The Echo Advisory Committee on Land Acquisition

As reported in last month's Echo, Glen Echo's Mayor, Willem Polak, after consultation with the Town Council, formed an Advisory Committee. Our charter is to provide objective business, financial, and legal analysis and advice to the Mayor and Town Council to help them better understand the current and potential value of the Town's existing real estate assets. This initiative was prompted by the offer by Aaron Hirsch to sell the Vassar Circle property to the Town outright (not swap as previously offered). The real estate assets being reviewed by the committee are the Town Hall (and property), the undeveloped property on Tulane Avenue (behind the Irish Inn), and the Vassar Circle property.

The Advisory Committee met in a closed session at our initial meetings, as we wanted to hear from Town counsel Ron Bolt on property zoning and other legal matters surrounding the properties. Three of our meetings were open for all or part of the time; our goal is to hold as many open meetings as possible moving forward so interested residents can observe the process. In addition, I have requested a time slot at the September 11 Town Council meeting to provide an update.

One of our first activities has been data gathering—both the historical perspective as well as from interested and potentially impacted folks. To that end, we met with Chris Hughes from the Irish Inn, architect Dick Leggin, and developer and resident Aaron Hirsch. We also received excellent input from several residents, including our former Mayor, Debbie Beers. We will work closely with the Town Council on when and how all Glen Echo residents will provide their thoughts and input on potential options. As of now, the Advisory Committee does not have a specific due date for our final recommendations, though we hope to complete our analysis and present early in October. Every person on our committee has expressed their appreciation for the opportunity to contribute to this important decision for the Town. We also believe this might serve as a test case for future Town initiatives.

—Alexis Feringa

Town Council Notes

There are no Town Council Notes this month as the Council did not meet in August. The Echo reached out to the Advisory Committee on Land Acquisition, which has been meeting weekly in August, to see if they would like to share any details with residents. Mayor Polak and the committee's chair Alexis Feringa were enthusiastic to report.

Advisory Committee on Land Acquisition

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The Advisory Committee comprises residents and non-residents, well-versed in the fields of architecture, zoning, planning, design, and finance, and is chaired by me, Alexis Feringa. Our mission, in fulfillment of the charter, is to conduct due diligence on a set of options as related to Town-owned properties and the offer to acquire Vassar Circle, which could include maintaining the status quo. We have developed a set of considerations, including financial security of the Town, impact on residents and local businesses, increased green space, and risk, among others. Ultimately, we will provide a set of recommendations to the Town Council. It will then be up to the Council to take action, if any, on the due diligence presented.

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—Alexis Feringa
New to Town

Let me start with a warning that my first newcomers column is deeply self-serving: Anne Speca and Lyonel Moreau are old friends who we lured to Glen Echo from Columbia Heights, and I’m delighted to introduce them in the pages of The Echo. They purchased their home at 6003 Bryn Mawr Avenue in 2015, but moved in this summer, having rented it out until the right time for their twins to change schools.

Anne and Lyo are the parents of six-year-olds Cléophée (Cléo) and Manoé, who will join the sizeable troupe of Glen Echo first graders at Bannockburn next year. Prior to moving, they attended a bilingual Montessori school, and are hoping to find opportunities to practice the near-fluent Spanish they developed there. Cléo and Manoé have enjoyed art camp at Glen Echo and the freedom of dropping in on neighborhood friends. Manoé is also an avid hide-and-seek player.

Lyo moved to the United States from France in 2002 to work as a hair stylist, expecting to stay only a short time. He met Anne within a few months, though, and the rest, c’est l’histoire. Lyo is the owner of Evolve Salon in Georgetown, where he has worked for several years. Lyo enjoys glassblowing and looking for wild foods in the forest.

Anne has worked in international development for 15 years, specializing in disaster risk management and food crisis analysis. She loves the biking and running trails and woodsiness of Glen Echo, and is taken with the ambient noise. In addition to the sound of crickets and birds, she likens the ebb and flow of traffic noise on the Clara Barton Parkway to the rhythms of waves on the beach. Talk about a glass-half-full attitude! As a city resident for many years, Anne is interested in ways to improve the walkability between Glen Echo and nearby neighborhoods.

