Winter Edition 2023

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

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C. Aaron Gross, *president*

President's Letter

C. Aaron Gross

Dear Neighbors,

Thanks so much to all of you who came out to our fabulous Fourth of July summer festival. Once again, it was nice to see so many neighbors get together in a spirit of unity and joy. And thanks to our many sponsors and supporters for making it possible year after year.

In that spirit, let me reach out to all of you to ask for volunteers to step up and help organize the festival. Without volunteers, this communitywide event would not be possible. Thank you, Anne Greenhalgh, for your dedication to organizing and running the event. It is my hope that someone heeds this call to help you bring the festival forward for the next generation.

Some of the most common questions I receive are about pedestrian safety and development. Let me first inform you that some progress has been made in the early stages of looking at the different options for making Montgomery Avenue safer and easier to cross. I know there are mixed feelings about the removal of the bypass lane at Old Lancaster Road, but this was done to ensure pedestrian safety. The Township is currently looking at our sidewalk situation as a whole and will hopefully come forward soon with more concrete steps to ensure greater walkability. The bypass lane by the Cynwyd

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There's Action Afoot Along Bala Avenue

By Jim Remsen

Will our beloved but struggling Bala Avenue corridor truly be reborn as a vibrant "epicenter of art and culture"? That is the expressed goal of the newly formed local nonprofit called Bala Avenue of the Arts. And to bring about the hoped-for transformation, BAoA is coordinating with the Township and the City Avenue Special Services District on action plans.

PHOTO BY GEORGE MANOS

Artist and author Ruth Pinkenson Feldman (right) was among the vendors at the Art Walk event presented September 10 by the Bala Avenue of the Arts organization.

Residents have long lamented the closing of the Bala Theater, with some envisioning the space becoming an anchor performing-arts center. The fate of the historic building remains uncertain, however. Renovating its interior would cost millions of dollars and take years to complete. Similarly, the future of large empty lot across Bala Avenue is in limbo because the Township's time period for the developer to act on his building plan has recently expired.

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Annual Meeting Set • Tuesday, December 19

The Neighborhood Club of Bala Cynwyd is holding its annual meeting Tuesday, December 19 at the Levering Mill Tribute House, 382 Bala Avenue. Neighbors are encouraged to attend.

Refreshments will be served at 7 p.m., with the business meeting starting at 7:30.

The first order of business will be the election of directors and officers. After the election, we will conduct a full slate of business including presentations and discussion about current neighborhood issues. All residents are welcome.

Commissioner's Corner

A fond farewell, with a look at our local state of affairs

David McComb

By David McComb

As I enter into the last few months of my terms as Commissioner, I have been asked to give NCBC members an overview of my term and some parting thoughts about the Township and my Ward 9 in general.

To start with, I'd like to express my deep appreciation for having had the opportunity to serve as a Township commissioner. We are truly fortunate to live in Lower Merion. We are the envy of the Delaware Valley in so many ways, with our natural resources, award-winning schools, historic architecture and neighborhoods, and our close proximity to Philadelphia. Our residents tend to be well-educated and well-informed about what is occurring in Lower Merion and elsewhere, and are interested in preserving our high quality of life.

Most of us know that. But many residents don't realize the hard work it takes to keep the Township running as smoothly as it does – particularly without a tax increase in over ten years. Our Township and professional staff are talented and capable, and they are aided by the numerous advisory boards led by our fellow residents who give generously of their time and ability to provide substantive advice. The Township always welcomes residents to participate on those boards, and such service is always worthwhile and engaging. I encourage all of you to consider ways in which you can provide service to our community. I assure you that it will be time well spent.

As the sun sets on my term, there are several current projects that are noteworthy. First, we are witnessing a revitalization of the City Avenue corridor and an investment in our infrastructure, which includes, among many other things, a refresh of the Bala Shopping Center, the planting of street trees, and improved pedestrian walkways, signage and bus shelters. The Farmer's Market on Thursday afternoons at One Belmont has been a success, and the "pop-up pub" has been a great place to visit with neighbors. In addition, a retail marketing study is underway so that we can find better ways of attracting higher quality retail investment to the City Avenue area.

