Seminary Hill Association, Inc.

2016 ANNUAL MEMBERSHIP MEETING

**Review of the Past Year**

*Speech by President Nancy R. Jennings*

*November 10, 2016*

Thought I would categorize my thoughts on the past year as the GOOD, the BAD and the HORRIBLES.

The GOOD—during the past year, the Mayor and City Council have worked with us to improve the quality of life in our neighborhoods. While we all wish it would happen faster, I am seeing positive results and hope this trend will continue. Let me give you four examples:

First, the implementation of the Fort Ward Plan

Second, City Council is establishing an ethics pledge and code of conduct for all members of City Council and appointees to commissions.

And two Efforts to Make Our Streets Safer.

* The lowering of speed limits on Quaker and Seminary Roads. Although we are still waiting for data about the effectiveness of these measures to slow drivers.
* and the creation of a citizen advisory committee—comprised of three civic groups (SHA, Clover-College Park, and Taylor Run)—to reduce cut-through traffic.

Just a couple of items under the BAD:

1. First is that the income from the commercial sector has not increased as planned, so last spring City Council approved a 4 ½ % tax increase.
2. The second is that plans to turn the HOV lanes on I-395 into HOT lanes are moving forward, despite concerns about changing the two lanes and shoulders into three narrow lanes.

No enforcement is planned to prevent non-HOV vehicles from exiting from the HOT Lanes onto Seminary Road except ticket writing police officers. I expect we will see rush hour traffic diverted into our neighborhoods, particularly when there is an accident in the HOT Lanes.

The HORRIBLES are the School issues of this past year. Despite our efforts to work with the newly elected School Board—you may remember we met with four of them in April—the number of contentious issues has grown from 3 to 5 and is likely to go higher! We will meet again with School Board members on December 14th in this room, so plan to come back next month.

Actions of the School Board have created a trust problem with citizens and the city Council. For example:

1. The School Board has mismanaged the expansion of Patrick Henry School by rejecting the design option chosen by the Community Advisory Committee. The unpopular option the School Board chose goes to the Planning Commission on December 6th, and we will be there to strongly object to several measures needed for their option in the DSUP.
2. The School Board continues to pursue the **feasibility** of putting stadium lights at T. C. Williams High School, which are prohibited by Condition 85 of the DSUP.
3. On the advice of a lawyer that the ACPS hired, the School Board created more distrust by **another** effort to change the TC Williams DSUP by expanding the membership on the TC Community Advisory Committee. I haven’t been able to find out what the next steps are with regard to the Resolution the School Board passed to change Condition 69, but in my opinion, the $100,000 retainer would have been better spent on landscaping at TC.
4. Overcrowding at some schools NOW has the School Board **scrambling** to redraw school boundaries. In 2008, the City’s student population was predicted to remain flat but instead it has grown more than 40%. Some of the options being discussed as “redistricting” would move Seminary Hill children—who total 20 children—to new schools for no apparent reason.
5. Last, but not lease, the Superintendent of Schools recently announced that we need four new schools to the tune of $515 M dollars. This September, he began exploring a plan to purchase an office building on Beauregard Street in Mark Center that would be converted into pre-K classrooms and school offices, but no one can talk about it now because we are in “negotiations.” His most recent announcement includes tearing down Mini Howard School and building a multi-story annex to TC on the site.

I’ll close as always, reminding you that

* Information on all of these issues is posted on the Seminary Hill website
* You are invited to subscribe to the Seminary Hill e-news
* You are always welcome to attend the monthly Board of Directors’ meetings,
* But MOST IMPORTANT become involved in civic issues that concern you!