Both Anne and Lyo have joined the ranks of Glen Echo bike commuters—give a wave when you see them speeding by! —ANGELA HIRSCH
I was recently out of town overnight, so I first got word that something was out of the ordinary when my wife Becky called me at 11:30 PM to ask where the breaker for our home office was. After she cut the power supply to the room, she told me that she had smelled smoke, searched the house for the source, and determined it was coming from an outlet in the office. Hearing loud, crackling electric sounds, and seeing wisps of smoke coming from the outlet affirmed the problem. Naturally, she called 911. Eight minutes later a brigade of firefighters were parked on Wellesley, inspecting the house and pointing heat guns at every wall but coming up cold. They assured Becky that everything was fine and wondered out loud whether the smell she smelled really had been smoke. They said to just call an electrician in the morning and that she’d be fine to leave the power on. Wisely, Becky questioned that judgment and left the breaker off.

That night, Becky was up every hour checking for smoke. The next day, she worked from home. She didn’t need to call an electrician because it just so happened we were in the middle of a bathroom remodel by fellow Glen Echoan, Mark McCaffery, who also does electrical work. How convenient. So toward the end of the day, when Mark had a moment, he went to the office, removed the outlet plate, and could smell the burning smell Becky was getting the night before (vindication!). Mark’s words to Becky were something along the lines of, “You aren’t going to like this but I need to cut a hole in your wall.” And then, after cutting a second, even larger hole in the wall, an explicative may have been heard as Mark was suddenly face to face with a very stuck, three-foot-long, black rat snake.

The snake had been attracted into the wall by a family of mice who were nesting between the studs. The good snake ate up all the mice, but with its belly full, it could no longer fit through the small holes that led out of the mouse den. As it tried to find its way back outside the snake got stuck between the stud and an electric wire. Previously, the mice had voraciously chewed the insulated casing around the wire such that the copper wire was exposed. Once wedged between the wire and the stud, the snake’s body arced the wires sending non-lethal electric shocks through its mice-filled belly. Hence the smell, the crackling, and the smoke the night before. Dexterously, Mark removed the snake, mugged for the camera with it (see pic), and then released it in the woods behind our house just as I arrived home.

The snake did suffer from some burn wounds, but thankfully it had a big meal to heal on. Here’s to the good health of Glen Echo’s snakes. Their work in keeping our Town’s mouse population down is greatly appreciated, but we hope that future predation is an outside business.—PETE EPANCHIN

I n June, the Maasjo/Spealman family at the bottom of Bryn Mawr had a close encounter with a tiny, fuzzy interloper in their house. Having lived in downtown DC for many years, everyone at first assumed it was a rat. But closer examination revealed that it had long ears and a short tail (instead of short ears and a long tail) and was in fact a baby bunny; not much bigger than a fist. No one knows for sure just how the trespasser made its way inside, but once identified, various herding and catching implements were deployed (bags, buckets, brooms, etc.). The intruder had a williness and quickness that belied its age. Eventually, it was herded into a small bathroom, where a tense face-off finally resulted in capture. The family authorities decided to extend leniency, and released the bunny without bail. It hopped away happily, accompanied by a torrent of “awwwws” from the children in attendance. —DAN SPEALMAN

A cross the way, at 6001 Bryn Mawr, we were having our own little visitors though things were a bit more morbid. First, two-year-old Alice unwittingly stepped on a tiny mouse in our driveway and killed it. She was barefoot. We watched it decompose over the next weeks. Then later in the summer, when Mumgee discovered another mouse, this time in the basement, she knew just what to do. Another stomp; another lesson in life and death in the natural world. —EMILY PARSONS

Send your photos and tales of encounters with local wildlife to TheEchoEditor@gmail.com

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I love frogs and toads. They come visit my garden in spring and can be heard like an orchestra during mating season. Shortly after, I can see tadpoles and occasionally a few little frogs and toads in the small pool and then they vanish. Where do they go?

There are about nine species of frogs and toads (henceforth called frogs) commonly encountered in Montgomery County. Most of these live in the woods and make use of vernal pools (temporary fish-less ponds) to breed. The green frog and Bullfrog usually live in ponds year-round.

In Glen Echo we mostly have the Wood Frog, Peeper, and American Toad. They often show up at breeding time and then return to the woods as do the little ones after they have matured into frogs in the late spring to early summer.

