

BEFORE THE DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA ZONING COMMISSION
CASE NO. 02-19

[Text amendment - Forest Hills Tree & Slope Protection Overlay]

ON BEHALF OF ANC 3F and SMD 3F02

27 June 2002

Chair Mitten, members of the Commission. My name is Karen Perry. The last time I appeared before the Zoning Commission I was working for the National Association of Home Builders seeking to change their SP zoning in order to allow the Association to build a larger headquarters building. Even though I would like to believe I'm still nineteen, in the 20 plus years I worked for the Association I was programmed to believe that old growth forests made nice homes and beautiful floors; that the Spotted Owl could find another tree; and that private property rights cases and restrictive zoning cases needed to be funded in all 50 states.

Then two years ago along came Clark Construction and 3883 Connecticut Avenue. It was an eye opener for me, for many residents of North Cleveland Park and Forest Hills, and the beginning of the Tree and Slope Overlay and the reason we are here tonight. Until Clark Construction applied for a permit to build a ninety-foot highrise on a stream adjacent to Melvin Hazen Park on the Melvin Hazen Trail, many of us took for granted our environment, our setting, and the importance of our natural resources. As more and more trees fell, residents and the ANC tried to have input during the building permit process to no avail. Clark filled out an environmental assessment form stating there were no large trees, no streams, and no historic buildings and the Department of Health signed off on their form. Reporters flooded the site holding up the falsified form, citizens chained themselves to the trees and were arrested by the police and taken to jail. The National Park Service wrote letters to DCRA, the Sierra Club wrote letters, residents signed petitions, and several Council members requested an Environmental Impact Statement. The Army Corps of Engineers cited Clark for a violation of the Clean Water Act in that they graded and grubbed the ravine which contains waters of the U.S. of an unnamed tributary of Rock Creek and ordered them to stop the placement of fill material in waters of the United States and to erect a super silt fence ASAP. Clark never stopped work and never applied for the permit.

This was an R-5-D property and everyone agreed a building was appropriate. All the residents and the ANC asked for was a chance to be heard and for a level of review because of the Park. But, as we learned, just three little words in the zoning code --- matter of right --- meant a property owner could do what they wanted including clear-cutting the land or cementing over an entire site. Trees that survived more than 100 years could not survive the D.C. building permit process. Saddest of all is that not only did Clark clear cut the trees on the R-5-D property, but they clear cut all of the heavily wooded site of an R-2 lot on Tilden Street adjacent to the Park, even though they indicated they had no plans to build on it and might sell the lot.

This is not an anti-development overlay and no lot will be unbuildable under the overlay. It might mean learning to adopt new ways of building, such as the principles espoused by the architects and builders committed to "Building Green," it might also mean learning to use the

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many new materials on the market to create permeable surfaces, and it might mean using bio-retention systems and rain gardens. But this will enhance the landscape of Forest Hills and provide a benefit under the Clean Water and Clean Air Acts to the City. Contrary to many rumors about Ward 3, we do not discriminate between R-1 properties and R-2 and R-5 properties. This overlay was truly designed to protect all properties that border Rock Creek Park, Soapstone Park, and the other smaller parks and stream beds thus protecting our Federal Parks and a natural resource for all residents and visitors. It is an overlay designed to ensure a level of review for all residents and it is an overlay that is consistent with the Ward 3 Comprehensive Plan.

The Office of Planning has quoted from some sections of the Ward 3 Comprehensive Plan, but then switched to the more generalized Comprehensive Plan for the city. But the Ward 3 Plan trumps the more generalized plan and focuses on issues unique to Ward 3 and states that "the Ward 3 Plan interprets the Comprehensive Plan's more general objectives and policies." The Ward 3 Plan states that development adjacent to parks which are designated landmarks must be low density and shall be further restricted to protect unstable soils, eliminate runoff potential, and promote a green buffer between the built environment and these natural settings; development must avoid any adverse effect (known or plausibly suspected) on these landmarks, including the water quality, flora, and fauna, and should minimize any intrusion on views from these parks. The Plan states that Ward 3 is already built and cites the development the swaths of green space fronting many apartment buildings, particularly along Connecticut Avenue, and the few large interior spaces of certain blocks, such as those behind some apartment buildings on Connecticut Avenue, as examples of inappropriate infill locations.

The Ward 3 Housing Element also differs from the Generalized Comprehensive Plan used by OP. Our plan states that there is little vacant property available for development and that the vacant parcels that do exist are small in size and even in the aggregate are not suitable for significant development of new housing in the ward and it channels that new housing to four housing opportunity areas -- the Miller Tract in Spring Valley, the Tenleytown Metro Station Area, Whitehaven Woods, and Friendship Heights. None of these areas are covered by the overlay.

