

NORTH COLLEGE PARK COMMUNITY CENTER

By the NCPCA Community Center Committee, Mary C. Cook and Christine Nagle
April 20, 2018

During the past decade, the North College Park community has repeatedly called for a community center/senior center. Councilmember Fazlul Kabir and former Councilmember Christine Nagle championed this proposal with more than one City Council.

The clock is ticking; discussions have begun for the 2019FY budget session, and this is a terrific opportunity for Councilmembers Kabir and Kennedy to advocate on behalf of the North College Park community.

History

Although County Councilmember, Mary Lehman, has been on board with the concept of community center, as well as more than one City Council, the project has stalled due to lack of funding. In 2012, Maryland-National Capital Park and Planning Commission's (M-NCCPC) expressed interest in doing a feasibility study in conjunction with the City, and monies were allocated in the City's 2013FY budget. Subsequently, however, M-NCCPC stated that going forward the Commission will concentrate on large, regional community and sport facilities, not smaller, neighborhood centers like the ones in South College Park or Beltsville.

Over the years, a handful of locations have been discussed and/or explored. They include the Hollywood School, Davis Hall, Youth and Family Services, the northwest corner of Edgewood Rd. and Rhode Island Ave. as well as the Stone Straw property.

In the case of Hollywood School, a new 12,000-square foot gym at the Hollywood Elementary School was proposed for the community's use in the M-NCPCC 2040 plan. The project has never been part of the M-NCPCC's Capital Improvement Budget, however, and it is unclear that it will ever be part of the CIP in near future.

After repeated requests by District 1 Councilmembers, the Youth and Family Services and Davis Hall facilities are being made more "accessible" with the use of a keyless entry system, similar to the one at the Old Parish House. Although this may allow for greater access to residents, the spaces are often in use and cannot be ensured for a community center/senior center with regular hours.

The Shabaan property at the northwest corner of Edgewood Rd. and Rhode Island Ave. has been proposed as the site for the center but is not currently for sale. Although many believe it is the ideal location, no steps have been made to move forward because of the lack of ensured funding.

As for the Stone Straw property, Councilmembers Kabir and Kennedy, as well as former Councilmember Christine Nagle, have approached prospective buyers for space on the property to construct the center. And although the current prospective buyers have voiced positive intentions, as of yet, there has been no sale of the property so these discussions have not come to fruition.

FUTURE

It has been suggested, in order to launch the community center/senior center in a timely fashion that the City rents storefront(s) in the Edgewood Rd. and Rhode Island Ave. area. With MOM's move this summer, some space will open up in that strip mall. The company has been contacted for cost, as well as a determination of acceptable use. There is also space available on the northeast corner in the same strip mall as El Cordebes Latino Market.

This amenity would not exactly be a "pop up" community center/senior center, but the goals would be. Moreover, such a start would allow for the project's objective to be met in the next year or two at a fraction of the cost of a newly constructed center. In addition, it will encourage the North College Park community to provide increased input and involvement in the center's programming.

Below is a sampling of storefront rents in North College Park.

9300 Baltimore Ave. (mattress store)	5,893 SF	
9723-25 Baltimore Ave.	1,000+ SF (front)	\$1,700/mo + utilities
9723 Baltimore	1,000-2,000 SF (back)	\$1,550/mo/1,000 SF
Shaaban property Rhode Island Ave.	1,000 SF 2,000 SF	\$2,600/mo \$4,000/mo
9935 Rhode Island Ave	Two spaces of 1,400 SF Can rent separately or together	\$2,683/mo \$5,366/mo (inc. maintenance, real estate taxes, etc.)

As for programming, ideas continue to be explored. Suggestions have been made that a part-time staff person, who could be a volunteer with a modest stipend from the City, or be a part-time employee through the City or M-NCCPC. It has been proposed to involve the College Park Arts Exchange as well, but without a doubt, it is a priority to integrate residents into the process. They will contribute ideas, which will help tailor the programming to the community's needs and wants.

Local businesses can also play a role by donating money, time, or material needs. Again, by integrating them, they will become a stronger part of the local community.

CONCLUSION

The community/senior center is a long overdue amenity for North College Park. The simplicity of the center beginning in a storefront will allow the City Council to set aside funds, on an annual basis, in the CIP. However, initially, \$40,000 is being requested in the 2019FY budget to get the project off to a modest beginning. The center, in conjunction with the Hollywood Street Scape, will be an economic stimulus which will attract new and desired businesses. Most importantly, the North College Park community/senior center will be an exciting opportunity to build a sense of community among people of all ages.