# The Gateway

*Newsletter of The Neighborhood Club of Bala Cynwyd*

THE NEIGHBORHOOD CLUB OF
BALA CYNWYD

The Oldest of the Main Line
Civic Associations – 1906

**www.BalaCynwyd.org** **Fall 2024**


## President's Letter

Welcome to the Neighborhood Club of Bala Cynwyd! I hope everyone had a wonderful summer!

The NCBC co-sponsored two great events during the summer. I hope you had time to join us for the outdoor Movie Night at the Cynwyd Station Park! We co-sponsored movie night with the City Avenue District and the Cynwyd Heritage Trail, provided snacks and had a lawn full of people on a lovely summer evening! We are hoping to have these movie nights monthly next summer, and are thinking about ways to make it more than just a movie.

**Kay Sickles**

On Sept. 15, the Bala Avenue of the Arts held its second annual Bala Arts Walk, co-sponsored by the NCBC, the Cynwyd Heritage Trail and the City Avenue District. The Lower Merion Historical Society also drew a large crowd for the dedication of the historical marker honoring a family of trailblazing women who called Bala Cynwyd home (see story on Page 4).

More than 1,500 people strolled Bala Avenue, found fun hand-crafted objects to purchase from among the thirty artisans, chatted with township officials, and enjoyed homemade food. Look for more such events next spring and summer!

You may be wondering about the status of the traffic roundabout that PennDot has been planning for the Belmont/St. Asaph's intersection. The NCBC has been in regular contact about the roundabout with our dedicated Township Building

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## A Breakthrough on Bala Avenue

After five years as a neighborhood eyesore and irritant, the large abandoned lot on the 200 block of Bala Avenue has a new owner and is about to get fresh life.

A well-regarded development partnership, Core Development/The How Group, purchased the 1.33-acre property out of receivership in June, years after the prior owner, Cross Properties, defaulted. The sale price was $4.7 million, according to county property records.

Core/How also inherits the approvals that the township had granted to Cross's plan back in 2018. That plan was for a five-story, mixed-use building with some 5,000 square feet of commercial space on the ground floor, 86 upper-floor rental apartments, and two levels of at-grade parking behind the commercial space.

In 2019, after the site had already been cleared for construction, Cross permanently halted the project — a major blow to efforts to revitalize the Bala Avenue corridor. Now, with Core/How taking over, work on the still-unnamed building will ramp up in the coming months, Core Development principal Pete Staz said in a mid-October interview.

Core/How will not only erect the apartment building but will remain as its property manager, giving the company a continuing role in the community, he emphasized. "We're very excited about this project, but meanwhile we have hundreds of decisions to make."

Staz envisions a food-and-beverage establishment on the ground floor that will be open to the public, along with a plaza-like sidewalk in front that will allow for indoor and outdoor dining as well as public art, plantings, and perhaps a fountain.

The purchase also included 202 Bala Ave., a circa-1910 stone structure at the corner of Highland Avenue that is currently occupied by the Orthodox Jewish group Bala Chabad. Staz said that the building will be closed at some point for a period of

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GEORGE LONSDORF

**The 1.3-acre lot, fronting onto Bala Avenue, has sat vacant for five years, to the community's frustration.**

## Commissioner's Corner

### *Belmont-Rock Hill Road Project Proceeding Step by Step*

As the new Commissioner of Ward 3, I hope to provide a sustainable vision for an area of Lower Merion Township where investment has stalled at times.

**Jeremiah Woodring**

But first, for those who haven't met me, allow me to introduce myself. I am a young licensed architect who also holds several sustainably driven certifications. I have lived in the Ward 3 area for a few years with my wife and two children. Over the past several years I have participated in extensive advocacy work on behalf of architects throughout Pennsylvania. I have also been an adjunct professor at Thomas Jefferson University (formerly Philadelphia University, my alma mater) and Drexel University. As an educator and a mentor, I've focused on helping students expand their skills and better prepare for the fast-paced AEC (Architecture, Engineering and Construction) sector. Furthermore, as an advocate, I always stress the importance of architects as playmakers for sustainable and forward-thinking policy.

In Ward 3, we are at a pivotal moment where we could start to see improvement along the Belmont Ave and Rock Hill Road corridors. At this moment, the City of Philadelphia and Montgomery County have committed to the rehabilitation of the Green Lane Bridge over the Schuylkill. While construction may not begin until 2030, design options are being developed for investment that is long overdue. In these options, professionals are exploring ways to widen vehicular lanes and improve pedestrian circulation across the bridge. This project will allow the bridge to be safer and more accessible.

