



View From the Hill

Reservoir Hill . . . A Community Blooming with Opportunity!

Reservoir Hill Improvement Council, 2001 Park Avenue, Baltimore, MD 21217; Tel: (410) 225-7547; Fax: (410) 225-7455; www.reservoirhill.net

Community Briefing January 2008

Happy New Year!

Welcome Christiana Usenza as RHIC's Newest Staff Member

Christiana Usenza is joining RHIC as half-time Projects Coordinator. Christiana will be coordinating the supportive services program at Renaissance at Reservoir Hill. In addition, Christiana will provide support to housing and greening projects. Christiana comes to RHIC with a varied background in greening, working with youth, and in social advocacy, including the Human Rights Campaign, Environment Maryland, Parks & People Foundation, teaching a hip-hop class at The Creative Alliance, and working on organic farms. You can reach Christiana at the RHIC office (410.225.7547) or through her email: cusenza@reservoirhill.net

Next Reservoir Hill Peace Patrol Walks – 7 & 28 January

The Reservoir Hill Peace Patrol will hold its next walk on 7 January 2008 commencing at 7:00 pm from St. Francis Neighborhood Center at 2405 Linden Avenue. Come hear about the changes in the team and why the new name, and join in your neighbors as they walk. Peace Patrol members are volunteers who patrol their communities. Residents do not take enforcement action; they only observe. Peace Patrol volunteers do not carry weapons and are encouraged to avoid confrontation.

Project Contact: Joe Lazazzera, (410) 669-4060, grlazazzera@verizon.net

January Community Meeting – 8 January

The January Community Meeting will be held on Tuesday, 8 January 2008, 7:00 pm – 9:00 pm at the Riviera Apartments Community Room, 901 Druid Park Lake drive (enter by Linden Avenue). The main topic will be Maintaining Our Parks, Playgrounds, & Trees. We will be joined by Chris Delaporte of The Baltimore Park Advocate (www.parkadvocate.net) to discuss the need for increased maintenance resources for parks and open spaces. Mr. Delaporte's presentation will be followed by a community discussion of what we can do as a community to improve maintenance. In addition, we will be kicking off a new feature of each community meeting; a presentation by one or two RHIC Member Organizations to discuss briefly what they consider major issues and what they are doing. This month we will hear from the Linden Avenue Block Club.

Project Contact: Richard Gwynallen, (410) 225-7547, rgwynallen@reservoirhill.net

Friends of Druid Hill Park Meeting and Workday – 9 & 12 January

The Friends of Druid Hill Park meet on the second Tuesday of each month at 7pm at 2600 Madison Avenue. The Friends are currently forming working committees to work on issues in the park related to maintenance, historic preservation, and family programming. In 2008, the Friends will be sponsoring monthly workdays in the Park on second Saturdays from 9am- Noon. The next workday, January 12th will involve cleaning up the Historic Blacksmith Shop, where you'll have a great view of the elephants. Enter at the Zoo's service gate near the upper tennis courts and the former 'negro pool'. For day of event questions call Anne Draddy at 410-926-4195.

Project Contact: Mike Gaffney, (410) 897-7460, mgaffney@reservoirhill.net

St. Francis Neighborhood Center Community Hour – Traffic Issues – 21 January

This month's topic will be a follow-up to the November subject: Traffic Concerns and Speed Bumps. See the announcement further down in this Community Briefing, *Residents Initiate Traffic Improvement Project*. Please join the discussion. St. Francis Neighborhood Center hosts a safe place where Reservoir Hill residents can have open discussion on the challenges that they encounter. These monthly informal discussions take place every third Monday from 7pm- 8pm at the St. Francis Neighborhood Center, 2405 Linden Avenue (Corner of Linden Avenue & Whitelock Street). Residents take active roles in planning and leading community initiatives, topics and projects.

Project Contact: Sarah Taylor, (410) 669-2612, staylo@mac.com

Diabetes Screening – 22 January

The American Diabetes Association, Bon Secours Baltimore Health System, and the Baltimore City Health Department will host a Type 2 Diabetes Screening and Information event at 6:30pm on Tuesday, 22 January at Zion Baptist Church, 1700 N. Caroline Street, Baltimore. The event includes screening, information, and dinner! With Diabetes disproportionately striking Baltimoreans at an alarming rate of 56% higher than the national average, this is not an event to miss. For more information contact Tracy Newsome

Project Contact: Tracy Newsome, (410) 265-0075 ext. 4679, tnewsome@diabetes.org.

