Pres. John English appeared before the ACC Planning commission re-stating opposition to the total size of the proposed building. The commission voted 7 – 2 to deny their application request to re-zone. The developers plan to take their project before the ACC commission at the December 7th meeting. Boulevard honcho Tony Eubanks has been trying to get all parties together to implement a Neighborhood Planning Unit session.

"It's certainly reasonable to expect this prime location to be commercially developed," English said. "Given the Future Land Use Plan and CAPPAs vision for Prince Avenue, we hope any planned development on that Normaltown site would serve all adjoining neighborhood interests and not impact us negatively. It will clearly set a precedent for what follows in this area." (also see David Lynn's thoughts on this topic)

CAPPAs comprehensive vision now online

The Community Approach to Planning Prince Avenue (known as CAPPAs) project produced a variety of thoughtful development possibilities for the grand street that defines one boundary of our district. In mid-October, five design teams moved up and down Prince Avenue in a creative process called a charrette. They looked, they talked, they thought and they put their collective concepts down for others to respond to. Then, on Monday the 18th, they presented their re-imagining ideas to a packed-house at the ARMC auditorium. It was an amazing amount of work all done by volunteers in a very short amount of time. People voted on their preferences. And you can see what it's all about by going to their website: www.planningprince.org. Let's make this vision live...

Re-visiting the boundaries of Cobbham

Some homeowners in the vicinity of Meigs and Chase and Franklin streets have expressed interest in being included in the locally designated historic district. When Cobbham was originally formed some 20 years ago, it was oddly gerrymandered on that corner according to the preferences of the property owners at that time. Now with

property turnover those preferences seem to have switched. For all of us to consider expanding that boundary, we would need a petition from the homeowners who would now choose to be in the district. If the district approves, we can take the petition to the ACC Historic Preservation Commission and seek to make those changes. The initiative has to come from those currently just outside the district who would like to be inside. (The National Register of Historic Neighborhoods is a separate designation.)

The Ordeal of 640 Cobb St. is almost over...

When Hurricane Ivan blew into Georgia in September, it took its toll on Cobbham. Some were "lucky" enough to only have tree limbs to clean up or wrought-iron fences to repair. Tim Johnson and Laurie Fowler got a major hit, when an old pecan tree in the O'Looney's back yard next door toppled and smushed the back of their house. Only after a big crane lifted the tree off the house could they assess the destruction. "It destroyed one bath and damaged the kitchen and the house's wiring," said Johnson, "so we had to move out while it was being restored. We had to replace the back part of the roof and ceiling and part of the floor. Years of coal dust in the ceiling went all over the house, so everything had to be removed and cleaned. The good news is that no one was hurt and we expect to be back in our house before Christmas."

Alva Jo Evans (1917-2004)

Alva Jo *knew* Hill Street. A native Athenian, she lived most of her life in her family home at 869 Hill Street. AJ, as she was known, was a talented painter and musician. At one stage in her life, she went to clown school and entertained children with balloons and games as "Jo Jo the Clown." She used to tell everyone that her father had planted that California cedar tree in her front yard when she was young. Today that same tree is 76-feet tall and listed on the Athens tree registry. It's a stately specimen that towers over the neighborhood like a sentinel. Neighbors think of it as a living symbol of her feisty spirit. Alva Jo died quietly this summer at age 86.

A glut of Cobbham real estate?

All of sudden there are a number of houses for sale in our district. The biggest prize is the fabled Cheney House, a Queen Anne Victorian at Hill & Milledge. At 584 Milledge Ave. is a bungalow that was an antique shop for years. On Cobb Street at 552, Stanton Forbes' old house with its log cabin in back is on the market, as is Melody Wilson's and David Daniel's former residence at 629. David recently renovated that house, updating the kitchen and adding a deck on the back. The old Meigs Street schoolhouse, at 475 Meigs, is up for sale, as the Rutledges are moving to Tybee Island. Finally, a modest cottage near King Ave. at 950 Hill St. has also become available. If you have friends wanting to live in this neighborhood, now is the time to tell them about these properties.

Infill ala Michael Songster

When Mary and Michael Songster started designing a new house a couple of years ago, they had no idea that clones of it would follow. The Songster's house at 437 N. Pope St. is a Craftsman-style bungalow with two bedrooms and two baths. Its main floor has 1600-square feet of floor space, plus a full basement and a 1000-square foot attic. A builder himself, Michael did much of the construction.

The Songster's newly finished home was so appealing to Robert and Tami Ramsey of 930 Hill Street that they decided to buy Michael's plans and build a modified version in

front of their stone cottage. The Ramsey's new home is now almost finished and they expect to move in before the first of the year.

A third version of the Songster design is being planned on an empty lot that will probably be numbered 101 The Plaza, just in the curve where Hill St. turns and The Plaza begins. Construction of that dwelling should begin late next summer, Songster said. "A lot of people can't tell these houses are new; they just think we've renovated an old one."

Newest residents...the boomlet continues...

- Rylee Beauvias Sniff, the daughter of Joyce and Danny, born Aug. 1, at 7 lb. 12 oz.
- Beckett Jennings Ramsey, the son of Tami and Robert, born Nov. 5th, 7 lb. 8 oz.
- John William Dorris, the son of Leslie and John, born Oct. 28th, 6 lb. 13 oz.

Some thoughts from ACC Commissioner David Lynn...

A friendly reminder...

Please remember that any renovation involving the exterior of your home requires an approval from the Historic Preservation Commission. Obviously, there are exceptions, painting and re-roofing, for example, do not require a Certificate of Appropriateness (COA), but most work that would require a building permit will also require a COA. While it sounds burdensome, the process is fairly simple and is unquestionably in the best interest of the neighborhood.