What we hope to do in Lower Merion is leverage this investment and move ahead what has been called our "Gateway" project. Currently some properties along lower Belmont Avenue are abandoned, giving the appearance of blighted conditions. To deter the ongoing dumping and loitering in this area, PennDot has begun fencing off the properties while we await progress on this critical project, which began in the 1990s. The project includes various road improvements and an extension of the on-ramp for Interstate 76 East. While we await commitment from remaining parties, Lower Merion is working with the County and PennDot to split the project into two, which will allow parts of the project to be implemented sooner.

Because these corridors can be a visitor's first introduction to Lower Merion, they should be treated with the same importance as other roadways in Lower Merion Township. We have the opportunity to enrich the area by encouraging pedestrian friendly-growth up through Rock Hill Road. The residents of the surrounding areas of Bala Cynwyd and Belmont HIlls deserve a place where they can go to enjoy community-driven amenities.

In recent years we have seen the beginnings of this revitalization with the construction of the beautiful Residence at Bala Cynwyd. Imagine an area where residents in the vicinity can go to not only service their vehicles but to enjoy recreational activities and open green space, a place to grab lunch, or simply to gather with neighbors. We are at that pivotal moment that could result in a flourishing destination at an end of the charming Cynwyd Heritage Trail. This is what we hope to accomplish in the coming years.

*– By Jeremiah Woodring*

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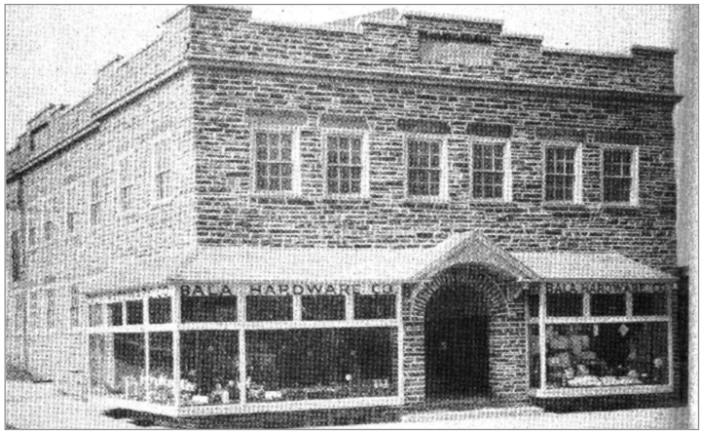
extensive "deferred maintenance," and that its future use had not been decided.

The 202 Bala building originally housed a hardware store, with an auditorium upstairs for concerts, period movies, and community meetings. Because, it is a Class II historic resource, any modifications will require review by the Historical Commission, noted Jillian Dierks, who until recently was senior planner for the township.




**The202 Bala building once housed a hardware store and an auditorium on the second floor. The building is classified as a historic resource.**

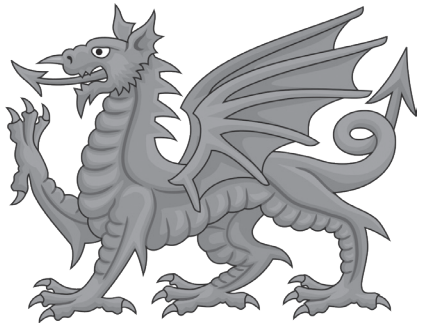
On Oct. 16, the township commissioners approved a $500,000, zero-percent loan to Core/How through the township's Anchor Building Loan Program to support the development. The state provided the revolving-loan funds to encourage the adaptive reuse of historically or culturally significant commercial buildings, which often face challenges due to high construction costs and modern building code requirements, Dierks explained.

Core Development, based in Bucks County, has built several other projects in the township. One, Cricket Flats in Ardmore, won an award from the Montgomery County Planning Commission for how it "blends seamlessly" into the neighborhood and enhances downtown Ardmore.

Dierks had praise for Core/How's plans in Bala: "By adding modern, street-facing commercial space and preserving a key historic building, the project is set to play a critical role in the long-term sustainability of Bala Avenue."

*– By Jim Remsen*

## All Welcome at Annual Meeting and History Talk on December 10



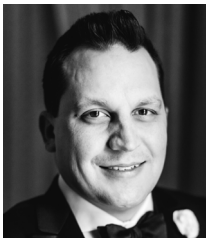
The Neighborhood Club of Bala Cynwyd will hold its annual meeting Tuesday evening, Dec. 10, in the upstairs meeting hall of the Union Fire Association, 149 Montgomery Ave. Residents are encouraged to attend. Refreshments will be served at 7 p.m., with the program starting at 7:30.

