Winter Edition 2022

THE NEIGHBORHOOD CLUB OF
BALA CYNWYD
EST. 1906

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 • https://balacynwyd.org

balacynwydorg@gmail.com

C. Aaron Gross, *president*

President's Letter

C. Aaron Gross

To all those who moved here over the summer, Welcome to Bala Cynwyd! We hope you are here to stay, but even if you are just stopping through, we are excited for you to join us. We hope you discover the same Bala Cynwyd we did — a beautiful and diverse community of friendly neighbors, community institutions, local and big-box retail, doctors and other professionals with local offices, great parks and paths, and access to local and long-distance points of access, both into the city and out to the countryside.

We welcome your contribution to the local civic institutions no matter how recent your arrival or how short your stay.

The Neighborhood Club's next major focus will be to advance community cohesion. We aim to support events, projects, and other avenues of outreach that can serve as forums for residents to get to know one another and enjoy the beauty of our neighborhood. Please share your ideas with us.

I expect many readers to pick up this issue wondering what the deal is with all the development proposals we wrote about in the spring/summer issue. Well, in short, these things take time. We are keeping abreast of the schedules of these developments. Coming to our meetings is a great way to stay on top of when and where construction will next start.

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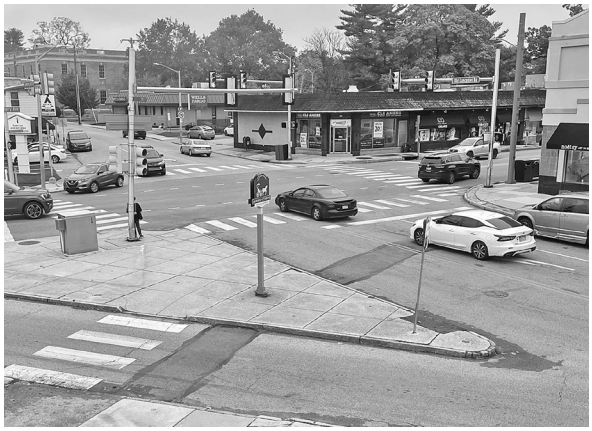
Roadwork Ahead on Busy Montgomery Avenue

By Roger Moog



Residents of Bala Cynwyd and regional commuters use Montgomery Avenue frequently as a necessary transportation link in our lives. The Neighborhood Club has learned that Lower Merion Township will soon embark on two construction projects to improve pedestrian and vehicle safety on the busy roadway.

At the intersection with Old Lancaster Avenue, traffic turns will be simplified by eliminating the vehicle cut-through lane from Montgomery Avenue eastbound onto Old Lancaster southbound. Traffic onto Old Lancaster will be able to turn south only at the light, ending the worry for pedestrians of crossing from the traffic island into the fast-flowing vehicle cut-through. The island will be reconfigured to have a sidewalk curving around

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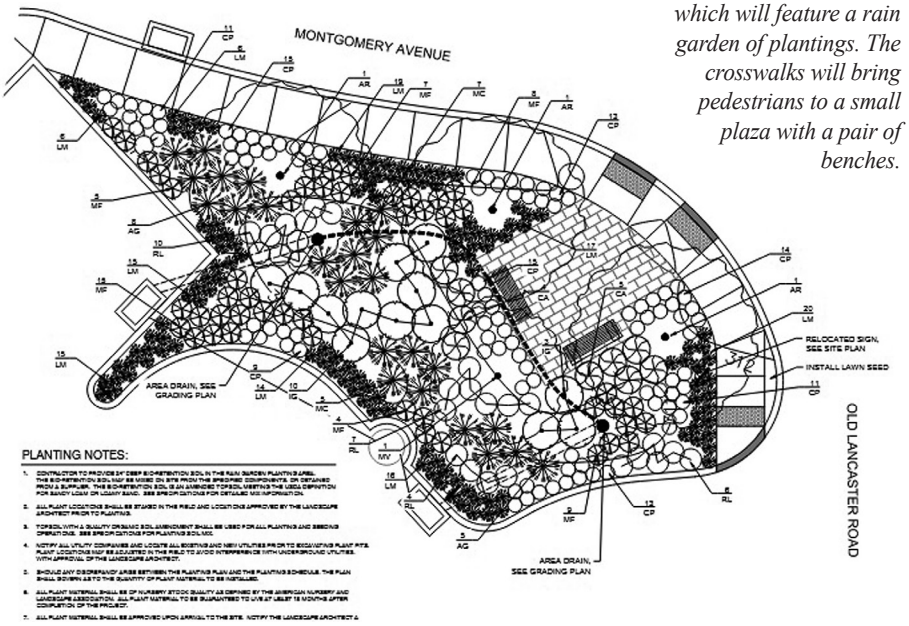
The photo above shows the familiar pedestrian island that many of us navigate at the Montgomery-Old Lancaster intersection. The vehicle cut-through lane, shown in the foreground, will be eliminated. The sketch below shows the reconfigured space, which will feature a rain garden of plantings. The crosswalks will bring pedestrians to a small plaza with a pair of benches.



