Winter 2016

# The Gateway

Newsletter of The Neighborhood Club of Bala Cynwyd

The Oldest of the Main Line Civic Associations – 1906

P.O. Box 717, Bala Cynwyd, Pennsylvania 19004 • www.balacynwyd.org

TheNeighborhoodClub@BalaCynwyd.org

Jerry Skillings, *president* • Courtenay Harris Bond, *editor*

## President's Letter

Dear Neighbors,

As 2016 begins, The Neighborhood Club of Bala Cynwyd would like to introduce its new officers. I am happy to serve as its president, along with Dan Russoniello as vice president, Eric Godfrey as treasurer, Anne Greenhalgh as secretary, John Grugan as solicitor and Roger Moog as past president.

In addition, this civic association is celebrating its 110th year. Our mission is to strengthen the social, cultural and economic fabric of our diverse community by promoting civic engagement, preserving the historic character of our residential neighborhoods, protecting our remaining open space and enhancing the viability of our commercial corridors.

For those of you who don't know me, I am a longtime member of the Bala Cynwyd community and have lived on Cynwyd Circle for 23 years. Like many of you, my wife, Abby, and I moved to Bala Cynwyd because of its proximity to the city as well as its great schools and neighborhood spirit.

This is a dynamic time in our community. Bala Cynwyd is experiencing unprecedented development with the arrival of new apartment buildings, restaurants and stores (while some old favorites close their doors), growing school enrollment and an amazing and wonderful trail that now links us with Philadelphia via the Manayunk bridge. Our township's newly

*(continued on pg. 2)*

## The City Ave Special Services District Continues Improvements

The City Ave Special Services District continues to create greater accessibility to vehicles and pedestrians throughout the area with traffic adaptive signals and other improvements.

Traffic adaptive signals were installed along St. Asaph's Road last May, and PennDOT and Comcast communication problems have since been resolved. By the time residents receive this newsletter, the system should be fully operational.

In addition, the first phase of construction for important improvements along City Avenue is slated to begin in April. This project includes new adaptive signal equipment, enhanced pedestrian signal heads with countdown timers, new pedestrian push buttons and signage, ADA ramp construction and other intersection improvements.

The City Ave Special Services District has also applied for multi-modal grants from both the Pennsylvania Department of Community and Economic Development and PennDOT for the second phase of the City Avenue project and a Transportation Alternatives Program (TAP) grant for the third phase.

The district is still awaiting approval on the Automated Red Light Enforcement (ARLE) grant from the state for the project to redesign Presidential Boulevard. Unfortunately, the Pennsylvania budget impasse has delayed this grant process.

Stay up-to-date on these projects and other City Ave District initiatives by visiting **www.cityave.org** or by following us on Twitter (@CityAve) or Facebook.

## Music Fest Heading to Bala Cynwyd

***The Neighborhood Club of Bala Cynwyd is very excited to present a first this coming year —***

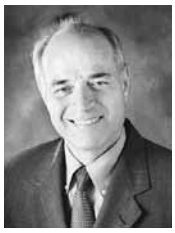
**Music Fest**

***to be held late summer 2016 on the Cynwyd Heritage Trail. The festival will feature multiple live bands, DJs, food vendors, crafts and more.***

***Look for more information and updates in the coming months by following our Facebook page:***

***https://www.facebook.com/balacynwydcivicassociation/***

## Commissioner's Corner



Greetings, Neighbors!

As I sit down to write this, it is the beginning of a new year. Commissioner Paul McElhaney (Belmont Hills, College Park, Penn Valley) has been elected president of the Board of Commissioners and Commissioner Dan Bernheim is vice president and president elect. In addition, our new Township Manager Ernie McNeely has been in office for a bit over a year and has already begun to streamline township operations.

The budget for 2016 maintains the same township tax rate as in 2015, the same as it has been since 2011. The township has also refinanced a portion of its bond funding, saving Lower Merion more than $400,000 in long-term debt. Furthermore, the unemployment rate in Lower Merion is at a low 3.4 percent.

In addition, the Manayunk Bridge has opened, connecting the Cynwyd Heritage Trail with Manayunk and the Schuylkill River Trail and thus to Valley Forge and further points west. The newly renovated Ardmore Library has reopened, another sparkling example of the value of our extraordinary library system. And although by the time you read this there may have been yet another "storm of the century," to date Bala Cynwyd is experiencing a mild winter. Keep your fingers crossed on that.

Noteworthy in the above is the rare vote among the commissioners to elect simultaneously two board members to successive half terms as president and vice president, switching offices after one year. (The office of president carries a two-year term.) This was last done in 1994 and now, as was the case then, is due to the exceptional qualifications of the two board members elected.

Equally noteworthy is that Lower Merion's tax rate at 4.19 mils (0.00419 x assessed value) has remained level during a time of gradually rising costs, as both the country and the region slowly recover from 2008's calamitous economic tumble. Our area's stability is due to the diligent efforts of township management and staff and the guidance of board leadership over the last five years. Lower Merion also experienced gains in business tax revenue that exceeded projections, further enabling it to hold the line on taxes.

