

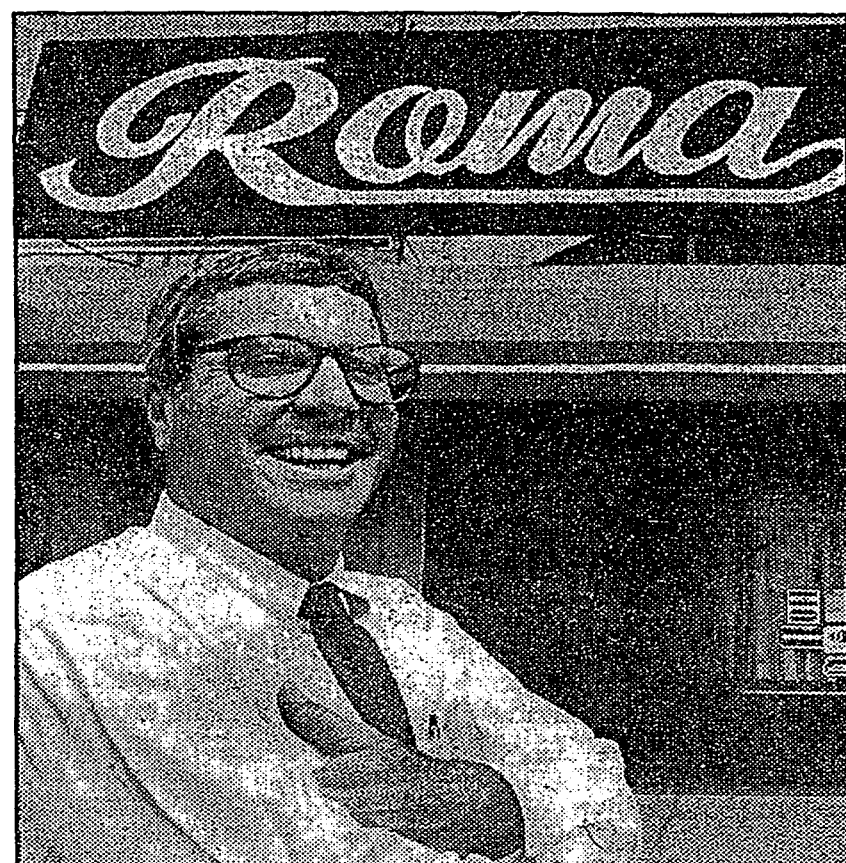
The Panic in Cleveland Park

By Elizabeth Kastor Washington Post Staff Writer
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BY BILL SNEAD—THE WASHINGTON POST

Cleveland Park residents Tilford Dudley, Kathy Wood and Tersh Boasberg.



BY FRED SWEETS—THE WASHINGTON POST

Bobby Abbo, owner of Cleveland Park's Roma restaurant.

The Panic in Cleveland Park

It's Residents Versus Developers, And the Battle Lines Are Drawn At the Park and Shop

By Elizabeth Kastor
Washington Post Staff Writer

When residents of Cleveland Park tell you where they live, their voices assume a soft and reverent pride. Macomb and Newark streets, Connecticut Avenue, the food co-op, the trees, the dry cleaner at the corner, "our neighborhood": These are holy words to pilgrims who long ago recognized the promised land and this year are adding a nice new deck in back.

"When we first came to Washington, everyone said, 'You *have* to live in Cleveland Park!' " says Joan Mondale, and now she and Fritz are disciples, for moving into Cleveland Park is sort of like joining a religion.

This being so, it was probably only a matter of time before something like the Park and Shop crisis hit.