Commissioner's Corner

Update on Cynwyd Hertiage Trail and Local Gun Shop

David McComb

By David McComb

I have been asked to give Neighborhood Club members an update on two subjects of particular interest to residents: our Cynwyd Heritage Trail; and the recently opened gun shop on Bala Avenue.

As many of you know, the Trail is one of the Township's most heavily used parks. It is a two-mile recreational multi-use trail running from SEPTA's Cynwyd Station to the Manayunk Viaduct and on to Belmont Avenue. Several months ago, lights were installed on the Manayunk Bridge to enable bike commuters to fully access the Trail's connecting points in the early morning and evening hours. The Township's director of parks and recreation, Donna Heller, has worked closely with the Friends of the Cynwyd Heritage Trail and its network of volunteers on Trail maintenance and improvements.

Also, the Township recently allocated significant American Rescue Plan funds for improvements at a Trail underpass near Pencoyd Landing that will allow better access to that branch. This is part of a proposed lease arrangement under which the Township will acquire the site – which is well-suited for recreational uses — from Norfolk Southern Railroad. The Township currently has easement rights next to the Royal Athena Apartments, and the site has direct Schuylkill River access, making it a possible location for a boathouse. Currently, our high school rowers and rowers from several other schools use locations in Conshohocken, which requires lengthy travel on the Expressway and less time on the water. The adjacent Ironworks at Pencoyd Landing contains a hotel and two restaurants that are popular gathering spots for residents and visitors.

In addition, the Township has worked with the Friends of the Cynwyd Heritage Trail and others to improve Trail access and usage. Improved signage and markers at the Cynwyd Station and Barmouth Trailhead (175 East Levering Mill Road) are being developed. American Rescue Plan funds also are being used to fund expansion of the Trail from the Cynwyd Station to the Bala Station and to fund a possible land acquisition that would give direct access to that extension for residents in the St. Asaph's and Conshohocken State Road buildings. This acquisition could potentially provide workforce/moderate income housing and offer better connectivity to other trail networks adjacent to the Township. Work on the extension is expected to be underway by year's end, although the start could be delayed by the supply-chain issues impacting construction projects throughout the region.

This summer, most of us were surprised and dismayed to learn of the opening of Shot Tec, a gun shop on Bala Avenue. Neighborhood Club President Aaron Gross and I met with the gun shop owner and the landlord to get a better sense of the store's operations. Shot Tec primarily focuses on providing firearm instruction and training on an in-store simulator. Although it is a federally-licensed firearms dealer, the store carries no inventory of firearms and ammunition but allows purchasers to order through its online website. Thus purchased, the firearm is then drop shipped to the store, where it is picked up by the owner and paperwork is completed. The owner explained that he has strong ties to our Orthodox Jewish community and that most of his training is provided to synagogues, schools and other related institutions. The owner explained that he does not permit walk-in customers and that he attempts to carefully screen customers.