The main order of business will be the election of NCBC officers and directors. The meeting also will feature a special illustrated presentation, "Where's Bala? Where's Cynwyd?" about the odd history of our neighborhood and its indeterminate boundaries. The presenters will be two local history buffs, NCBC board member Jim Remsen and Lower Merion Historical Society board member Jim Bevlock.

## Introducing 3 New Neighborhood Club Board Members

**Margaret Hunting** has lived in Bala Cynwyd for 27 years after moving here from Wynnewood. Both her children graduated from Lower Merion High School. After retiring from a career in law, Margaret is currently executive director of the Austelle Foundation, a small family foundation that primarily benefits environmental causes. She believes Bala Cynwyd possesses attributes that make it an unusually vibrant place to live, including walkable neighborhoods, a train link to a great city, beautiful green spaces and architecture, and a sense of community among residents. She looks forward to maintaining this community by serving on the NCBC board.

**Mark Prudente** is a nurse anesthetist who has lived in Bala Cynwyd for four years. He and his wife, Ali, have three daughters who all attend Cynwyd Elementary. In his free time, he says, he's passionate about running, gardening, and spending time with family and friends. "We couldn't be happier living here and truly appreciate the sense of connection among this tight-knit community," Mark says. "I'm looking forward to connecting with more of you and contributing to our great neighborhood!"



**Juan Rodriguez** moved to Bala Cynwyd in 2021 and fell in love with the neighborhood and people who make this community special. He and his wife, Allison Sharkey, have two young daughters, the eldest attending Cynwyd Elementary. Juan earned degrees from Penn State and Lehigh University before obtaining a J.D. and Tax LL.M. from Temple University. He is a civil litigator whose professional background includes public policy work for the State Senate and higher-education work for the Pennsylvania State System of Higher Education. Juan is grateful for an opportunity to serve on the board and aims to promote community engagement, traffic management, and pedestrian safety initiatives.

## Monthly Meeting Dates Announced

The board meetings of The Neighborhood Club will take place on the first Tuesday of each month, 7:30 p.m., until our two-month break over the summer.

Our meetings are held at the Union Fire Association, 149 Montgomery Ave. They include reports from elected officials and police, and open discussion on issues of public concern. Residents are encouraged to attend, so please mark the upcoming meeting dates in your calendars.

**January 7**
**February 4**
**March 4**
**April 1**
**May 6**
**June 3**

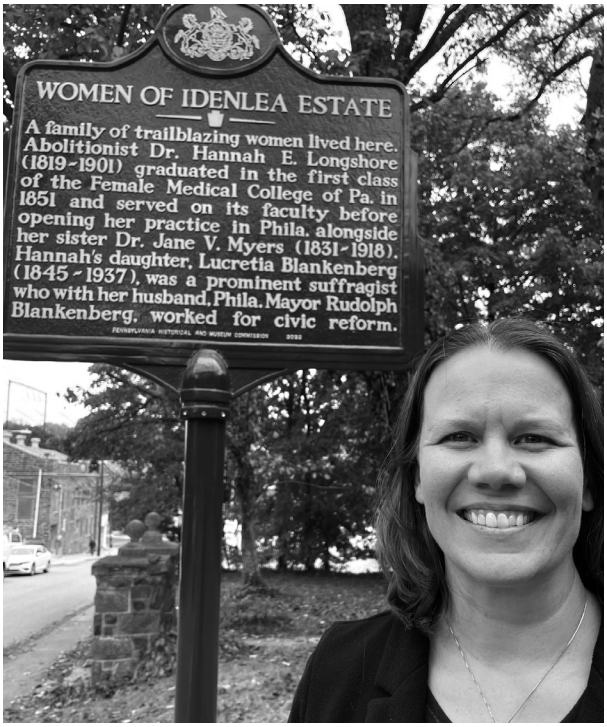
## Shining a Light on Trio of Trailblazing Women

Erin Betley, vice president of the Lower Merion Historical Society, has long been passionate about uncovering the history of her community. From her childhood exploring the remnants of an old cranberry bog in Massachusetts, Betley's interest in local history has followed her through various places she's lived, including Boston, Alaska, and now, Lower Merion.

Her curiosity about the history of her house in Bala Cynwyd, where she lives with her husband and two young daughters, led to a years-long research project that utilized her skills as a conservation biologist at the American Museum of Natural History. And it resulted in the newest Pennsylvania historical marker in Lower Merion in over 20 years.