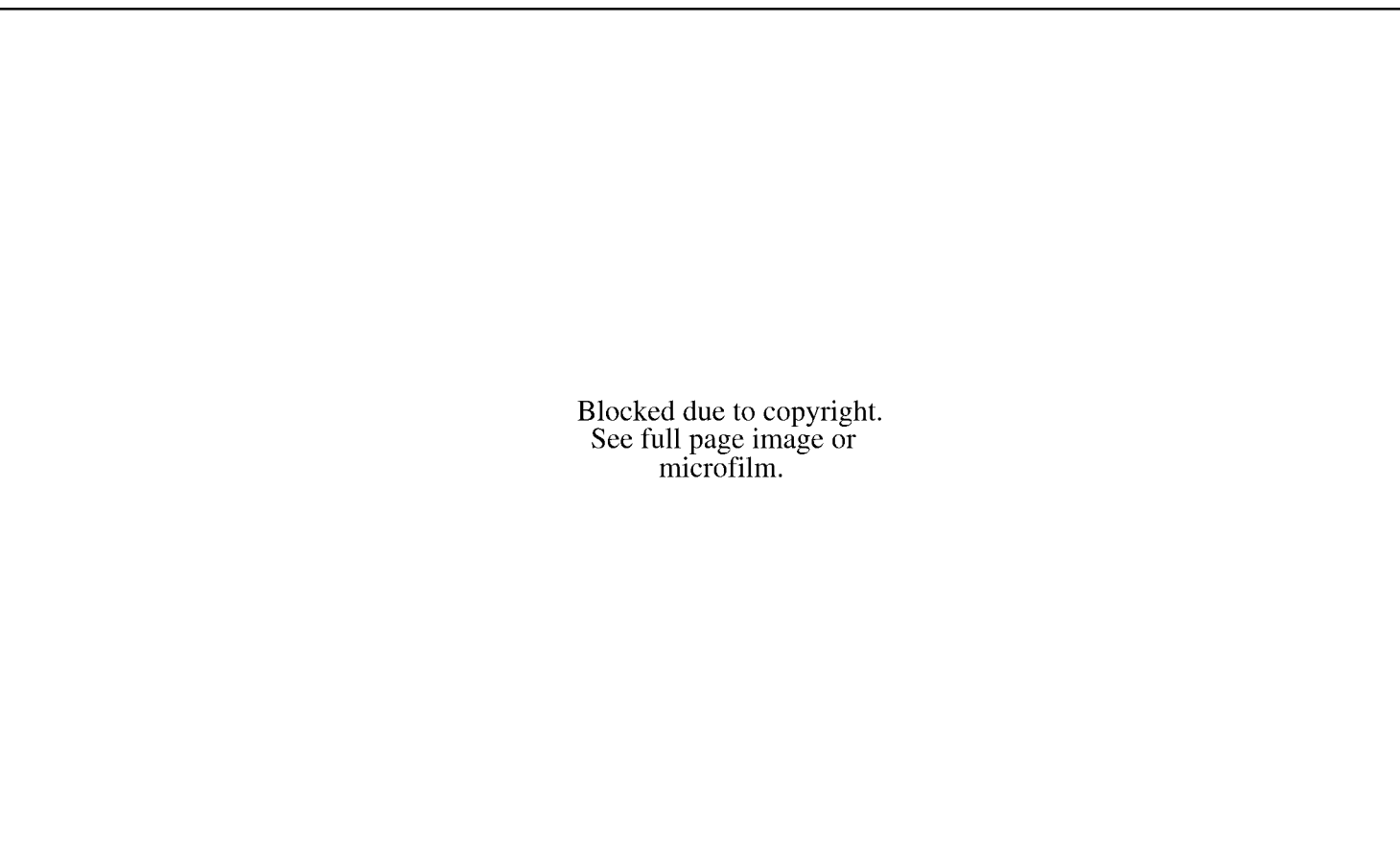
"If the Park and Shop goes, it's the first step," says Judy Hubbard, a 13-year resident. "This is my neighborhood, and I'm not going to let it look like Bethesda."

The rumors of trouble began to spread last winter. A 10-story office building with four movie theaters was going to replace the Park and Shop—an L-shaped, colonial revival-style structure with a parking lot out front at Connecticut and Ordway. The Cleveland Park Historical Society, already in the process of requesting historic designation for the entire neighborhood, filed an emergency request for the Park and Shop to be named historic in its own right and circulated a flyer showing a simple drawing of the Park and Shop next to a photograph of a gargantuan crystal tower identified as a "typical Metro-sited new construction."