Attached to my testimony is 7 pages of excerpts from the Ward 3 Comprehensive Plan, all supporting the Overlay and the inclusion of all properties, whether R-1-A or R-5.

I'm sure you will hear much about process tonight from some opposing the overlay. I want to assure the Commission that this Overlay process was fair and open to all residents of the Ward. I will say the same thing here tonight that I said the night our ANC took the vote supporting the overlay with amendments. Many years ago, probably 15 or so, residents wanted an overlay. That process was killed by some of the same comments about lack of citizen involvement and there was a promise then, that a more broad-range group would get together and redesign the overlay. That never happened. Then there were ANC meetings and citizen involvement in all layers of the process developing the Ward 3 Comprehensive Plan that calls for an overlay to protect border areas to the parks. Then more than a year ago, our ANC, following a public meeting with David Murphy from the National Park Service, proposed the creation of a Tree and Slope Committee open to all residents. Announcements for involvement were made

every month at our meetings, progress reports were given, and the discussions were covered by the Northwest Current. I read every letter and e-mail, pro overlay and against the overlay, that I received and I went to the voting meeting prepared to hear from residents with ideas for amending the overlay, but none were offered. There were public meetings, residents in the overlay district all received notices of the proposed overlay and were invited to a public meeting. David Bardin and George Clark met individually with each property owner that expressed a concern and amended the filed overlay to address concerns. However, all I heard was process and that the overlay was filed prematurely, reminiscent of the discussions and promises made many years ago that killed the Overlay. As a fourth term ANC Commissioner, I don't know how you get citizen involvement, other than when the inappropriate development is next door to their house, unless we go back to the caveman days of clubbing people over the head and dragging them from their homes. Private property rights advocates will never accept any controls. There never would have been a good time to move the Overlay forward. And, as much as I hate testifying and going to the BZA, I also know that many issues, no matter how many meetings you have, cannot be resolved except by the BZA or Zoning Commission.

My single member district contains several of the properties that OP wants to exclude. In 1989, Bill 8-379, closed Windom Place, N.W., east of Connecticut Avenue and adjacent to Square 2049 and U.S. Reservation 402 (Soapstone Valley Park). The applicants were the Van Ness North Cooperative and the Van Ness East Condominium. Both buildings at the same time through a land covenant, deeded land to the Park Service. Van Ness East, Square 2049, is fully developed as a condominium. They want to be included in the Overlay. This property adjoins Rock Creek Park, is heavily wooded and sloped, and contains a ravine that feeds the Park. If this property does not deserve protection, nothing does. Howard University, also in this square, is also in my District. They have not objected to the Overlay. The campus plan for this property contains a condition stating that "Howard University Law School shall maintain the portion of the West Campus bordering Soapstone Valley Park as open space for the term of this West Campus Plan, consistent with the Parks and Open Space Element of the Comprehensive Plan.

Square 2046, a C-3-A property is also in my Single Member District. They have not objected to the overlay. This property was the subject of Zoning Commission Order No. 464, which states that the PUD site is constrained in that the National Park Service has a fifty foot easement along the east side of the site and that the PUD site has unique characteristics in its limited buildable area due to the easement and the fact that the eastern portion of the PUD site drops sharply into Soapstone Valley Park. This property also contains a covenant limiting the percentage of lot occupancy not to exceed 60 percent, along with the construction and maintenance of a mini-park area.

In addition to the Ward 3 Plan supporting inclusion of these properties, the Comprehensive Plan for the National Capital in the Parks, Open Space and Natural Features section states that the basic thrust of planning policies pertaining to Parks and Open Space lands is that of protection, conservation and enhancement. It also identifies Soapstone Valley Park as a Natural Park and states a specific policy: "The narrow threads of natural green areas throughout the District, like Whitehaven Parkway, Klingle Valley Parkway, Glover-Archbald Park, Soapstone Valley Park or Piney Branch Parkway, should be protected and maintained to provide green background and Open Space amenity for the residential areas of the city. These natural

areas should be protected from border development that would adversely impact their natural quality. The use of set back and height controls and the donation of scenic easements or the transfer of development rights from adjacent land owners to ensure protection should be encouraged.”

Before excluding these properties, I would ask you not to just look at a map or look at arbitrary zoning regulation that apply to the whole City and not the heavily wooded and sloped Forest Hills, but to come out to the Ward and look at the properties we are trying to protect. I think you will agree that they deserve the protection afforded under the Tree and Slope Overlay.

I would also like to enter into the record, three articles I have attached to my testimony. One entitled Home, Gargantuan Home, from the Washington Post. I don't know where the person who wrote the article lives, but it expresses everything I've heard at our ANC meetings as we have dealt with projects on a case-by-case basis. The second from the Northwest Current about an architect in our Ward that “Builds Green” and the benefits for such development to the environment and the cost-savings to the homeowners. And the third, also from the Northwest Current, that refers to a recent survey from the National Association of Home Builders that says, resale buyers are “more likely to favor the city's open space, gardens and easy-walking access to shared recreation space and that resale buyers prefer mature trees and in-place community services.”