Frogs are imperiled worldwide. They are extremely sensitive to polluted water, and since they breath and drink through their skin, they are highly susceptible to environmental toxins. Most require wetland habitats and pools. Because of the way that neighborhoods are developed, with lots being clear cut and leveled, the depressions that form vernal pools are eliminated. Then the dense road networks that are installed lead to mass killings of amphibians. The final blow is the creation of lawns that are intensely fertilized and treated with pesticides. This results in poisoning of any remaining vernal pools or ponds.

In Glen Echo, the Potomac River and Cabin John Creek provide the refuge that resupplies the neighborhood as frogs start to die out. In most American suburbs, you can drive through in spring and not hear or see a single frog. As you get further out in the country, frogs are abundant and the choruses can be deafening.

What’s left in the suburbs is concentrated around streams and parks.

We can help encourage frogs by keeping as much natural habitat as possible. Small naturalistic ponds without fish can help replace lost vernal pools. Water is required to help them escape from predators, to hunt, and to reproduce. The ponds should have some aeration and need to have at least one shallow area about a foot deep with some vegetation to be suitable for frogs to lay egg masses. Having a gentle slope for the frogs to go in and out of the water is helpful. Aquatic plants and algae are needed as they provide oxygen, shelter, and attract insects for the frogs. Near the pond, have plenty of vegetation such as ferns to provide hiding spots and retain moisture. Levee leaf litter and make a brush pile with logs, twigs and rocks to help attract insects while providing shelter from hot sunlight, predators, and stormy weather.

Vernal pools are also important for woodland salamanders. The woodland forms breed in vernal pools and lay eggs under rocks. Maryland is home to 19 species of salamanders, with 11 known to be in Montgomery County, and 7 that are fairly common. They love to eat ticks and mosquitoes which provides great natural pest control. Salamanders are threatened by excessive storm water runoff and loss of forest habitat next to streams. In Glen Echo, we have the spotted Salamander which is very beautiful and breeds in March. Also keep an eye out for Grey Tree Frogs, which are extremely vocal and change their skin color from various shades of grays and greens to match the bark of a tree so they won’t be seen.

Toads, frogs, and salamanders are great additions to your garden. A single frog will eat a huge number of insects including sow bugs, slugs, mosquitoes, flies, and cutworms. To encourage frogs to stay in my Glen Echo garden, I am going to create a small brush pile with logs, twigs, leaves, and rocks and hope they can get the protection and food they need to stay.

So, now we know where the frogs go—back to the woods, if they make it (do they cross the parkway?). We in Glen Echo are extremely lucky to live in a place with such a rich natural environment due to its proximity to the Potomac River. We can enhance our gardens by creating safe habitats for frogs and enjoy the fun of beautiful amphibians hopping around the garden. —HOLLY SHIMIZU, with special thanks to Lance Benedict, Montgomery County Coordinator for MARA (Maryland Amphibian and Reptile Atlas) for much of this information.
To get there, look for the bright yellow house at the corner of MacArthur Boulevard and Walhonding Road. The wooden sign is worn, but still reads “Sycamore Store” — likely confusing passing motorists from elsewhere who are unaware that it stopped serving that purpose decades ago. Across from that landmark, you’ll find the dirt path that heads under the old abandoned trolley trestle before arriving at a concrete bridge. Follow the narrow bridge as it arches over the Clara Barton Parkway and then loops around to drop you off on the other side. Continue down the steep path and over one more wooden and steel footbridge across the canal to arrive at the towpath.

There, if you peer into the right opening in the trees, you’ll find a small dock on the Potomac, and a rope that leads across a channel to an island you might even miss if you were just biking the towpath from one place to another. If you pull the rope, a bell rings on the island, summoning Joe Hage, who likely has the most interesting job and living situation out of all your neighbors. Joe is the caretaker of Sycamore Island, and he’s responsible for repairs and upkeep of the buildings and grounds, but his main job is to run the ferry back and forth between the island and the towpath. My family and I have come for a visit, and after the kids have a brief argument over who gets to ring the bell (surprise twist: they both can ring the bell) what seems at first like a flat portion of the dock on the other side detaches from the island and heads our way. This rudimentary ferry must be operated manually by someone pulling it back and forth via a tethered line across the channel.

