

An Historical Perspective by Pat Scolaro

I have lived in Burleith for 36 years. Many of you in this room have lived here longer than I. Many are newcomers to this Village in the City. Each of us had a special reason for choosing Burleith; however once settled the special aspects of living in this community are soon evident. Burleith has the atmosphere and ambiance of a small town plus all the benefits of life in the big city!

Within these four square blocks there are unique features. The Green Lot for community events; for pick-up games or just enjoying the outdoors; we have Ellington Field with a track and an ideal space for walking/running dogs; The large park adjacent to our neighborhood gives us a bit a of country. There is the Tot Lot, originally planned, paid for and built by Burleith parents and a library within walking distance. We are conveniently located close to shopping, transportation, and a hospital. Ellington School of the Arts and the University provide educational and entertainment choices. I choose to live in the city, and I have a neighborhood!

It was in 1923 that Shannon and Luchs started it's venture to develop a middle-class family oriented community. It was easy to sell these modern homes with central heating, a bathroom and a hot water heater for a mere \$7000. Other developers followed later.

It was a viable active community, as it is now, with residents who take pride in their homes and gardens. In fact, Burleith was noted for its beautiful trees and gardens. The green space between behind 37th and 38th Streets, north of T Street were terraced and called "The Hanging Gardens of Burleith". Doubt there is any flora left from that no so long ago era. Just one of the changes seen in this community.

In any city change is inevitable and that is certainly true of Burleith, not physically but in the resident profiles because as Washington grew and evolved, Burleith's unique location made it a popular destination for young professional couples and singles who enjoyed city life and were within easy commuting distances. Many chose to rent homes but they too are active participants in maintaining the atmosphere of this community

In the 1980s the residents of Burleith included some of our older friends, professionals, singles and couples with young children and/or teenagers - it was still very much a middle class neighborhood.

It was during this time that Georgetown University undergraduates began renting and living in the community and the integrity of Burleith was being threatened as was the quality of life. At that time GU did not provide housing for at least 23% of its undergraduates and there was no requirement or incentives for students (freshman and sophomores included) to live on campus.

A 1990 NY Times article addressed the issue of student housing off-campus and residents are quoted on the behavior of some of these off campus student homes, often with freshman and sophomores, and how it was affecting the quality of life of this close neighborhood. Two diverse groups with totally different life-styles converging on this small space. And, the University was increasing the undergraduate enrollment. In this same article a representative said that Georgetown was committed to adding on-campus housing by 1997. "We will have a bed for each undergraduate," he said. "That is a commitment we are willing to make." Further, freshman would be required to live on campus by 1992. Sophomores followed shortly thereafter.

A dormitory was not built until 2003, six years later; but once again the undergraduate enrollment was increased. Still, 15% or more of the undergraduates currently live off campus. An increase in enrollment over the next ten years (even though mostly graduate students) will adversely affect this community.

Georgetown University has stated emphatically that it is not its plan to build any additional on campus housing.

In many ways having these young adults living in the community is an asset. Some provide services to the residents, there is the presence of young folks walking the streets and alleys and most make good neighbors. Some of the disruption is unintentional; however, the diversity of Burleith is changing and the issue of any additional growth by GU requires our serious consideration.

There is one consistency in Burleith. The Burleith Citizens Association was founded by concerned and interested neighbors in 1925 and through the years it has worked hard, addressed many problems that could have adversely impacted this community. Today the BCA is dealing with one of the most serious threats; and let me assure that its current leadership is facing it head on with every intention of preserving this community.