EXCERPTS FROM THE District of Columbia Municipal Regulations

Title 10, Chapter 14

Ward 3, Planning and Development

Proposed Tree and Slope Overlay

1402 Ward 3 Housing

1402.1 Preface:

(f) Thus, the major public policy issue confronting the ward is the prevention of further displacement of residents, particularly those with low- and moderate-income, as a result of redevelopment, conversions, and escalating taxes.

(g) There is little vacant property available for development. The vacant parcels that do exist are small in size (available for what planners term “infill” development), and even in the aggregate are not suitable for significant development of new housing in the ward. However, there is underutilized land in the ward that should be the focus for the development of new housing; these areas have been designated in the Land Use Element as housing opportunity areas.

(h) While new housing is needed, all development proposals must be evaluated to avoid adverse impacts on neighborhood stability, traffic, parking, and environmental quality.

1403 Ward 3 Environment

1403.1 Preface:

(b) There is a general need for improved planning for, and management of, the ward’s natural resources. The ward shares the city’s need for improved air and water quality, solid waste management, quality of land, environmental health and sanitation, water and energy conservation, food production and urban gardens.

(c) Ward 3, unlike most of the city’s other wards, is characterized by open spaces, an abundance of greenery, and a predominantly low density built environment. The ward covers 5, 986 acres (excluding public rights-of way) of which about half is parkland (including Rock Creek Park (and tributary valleys), Zoological Park, Glover Parkway and Children’s Playground, Whitehaven Parkway, Battery Kemble, and the C & O Canal).

(d) Ward 3 has the lowest population density in the city: sixteen (16) persons per acre for the ward as a whole and twenty-eight (28) persons per acre in residential areas. The categorization of environmental issues in this Ward 3 Plan follows the organization of the Environmental Protection Element of the Comprehensive Plan, and therefore certain issues may not be found easily. For instance, the need to protect parkland from incompatible development adjacent to park borders is discussed under the objective for water quality and the need to promote tree landscaping is discussed in part under the objectives for air quality and energy conservation.

(e) It is essential that future growth and change be sensitive to the protection and enhancement of the total environment. The existing environment should not just be maintained, but must be improved.

1403.2 Relation of Ward 3 to the declaration of major policies in the Environmental Protection Element of the Comprehensive Plan: Because the Comprehensive Plan does not contemplate substantial economic development in Ward 3, the environmental policies of this ward plan are less a response to planned growth, change, and renewal, and are more a direction for improving the environmental quality of an already-built ward.

1403.3 Environmental Protection Goals: The preservation and improvement of the environmental qualities of Ward 3, including maintenance and enhancement of the park and open space system, protection of its healthful verdancy, and encouragement of design solutions that promote both conservation and improvement of the ward's resources, are the primary environmental goals for Ward 3.

1403.4 Improving water quality objectives and policies: The District government should do the following:

(b) Require strict controls in connection with construction to prevent soil erosion that may directly or indirectly (via storm sewers) cause sedimentation of the ward's streams; such controls could often include sedimentation ponds, which may need to be permanent:

1. Promote an increase in plantings (particularly trees but also shrubbery) and encourage the use of permeable surfaces for parking lots, driveways, etc. to reduce storm runoff;

2. Map the Tree & Slope Protection overlay in hilly areas throughout the ward in addition to Woodland-Normanstone; and

3. Evaluate storm water outfalls in the ward's stream valleys; link the approval of development projects to the improvement of affected outfalls, with the objective of improving, not just maintaining, the quality of water runoff; and

(c) Identify and protect wetlands areas on private land, usually to be found proximate to the ward's stream valley parks; not only should this be accomplished by an official survey of the ward when government resources permit, but this must be an application requirement for individual development proposals.

1403.5 Improving air quality objective and policies:

(d) There must be an aggressive policy to replace trees (both public and private) and to plant additional trees. A healthy, verdant urban forest provides numerous environmental benefits, including better climate and air quality that result from the cleansing of automobile exhaust and the production of oxygen through photosynthesis.

1403.7 Protecting the quality of the land areas objective and policies:

- (a) The overall environmental quality of the ward's land areas can be protected by doing the following:

- (1) Requiring that any construction preserve natural features;
- (2) Promoting extensive planting, especially of trees; if the plantings are a condition to a permit, then there shall be a proviso to include a reasonable requirement for landscape maintenance; and
- (3) Minimizing any development adjacent or proximate to the ward's stream valley parks (e.g., Rock Creek Park) that infringes on views from the park, creates erosion or sedimentation problems, adversely affects or is plausibly suspected to adversely affect flora or fauna, or that has any negative impact on the parkland.