As we board and cross, Joe and his girlfriend, Mary Kearney, welcome us cheerfully to the island. It gets a bit solitary in the winter, we’re told, when most people don’t venture out. The bell doesn’t often ring and the whole world quiets.

The bell rope and tour rope for the ferry parked across the river.

**ALONG THE POTOMAC**

**THE CARETAKER OF SYCAMORE ISLAND**
regularly line the banks of the Potomac to watch whitewater races and regattas. Joe came to the island when he was 40. He was running a painting business, feeling burned out, and about ready for a midlife crisis when he heard through a friend about a possible mainstem, and tossing sticks at a beaver to move it off the path so they could make it to the school bus on time.

Mostly it’s an idyllic life. When the sounds of the parkway fade away behind you as you trek to the river and make the crossing, “the short walk can transform the way you look at the way you live” says Joe. Just a little over a half a mile from Glen Echo, Joe resides in a different world full of Mistflower and Bluebells, Morning Glory and Rose Mallow and Yellow Wood Sorrel. His neighbors include muskrats, otters, foxes, and turtles that eat the mulberries that fall into the channel. He’s seen swimming squirrels, a snake that consumed a nine-inch bass, and a spooked dear that swam from the island clear across to the Virginia side.

But there’s also plenty of danger. About once a decade, the water gets high enough to put almost the entire island under water. The river can always surprise you, but usually Joe gets a couple days warning from upstream monitors. Then he has to chain up all of the boats and tie down all of the picnic tables, and hopefully leave the island before it gets too dangerous to cross. If he doesn’t, the National Park Service has warned him that they’re not sending in the helicopters to get him—the tree coverage is too dense. “You have to respect the river,” says Joe, “it’s always going to win.”

Joe’s been doing his job now since 2002. “Figure I’ll stay here forever,” he says. “The longer I stay, the harder it gets to leave.” Two more years, and he’ll be the longest serving caretaker, and he’s confident he’ll be at it at least another twenty. “Until he’s a crotchety old man” teases Mary with a wink. But it’s hard to imagine Joe getting crotchety about a job he clearly loves so much. It’s evident in his warm smile as he tugs us back across the channel—letting the kids “help” along the way—and then returns back to his island home. —Dan Spealman
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With the weather getting cool and the leaves turning auburn, September kicks off the region’s unofficial festival season. If you’re looking for culture, check out the well established **Turkish Festival** (September 24, 11 AM–7 PM at Freedom Plaza in downtown DC) or the lesser known **Ukrainian Festival** (September 15–17, Silver Spring) and **Syria Fest** (September 3, 11 AM–7 PM, Pennsylvania Avenue and 14th Street). In its inaugural year, the latter aims to be an immersive experience filled with dance, music, art, and food.

Speaking of arts, you can fill every weekend this month with a different festival. On September 10, join the **Takoma Park Folk Festival** at one of the stages studding the neighborhood with great bands. On September 16, come early to the most popular street party of the year at the **H Street Festival**. It has a quintessential community feel with participants of all levels, from school bands to big music acts. The streets of Old Town Alexandria transform to an outdoor art gallery as part of the **Alexandria King Street Art Festival**. Over 200 artists will be showcasing their wares from all over the world September 16–17.

From September 7–17, make sure to check out at least one of the hundreds of live-action, animated, or documentary shorts being featured during the **DC Shorts Film Festival**. With films on the path to Oscar notoriety as well as amateur projects, this is one of my favorite events of the year. And for those looking to find a good read in time for a hibernating winter, check out the 17th **National Book Festival** on September 2 at the Washington Convention Center. It promises to bring in over 100 award-winning authors for sales and book signing.

While Oktoberfest may sound like it’s more appropriate for next month, it’s traditionally celebrated in September to bring in the upcoming month’s harvest. The area has its own rendition beginning with **Snallygaster DC** beer festival on the 23rd from 1–6 PM at Yards Park in SE Washington. To pair with your beer of choice, join **Taste of Georgetown** on September 24 to sample the neighborhood’s top restaurants. Tickets range from $22 to $44 with proceeds going to the Homeless Assistance Program at Georgetown Ministry Center.