Following the opening of the store, there was an online town hall meeting hosted for our state representatives, Pam DeLissio and Mary Jo Daley, and attended by me and fellow Commissioners Gilda Kramer and Mike McKeon and numerous residents. Not unexpectedly, many in attendance expressed concern and anger about the opening of the store and wondered why the Township had granted Shot Tec a business permit.

As all of the elected officials explained, Pennsylvania law expressly forbids all municipalities from enacting ordinances regulating or prohibiting the purchase, sale or use of firearms. The legal concept is known as "preemption," meaning that the Commonwealth has preempted the field and reserved only to itself the authority to regulate in that area. An example occurred in 2016 when the Township enacted a ban on firearms in Township parks. That ordinance was challenged in court and then struck down as violative of the state law.

More recently, the City of Philadelphia, following a fatal shooting at a recreation center in September, enacted an ordinance banning firearms at its recreational facilities. Within days, the ordinance was challenged in court and struck down. The City of Philadelphia is currently appealing another court order striking down its ordinance requiring gun permits. That appeal is working its way to the Pennsylvania Supreme Court.

Commissioners Kramer, McKeon and I have been asked by the Township to work with our solicitor to see if there are certain areas where the Township can regulate gun sales, such as within 1,000 feet of a school. Such an ordinance, if passed, would resemble the federal gun-free school zone legislation and potentially allow the Township — as opposed to federal regulators — to take steps to enforce the restrictions. We hope to make progress on this and potentially other measures within the next few months. In the meantime, we suggest that concerned residents make their views known to our state legislators and work within the political process if they would like to see the Pennsylvania law changed.

Union Fire Association Launches Upgrade Project

Bala Cynwyd's fire station, the Union Fire Association, has launched a major, two-pronged project to both cut its response time to emergencies and expand its medical-dispatch services.

To quicken its crucial "boots on the ground" response time, the association aims to build four to six single bedrooms for firefighters who would be on call around the clock. A campaign is underway through the end of the year to raise $150,000 from the public to begin the renovation process at its firehouse at 149 Montgomery Ave.

According to association president Mike Leibowitz, space would be carved out of the fire station's current upstairs meeting hall to create the private bedrooms with en suite bathrooms, where Union members could stay for up to a week and be fully on call. Deputy chief David Staffieri said the association also may reach out to local colleges to offer students with firefighter training rent-free lodging in return for their being on call.

Until now the fire station has made do with a cramped bunkroom holding five beds. But for the extended stays that are now envisioned, separate bedrooms with private baths are far more suitable, Leibowitz said.

The benefit will be immediately felt, he said. "When we launch a truck with four firefighters, now there are two [firefighters] there, and they have to wait for the two others to arrive. If there's no wait at all and a call comes in the middle of the night, they'll be able to leave in under a minute and a half. Right now it's four minutes. That's a huge difference in a fire."

As for the medical response, Union has EMTs but they are only dispatched now as part of fire calls. The goal, Leibowitz said, is to dispatch them to accidents, injuries or public emergencies to provide "first response medical care" even if it's only until an ambulance arrives. At present, he said, Narberth Ambulance in Ardmore might be sent to an accident on City Line Avenue, "but it can take them ten minutes to reach City Line, where we can do it in four minutes."

The Union Fire Association held a Family Day for the community Oct. 23 at the Bala Cynwyd Library. Residents had a chance to see the firefighting apparatus and techniques up close, and to mingle with Union members including association president Mike Leibowitz (center.)

The Penn Wynne fire station has added the QRS (Quick Response Service) to its abilities, and Union aims to follow suit. It's a complicated process that requires a specially equipped vehicle, extra training and staffing, and new certifications. As for staffing, Leibowitz invites doctors or other medical professionals who live in the community step forward to be QRS volunteers: "They may not be willing to jump into a fire but would want to do this."