Next Homebuyer Workshop – 23 January 2008

The next homebuyer workshop is scheduled for 24 January 2008 from 6:00 pm - 9:00 pm at St. Francis Community Center, 2405 Linden Avenue. The workshops provide a broad overview of each step of the home buying process, from budgeting and affordability to contracts and mortgage process. The workshops are free, but pre-registration is required.

Project Contact: Carl Cleary, (410) 225-7547, ccleary@reservoirhill.net

Smoking Ban in Effect – 1 February

Beginning 1 February 2008, smoking is illegal in bars, restaurants, and private clubs, which includes American Legion halls, throughout Maryland. The smoking ban was supposed to take effect on 1 January 1, 2008 in Baltimore City, but officials moved it to 1 February to coincide with the Maryland state smoking ban. The Baltimore City Council passed its smoking ban in February 2007. Baltimore City's action, just as the Maryland General Assembly session began, set the stage for statewide anti-smoking legislation passed in 2007. The ban does not apply to tobacco shops. Businesses affected by the smoking ban could apply for a "hardship" waiver. These waivers expire in 2011 and cannot be renewed. The state Department of Health and Mental Hygiene is to develop regulations about the waivers prior to the start of the ban. Local health departments will issue the waivers. Business caught violating the ban will receive a warning on the first offense and a \$100 fine on the second, but fines can escalate on subsequent offenses to more than \$1,000.

Project Contact: Richard Gwynallen, (410) 225-7547, rgwynallen@reservoirhill.net

Twentieth Century Strings at First Unitarian Church – 15 February

On Friday, 15 February 2008, 8:00 pm, faculty and students of the Peabody Institute of the Johns Hopkins University and guest artists will present a program of twentieth century music for strings at the First Unitarian Church of Baltimore, downtown at the corner of Charles and Franklin Streets. The concert is free and open to the public. For details: www.firstunitarian.net/activities/events/index.asp

Project Contact: First Unitarian Church of Baltimore, (410) 685-2330

Reservoir Hill Unity Day – 16 February

Come to the Reservoir Hill Unity Day Celebration, our annual Black History Month event. The celebration will be held at the John Eager Howard Recreation Center on 16 February 2008 from 3:00 pm to 6:00 pm. There will be food and entertainment including a puppet show and live music. Volunteers are needed for set up, decoration, clean up and serving food. If you are willing to volunteer, please contact Darryl Smith.

Project Contact: Darryl Smith, (410) 225-7547, dsmith@reservoirhill.net

Spring Clean Up – 19 April

RHIC is beginning to organize for this year's Mayor's Spring Clean Up. The clean up is scheduled for 19 April 2008. We are trying to make sure that the entire community is covered. In recent years each block club has assumed responsibility for their area, and we are asking each organization to step up to the plate again. Please begin to line up your volunteers. RHIC will coordinate with the Mayor's office to ensure that everyone gets the tools and bags that they need for the clean up. As you gather your volunteers, please contact me to let me know what area you will cover and what tools you will need. RHIC plans to host a cook out after the clean up for those clubs that participate in the clean up.

Project Contact: Darryl Smith, (410) 225-7547, dsmith@reservoirhill.net

RHIC Executive Director Selected for Weinberg Fellowship

RHIC's Executive Director, John Ruffin, was accepted into the 2008 Harry and Jeanette Weinberg Fellows Program. John will participate in a series of retreats March through September 2008 designed to explore issues important to agency leaders.

