

Despite Trail Support Concerns, County Council Approves Funds For Fence Along Capital Crescent Trail to Benefit Columbia Country Club

By Henri Bartholomot

On Tuesday, July 30, 1996, the Montgomery County Council approved \$100,000 -- on top of an estimated \$40,000 already appropriated -- to help pay for changes requested by the Columbia Country Club in the planned Interim Capital Crescent Trail between Bethesda and Silver Spring. The Club also will contribute some funds toward the total cost of the proposed changes, though less than the County.

A large part of these funds will be used to put an eight-foot high chain link fence along both sides of the Trail in the entire section where the Trail passes through the Club's property. Nearly half of the fenced area will be 16-foot wide, with 20-inch overhangs on each side, while the rest will be 25-foot wide, creating a fenced-in corridor more than one-third of a mile long.

The Trail right-of-way is 100-foot wide as it passes through the Club property, though the Club claims rights to some of that width (an issue now being litigated). The proposed fence will effectively cede use of more than 3/4 of this land to the Club, primarily for the Club's benefit. The Coalition has identified two relatively short parts of this section where fence or landscaping would be appropriate, on one side of the Trail, to protect trail users from golf balls. However, the remainder of the fence will be for the benefit of the Country Club and its members, to separate the Trail from the Club.

CCCT, along with the Washington Area Bicyclist Association and American Hiking Society, asked the Council not to approve such extensive use of close-in fencing. Instead, the three groups suggested that the County use fencing and landscaping in a more selective way to address the Country Club's concerns while creating a far friendlier trail. This could have shaved more than \$100,000 off the cost of the Club's proposed changes in the trail. However, the Club was unwilling to discuss these modifications, and threatened to sue the County to stop the Interim Trail if the County did not authorize the \$100,000.

CCCT is dismayed that \$100,000 in public funds is being spent for the benefit of a private landowner to the detriment of the Trail, when those funds could better be spent on other Trail components or public needs. For example, the tunnel under Wisconsin Avenue is still not part of the Interim Trail plan, and these funds could be instrumental in getting that piece of the Trail done.

We also are dismayed that the public's voice was effectively shut out of the negotiation that led to approval of the fence proposal. Though CCCT repeatedly requested an opportunity to discuss trail-friendly ways of addressing the Country Club's concerns, we were not given that chance. Neither the Club nor the County would sit down with us to discuss these issues. Instead, the fence deal was struck in private between the County and the Club.

Though the fence has now been approved and will be installed within the next few weeks, in time CCCT would still like much of it removed or at least relocated to the boundary between the Club and the Trail right-of-way. In shorter sections where fencing or landscaping near the Trail may be appropriate, we would like it used discreetly and the resulting Trail passageway made wider than the current plan. We also do not want this fence used as a precedent for similar treatment of other sections of the Trail. The "Interim" Trail may be around for a long time. It should be installed and maintained to the same high-quality as the more permanent sections.

In related developments, the County Council also approved use the appropriated funds to help the Country Club relocate its two gold cart crossings so they will pass below the trail (which will stay on its current alignment) rather than cross "at grade." CCCT views this as a positive development that will improve interaction between the Trail and golf course. The Council also approved funds to purchase two easements needed to connect the Interim Trail to Elm Street Park in Bethesda and to Kansas Avenue in Silver Spring.