- (b) All discretionary construction approvals should be conditioned on an affirmative answer to the question: does the proposed project provide a net gain for the ward environmentally.

1403.9 Conserving energy objective and policies: Two of the policies in support of other environmental objectives for Ward 3 also further the conserving energy objective for the ward:

- (a) An aggressive campaign to protect trees and promote new plantings; and
- (b) Encouraging the use of permeable surfaces for parking lots, driveways, etc. (because permeable surfaces maintain water tables and, depending on design, may allow ground cover such as grass to grow upon it). A healthy urban forest mitigates heat island effect and reduces energy demand such as for indoor air conditioning.

1404 Ward 3 Transportation

1404.2 Relation of Ward 3 to the declaration of major policies in the Transportation Element of the Comprehensive Plan:

- (f) Ward 3 is primarily a residential ward, and is not targeted in the Comprehensive Plan as a location for significant economic development (except for three housing opportunity areas). Because of this, and because of the already-built nature of the ward's transportation system, transportation impacts must be a critical factor in the review of development plans and approval of building permits.

1406 Ward 3 Urban Design

1406.1 Preface:

- (a) Urban design is an aspect of public and private activity that can significantly contribute to the quality of life in the urban environment.

- (d) Continuing development in Ward 3 requires conscious consideration of urban design to ensure that the quality of life is maintained or improved. Factors such as pedestrian amenities, streetscape design, compatibility and sensitivity to the scale of existing buildings, maintenance of environmental quality, integration of new development with existing area or neighborhood quality, and transitions between land uses are all areas of concern in Ward 3.

1406.2 Relation of Ward 3 to the declaration of major policies in the Urban Design Element of the Comprehensive Plan.

- (a) Areas of Ward 3 that deserve special attention to urban design issues include: the special streets, historic districts, the immediate environs of the numerous individual historic landmarks and sites, the commercial centers, and any areas with significant environmental or topographical features including the Palisades, Woodland-Normanstone, Tenleytown and Fort Reno, and Forest Hills.
- (d) Land use and future development must be carefully controlled to protect the existing scale and low density character, and to enhance the maintenance and improvement of existing natural open spaces and other qualities of the ward.

1406.5 Objectives and policies for the natural environment, areas with severe building restraints, and streams and stream valleys:

- (a) Areas in Ward 3 that are environmentally valuable and sensitive to urban development include the following:
 - 5. Stream valleys, which include Rock Creek Park (and its tributaries) and Glover Archbold Park: Development adjacent to these parks must be low density and shall be further restricted where advisable to protect unstable soils, eliminate runoff potential, and promote a green buffer between the built environment and these natural settings. Development of border areas must avoid any adverse effect (known or plausibly suspected) on the stream valley parks, including the water quality, flora and fauna, and should minimize any intrusion on views from these parks;
 - 6. Neighborhoods developed over hilly terrain or near stream valleys (such as Barnaby Woods, Forest Hills, Hawthorne, Palisades, Spring Valley and Woodland Normanstone): Urban design should respect and perpetuate the natural features, low density, and usually wooded character of these built areas.
- (b) Appropriate design solutions include the following:
 - (1) Limit density of development adjacent to natural areas, areas with severe building restraints, or stream valleys; maintain park-like settings on streets and lands adjacent to the natural areas and stream valleys, and require ample building setbacks.

- (5) Encourage retention of natural growth and grades; minimize regrading or the removal of topsoil and vegetation; establish new vegetation, especially trees.
- (6) Minimize the construction of impervious surfaces; promote permeable materials for driveways, walkways, parking lots, and the like.
- (7) No streams in the ward should be channeled or culverted.

1406.9 Objectives and policies for areas of strong architectural character and areas of stable character include the following design guidelines:

- (a) **Height:** Relate the overall height of new construction (including additions) to that of adjacent structures. Avoid new construction that greatly varies in height (too high or too low) from older buildings in the vicinity;
- (b) **Scale:** Relate the size and proportions of new construction to the scale of adjacent buildings. New construction should maintain the scale of existing buildings, regardless of size. Avoid new construction, which in height, width, or massing violates the existing scale of the area,
- (c) **Massing:** Box-like facades and forms are intrusive when placed in a streetscape of older buildings which have varied massing and facade articulation;
- (d) **Directional expression:** Relate the vertical, horizontal, or non-directional facade character of new construction to the predominant directional expression of nearby buildings. Avoid strongly horizontal or vertical facade expressions unless compatible with the character of structures in the immediate area;
- (e) **Setback:** Maintain the historic facade lines of streetscapes by location front walls of new construction in the same plane as the facades of adjacent buildings. If exceptions are made, buildings should be set back into the lot rather than closer to the street. If existing setbacks vary, new buildings should conform to historic siting patterns. Avoid violating the existing setback pattern by placing new construction in front of or behind the historic facade line. Avoid placing buildings at odd angles to the street, unless in an area where diverse siting already exists, even if proper setback is maintained;
- (f) **Roof shapes:** Relate the roof forms of new construction to those found in the area. Although not entirely necessary, duplication of the existing or traditional roof shapes, pitches and materials on new construction is one way of making new structures more visually compatible. Avoid introducing roof shapes, pitches or materials not traditionally used in the area;
- (g) **Rhythm of openings:** Avoid introducing incompatible facade patterns which upset the rhythm of openings established in surrounding structures; and
- (h) **Material:**
 - 1. Use building materials that match or harmonize with the materials predominant in the area or adjacent structures;