Project Contact: John Ruffin, (410) 225-7547, jruffin@reservoirhill.net

Clean Streets Bill Showing Positive Changes

The bill known as the Clean Streets Bill that reformed eviction practices in Baltimore City went into effect on 1 October. The bill bans the dumping of a household's belongings in public areas to be picked up by the city at taxpayer expense, now requiring landlords to assume responsibility for disposal of the belongings in a legal manner. The bill also requires that tenants receive a two-week notice of the precise date of eviction. According to the Baltimore City Department of Public Works (DPW), City crews cleaned up after only five evictions this past October and three evictions in November, virtually eliminating the 1,377 set-outs DPW had to contend with in October and November of 2006. Since the average City eviction has been 829 lbs. in recent years, 1,369 fewer set-outs means the new law kept more than 500 tons of debris out of Baltimore streets in its first two months. Prior to enactment of this year's eviction reform, City Public Works crews cleaned up after more than 7,000 evictions each year at a cost of \$800,000 to City taxpayers. Eviction dumping is now illegal and punishable by a fine of up to \$1,000 per day. City officials and community advocates encourage residents who see such dumping in the street to call 311 to prompt City enforcement. Further, despite similar numbers of landlord complaints of tenant non-payment of rent, the Baltimore sheriff's office evicted 449 fewer people in October and November of 2007 than they did in the same two months of 2006 – a 34% decrease.

Project Contact: Darryl Smith, (410) 225-7547, dsmith@reservoirhill.net

Did Your Property Tax Assessment Go Up?

RHIC has received word from some property owners that their tax assessment has increased dramatically. The State Department of Assessments & Taxation says assessment notices dated 28 December 2007 reflect the change in real estate values since these properties were last valued in 2004. Property owners who use the property as their principal residence should have received a Homestead Tax Credit Application with their assessment. The Homestead Tax Credit is a State law which mandates that all taxable assessment increases for homeowner occupied properties cannot increase by more than 10 percent per year. Baltimore City and each of the 23 counties are authorized to determine a lower percentage of allowable increase in taxable assessment for their eligible homeowners. The taxable assessment increases are limited to four percent per year in Baltimore City. **The Homestead Tax Credit application must be submitted in order to insure that the credit is granted only on eligible properties and not on properties that are rented or used as vacation homes.** The applications can be filed on-line by going to the Department's website at www.dat.state.md.us or by mailing the paper form in the enclosed postage paid envelope. For further information about the Homestead Tax Credit Application, one can call (410) 767-2165 in the Baltimore metropolitan area or at 1-866-650-8783 toll-free elsewhere in Maryland. **If you believe that the Total New Market Value on your notice is incorrect, you may file an appeal online no later than 11 February 2008: <http://sdatcert1.resiusa.org/SDATAPPEALS/>** To read more about the new tax assessment, you may use the the Department of Assessments & Taxation website: <http://www.dat.state.md.us/>

Project Contact: Carl Cleary, (410) 225-7547, ccleary@reservoirhill.net

Help Stock John Eager Howard Recreation Center

John Eager Howard Recreation Center underwent an extensive and wonderful renovation over the last year. The building offers a much improved environment for our young people and for community uses. The staff at the recreation center is creating some very important programs. However, the renovation funds did not include stocking the center with much of what it needs to make the programs fully functional. Their computers are old. Their new kitchen doesn't have enough pots. They lack athletic supplies. The recreation center can use your help in acquiring a number of items or with financial donations to help with the acquisition of the items. If you can help, please contact Center Director Carolyn Newton. If you wish to make a financial donation, the city requires donations come in the form of a money order made out to Director of Finance. The following is a list of needs:

- Ping Pong table
- Bumper pool table
- Board games - Sorry, Monopoly, Connect 4, Battle Ship, etc
- P.E. equipment - jump rope, hula hoops, etc
- Cooking Pots
- Toaster
- Can Opener
- Juice Maker
- Basketballs
- Whistles (athletic)
- Folding Chairs
- Folding Tables
- Camcorder
- DVD/VCR player
- CD/Radio/ cassette player
- Sound System
- Pool Table
- Pool cues (sticks)
- Computers

Project Contact: Carolyn Newton, (410) 396-7849

Proposal Emerges to Reduce Property Taxes

A mayoral task force examining ways of reducing Baltimore City property taxes recently issued a set of recommendations for consideration by the Mayor and the city Council. The task force report recommends an 11% decrease in the property tax rate. To balance the loss of revenues from this decrease, the report presents a number of short-term solutions, including increasing the Homestead Tax Credit cap from 4% to 10%, raising the income tax from 3.05% to 3.2%, and increasing the hotel tax from 7.5% to 10%. We recommend everyone read the recent Sun article on the subject (http://www.baltimoresun.com/news/local/baltimore_city/bal-te.ci.tax03jan03,0,4859145.story) and keep abreast of developments. RHIC would like to hear readers' perspectives on the proposals as they unfold.