"This? or THIS?" the flyer asked.

The question seemed simple. But such things seldom are.

The Cafritz Foundation, which owns the Park and Shop, and HDS Co., the developer to which Cafritz



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The Park and Shop shopping center circa 1930.

BY THEODOR HORVDCZAK; FROM THE LIBRARY OF CONGRESS ARCHIVES

plans to sell it, argued that the new building "probably wouldn't be half that" size and called the brochure dirty pool because the "typical" building it pictures isn't even in the District.

But the residents were undeterred.

"We're all very grateful for this," says Historical Society president and preservation lawyer Tersh Boasberg of the tree-lined neighborhood where he has lived since 1964. "We realize it's terribly precious and I think people are going to fight for it. I think it's going to be a dogfight."

Nobody is disputing the historical value of many of the neighborhood's houses—the grand wooden fantasies built in the early 1900s, the art deco apartment buildings, the Hansel-and-Gretel, peaked-roof house

ordered in pieces from the Sears catalogue. But the Park and Shop—a 1930 complex preservationists describe as a prototype of the small neighborhood shopping center with off-street parking copied around Washington—and the adjoining Connecticut Avenue commercial strip that are included in the historic district application are another matter.

"They talk about smiling shopkeepers and other nice things," Christopher Collins, the lawyer who represents Cafritz, says of the residents who want to save the Park and Shop and the rest of the commercial strip. "But there's no basis for [historic] designation. They're little one-story, typical commercial row

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Cleveland Park

NEIGHBORHOOD, From B1

buildings that have been altered to suit the needs of the different occupants.

"There's nothing particularly wonderful about any of them," he says. "It's merely a backdoor method to oppose development."

But residents say they're not against growth or "responsible" development—just adamant that Cleveland Park not become "another Van Ness," the next Metro stop on the Red Line, with its large, cement-bound buildings and slick shops.

"I think the central question is, 'Can an urban neighborhood control what happens to it, or is development inevitable?'" says Boasberg. "I think if the community can get organized everything that is commercial need not be developed."

The proposed historic district covers about 285 acres between Wisconsin and Connecticut avenues, from Woodley and Klinge on the south to Rodman Street and Melvin Hazen Park on the north. Historic designation would mean that changes on any property would have to be cleared with the city's Historic Preservation Review Board—a hurdle that preservationists hope would protect buildings like the Park and Shop. Residents would no longer have to "fight piecemeal every individual case when somebody wants to tear something down," says Peggy Robin, chairman of the Cleveland Park Advisory Neighborhood Council, which cosponsored the district request.

But merchants want the new customers who would come with development, and they grate at the idea that if their restaurants and liquor stores are absorbed into a historic district architectural historians would dictate what signs they could hang, what additions they could build.

And so a question of historicity has grown into a debate on the meaning of neighborhood, the nature of progress, the future of development in Washington, the virtues of capitalism and just about anything else you can think of.

The Review Board staff has recommended the district be approved, but the Review Board is an independent body appointed by the mayor, not bound by its staff's evaluation; the board will make its decision within the next three months. Until then, Cleveland Park is waiting.

Here's Admiral Peary's house with the porthole window . . . This is Judy

Hubbard's place. She's active in the Historical Society and drives a former Checker Cab—that's Cleveland Park for you . . . Sen. William Proxmire lives here, writer Judith Viorst there . . . The house with the studio in back belongs to artists Lou and Di Stovall, the velvet-green lawns rolling from a tile-roofed tower to arms negotiator Max Kampelman . . . The summer home Grover Cleveland bought—he gave his name to the neighborhood—sat on this plot until it was pulled down . . .

Tersh Boasberg and architectural historian Kathy Wood are showing off Cleveland Park. They seem to know who lives in every house, and on a warm Sunday afternoon parents wheeling strollers of gurgling babies parade by and old friends wave from passing cars as if on cue.