Union currently has forty active volunteer firefighters, who work with nine full and part-time paid firefighters. They respond to an average of 450 annual calls — and are on track for 500 calls this year — for not only fires but also carbon monoxide alarms, gas leaks, trees into homes, vehicle accidents, and other situations.

To donate or get involved, visit station28.org

13 St. Asaphs Expansion

13 St. Asaphs Road, a six-unit, below-market apartment building, will add a rear wing with seven units under an expansion plan launched by the Lower Merion Affordable Housing Corporation. The nonprofit group has developed preliminary plans and is applying for township approvals in hopes of obtaining a building permit early next year. The plans, pictured at right, show the existing building (with chimney) and the proposed wing. Mike Leibowitz, the corporation's board president, says the project will cost about $2 million and be funded from state and county housing trust funds, various grants, and perhaps a capital campaign.

Real Estate Market in Bala Cynwyd Is Still Bullish

By Randy Myer

The last few years in real estate have been like nothing we've ever seen. Since the beginning of the pandemic, the Bala Cynwyd market has been strong year-round, not just in the spring and fall as had been the case.

For sellers, the low supply and high demand has been a boon. Not so for the buyers, who have often found themselves competing in multiple-bid situations, sometimes waiving mortgage and inspections contingencies, and still losing out.

So far in 2022, according to Bright MLS, 102 residential units have been sold in Bala Cynwyd, for a median sales price of $565,000. In 2021, 178 residential units sold, for a median price of $460,500. In 2022, the ratio of sale price to list price has been 97.6% – 107.7%, with 7 of the 10 months hitting or exceeding 100%. Median days on market has been impressive as well: 6 days, compared to 13 days in 2021.

You might have heard how the market has softened, but this is on the national front. In Lower Merion, prices are still at record highs. One thing that has changed here is the terms. Buyers' offers are containing contingencies again. They want a house to be in excellent condition. And while people in the real estate field still are seeing multiple offers for a house, there might only be 2 or 3, not the 10 or 15 seen earlier.

The largest single change we're seeing right now is in the interest rates. Where they were as low as 3% last year, they are now around 7%. That has caused some buyers to hold off for the time being.

When I moved here over 30 years ago, I was told that I might not want to buy in Bala Cynwyd because the values were never going to go up. Wrong! We have had numerous properties selling for over $1 million, unheard of here not so long ago.

It hasn't hurt that *Money* magazine named Lower Merion the second-best community in the country for working from home.

Roadwork Ahead on Busy Montgomery Avenue

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the edge past both a new rain garden of trees and perennials and a small plaza with two benches.

Directly behind the plaza, it so happens, is the freshly opened district office of State Rep. Mary Jo Daley at 312 Old Lancaster — another new feature of the intersection area.

The second pending road project will entail installing signals on Montgomery Avenue in front of the Union Fire Station to allow rapid deployment of fire equipment and avoid conflicts with oncoming vehicle traffic.

The roadwork is expected to begin in the spring and take six to eight months to complete. Brian Keaveney, senior engineer for the projects, said drivers should expect brief lane closures. The work will be funded by the Township at an estimated cost of $400,000 to $500,000, most of it for reconfiguring the pedestrian island.

In recent years, the stretch of Montgomery between the intersections of Bala Avenue/ Conshohocken State Road and Levering Mill/ Old Lancaster has literally become a speedway. More and more drivers travel over 50 MPH in the posted 25 MPH half-mile stretch, including accelerating motorcycles, commercial and construction vehicles, and necessary fire trucks and ambulances.

Why is this happening? Increased residential and commercial development density in the township and adjoining communities has resulted in more through traffic. More roadway construction has brought congestion and delays on major roads, causing drivers to divert to Montgomery Avenue.

A complicating factor is the physical nature of the road itself. This segment of the four-lane roadway has downward curves both east and west from Kent Road, its high point. Speeding, inattentive drivers have run off the road into utility poles, fences, and boulders placed to protect homes. Accidents, injuries, and property damage are increasing, alarmingly.

