



More Changes at the Barracks?

Marine Corps Buildings Near the Freeway Deemed A Security Risk

ARTICLE AND PHOTOS BY KYLE JOHNSON

Improving security at the Marine Corps barracks may mean more than just making upgrades near the Commandant's house. The security of the buildings on the south side of I Street SE, currently used to house Marines, is also being examined by the Corps. Those buildings are considered security risks because of their proximity to the SE/SW Freeway, particularly exit ramps off the freeway.

Capt. Lisa Lawrence, public affairs officer for the barracks, said that it's too early to determine if that will happen and how a security upgrade would be accomplished there. Marine Corps officials raised the issue at a meeting discussing the future of lower 8th Street SE.

"Nothing's been thoroughly thought out or planned at this time," she said.

Because the buildings are located next to the freeway and there isn't open land on those sites, it's difficult to imagine a scenario where Marines could continue to be housed in the buildings if it is decided that it is in fact a major security risk.

ANC 6B Commissioner Kirsten Oldenburg didn't know the details of the Marine Corps' plan, but said the buildings could possibly be used in a different capacity that would make them less of a security risk. The security upgrades planned for the commandant's house have sparked some negative feedback from neighbors, and Lawrence acknowledged that other changes related to the barracks could also provoke strong feelings from affected neighbors.

"You won't always please everyone, but the whole idea is to ensure we're meeting their needs as well as meeting our needs," Lawrence said. "The lines

of communication are open."

Oldenburg said the Marines "have some work to do" when it comes to community outreach, and Sharon Bowersworth of Barracks Row Main Street said that it seemed like a "mistake" to not alert her organization and other stakeholders about the I Street plans.

There is no timeline in place for any changes at the buildings, and community meetings will be held when plans begin to take shape, Lawrence said.

Getting better all the time

At least in the short-term, a community meeting designed to shed some light on the numerous problems



TOP: The Capitol Riverfront BID held a picnic and outdoor home tour in the Canal Park. Photo by Capitol Riverfront BID
 BOTTOM: Southwest Safeway store officials vowed to make improvements prior to next year's opening of the new store.

at the southwest Safeway seems to have encouraged Safeway to address the most egregious concerns as the chain readies for its new Southwest store to open early next year.

That community meeting, hosted by ANC 6D and the Southwest Neighborhood Assembly, brought in a large gathering of community residents, city officials and some of the top brass of the Safeway chain.

Residents took turns at the microphones, telling stories about poor stocking, long checkout lines, a customer service desk that never seemed to be open and security risks inside and around the existing store. One of the more embarrassing stories came from a Safeway shopper who said he approached the store's produce manager to ask for alfalfa sprouts. When he couldn't find the item, the produce manager suggested using brussel sprouts instead, apparently unaware of the difference between the two items.

Sitting on the stage at Westminster Presbyterian Church and hearing about years of inadequate service at one of their stores, Safeway representatives said they have been working over the past few months to make improvements and that they would continue those efforts.

ANC 6D Chair Andy Litsky said that the store has made some changes for the better recently. He noted that Safeway's district manager has been seen in the store in recent weeks, holding true to his word that he would work to address the problems in person.

Visiting the store several times in the days after the meeting, this reporter also noticed some dramatic improvements: on one five minute trip, two workers asked if I needed assistance finding anything. That hadn't happened even once in many times I had been in the store in the 12 months before the meeting. The store's rain check policy was also posted for all to see and some of the items previously hard to find in stock, particularly skim milk, were sitting on the shelves ready to be purchased.

In addition to being discouraged by their current community grocery store, the meeting attendees seemed to be equally excited for the new "lifestyle concept" store expected to open in March or April. Safeway officials said it will be very similar to the City Vista store, featuring "subdued lighting," a bakery department with a hearth oven, a floral kiosk, a Starbucks coffee shop and, if the city approves, a beer and wine section.

"I think people are going to be extremely happy with the new store," Litsky said. "It's going to be better than what we've ever had before."

What is and what will be

The Capitol Riverfront Business Improvement District (BID) held the first an-

nual Canal Park picnic and front door home tour in September, highlighting the strides the community has made and the improvements coming soon. Held in Canal Park, which is nearly two years away from completion, the event highlighted the transitional nature of the area.

BID Deputy Executive Director Claire Schaefer noted that the empty plot of grass – which will one day have plenty of trees, a restaurant pavilion and a winter ice skating path – was very recently used as a bus parking lot. Along a walking tour of the neighborhood, Schaefer discussed the plans for renovated buildings, new construction and more parks in the area.

While it took an imagination to picture what the community will be like when completed, some things in the area are already established. Schaefer said about 2,100 people live in the Capitol Riverfront area, more than five times the number of residents just one year ago.

About 400 people, many of them nearby residents, attended the Canal Park festivities to mingle with their neighbors and get a better sense of what to expect in the coming years. The event also featured outdoor games, free food from street vendors and live music.

"We'll definitely do this event again next year," Schaefer said.

Plenty to do

The BID is also looking to expand and improve its other events. A Canal Park outdoor film series with an outer space theme began in September. Films will continue to be shown each Thursday at 7:30 pm through mid-October.

The farmer's markets held behind the Department of Transportation building Tuesdays and Wednesdays will run through November, and Schaefer said the live music series held over the summer will likely be brought back next year. For more information on the BID and its activities, visit www.capitolriverfront.org.

The city's piece of the pie

The city plans to be "patient" with the land it owns on the northeast portion of the former Waterside Mall site, according to Sean Madigan, communications director for the Office of the Deputy Mayor for Planning and Economic Development.

Madigan said residential development "will make the most sense" because much of the development in the area is office-related.

"But with the housing market being what it is, we are probably going to be a little patient on this one and not put it out on the street for bids until conditions improve," he said. ★

*providing Capitol Hill residents
with the confidence and practical
means to live safely and comfortably
in their own homes*

Join · Volunteer · Donate

CAPITOL HILL VILLAGE

202.543.1778
capitolhillvillage.org

This ad is sponsored by
The National Capital Bank of Washington

CHRS October 21 Preservation Café: Backyard Archeology on Capitol Hill

Come to the Capitol Hill Restoration Society's October Preservation Café for a "show and tell" about archeology underfoot on Capitol Hill. After a Capitol Hill archeologist shows and describes some artifacts typical of those found on the Hill, members of the audience can show him bottles, pottery, and other historic items found in their yards so they can be identified and explained.

Speaker: Bob Sonderman – senior archeologist for the National Park Service's National Capital Region; Capitol Hill resident; and member of DC's Historic Preservation Review Board

When: Wednesday, October 21, 2009, 6:30-7:15 p.m.
Where: Ebenezers Coffeehouse, 2nd & F Streets, NE, downstairs

Questions?: CapHRS@aol.com
543-0425



"Working To Make Your Life Easier"

ELECTRONIC FILING AND RAPID REFUND AVAILABLE

1324 G Street, SE

Phone: (202) 548-0351

Fax: (202) 548-4992

Email: capitolsev@aol.com

Specializing in Individual and Small Business Service