In addition, we continue to look at ways to revive the commercial area of Bala Avenue. A few months ago, several residents formed Bala Avenue of the Arts, a nonprofit organization seeking to promote Bala Avenue as an arts and culture destination to jumpstart arts-oriented business activity. The group provided art installations in vacant store front windows and, in September, organized an "Art Walk" that saw over 500 visitors enjoying art displays, live music and family activities. In September, the Board of Commissioners voted to authorize $25,000 for planning activity for the Bala Avenue strip.

Some residents have questioned whether there is a need for the development that has been occurring in our area. The short answer is that our Township's Comprehensive Plan and our zoning ordinances all contemplate greater density in Bala Cynwyd than in other parts of the Township, and it is historical fact that the assessed value of commercial real estate in Ward 9 is greater than the rest of the Township combined. Accordingly, the apartment developments have been built "by right" meaning that no land use changes or variances were requested or needed by the developers. The increased number of apartments, however, has had virtually no real impact on school enrollments as studies confirm that new apartment buildings contribute only about one student for every ten units. To the extent there is some overcrowding in our schools, it largely is a result of generational turnover, namely "Baby Boom" empty nesters downsizing and selling their houses to growing families moving into Lower Merion because of its desirability and excellent schools.

Likewise, development in our area has had a negligible impact on traffic. Numerous studies show that up to 90 percent of the traffic on City Avenue is known as "pass through" traffic, meaning that it neither originates nor ends in Bala Cynwyd. It is primarily attributable to Delaware County residents and others travelling to Center City or points west. Some of the volume also seems to be the result of traffic apps such as Waze and Google Maps diverting drivers away from major roads once they start to back up. Traffic has been an issue in the Township for decades and likely won't go away anytime soon. The best approach, of course, is to utilize SEPTA, change your commuting schedule, and, if possible, walk or take a bike for shorter trips.

To be sure, change can be difficult to swallow for some residents. In hindsight, the past sometimes looks better than it was. In my 25 years living here, I have observed our area become safer, greener and more walkable. That will continue. We have many new residents who are thrilled to be living here, and that bodes well for the continued and long-term vitality of our beloved neighborhood.

Please follow The Neighborhood Club on FACEBOOK at www.facebook.com/balacynwydcivicassociation

Tree Care Is the Mission of BC Tree Tenders *By Marion J. Williams*

"Who will speak for the trees?" The Lorax asks a simple but profound question.

Bala Cynwyd was a beautiful, leafy neighborhood that we were drawn to — and though it still is, we have been losing trees steadily over the last several years. When a mature tree is felled, it takes decades for one or two young trees to replace the ecological services provided by the old one: habitat, carbon storage, oxygen production and air filtration, storm water management, shade and temperature control and the oft unrecognized improvements in mood, relationships and community. Remember, too, that mature trees increase our property values and offer our homes a sense of place.

We must continue to plant new trees to provide those benefits for the future. Scientists warn us that although planting trees is important, what is essential is preserving our existing mature trees, because when trees are cut down (or burned in a wildfire) they release all the carbon dioxide that they had stored. "The value you have in large mature trees is almost incalculable, and so you should avoid losing that at any cost – regardless of how many trees you think about planting," says Professor Mat Disney of University College London.

Therefore, the Neighborhood Club is supporting the re-establishment of the Bala Cynwyd Tree Tenders. We can save trees by removing English ivy that makes them susceptible to being blown over. We will share information about the different species and how to care for them to ensure that they live for many years. We want your families to learn about, love and protect the tree elders in our midst!

We in Tree Tenders are going to plant as many trees as possible, choosing the right tree for the right location, planting them properly to ensure a long life, and supporting you in caring for them.

So, now you know — we speak for the trees!
Please volunteer with us to steward Bala Cynwyd's trees.

To plant a tree during the Philadelphia Horticultural Society's spring or fall planting, scan the QR code on this page or contact Bala Cynwyd Tree Tenders at bctreetenders@gmail.com.

To request free street trees, contact the Lower Merion Township Arborist at 610-726-7141.