"Once I realized that my 1926 home was built on the former family estate of some of the earliest women physicians in the U.S.," she says, "I found myself engaging with many different topics, literatures, and historians to be able to understand the significance of these women, their lifetimes of work, and the world they lived in: women's history, the history of medicine, first-wave feminism, architectural history, Quaker history, and the political, economic, and social history of Philadelphia, to name just a few."

The archival records of the three "Women of Idenlea Estate" — Dr. Hannah E. Longshore, her sister Dr. Jane Viola Myers, and her daughter Lucretia Mott Longshore Blankenburg — reveals the battles they faced, Betley says. These included " the staunch opposition to women entering the profession of medicine, the incredibly constrained rights of married women in the late 1800s and early 1900s, the child labor and factory abuses that these women fought to end, the rigid codes of dress and class, etc. These women organized and created alliances that changed systems and changed history. As I reflect on the power of their vision given the rights that my daughters and I enjoy, it renews my commitment to do my own part to make things better for generations to come."




JIM REMSEN

**Erin Betley at the new historical marker on Highland Avenue.**

Betley encourages others to explore their own community's past and hopes the new historical marker will inspire more people to engage with the rich, hidden stories around them.

*– By Shira Segman*

GEORGE MANOS

## Bala Avenue Art Walk Draws a Crowd

More than 1,500 people turned out for the second annual Bala Avenue Art Walk on Sept. 15 along the Bala Avenue corridor. The event featured thirty artist vendors, six community groups, four "make-and-take" crafters, and six food vendors. The City Avenue District presented the event in collaboration with Bala Avenue of the Arts (BAoA) and Art Star, with the support of the Cynwyd Heritage Trail and the Neighborhood Club.

More recently, the township, the City Avenue District and BAoA issued a joint Public Arts Plan for the Bala corridor. It can be found online at cityave.org/reports.

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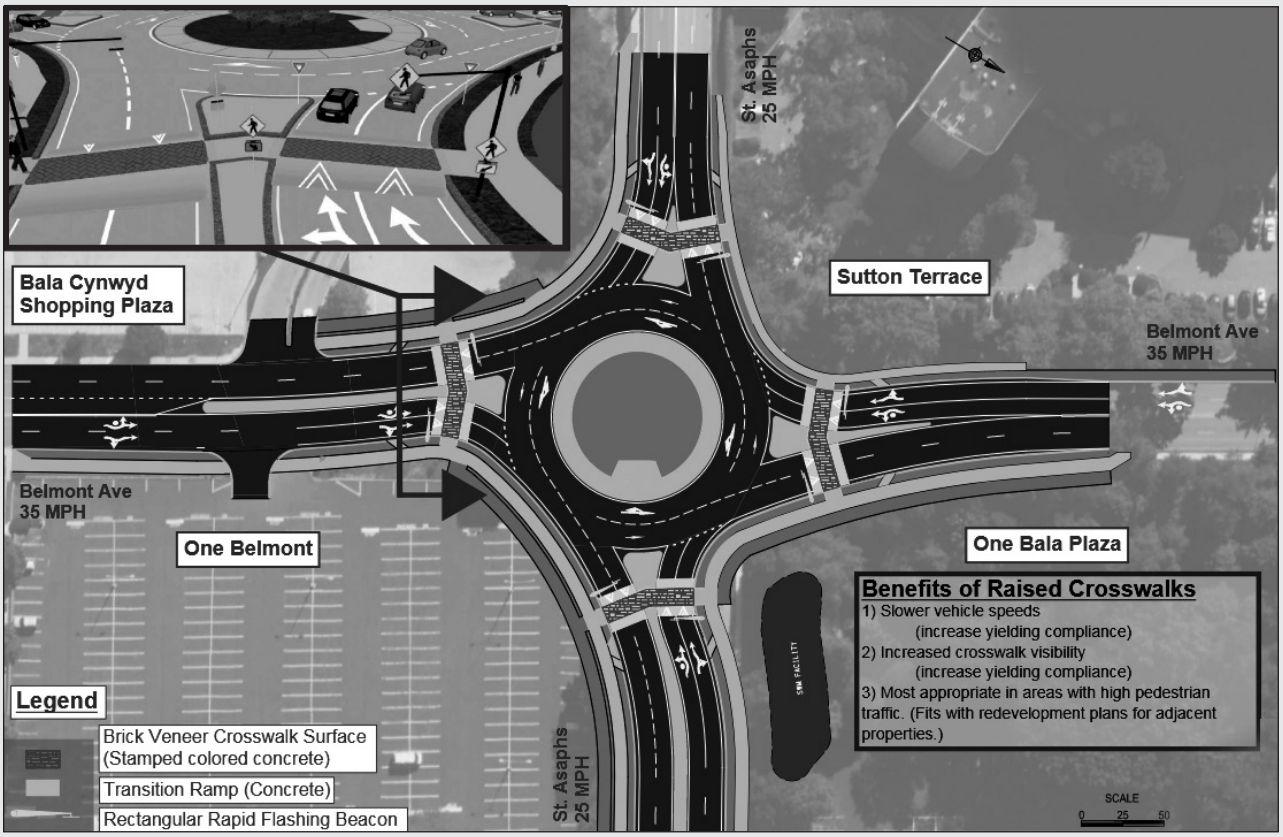
and Planning Department. At a Sept. 25 meeting with PennDot and a group of concerned citizens, we learned that PennDot has responded to residents' concerns by adding raised pedestrian crossings at the entrance and exit of the proposed roundabout, and is also adding signage and markings, all to enhance pedestrian safety and to slow traffic. Note the new design in the PennDot illustration below.