That being said, it is appropriate to acknowledge that the total tax bill that homeowners receive does place a strain on many household budgets. At the same time, it reflects the importance that the community puts on the education of its youth, education comprising roughly 78 percent of the total tax bill. The exceptional educational opportunities our township offers, along with the extraordinary services and amenities available to residents, doubtless accounts in meaningful measure for the sustained high value of our homes. Your commissioners understand how important it is to consider all of these factors as they contemplate spending options and together with township management will continue to improve efficiencies where possible to hold costs down.

On the development front, several multi-family mid-rise residential projects are underway or are about to get underway in the Bala Cynwyd area. Many voices have expressed concern about the effect this will have on public school enrollment, so some clarification is in order.

The Lower Merion School District has gauged the effect of these developments by combining data from the Delaware Valley Regional Planning Commission, the Montgomery County Planning Commission and its own calculations. Estimates range from eight to 16 students per 100 units, depending on several factors. Based on these projections, enrollment over the next five years is estimated to increase by roughly 100 students in Bala Cynwyd. This is within a total student population currently at 8,000 — down from its peak in 1962 of 10,000 — spread across all grades. The school district believes it can absorb this increase without having to take any exceptional measures.

Since development in Lower Merion is often a topic of discussion, I plan to hold a series of mini-seminars on this subject to answer questions and engender a free and frank exchange of ideas. You are invited to participate, so stay tuned for notice of these over the next few months. And please do not hesitate to contact me at george@gtmanos.com or at 610-664-4534 on any township-related issues that you would like to discuss or about which you are concerned.

With thanks to The Neighborhood Club of Bala Cynwyd for the opportunity to convey these thoughts to you, I wish you a safe and healthy winter!

Sincerely,
George T. Manos
Lower Merion Township Commissioner, Ward 9

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### President's Letter *(continued from pg. 1)*

approved comprehensive plan will promote commercial and residential growth along City Avenue and in other parts of our area.

In the year ahead, The Neighborhood Club will represent our community's interests with each change and every project. We welcome your input and involvement as we address the new challenges and opportunities affecting Bala Cynwyd and as we launch initiatives to enrich our community.

Here is a preview of 2016:

- July 4th Centennial Celebration sponsored by The Neighborhood Club of Bala Cynwyd
- A Fall Music Festival on the Cynwyd Heritage Trail
- An Overview of the Lower Merion Township Comprehensive Plan presented by our commissioners
- Enhanced website, Facebook and other social media channels of communication for our community

There is more to come, and I look forward to updating you throughout the year.

Sincerely,
Jerry Skillings

# The Neighborhood Club Marks the 100th Anniversary of its Independence Day Celebration

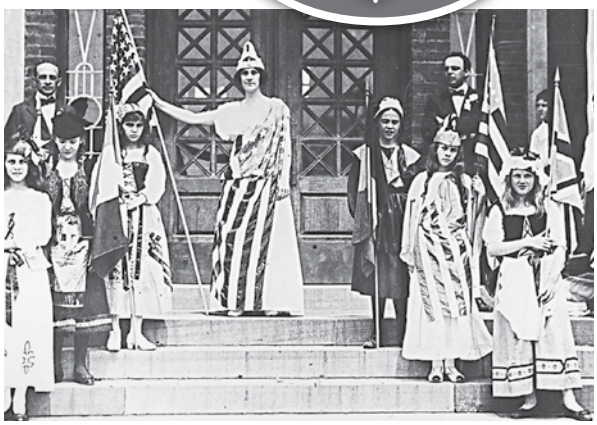
Founded in 1906, The Neighborhood Club of Bala Cynwyd, the civic association for both Bala and Cynwyd, strives to preserve the residential character of our town and to promote community engagement in civic life.

One hundred years ago, in 1916, World War I had already been raging for two years. The *RMS Lusitania* had been sunk and President Wilson was readying America to enter the war to support our allies: Britain, France and Russia. America was also making preparations for the coming war by staging patriotic events. So began the public display of the flag to rally the community in support of our country.

*The Neighborhood Club of Bala Cynwyd's Annual July 4 pageant was a time to celebrate. Above, students are parading the "Grand Old Flag," coming up Bryn Mawr Avenue and making a left onto Levering Mill Road on their way to the Cynwyd Elementary School. Community members gathered at the school for a patriotic program, athletic events, games and prizes.*

## 1916 Independence Day Celebration

*Pictured right is the first Neighborhood Club's July 4 pageant, held in 1916. Lady Liberty is staged on the steps of the Cynwyd Elementary School. Patriotic themes were acted out in parades, dioramas, community fetes and historical pageants.*



And so in 1916, The Neighborhood Club of Bala Cynwyd decided to initiate its first annual Independence Day Celebration. At the original ceremony, the community gathered for a parade and the singing of "America," "Columbia, the Gem of the Ocean," "Hail, Columbia!" and "The Star-Spangled Banner."

This year will be the 100th Anniversary of this patriotic event.

**Join us on July 4 and celebrate our freedom by marching in the parade and by waving the American flag.**

# Township Officials Strive to Extend Manayunk Bridge Hours and Make Other Trail Improvements

Township and city officials are seeking ways to open the new Manayunk Bridge earlier and to close it later each day and even discussing the possible addition of lighting along its length that links Lower Merion and Philadelphia.