2. Commercial development and high-density residential adjacent to residential districts, particularly low-density, must provide buffers to mitigate adverse effects (which may include the shadows, noise, odors, traffic congestion, etc.);
3. Encourage the renovation and adaptive re-use of existing structures rather than demolition in Ward 3;
4. As a general rule, it is inappropriate to erect fences or walls in front yards. The residential neighborhoods of Ward 3 are characterized by open spaces and building setbacks;
5. Superior design is a prerequisite amenity for all development projects in the ward that are reviewed through the Planned Unit Development or R-5-A processes of the Zoning Regulations or through the Large Tract Review; and
6. The Historic Preservation Review Board may review and make recommendations on the design of new development in local neighborhood centers adjacent to one of the ward's historic districts.

Section 1407 Ward 3 Preservation and Historic Features

1407.1 Preface:

(c) Structures throughout Ward 3 are relatively new compared to the average age of structures in the original city of Washington. There are, however, a number of old and historic structures, as well as classes of structures such as apartment buildings and bridges, that have been designated or present possibilities for historic designations. Historic areas or features in Ward 3 include: Rock Creek Park.... the Carnegie Department of Terrestrial Magnetism on Broad Branch Road....the Pine Crest/Greystone/Klingbe Mansion cluster of houses near Rock Creek, ...

1407.3 Development adjacent to parks which are designated landmarks must be low density and shall be further restricted where advisable to protect unstable soils, eliminate runoff potential, and promote a green buffer between the built environment and these natural settings; development must avoid any adverse effect (known or plausibly suspected) on these landmarks, including the water quality, flora, and fauna, and should minimize any intrusion on views from these parks.

Section 1409 Ward 3 Land Use

1409.1 Preface

(a) The overall protection and enhancement of established residential and commercial areas are the primary objectives of the District's land use policy for Ward 3.

(c) Parks, recreation, and open space comprise the second largest land use in Ward 3. This mostly wilderness, natural resource has a significant influence on quality of life in Ward 3.

(h) The current land use character of the ward - which is reflected in the Comprehensive Plan without change - has created a value in the land and attracted an affluence in population that contributes substantially to the District's tax base.

1409.2 Relation of Ward 3 to the declaration of major policies in the Land Use Element of the Comprehensive Plan. The objectives for land use/zoning in Ward 3 are as follows:

- (a) Maintain the existing land use character of the ward;
- (b) Protect existing residential neighborhoods and enhance their qualities;
- (l) Ensure that land use does not exceed the capacity of the Ward's infrastructure.

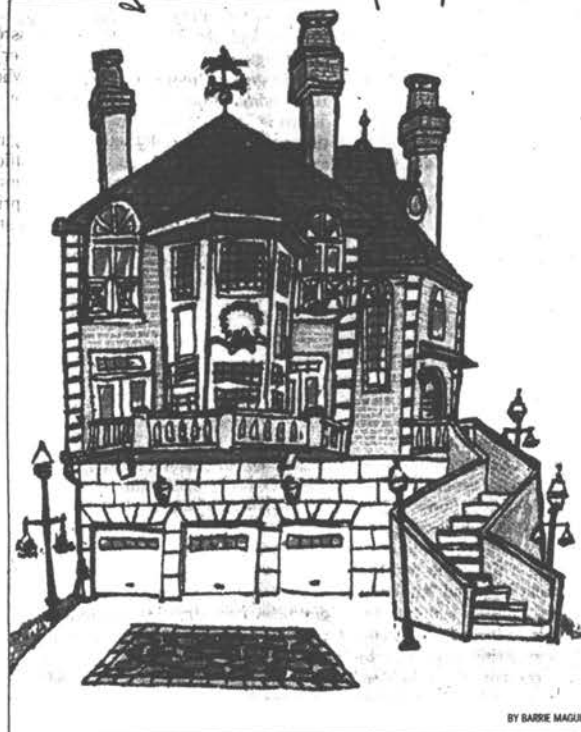
1409.4 Residential neighborhood objectives, policies, and actions are as follows:

(a) Infill development and future breakup of the few remaining large estates present the only other important potentials for residential development in the ward. Much of this is likely to be controversial - a reason to do the following:

- (1) Encourage interest in and direct development to the housing opportunity areas.
- (3) Ensure stringent protection against infill at inappropriate locations as follows:
 - (A) Careful controls include ensuring consistency with policies in the Comprehensive Plan including the environment, transportation, urban design, and preservation and historic features sections of this Ward plan to avoid adverse effects and promote desirable amenities; and
 - (B) Examples of inappropriate infill locations include the swaths of green space fronting many apartment buildings, particularly along Connecticut Avenue; the few large interior spaces of certain blocks, such as those behind some apartment buildings on Connecticut Avenue; and on very large lots in single-family neighborhoods.

(b) Several areas in the ward, because of their existing low density and "park-like" setting, require land use controls in addition to the requirements of R-1 zoning.

(2) The Tree & Slope Protection Overlay should be considered and adapted for other park-like, hilly areas such as the Potomac Palisades and the portions of the Forest Hills and Barnaby Woods neighborhoods adjacent to Rock Creek.



Home, Gargantuan Home

Washington and its surrounding counties feature a gently sloping terrain that is forested by a splendid array of trees. Each spring, a gray woodland blossoms into dogwood and redbud, and the soft green leaves of huge oaks swiftly shade the ground. And each year, we see the havoc wreaked on this beauty by the builders and owners of Washington's suburban manses.

When the first bedroom communities sprang up around Washington in the '30s and '40s, houses were scaled appropriately to the size of their lots and managed to incorporate some craftsmanship into their details. But today's builders and homeowners seem wedded to oversized and out-of-scale houses that consume all but a few feet of their lots. They seem to be following a universal and perverse set of guidelines:

First, avoid studying the details of fine homes in our region's older communities. These homes, while pretentious upon occasion, rarely appear massive even when their rooms are generous enough to host the extended family for Thanksgiving dinner. Shun the neighborhoods of Chevy Chase, Rosemont, Lyon Village, Takoma Park and American University Park as bad influences.

Second, freely mix design elements. People don't want to be stuck with one style of house

anymore, so merge periods, preferably erring on the side of including elements of the Queen Anne or Victorian style. And remember that turrets go with everything and offer the perfect setting for that old bean-bag chair.

Third, think brass, brass and more brass. Shiny brass fixtures should adorn not just the facade of the manse but its lanes and walkways too.

Fourth, don't waste money on the approach to the house. Although the land may have cost \$1 million and the house \$2.5 million, economies can be realized on the site plan. Black asphalt should ooze from the street directly to the front door with plenty of turnaround room for the SUV. The driveway also should lead to a five-car garage, which can serve as the point of arrival for family members and guests.

Fifth, raze as many trees as possible. Cutting down trees has a double benefit: Not only do passersby get an unobstructed view of all the prosperous details of the house—right down to the mortar on the seventh chimney and the brass door numbers—but also leaf-raking costs are reduced drastically.

Sixth, scale back the landscaping. Install the smallest shrubs possible—the kind sold in strip mall parking lots at 10 for \$29. In 30 or 40 years, a

garden will emerge just in time for the latest Potomac River bridge crossing to consume the property whole. Also, consider mulch as the ideal garden element. In the past, ground cover and perennial beds formed a tier below the trees and shrubs, but mulching is now acceptable in lieu of plants. If spread eight inches thick, it eliminates the need to plant any of the many ground covers that thrive in the area's fair climate.

Seventh, fence the lot. Dividing the neighborhood's common landscape will define the property and help the surveyor when it's time to sell. Deer and other wildlife also enjoy the challenge of negotiating a chain-link fence.

Last, name the house. What was good enough for George Washington is good enough for today's suburbanite. The name Mount Vernon has been taken, but Manderley has a certain ring to it.

Following these guidelines will guarantee the creation of a made-to-order manse, but if our offspring are lucky, in a few decades the shrubbery will grow tall enough to mask these mishaps of the new millennium.

—Brian Kane
is a landscape architect.

WEST BUSINESS

Local architect designs 'green' houses

By CHRISTOPHER ANDERSON
Current Correspondent

It ain't easy being green, or so the song goes. But Rick Schneider, a certified green architect and Glover Park resident, disagrees.

Green, or environmentally friendly, architectural design and construction is a trend in home building that Schneider believes is becoming more and more attractive to D.C. homeowners.

Green architects like Schneider look for creative ways to design homes and other buildings that are easier on the environment than old methods. But, said Schneider, the environment isn't the only beneficiary of green design.