Need or want a tree? Township officials contacted residents in August to let them know trees will be planted in November. It might be too late for 2024, but if you want a tree, call the township arborist at 610-726-7141 and put in your request.

Would you like to learn more about any of the events or topics in this newsletter? Come to a monthly board meeting to find out more about actions being taken to help attain the best outcome for our community — and get involved.

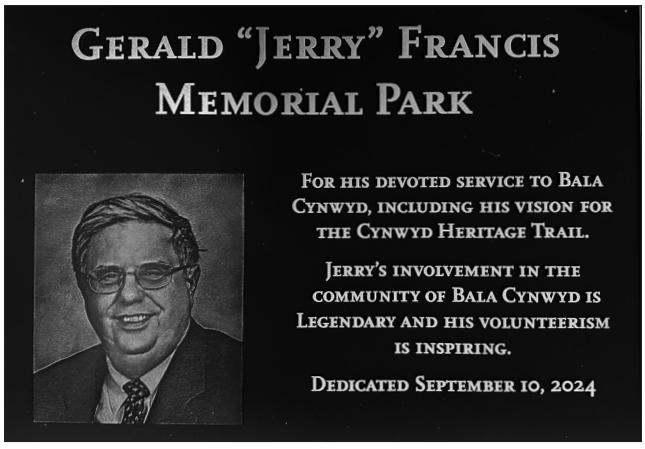
*– Kay Sickles*




**The image in the top left corner of this PennDot illustration shows one of the four sets of raised pedestrian crosswalks, which would resemble speed bumps.**

## Park Is Dedicated to Jerry Francis

In a ceremony this fall, the Residence at Bala Cynwyd senior-living facility dedicated a public garden and seating area in memory of neighborhood civic leader Jerry Francis. The park is at the intersection of Belmont Avenue and Rock Hill Road. Jerry, who died in March 2023, was a former president of the Neighborhood Club and the longtime leader of the Lower Merion Historical Society. Ted Doyle, an executive of LCB Senior Living, which owns the site, praised Jerry as "the driving force behind the creation of the Cynwyd Heritage Trail, which is our neighbor. Beyond that, his tireless service to the community as a leader of the Neighborhood Club of Bala Cynwyd and many other endeavors is an inspiration to all of us who want to be good and productive citizens."



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## Please Visit Our Website!

**www.BalaCynwyd.org** is a resource for:

- Community calendar
- The monthly agenda
- Minutes of previous meetings
- Past copies of *The Gateway*
- Contact information for board members.

## Thanks to the following who contributed to this issue of The Gateway:

Jeremiah Goodring
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Shira Segman, *student reporter*
Jim Remsen, *editor*

**This form is available on our website.**

THE NEIGHBORHOOD CLUB OF
BALA CYNWYD
EST. 1906

## MEMBERSHIP FORM

**YOUR DUES HELP TO:**

- represent neighborhood interests during public meetings on new zoning code and other issues
- sponsor community events like the annual 4th of July parade and carnival
- promote appropriate commercial and residential development
- preserve the residential character of Bala Cynwyd
- provide information on critical issues and meetings affecting Bala Cynwyd

**HOUSEHOLD:** ☐ Benefactor $100* ☐ Premium $50* ☐ Basic $35
**Contribute at the benefactor and premium levels and be recognized on our website.*

**BUSINESS:** ☐ Platinum $350 ☐ Gold $200 ☐ Silver $100

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☐ Check here if you do not want to be listed as a member in the website directories.

**PLEASE SEND YOUR ANNUAL DUES TO:**
The NCBC, P.O. Box 717, Bala Cynwyd, PA 19004