Project Contact: Richard Gwynallen, (410) 225-7547, rgwynallen@reservoirhill.net

State Bill Emerging to Assist Tenants in Improving Rental Properties

RHIC's current Tenant Organizing Initiative is about a year old. Part of what we want to come out of the initiative is structures and actions that open opportunities for tenants to be an organized, effective force in improving our communities and their lives. One of the key impediments to that is the fear of being evicted or having their rents raised if they complain about conditions. In one complex, several families have been living with mold and there are numerous rat holes all through the complex. RHIC is now working with those residents, but they were silent for a long time when the management did little simply because they were afraid of being evicted. The majority of Reservoir Hill residents are tenants and should be a vital force in improving the conditions of life in this community. Our answer is to work with the Rental Housing Coalition to strengthen what we have found are among the most restrictive and regressive laws on retaliatory evictions in the country. As it stands, the new bill will eliminate the bar on tenants with histories of late payments from filing a complaint, change the standard of proof that a landlord's action was retaliatory from being the "only cause" to being a "material cause" proven by the preponderance of the evidence, and changing the time limit for protection from eviction. Many things in this developing bill are still being worked out, but the driving purpose is to create sufficient protections from retaliatory evictions to allow tenants the real, and not just legal, right to effectively advocate for the improvement of rental properties. We see it as a win-win for the whole community.

Project Contact: Darryl Smith, (410) 225-7547, dsmith@reservoirhill.net

Accessible Homes for Seniors

Help is available for seniors who wish to remain in their homes. The State of Maryland is offering zero percent interest, deferred loans for senior homeowners. The program is specifically designed to improve the accessibility of the home – for everything from wheelchair ramps to grab bars in the bathroom. Contact the Baltimore Commission on Aging and Retirement Education (CARE) for more information, or to apply, contact Thelma Winn. Learn more at: <http://www.dhcd.state.md.us/Website/programs/ahsp/ahsp.aspx>.

Project Contact: Thelma Winn, (410) 396-2273, Thelma.Winn@baltimorecity.gov

Baltimore City Leaf Collection

The Department of Public Works (DPW) will collect bagged leaves on your second trash collection day of the week (Thursday). These collections will continue through January 26, 2008. Residents are reminded to: (1) Place leaves in clear or labeled bags. (2) When cleaning up leaves, please do not blow leaves or place bagged leaves in the gutter or public right-of-way. (3) There will be no vacuuming or street sweeping of leaves by DPW.

Project Contact: Kurt L. Kocher, (410) 545-6541, Kurt.Kocher@Baltimorecity.gov

Healthy Neighborhoods – Low-Interest Loans for Remodeling Your Home

Get a low-interest loan to remodel your home! Free architectural advice and low-interest rehab loans are available through Healthy Neighborhoods. Other exceptional loan features are an ability to borrow more than the after-rehab value of the home, as well as no mortgage insurance requirement. Contact Carl Cleary to learn more, or to take the first step in applying for a Healthy Neighborhoods loan.

Project Contact: Carl Cleary, (410) 225-7547, ccleary@reservoirhill.net

Use This Link to Make a Donation to RHIC Online! Thank You!

<http://www.reservoirhill.net/donate.htm>

Any questions relative to the policies or programs of RHIC should be directed to Executive Director John Henry Ruffin at 410.225.7547, or by email to jruffin@reservoirhill.net.

Mission

Reservoir Hill Improvement Council (RHIC) unites residents and organizations as a vehicle by which to define and solve problems common to the Reservoir Hill community.

Goal

To revitalize the physical and human infrastructure of Reservoir Hill without resulting in full-scale gentrification and significant displacement, including rehabilitation of deteriorating buildings; alleviating poverty and its attendant problems, including, sanitation, public safety, education, low homeownership, and unemployment; and making the organized, informed voice of residents influential and effective.

Strategy

As an umbrella organization, the foundation of RHIC's approach is to aggregate the power of local associations and institutions through a community-wide infrastructure for educating residents, training leaders, promoting mutual support among community associations, developing common perspectives and strategy, and implementing collective projects and campaigns. The underlying principles of this strategic approach are that organized people and economic development lead to community empowerment; empowerment achieved as a result of networking, combining talents and resources, and wielding the power of an educated, united citizenry in a program grounded in economic and social equity.