

Alexandria Area Raises Preservation Questions

By Leah Y. Latimer Washington Post Staff Writer

The Washington Post (1974-Current file); Sep 28, 1984; ProQuest Historical Newspapers The Washington Post (1877 - 1989)
pg. B12

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Even though the Alexandria City Council has designated the Parker-Gray neighborhood as a special preservation district, the area's residents and city officials remain at odds over what's special about the neighborhood and what ought to be preserved there.

"I'm not really clear about what people want," Planning Commissioner T. Edward Braswell Jr. said at a meeting earlier this week.

Parker-Gray is a predominantly black, working-class neighborhood at the edge of fashionable Old Town and close to the new Braddock Road Metro Station. It has been at the center of an often emotional, hotly debated controversy over how to protect the area from overdevelopment and its residents from displacement.

When the City Council approved the special district designation in June it gave a citizens committee and city planners until November to develop standards for the area. If no standards are submitted and approved by the council, the designation will lapse automatically.

Mayor Charles E. Beatley, who concedes he was "never that enthusiastic" about the plan approved in June, said yesterday the council is likely to take some action by the November deadline, adding: "Maybe it'll be [something with] not too much substance, but they'll come up with something."

The main points of contention are virtually the same ones that have generated controversy for more

than a year: what the district's boundaries should be and whether it should come under the jurisdiction of the city's Board of Architectural Review. That agency now reviews and approves or rejects applications for renovation, construction and demolition in the city's Old and Historic District, known as Old Town.

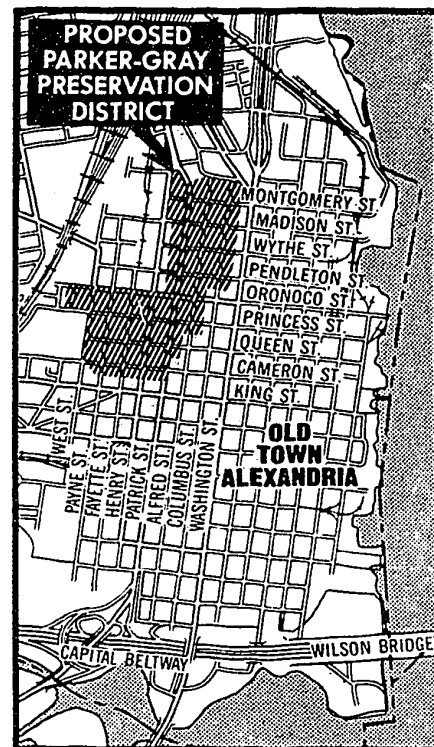
In a report to the City Council earlier this month, the citizens committee, made up of longtime residents of and newcomers to Parker-Gray, who have often disagreed on what to do, recommended expanding the already approved boundaries of the special preservation district north and west. But they stopped short of including an area nearest the Braddock Road Metro Station, though residents there have long been considered part of the Parker-Gray community.

At a meeting Thursday night, Eudora Lyles, who represented people whose houses are outside the newly recommended boundaries, told the Planning Commission "We're looking for hope and survival in this area . . . to pass down to our children."

City Planner Robert Crabill said the district was not expanded to include the area closest to the Metro Station because a zoning plan governing development there has already been adopted.

The committee report also called for adding five new members to the seven-member architectural review board. The new members would review changes proposed in the special Parker-Gray District.

But at this week's meeting, Tyler



By Dave Cook—The Washington Post

declared, "We don't want a part of that Architectural Review Board."

Some members of the committee that drafted the newest recommendations said this week that if the plan lapses they will support trying again to have Parker-Gray annexed to the Old and Historic District and thus subject to the full control of the review board.

Planning Commissioner William B. Hurd has come up with another alternative. "The best solution might be to set up a Parker-Gray planning district with an advisory board" to the City Council, he said yesterday.

The move would allow residents more say in what happens in the area by removing it from the restrictions of a special preservation district. Residents would advise the council on safeguards they want to "conserve the character of the neighborhood."