PHOTOS BY MARION J. WILLIAMS

These two neighborhood trees are lovely to look at, and important in other ways as well.

Update on East Levering Mill Road Sidewalk Project *By Brian McGuire*

The closely watched plan to add sidewalks to the south side of East Levering Mill Road between Belmont Avenue and Conshohocken State Road continues to move forward. In our last newsletter, we shared background on the project as well as its status at the time.

Recent conversations with the Township's public works staff revealed that a more detailed engineering assessment identified a number of issues that had to be addressed prior to soliciting bids for the project. They relate particularly to storm-water management and the need for additional storm drains.

These changes have been added to the plan, and the department expects a bid to be awarded by the Board of Commissioners by early December. This should allow for construction of the sidewalks, which will be five feet wide and include a two-foot verge between the sidewalks and the curb, to be completed in the spring.

In addition, with all the changes in the project, that stretch of East Levering Mill Road will have to be repaved after the sidewalk work is completed. That is likely to be done next summer.

Pedestrian and bicycle safety is a top priority of the Neighborhood Club of Bala Cynwyd, and we have been pleased to work constructively on this project with local neighbors, including the organization Bala Walks, as well as Township staff and Ward 9 Commissioner David McComb. The Club will continue to look for opportunities to enhance safety and improve the quality of life for residents of Bala Cynwyd.

There's Action Afoot Along Bala Avenue

(continued from page 1)

Fortunately, there is movement on several other fronts. The Township has allocated $25,000 that will presumably be used to bring in a consultant and to launch streetscape improvements such as lighting and banners along Bala Avenue. The Special Services District is developing a retail master plan for the corridor that it will present very soon to the Township. BAoA plans to complete its own strategic plan by the end of the year. And, in a happy development, an ice cream parlor will open soon at 120 Bala that owner Adam Corenzwit says might feature kosher fare.

The Special Services District's ongoing retail study will aim to promote a mix of service, retail and dining offerings to make Bala Avenue "a livable, walkable shopping destination," according to Alec Hersh, the group's economic development manager. As for the creative-arts goals, he spoke of bringing in specialty crafts stores, but also public art such as "murals, sculpture, outdoor art programs, artistic lighting, and banners, so it looks vibrant and exciting." Previously, Hersh worked on creating an arts district in a vacant stretch of Myrtle Beach, S.C.: "I've seen it happen firsthand, and I believe in it."

Ward 13 Commissioner Gilda Kramer was instrumental in getting BAoA launched and in making Bala Avenue a priority of the Township planning staff. She said residents had been telling her for years how much they missed the Bala Theater and also wished the corridor might have extra attractions such as coffee shops, galleries and bars. Among the additional ideas she and others have floated is having an outdoor performance space and a community garden along the Cynwyd Heritage Trail extension that will run parallel to Bala Avenue.

Daniella Weinberg, the BAoA's board president, noted that there also have been discussions about creating an art co-op, shared studio space for working artists, and perhaps a rotating art gallery. Her group is focused on its strategic plan and a budget setting out "our priorities, a timeline, and fundraising goals. … I know the community wants a theater, but it's complicated. It's on the list we're discussing." The strategic plan will be shared with the Neighborhood Club and other organizations for input and fine-tuning, she said, emphasizing that "we're a work in progress."

By next spring and summer, residents can expect more BAoA events like September's well-attended public Art Walk. Meanwhile, you can go to balaavenueofthearts.org to stay abreast of developments and to get involved.

PHOTO BY GEORGE MANOS

Bala Avenue of the Arts board members (from left) Rachel Perl, Val Rossman, and Marjorie Ochroch at the group's information table.

