

The MONTEBELLO Voice

an independent publication

EXTRA!

May 11, 2016

Board moves toward non-chemical land management, yet an advisory committee of resident experts would be another leap forward for our community

By Marie-Christine Bonzom

The petition against the use of chemical herbicides and pesticides and for a chemical-free land management policy at Montebello was again submitted to the Board of Directors and the management on Earth Day, April 22.

First launched on Earth Day 2014, the petition has now gathered 104 signatures. That number reflects an unprecedented level of support for any issue in our community, since at least 2000. That year, current petitioner Jannette Sherman, M.D., told us, a previous similar effort on the same issue had garnered 75 names.



And then there were seven: planted a few weeks ago on the gazebo hill, one Leyland cypress failed to take root.

The current petition sent was preceded by an article I wrote in *The Montebello Voice* of April 7, 2016.

Following this long term effort, petitioners were pleased when, during the Board meeting of April 12, Director Lynn Tjeerdsma announced that Montebello will move to reduce the use of chemical applications on its grounds. Director Tjeerdsma said that the new land maintenance contract would be signed soon.

On April 15, all residents were sent a “Montebello e-Mail Bulletin on Board Action Updates” confirming that the Board was working on a new contract that would call “for reduction of synthetic chemicals and increased use of organic products” on the grounds of our community.

As the e-Mail Bulletin indicated, the new contract is “in response to comments about grounds maintenance in recent years.”

When submitting the petition on Earth Day, I also requested more information about the new contract being negotiated with a landscaping company. I received a reply dated April 29 in the form of an unsigned letter from the association management, which suggests that the new contract has been signed.

The letter emphasizes that board and management “take care and maintenance of Montebello grounds very seriously” and that “all reasonable efforts are been undertaken to successfully transition the grounds maintenance at Montebello to a more eco-friendly treatment process.”

Kennett presides at his final meeting, contracts for landscape management and café are ratified

By Mikhailina Karina

With a standing ovation at the end of the meeting, long-time Board of Directors President, Doug Kennett, lowered his gavel for the last time at the May 10 board meeting.

In his tribute to Kennett, Board Vice-President Greg Bender said that over the past 18 years, Kennett had spent more than 5,000 hours in well over 600 board meetings and numerous other related events.

Moved by the outpouring of appreciation, Kennett said he’d been “blessed” to work with two terrific general managers and great staff at Montebello. He now plans to “see the grandkids more often.”

The board also unanimously ratified a contract with R.C. Fields & Associates, which “has performed well as Montebello’s civil engineer for the Fitness Center project... [and] reviewed the design, performed inspections throughout the project ... and advised and recommended short term measure for erosion control behind building 5,” stated the May 10 General Resolution in the board packet. The Alexandria-based full service site engineering, land surveying, and land use planning firm was hired “for site engineering and consulting for site improvements, landscape architectural services, and Project #1 Erosion Control,” stated the Montebello

Continued on next page

Continued on next page

Important steps in right direction

The new contract, as briefly outlined in the association management letter, includes measures that petitioners had long requested.

“All weeds” will now be “removed” by “hand pulling” from “landscape structures in the roadway and parking lots, tree rings, hedges and shrub groundcover beds.”

Chemical pre-emergent and post-emergent herbicides “shall not be used.” In particular, Montebello will stop using Roundup®, a Monsanto post-emergent chemical herbicide containing glyphosate, an ingredient classified as “probably carcinogenic” by the World Health Organization in 2015, and before that, by Canada and France.

Organic herbicides, both pre- and post-emergent, “may be used and shall be approved by the association in advance of application.”

In addition, the association management says that the new contract sets a “goal” to “provide prescription fertilizer rather than applying an all-purpose fertilizer” and to use fertilizers that “promote health rather than growth” of plants.

More details and steps needed

However, the letter from the association management does not specify that the use of chemical fertilizers will cease, even if it says that “the contrac-

As this short-term contract is implemented and a long-term green space policy is urgently needed, petitioners continue to call on the board to form an ad hoc advisory committee of residents with relevant expertise (among signatories to the petition are experts in botany, ecology, toxicology, medicine and public health as well as gardeners) and of residents representing relevant concerns such as pet owners and parents or guardians of young children.

tor will use a slow release, granular, organic, non-burning fertilizer such as bone-meal, cottonseed meal, Hollytone.” Neither does the letter indicate the parameters for use of any chemicals potentially still permitted such as fertilizers and pesticides in terms of the frequency of applications, the quantities used per application, and the locations treated.

Although the letter does not provide this information, we understand that this new land management contract is for one year. As this short-term contract is implemented and a long-term green space policy is urgently needed, petitioners continue to call on the board to form, as was the case with other major projects at Montebello, an *ad hoc* advisory committee of residents with relevant expertise (among signatories to the petition are experts in botany, ecology,

toxicology, medicine and public health as well as gardeners) and of residents representing relevant concerns such as pet owners and parents or guardians of young children.

An *ad hoc* committee could invite for discussion and advice outside experts drawn from the many area public and private entities such as the American Horticultural Society, the National Park Service or the Landscape for Life program at the U.S. Botanical Gardens.

Another remaining concern is that, at no point since Earth Day 2014, was the petition acknowledged and responded to directly and on the substance. Indeed, the recent letter from the association management was addressed only to me, with no mention at all of the 103 other Montebello residents who are equally concerned with the necessity for a sustainable land management policy that restores our soil and vegetation as well as protects our health.

As Montebello moves toward a land management policy more in tune with nature, it is important for the board to engage in two-way communication with residents and respond to their concerns in a timely and conscientious manner. One way to ensure so-called “bottom-up” communication on this topic and others would be to adopt a rule by which petitions of, for example, more than 40 signatures have the issue they raise put automatically on the agenda of the board. 📌

Board *continued*

Condominium Site Improvements and Landscape Initiative Preliminary Design Contract.

“It’s an important first step in erosion control,” said board member Lynn Tjeerdsma, who was instrumental in negotiating the contract (see Marie-Christine Bonzom’s article).

The board also approved a 10-year extension for the convenience store and Montebello Café lease at a monthly rent of \$1,200. “This is a real asset, not a money-maker for Montebello,” said

board Treasurer Joe Riccobono.

In an email reply from Kennett, “To the best of our knowledge, we are the only condo in the greater Washington, D.C., area with a fully licensed bar/restaurant facility. It is a singular amenity. We know others have tried and failed.”

“Both the cafe and beauty salon are considered amenities for residents so rent is kept to a reasonable sum to cover our costs and keep prices reasonable,” Kennett continued. “Rent for the new lease is \$1,200 per month, up from \$800, or an increase of \$4,800 per year.

Rent for the salon is \$200 per month.”

According to Kennett, “José [Zelaya] and Ugur [Gokova] have been here for 22 years as I recall, first as chef and waiter for Serdar, who then moved on and José and Ugur teamed up to take over the lease, with board approval. Since being here, both have become U.S. citizens.”

In the coming weeks, café co-owner Zelaya said, the menu will be expanded to include items for children, such as chicken nuggets with vegetables, as well as gluten-free dishes. 📌