What can be done? More signals at additional intersections with Montgomery Avenue would slow traffic but may increase congestion. Thirty years ago, an attempt was made to install a signal at Bangor and Montgomery, but it was unsuccessful because Bangor's traffic did not meet PennDot warrant levels. Taking auto lanes for bikes or other uses may further back up traffic.

Police stops for speeding and other infractions have not proved to be a significant deterrent. State regulations do not allow Township police to use radar as a speeding control tool. Speed bumps and more signalized intersections may provide answers as traffic continues to grow right along with township-approved development.

President's Letter

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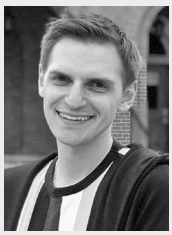
Thank you to everyone who made our Fourth of July event such a great success! We are looking for a brave volunteer to step up and allow us to continue this great tradition. Anne Greenhalgh has led our Fourth of July committee for many years and will serve as director emeritus in future years. After 30-plus years of service, she is looking to pass the torch onto the next leader or leaders. We are also looking for an accountant/bookkeeper to serve as the club's Treasurer. Please reach out to us if you or someone you know can fill this role.

Sincerely, C. Aaron Gross, Esq.

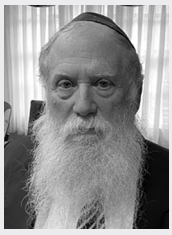
Meet New Board Members

KAY SICKLES is a litigator who works primarily with universities and other businesses in the Philadelphia area. She has lived with her husband, Michael Morse, in Bala Cynwyd for 20 years. They have two children, the younger a sophomore at Lower Merion High School. Kay uses her lawyering skills to help people in need and has been volunteering in local politics for approximately 15 years. She just started her third term as one of Bala Cynwyd's Judges of Elections.



JASON LANDAU GOODMAN is an environmental lawyer who is excited to join the Neighborhood Club board as a fourth-generation resident of Bala Cynwyd. Before taking his current position in state government last year, Jason led a statewide LGBTQ advocacy organization, the Pennsylvania Youth Congress. While in college, he helped spearhead the successful effort to have our township commissioners adopt an LGBTQ-inclusive nondiscrimination ordinance — the first township in the state to do so.

LINDA TASKER moved to Bala Cynwyd in 2016 after several years living in Shanghai, where she co-chaired the British School PTA and led expat community events and fundraisers for Chinese children. Linda and her husband are members of the Cynwyd Club, and their two children are Harriton graduates. Now retired, she had been a research and development scientist in the biotechnology field. Currently she is a Vice Chair of the local Democratic Committee, where she works on voter access and education.



FREDRIC GOLDFEIN is an attorney specializing in civil litigation. He and his wife have lived in Bala Cynwyd since 1976 and raised their four children here. Two of them have purchased homes and are raising their families here. Fredric has served on the boards of Kosloff Torah Academy in Bala Cynwyd and Torah Academy of Greater Philadelphia in Wynnewood. He volunteers as a teacher at Kosloff Torah Academy and at Mesivta of Greater Philadelphia, which is also in Bala Cynwyd.

JIM REMSEN is a journalist who spent his career at *The Philadelphia Inquirer* and, before that, at *The Bulletin.* He and his wife have lived in Cynwyd since 1990 and sent their three sons to LM schools. Now retired, Jim has written several books about aspects of Pennsylvania history, including one *(Back From Battle)* about a Civil War base that the Union Army built in Lower Merion. He currently is researching the development of his Cynwyd neighborhood a century ago.

CAN YOU HELP?

The Neighborhood Club of Bala Cynwyd is seeking a Treasurer.

If you or someone you know has accounting experience and is interested in getting involved in our community, please send an email to **balacynwydorg@gmail.com.**

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Please Visit Our Website!

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*:

David McComb
Roger Moog
Randy Myer
Paul McElhaney
Brian Keaveney
Jim Remsen, *editor*

The Neighborhood Club of Bala Cynwyd Membership Form

Your 2023 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

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

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

Name _____

Address _____

Email Address _____

Phone No. _____

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