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D.C. activists sound off on constitution

By **CUNEYT DIL**
Current Correspondent

Hundreds of Washingtonians turned out for two constitutional convention events over the weekend to give their say on how the District should function as a state, completing the final round of public comment in the re-energized push for statehood.

The conventions, intended to hear out practical tweaks to a draft constitution released last month, brought passionate speeches, and even songs, for the cause. The events at Wilson High School in Tenleytown featured guest speakers and politicians calling on the city to seize recent momentum for statehood. Many residents agreed the 51st state should have a larger legislature, and others suggested diluting certain proposed powers of the executive, such as the line-item veto.

On the other hand, a sizable portion of residents took issue with the convention process, which instead of using elected, voting delegates gave any attend- See **Statehood**/Page 5

HERE'S LOOKING AT YOU, KID



Brian Kapur/The Current

The all-volunteer Picnic Theatre Company presented a performance of "Casablanca," based on the 1942 silver screen classic, at Georgetown's Dumbarton House last Wednesday, Thursday and Friday.

Historic district vision faces debate in Burleith

■ **Preservation:** Residents divided at recent meeting

By **MARK LIEBERMAN**
Current Staff Writer

Burleith took a tentative step toward historic district designation at a community meeting Thursday — but not everyone was immediately won over by the prospect.

More than 40 residents of the residential neighborhood, which lies north and west of Georgetown, turned out for a presentation from the Burleith Citizens Asso-

ciation with assistance from Kim Williams of the D.C. Historic Preservation Office. The goal of the presentation, citizens association members said, was to gather community sentiments and address questions about the implications of an application. Many at the meeting appeared open to the benefits of historic designation, while some grumbled that the presentation focused too narrowly on positive ramifications and not enough on potential negative ones.

Neighborhood feedback is crucial to the process of becoming a historic district, Williams said during the meeting. See **Burleith**/Page 2

Shelter site neighbors seek greater study, public input

■ **Homelessness:** Cheh defends selection process

By **BRADY HOLT**
Current Staff Writer

Residents near the proposed Ward 3 homeless shelter location are increasing their criticisms of the D.C. Council's site selection process. A new citizens group and the area's advisory neighborhood commission are both calling for further study of the plan for 3320 Idaho Ave. NW.

The council approved the Idaho site — now a parking lot behind the Metropolitan Police Department's 2nd District Headquarters — after rejecting Mayor Muriel Bowser's original plans to lease land at Wisconsin Avenue and Edmunds Street NW. Council members concluded that it was fiscally imprudent to enter into costly leases with private developers and instead chose to use the government-owned police site.

The effort is part of the broader push, widely supported in principle, to close the D.C. General family shelter and distribute short-term homeless services to smaller



Brian Kapur/The Current

The shelter would replace the parking lot behind the station.

facilities around the city. But in several neighborhoods, the specific sites selected have come under fire for various reasons.

Ward 3 Council member Mary Cheh said the deciding factor for Bowser's Ward 3 site proposal was its price tag, not community fears about the shelter's impacts.

"When you want to put in a facility for homeless families, wherever you're going to put it, it seems it's inevitable there will be some who object," Cheh said in an interview. "The key factor was See **Shelter**/Page 5

ANC backs Rite Aid liquor compromise

By **BRADY HOLT**
Current Staff Writer

Glover Park's Rite Aid pharmacy staved off a fight with the community's advisory neighborhood commission last Thursday by signing an agreement that limits its hours of planned alcohol sales and establishes other operational requirements.

The compromise position was an abrupt end to strong neighborhood opposition against Rite Aid selling beer, wine and spirits at its new 2255 Wisconsin Ave. NW location. ANC 3B had asked the Alcoholic Beverage Control Board earlier this year to renew a moratorium on new liquor store licenses in the neighborhood, but the



Brian Kapur/Current file photo

The settlement agreement will go before the Alcoholic Beverage Control Board later this year.

board declined to do so, clearing the way for Rite Aid to apply for a license.