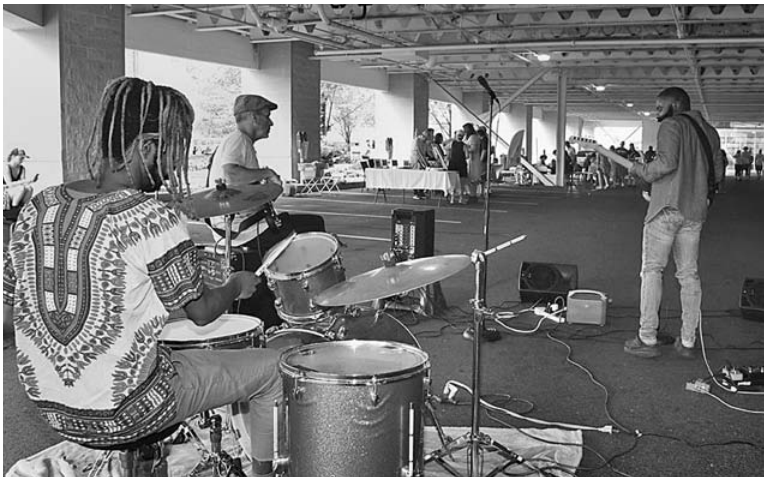

PHOTO BY GEORGE MANOS

The Steven Williams Group of Philadelphia performs for the crowd at the Art Walk. The prospect of rain moved the event under cover inside the municipal parking lot.

PHOTO BY GEORGE MANOS

The Art Walk was a family affair. The adults in this gaggle are (from right) outgoing Ward 9 Commissioner David McComb, Rabbi Baruch Davidson, Ward 9 Commissioner-elect Louis Rossman, and City Avenue Special Services District CEO Bryan Fenstermaker.

President's Letter *(continued from page 1)*

Station Bridge is scheduled to be under construction very shortly, if not already by the time this newsletter reaches your door.

I also want to make a specific call to high school students to get involved. We have many opportunities for students who are budding community activists and civic participants, and we would love to expand our reach. You're invited to contact me directly, or attend a monthly meeting to help us plan more exciting events.

Please come to our annual meeting Dec. 19 – and help support us with your time as well as your resources. That said, our 2024 Membership opened on Nov. 1. Consider raising your contribution from previous years to help us keep expanding our reach.

Have a great, safe (and for the kids - snowy!!) winter!

Best, C. Aaron Gross, Esq.

Here's Your Big Chance

Feeling witty? Write us a ditty.

Just for fun, *The Gateway* is inviting readers to submit original limericks to **info@balacynwyd.org**, for publication in our next issue.

Make 'em clever, keep 'em clean — and above all, slip in Bala Cynwyd references.

To prime the pump, here's one that sprang into our editor's mind:

What's that you say, 'Bala Sign-Wide'?
Ain't right, dear caller, though you tried,
It's 'Kin-Wid,' so say we,
Welsh-ish lingo in B.C.
And we take that llegacy yn stride.

Merchants See 'An Avenue of Opportunity'

By Amy Lee, Lower Merion HS student reporter

Two new independent eateries, Anchan Thai Cuisine and Slices and Rolls, placed their bets on the future of Bala Avenue by opening for business along the corridor earlier this year.

Anchan's owners, Wimonrat Tantichaipiya and husband Adam Corenzwit, viewed the location as an "avenue of opportunity," and hope to contribute to the neighborhood's lack of diversity in enterprises. Corenzwit notes that this characteristic is highlighted by other new businesses and younger communities settling in the area.

Slices and Rolls, at 163 Bala Ave., offers an array of dishes, all of it certified kosher to cater to the area's growing Orthodox Jewish population. Owner Eli Etgar, who was not available for an interview, has an international menu that includes pizza, poke bowls, tempura, falafel, and much more.

Anchan's owners, meanwhile, want their restaurant, at 126 Bala, to showcase the diaspora of Thailand's cultural dishes that goes far beyond the ever-popular pad thai.

They named their business after the Anchan flower, a botanical ingredient utilized in menu items like their Anchan coconut rice and Anchan lemonade. This adds authenticity to their dishes — a trait they will enhance by introducing a broader range of Thai cuisines monthly. Through this work, the business has already attracted regulars eager to explore the overlooked diversity of Thai cuisine.

PHOTO BY JIM REMSEN

Wimonrat Tantichaipiya and Adam Corenzwit outside their Anchan Thai restaurant.

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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
Brian McGuire
Marion J. Williams
George Manos
Amy Lee, *LMHS student*
Jim Remsen, *editor*

The Neighborhood Club of Bala Cynwyd Membership Form

Your 2024 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

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