Finally, your last long weekend of summer would not be complete without a walk over to the 47th **Labor Day Art Show at Glen Echo Park**. This event runs daily from September 2–4, and features over 200 artists from across the mid-Atlantic. —MONA KISHORE
The date for the Glen Echo Town Yard Sale has been set! Mark your calendars for Saturday, October 21, 9 AM–2 PM, and start cleaning out those basements, garages, and closets. For newbies, the Town will publicize the yard sale and all you need to do is set up on the day of in your yard or at the top of your street if you are anxious for more foot traffic. If you plan to participate, let organizer Bonnie Whyte know at whytehs@gmail.com. And if you don’t want to sell, hopefully you can do a little shopping. It’s a fun, social day in town. (If October 21 is rainy, sellers can set up in the Town Hall.)

Another way to bond with neighbors: Bonnie is looking for volunteers to help update, put up and take down signs, post to listservs, etc. Email her if you can pitch in.

After years of dedicated service, Susan Grigsby is looking to retire from her position of Circulation Director for The Echo. She manages all of our subscriptions and mails out copies to folks at NPS, elected officials, and former residents (subscribers) each month. She currently does the job with Julie Hull and recommends working with a buddy—it’s just more fun. It’s a very important job—and a huge money maker for the Town!

If you are interested in hearing more about this opportunity to get involved, email TheEchoEditor@gmail.com. Remember, volunteering gets you invited to the annual Echo holiday party…

Wellesley Circle residents Michael Bobbitt, Craig Hanna, and their son Sang sold their home and moved from Glen Echo in August. Michael wrote on the listserv: “It is with great sadness that Sang and I inform you that we are leaving this beautiful town on Saturday, the 26th. We are not moving far … near Bethesda Metro. Of course, I will still be at Adventure Theatre and Sang will be finishing school at Whitman. It has been a pleasure raising him amongst you all. Thank you for 14 great years.” It’s always sad to see good neighbors go. Best of luck!

The Healthy Kids Running series is starting September 17. There are races every Sunday at 3:30 PM at the Cabin John Park next to the Clara Barton Community Center through October 15. There are races for kids ages 2 through 8th grade, healthy snacks provided, and a medal for all participants. At $35 (for five races) and within walking distance, it’s pretty low impact for a fun
family activity. Many Glen Echo families participate each year and the organizer, Kathleen Wolf, is a former Bryn Mawr resident.

As you may be aware, Glen Echo Fire Department was founded in 1931 as a direct response to a tragic fire in 1930 that killed five members of the Moxley family in their home, located where the Irish Inn now stands. John Witherspoon, the president of the fire department, is looking for information about the incident, including details about the family, property records, accounts of the fire, photos, etc. If you have anything you could share, please contact him at john.witherspoon@gefd.org.

Real Estate Report
Not much new here. The commercial property at 6110 Oberlin Avenue is still listed at $1,999,995, and 2 Vassar Circle is still listed as a single-home residential property for $2,750,000. 30 Wellesley Circle listed at $775,000 is under contract, and 6005 Princeton Avenue listed at $999,900 is also under contract.

As you may be aware, Glen Echo Town Hall Events

FSGW English Country Dance, Wednesdays, September 6, 13, 20, 27
8–10:30 PM, free to Town residents

Local Events
September 12 5–6 PM, Free yoga class for teens aged 11 and up at Simon Says Yoga

September 16 2 PM, Cabin John’s 48th Annual Chicken and Crab Feast at the Clara Barton Center

Glen Echo Park Activities
Dentzel Carousel $1.25 a ride, in September: Sat.–Sun. 11 AM–5 PM (Carousel also open during concerts and other events.)

September 1 6–8 PM, Art Walk in the Park, First Friday of each month through September, open studios and artist demonstrations throughout the Park

September 2–4 12–6 PM, Labor Day Art Show in the Spanish Ballroom

September 3 3–5 PM, The Folklore Society of Greater Washington presents a Family Dance in the Spanish Ballroom’s back room, $5

September 4 1–6 PM, Irish Music and Dance Showcase in the Bumper Car Pavilion

September 10 1–3 PM, Nordic Folk Dancing in the Bumper Car Pavilion

September 30 10 AM–1 PM, Saturday morning parents’ swing dance in the Ballroom Back Room, $8, but kids under 13 free

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