"I tell clients right up front three reasons to go green," Schneider said. "One, it's better for the environment. Two, it's better for your health. Three, it's usually better for your wallet."

That cost can also make green design attractive comes as a surprise to many homeowners, Schneider said. The up-front costs of the design and building may sometimes be more expensive, he said, but that's not always the case. "Sometimes these things aren't any



A rooftop garden or "green roof" reduces rainwater runoff and cuts energy costs.

more expensive than any other way of designing."

Often, Schneider said, homeowners continue to save money long after construction or renovation is completed because of increased energy efficiency. "They might spend a little more up front, but gain that back within a year and continue the savings over time," he said.

Green design can also reduce the environmental impact of building, Schneider said, through a variety of strategies. They include choosing the right materials, like certified lumber that is not from clear-cut or old-growth trees; avoiding vinyl in flooring and other

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areas; and reducing storm-water runoff with landscaping.

Green design, Schneider added, can improve homeowner health by reducing the presence of toxic materials in the house, through use of paints with low levels of volatile organic compounds for better air quality and pressure-treated wood that does not contain arsenic.

Schneider's own home is a showcase of green design, or sustainable architecture, as it's sometimes called. The location itself is one key element. "One of the reasons my wife and I decided to live in the city was to be green," he said. "If we want to save our wild areas, we need to save our cities. So we live a lifestyle that allows us to walk, bike, as much as we can."

Inside the house, Schneider used paints low in volatile organic compounds and water-borne sealers on wood floors instead of polyurethane. The kitchen cabinets are made of formaldehyde-free particleboard and sustainably harvested wood, and the original cabinets were used in the woodshop rather than thrown away. Large windows take advantage of natural light and prevailing breezes to cool the house, reducing energy consumption that would be needed for artificial lighting and heating and cooling.

The yard includes indigenous plants that need little extra watering and few pesticides. A recycling area in the back of the house includes a compost box to turn organic kitchen

waste into nutrient-rich soil.

Schneider's home also houses his business, iStudio Design. The firm, started two years ago, includes two partners — a landscape architect and a community outreach specialist — allowing it to provide a full array of design services. At the heart of the firm, Schneider said, is a commitment to community process and sustainable design.

One of the firm's first projects was a community playground on Girard Street in Columbia Heights. The project was done in conjunction with the D.C. Parks and Recreation Department.

"As opposed to waiting for clients to come with us, we are involved with community groups. We find out what their needs are, and then we offer services early in the design process," he said. "That involved not just talking to one or two people, [but] rather getting input from the whole community as to what they would like to have happen to the playground."

Schneider also sees education as part of his firm's mission. Recently, the firm teamed up with the Shaw Ecovillage, a neighborhood environmental education youth group, to build a pavilion showcasing sustainable design on the Mall during last week's National Park Service-sponsored Sustainability Fair. The pavilion, constructed by volunteers from Shaw Ecovillage, featured many of the products and designs that Schneider uses in his own practice.

The technologies presented in the showcase include the so-called "green roof" — a rooftop garden system that replaces traditional sur-

faces with a garden bed. The shallow garden bed absorbs significant amounts of rainfall, and includes a waterproof liner and other methods to drain excess water away from the house. The systems not only reduce rainwater runoff; they also absorb many pollutants from rainwater and the air, and help insulate the house from heat, cold and even noise.

Schneider also gives speeches to community groups in the District and teaches at Catholic University, where he said a whole new crop of architects is learning how to integrate design with the environment.

Schneider is one of 36 building and design professionals in the Washington metropolitan area certified by the U.S. Green Building Council, a national industrywide coalition that promotes environmentally friendly building and sustainable design. There are 1,040 such certified professionals.

"There's no client who's come to

me, without knowing we were green, who said, 'No, I don't want to do that,' once they found out we were green."

Instead, those clients see the environmentally friendly element as an added bonus, he said.

Although Schneider admits environmental issues can be politically charged, green architecture doesn't have to be politically motivated, he said, adding that even George W. Bush built a green home in Texas. "Everybody wants to save money. Right?"

"We're not here to proselytize or

beat people over the head," Schneider said. "Most of the time people are happy to go in the direction that we work out with them. It's a process."

But, Schneider acknowledges, he's happy that more architects, builders and homeowners are showing an interest in integrated or so-called "smart" design.

"I would say our goal at iStudio and the goal of a lot of other green architects is to make the term 'green architect' completely obsolete," he said. "It should be the only way to build."

NORTHWEST REAL ESTATE

A LOOK AT THE MARKET IN NORTHWEST WASHINGTON

JUNE 12, 2002

Researchers say demographics working in favor of D.C., other cities

Current Staff Report

The District's real estate boom will likely continue through this decade, according to national demographic trends described in a study conducted for the Fannie Mae Foundation.