Neighborhoods that are designated as local historic districts enjoy a much higher degree of protection than undesignated neighborhoods. Please do your part by securing a COA prior to beginning renovation of your own house, as well as reporting to the Community Protection Division (613-3790) any building activity that does not display the proper permits.

Prince Avenue Rezoning

The proposed planned development for 1140 Prince Avenue will come before the Mayor and Commission for a final vote on Dec. 7. The proposal for the site includes a 76,600 square foot professional office building configured in 3 stories, as well as a 315 space "parking structure". Please note that the proposal is no longer for a medical office building but is described by the developers simply as a professional office building. The Boulevard, Cobbham and King Avenue Neighborhood Associations have all issued statements in opposition to the plan.

It is my position that this particular development is excessively large for the area and is in severe conflict with the Athens-Clarke County Future Land Use Plan and will greatly compromise the quality of life of the surrounding neighborhoods. The Boulevard area in particular is already subjected to a high degree of cut-through traffic, a condition that this development will certainly make worse. Moreover, the zoning classification of this area is Commercial-Neighborhood, which calls for low-density commercial uses that are focused on serving the immediate area.

"These areas will serve a variety of needs for the residents of an area up to a one-mile radius. The uses will typically be neighborhood-scale retail stores, along with small businesses. They are intended to be the focus of their respective neighborhoods, and their design should include connections between uses, good pedestrian connections, and compatibility with public transit. Auto-oriented uses are not included in this designation."

I think we should be able to develop a medical office building directly across the street

from the hospital. A building that exceeds the square footage of the Bank of America building downtown, however, is simply asking for too much. Please review the plan (http://www.historicboulevard.org/information/1140prince/PD04_002b.doc) and contact me with thoughts or suggestions.

Storm Water Utility

As part of the Clean Water Act of 1972, Athens-Clarke County has been directed by the EPA to develop a system to control the amount of untreated storm water that enters our streams and rivers. This requirement known as "Phase 2" of the Clean Water Act, will begin to affect you this summer. Many communities across the State and the Country have come to the conclusion that the only equitable and practical way to fund and develop the necessary storm water infrastructure is by establishing a storm water utility. The Mayor and Commission will vote on the creation of an Athens-Clarke County Storm Water Utility on Dec. 7.

Every drop of water that falls and filters away from property contains silt, oil, radiator fluid, fertilizers and other contaminants that drain directly into our water sources. What does the average Cobbham resident contribute to that problem? Not much, and you'll be charged accordingly. Every time you operate your vehicle, however, you leave brake dust along the roads, as well as oil and fluids in parking lots that will eventually poison our streams. The monthly fee that the average resident will pay, approximately \$3.50, will be the proportionate contribution towards cleaning up that part of the problem.

By creating a utility to attack and fund this problem the pain is spread to as many people as possible and for the least amount of money to the individual property owner. In this way, tax-exempt properties, such as those owned by the University of Georgia, pay their proportionate share into the system. If the cost of the program was just part of the general fund, and paid from your property taxes, those folks, as well as schools, churches and even the government, would not have to pay.

The establishment of a utility will allow Athens-Clarke County to develop a cost efficient program to manage storm water with an equitable and reliable source of funding. A utility allows the ACC Government to legally and fairly assess fees based on the quantity and quality of the water that runs off of a given ^{lot} of a large commercial property with a huge surface parking lot, for example, will pay far more than the average homeowner, because they are responsible for more of the problem.

Thank you for allowing me to serve as your Commissioner. Please contact me on these issues or any other item of concern. Happy Holidays! *David Lynn*

Toula's, the home, garden and gift shop of Eric Vaughn, has opened at 225 W. Clayton St. in the Mercury Art building. Tel: 353-7339. Drop by and say *hello!*

Feature--

The "Mayor" of Cobbham—Charles Brockman

Charles Brockman, who will turn 82 on January 13, 2005, was feeling a little under the weather on the first day of December -- but not bad enough to turn away company. Our neighbor at 336 Hill Street has always been cordial to visitors. Charles's memories go back to the 1920s in Cobbham. He remembers most of the good and more of the bad he has lived through in our neighborhood. Currently, he actually seems unfazed by the fine (but encroaching) restoration of the house by Bona Fide Construction -- even while he is sitting in it!

His maternal grandparents, Mr. and Mrs. Collett Pitner, built their house in the late 1880s. Dr. Charles J. Brockman, a chemistry professor from Nazareth, Pennsylvania came to the University of Georgia around 1919. He courted and wed the Pitner's daughter Marie, a Lucy Cobb student. (Charles pronounces his mother's name in the old Athens way, like "marry," but with equal stress on each syllable.) Dr. Brockman taught chemistry at the university for 44 years, and the family always lived in this house, except for a period in the 1930s when the dwelling, too large and hard to heat for just three people, was rented to a Jewish fraternity. During those years the Brockmans rented the Mell cottage at 257 Hill.

Charles attended Chase Street School for three years until he transferred to University Elementary and High School, present home of the Navy Supply Corps. From University High, Charles matriculated at Emory, staying long enough to obtain his master's degree in American history. Usually the college student took the Silver Comet passenger train from Athens to Decatur. Charles developed his lifelong love of music, especially the operas of Verdi, while singing in his university's glee club. "Besides," said Charles, "going to Emory was a good way to stay out of the Depression."

His neighbors are looking forward to seeing Charles Brockman's house restored to the way the man himself remembers it. *By Milton Leathers*