Since the Cynwyd Heritage Trail opened its extension over the Manayunk Bridge in October, Township Parks and Recreation Director Donna Heller and other officials have been actively addressing residents' concerns, according to Lower Merion Commissioner Brian McGuire (Ward 13).

The most important development is that the township and city parks departments have worked out many of the inter-departmental kinks so that the bridge is now open when it is supposed to be: from 8 a.m. to 6 p.m. Nov. 1 to March 31 and from 8 a.m. to 9 p.m. April 1 through October 31. The parks departments have also been collaborating to address graffiti and other operational issues, McGuire said.

In addition, the township and its partners are continuing to look at ways to open the bridge gates earlier and close them later. Philadelphia is pursuing a grant through PennDOT for site amenities and lights along the bridge. The general lighting design was discussed during the initial phases for the bridge design.

However, the final design will need to go through the PennDOT approval process, which will include a review based on the bridge's listing as a contributing element to the Manayunk Historic District.

Likewise, township staff will be coming to the Lower Merion Township Board of Commissioners later this year to pursue a Pennsylvania Department of Conservation and Natural Resources grant to conduct a lighting feasibility study for the Cynwyd Heritage Trail, from the bridge to the Barmouth and Rock Hill trailheads, McGuire said.

Furthermore, progress continues on mapping out future extensions of the trail along a spur to the Schuylkill River, as well as to the Bala Train Station and beyond to Fairmount Park.

Connections from the future spur along the riverfront and across the Pencoyd rail bridge are slated for completion by June and will be accessible to the public via a parking area and a public gathering space at the foot of Righters Ferry Road.

To get involved, contact the Friends of the Cynwyd Heritage Trail at: **http://www.cynwydtrail.org**.

## Interested in Becoming a Neighborhood Club Director?

Please send a resumé or letter of interest to:

The NCBC | Attn: Nominations

P.O. Box 717 | Bala Cynwyd PA 19004

# BMW Construction Set to Conclude in Mid-April

As with most major development projects, the building of the new BMW dealership at the corner of Bala and Montgomery avenues has been delayed.

The construction should now wrap up on or around April 10, instead of this winter as originally anticipated, according to company officials.

The new facility will combine the showroom and service facilities under one roof. The state-of-the-art building will also feature other customer amenities including a comfortable lounge, WiFi connections and a coffee bar, said Philip Miller, general manager of BMW and Mini of the Main Line.

In addition, the updated building will enable the company to display up to 20 vehicles at a time in its new showroom, as well as more than 100 cars and SUVs in its parking garage, Miller said.

He added that the new garage, which will be able to hold more than 350 vehicles, will greatly improve parking and access to the facility.

"This will also reduce local traffic, as we will not have to constantly shuttle cars around," Miller said.

During the construction, a temporary showroom has been open, with courtesy valet parking available to customers.

"We are excited to have made this investment here in Bala Cynwyd," Miller said.

***Support Our 100th Independence Day Celebration, Monday, July 4, 2016***

**Sponsored by The Neighborhood Club of Bala Cynwyd**

**Centennial Sponsor**
***For $2,500, enjoy:***

- Prominent signage at three of our attractions: pony ride, moon bounce, trackless train, rat race, extreme rock wall, carousel, bungee run, tubs of fun
- Corporate logo on the Sponsorship Banner
- Car/banner sponsor in parade
- Prominent logo on commemorative t-shirt
- Full-page advertisement in our special event program
- Speaking engagement at the event
- Special recognition on NCBC website

Make checks payable to:
*The Neighborhood Club of Bala Cynwyd*
P.O. Box 717, Bala Cynwyd, PA 19004

**Questions?**
Contact: Celebration Chair Anne Greenhalgh at:
**greenhaa@wharton.upenn.edu**
or Co-Chair Amara Briggs at:
**amara.briggs@comcast.net**

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***www.balacynwyd.org***

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## Please Visit Our Website!

The NCBC website is a resource for:

- ✓ The monthly agenda
- ✓ Minutes of previous meetings
- ✓ Past copies of *The Gateway*!
- ✓ Contact information for board members
- ✓ Community links
- ✓ PAYPAL — to pay dues electronically!

Please visit **www.balacynwyd.org**.

**Thanks to the following neighbors and friends who contributed to this issue of *The Gateway*:**

Jerry Skillings
George Manos
Brian McGuire
Gerald Francis
Terrence Foley
Glenn Manko

## The Neighborhood Club of Bala Cynwyd Membership Form

Your dues help to:

- alert you to neighborhood discussions about critical topics
- preserve the residential character of Bala Cynwyd
- support appropriate commercial development
- monitor zoning, traffic and safety on our streets
- provide community events like the 4th of July Celebration

Please send your annual dues to: The NCBC
P.O. Box 717, Bala Cynwyd, PA 19004

Household: ☐ Benefactor $100 ☐ Patron $50 ☐ Friend $35

Business: ☐ Gold $250 ☐ Silver $100

Name _____

Address _____

_____

Email Address _____

Phone No. _____