ANC 3B chair Jackie Blumenthal said at her commission's June

16 meeting that her "first instinct" was to file a protest against Rite Aid's application, but when the pharmacy approached her to discuss the settlement agreement, she concluded it was best to compromise. The commission unanimously approved the settlement agreement without public debate.

Under the agreement, which will still need approval from the alcohol board later this year, Rite Aid can sell alcohol from 9 a.m. to 11 p.m. daily, rather than the maximum legal hours of 7 a.m. to midnight it had originally sought. Outside those hours, the checkout counters would be programmed to not allow alcohol sales, and wine and spirits would be blocked off See **Agreement**/Page 14

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Hotel reopens

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PASSAGES

East meets West

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Pitching ace

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BURLEITH: Residents split over historic district concept

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ing her presentation. The Historic Preservation Office can't initiate an application on a neighborhood's behalf, and broad community consensus is among the biggest factors in the final vote on the application. Applications in Chevy Chase, Barney Circle, Eckington and Brookland faltered in recent years because the communities couldn't reach agreement, she said.

The Burleith Citizens Association has renewed its research on historic districts after a previous attempt in 2005 stalled because the cost appeared prohibitive. Development in the neighborhood has spiked in recent years as Georgetown University students have moved on campus and investors have come in seeking to snap up and expand former rental homes.

Thursday's meeting was the second of three information-gathering presentations for the community, with the third one scheduled for September.

Williams said benefits of the process include preserving historic buildings, recycling old buildings for new uses and involving the community in managing change. Peter Sefton from the DC Preservation League added that he's seen property values remain steady, and

even increase, once a neighborhood transforms into an historic district.

Numerous residents expressed support for the application process during the meeting, noting that they want to preserve the aesthetic characteristics that made them eager to move there in the first place.

But the presentation didn't assuage every concern. Walter Hillabrant, a 38th Street NW resident who has lived in the community for more than 40 years, told *The Current* before the meeting that, even with input from the community, he doesn't necessarily want the government deciding what he can do to his home.

"It's not like it's chaotic out there. There are regulations in existence," Hillabrant said. "Some people have complained they're not enforced. They perhaps should be enforced. But that doesn't necessarily mean they should be supplanted."

Hillabrant's neighbor Sheila Hegy also expressed trepidation about the long-term effects of discouraging development and growth. She said she's happy to see young families moving into the neighborhood and doesn't want to see that trend halt. She's also concerned that the \$25,000 application process to become a historic district will put an unne-



Photos by Alex Frederick

Some Burleith residents want to protect the community's 1920s row houses from major expansions or alterations.

cessary burden on the community.

"I'm not necessarily opposed to historic districts," Hegy said. "I'm just not sure if it's right for Burleith."

Richard Parker, who moved into Burleith last year, expressed concern that restricting development on the front-facing portions of nearby houses would push more expansion projects to the rear. That trend is a possibility, Williams conceded.

Burleith's oldest house dates back to 1803, Carol Baume, co-chair of the citizens association's Historic Designation Committee said at Thursday's meeting. Notable guests in the neighborhood have included George Washington and Harriet Tubman, and notable buildings have included a convent

for a cloistered order of nuns, a home for incorrigible girls and a home for former slaves. When developer Shannon & Luchs built most of today's Burleith in the 1920s, it laid out the blocks symmetrically with distinctive house designs at the center and corners of each row.

Preserving that history won't mean keeping the neighborhood stagnant, said Lenore Rubino, the other co-chair of the Historic Designation Committee. She pointed out that the high demand for real estate across the city means that, even with designation, development is likely to continue to keep the neighborhood vibrant and healthy in the years to come.

"There's a demand for housing that's unprecedented," Rubino

said at the meeting. "I don't see developers not wanting to develop here. They're looking for as many opportunities as possible."

Should the neighborhood choose to move forward, it will have support from Ward 2 D.C. Council member Jack Evans, who told *The Current* that he thinks Burleith is well-positioned for designation.

"It's really up to the neighborhood to decide whether they want to pursue it or not," Evans said. "We have a lot of historic districts in Ward 2, and they all work very well."

The citizens association will bring architects to the September meeting for more detailed discussions of specific homes in the neighborhood.

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