Reasons given for the trend of more homebuyers looking in the city include preference for compact, urban-style living; in-place community services; smaller yards; and proximity to destinations to cut out long commutes. Other factors include a decline in the percentage of households that include children, and recognition of benefits of moving into a resale home — like mature trees in the neighborhood.

There are variations of preferences and circumstances, but the District seems to fit the bill for a growing number of home searchers, with or without children. The Fannie Mae report studied a wide range of homebuyers — from the maturing baby boomers, born in the 1940s through the early 1960s — to the empty nesters.

In this decade, the post-World War II baby-boom generation is more likely to prefer the denser, more compact housing alternatives of the city over the large-lot, single-family home of the suburbs, according to Dowell Myers and Elizabeth Gearin of the University of Southern California, who performed the survey.

"The aging of baby boomers is remaking the residential landscape of America," state Myers and Gearin. They predict that from 2000 to 2010, the percentage of households of those between 55 and 64 will jump to 17.4 percent — from 13.2 percent of all households. "The lifestyle choices of baby boomers in this age range have enormous potential to change neighborhood patterns."

In writing about the home buyers' preferences, the duo refers to a conventional wisdom that says buyers favor a neighborhood with five major criteria: a suburban location and design, a single-family detached-unit style, a location within a low-density neighborhood, ease of automobile parking and driving, and a low price.

This adage is backed up by the gross numbers of a 1999 National Association of Home Builders' survey: 83 percent of respondents preferred a single-family detached home in the suburbs to a similarly priced town house in the city even if it required a substantially longer commute.

As described in the Fannie Mae report, however, a breakdown of the numbers in the survey shows that the desire for suburban-style housing against city living varies closely with age.

Older adults swing their priorities more to urban-type amenities.

While only 5 percent of the young adults indicated interest in walking access to shopping, 33 percent of the older people surveyed said it is important.

Among the 25- to 34-year-olds in the homebuilders' study, only 9 percent preferred the town house. In the 45- to 54-year-old group, the percentage jumped to 20. Among the 55-and-older group, 24 percent favored the town house.

And demographic trends have shifted strongly from the young group toward older homebuyers.

"The conventional wisdom about home-buyer preferences applies most accurately to those who are between 25 and 34," Myers and Gearin conclude.

Households younger than 50 are far more likely to favor large lots and lower density, while those older than 50 are more likely to favor smaller lots as well as easy access to commercial areas. And with the aging of the population, the share of homebuyers in the over-50 category will substantially increase while the share in the 25-to-34-age group will decline.

Even if the majority of respondents preferred the suburban model, the researchers noted, the number who want the town house with urban amenities presents a valuable market niche for cities such as the District.

A five-year-old tax change also

helps, they report.

Because 81 percent of the households in the 1999 home builders' survey were living in detached single-family homes, a move toward town houses in the city could mean that older people would be selling a large home and buying a less expensive one, the new report notes.

Before 1997, the tax laws strongly discouraged this type of "trading down," by assessing hefty capital gains taxes to people who traded their homes for smaller living quarters.

"The 1997 repeal of this tax may free middle-aged and older Americans to finally reveal their preference for smaller homes when their children have left," the Fannie Mae report reasons. "The older, often empty-nester households represent a niche market in terms of demand for large, luxury town houses" — a type of housing that abounds in the District.

A related change that should help the District market is the decline in the percentage of households including children, according to Myers and Gearin. In 1990, just over one-third of all households included children. This is projected to decline to 29.5 percent by 2010.

Urban real estate markets will also be affected by the different desires of buyers of new single-family homes and those looking at resale homes, according to the survey. The new-home buyer is more likely to favor a more auto-oriented place with more privacy, characteristics of the conventional suburban development. Resale buyers are more likely to favor the city's open space, gardens and easy-walking access to shared recreation space and stores.

There are also indications that the resale buyers prefer mature trees and in-place community services —

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TRENDS

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things that take time to develop in a new subdivision but are present in the District.

Also, says the study, mounting suburban traffic congestion, decreasing crime in urban areas, and the growth of the cafe culture will continue to draw the homebuyers to cities such as the District.

"Countless surveys have shown that American urban dwellers view mounting traffic congestion as one of the leading detractors from the quality of life," says the study. Drivers don't enjoy the freedom once promised by car company advertisements in

the 1950s and instead must make their way through traffic jams and red lights and hunt down parking spaces, the researchers say — making lifestyles "less exclusively dependent on the automobile" more attractive.

Until recently, the study points out, the perception of high crime traditionally presented a deterrent to urban living, as noted in the home builders' survey.

Myers and Gearin, however, declare that "Declining crime in recent years may encourage people to move back toward ... more urbanized locations. ... Even if the decline bottoms out, it is likely that more households may consider urban residential options than they did 10 years ago."