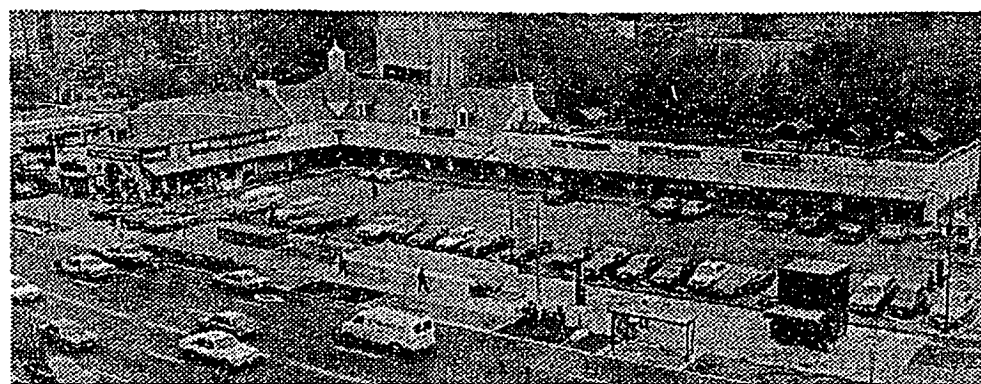
"The neighborhood generates loyalty," explains Peggy Robin.

And the demand to share in the loyalty is high. While attached town houses and more modest apartment buildings do exist in the neighborhood of about 1,100 houses, most of the homes are detached, single-family dwellings. According to Rufus Lusk and Son, the average house sale last year was \$266,190. Real estate agents say it is difficult to find a substantial home for less than \$500,000 to \$600,000.

Tilford Dudley moved here "before Pearl Harbor" with his wife and new baby and for some personifies Cleveland Park. After passing through a sort of neighborhood induction ritual led by a woman who worried he might sell the empty lot next to his house to developers, Dudley began to understand the spirit of Cleveland Park. Over the years, the lawyer and early Democratic Party organizer bought up house after house on a short block of Macomb, owning at one point six, which he then rented and sold only to people he felt were Cleveland Park.

"I'd explain that we wanted families with children," he says, "that the neighborhood wanted to maintain itself. I talked to people about their attitude, their purpose in life. We didn't insist they be high tone or wealthy or anything like that, but community-minded, willing to help people if the need arose."

Cleveland Park volunteers—rings doorbells, distributes leaflets, pickets, does whatever is necessary. The years have been marked by community crusades against development projects that residents felt violated the neighborhood and on behalf of assorted "good causes"—like the time



BY FRANK JOHNSTON—THE WASHINGTON POST

The Park and Shop shopping center on Connecticut Avenue in Cleveland Park.

when, as Judy Hubbard of the ex-Checker Cab put it, "We sent Wally from the Safeway to Italy."

Safeway Assistant Manager Wally Valentini, who has worked at the supermarket for 23 years, groans at the mention of the trip. "I'll never live that down!" he says. "I have a lot of relatives in Italy and the neighbors kept asking why didn't I go visit. I'm a great kidder, so I said, 'I can't afford it.' They took it literally and started a secret fund. It was kind of embarrassing. But the trip was marvelous. In fact, I went twice after, it was so good."

The neighborhood is packed with politicians and journalists, and has a reputation as a haven for good old-fashioned liberals. Boasberg, typically, moved to Washington "for the War on Poverty, to work with Sarge" (as in Shriver).

Joan Mondale says, "It was wonderful—when Reagan won the election in 1980 and all the Democrats moved back where they came from and the Republicans moved in, one person told me that the Republicans told the real estate agents, 'Don't show me anything in Cleveland Park. Too many Democrats and too many dogs.'"

Demonstrating that a sense of community unites an area helps justify the borders of a historic district. In addition to documenting the significance of the architecture in its proposal, the Historical Society also emphasized the neighborhood gestalt, describing Cleveland Park as "a liveable in-town community (almost like a village)" and wheeling in TVs and video equipment during one of the Review Board hearings so the board could watch the local public school's musical about Cleveland Park.

There's the city-owned home for the mentally retarded . . . The fire station, one of the first built for motorized vehicles . . . Vace, the Italian delicatessen for fresh mozzarella and tortellini . . . The hill where the kids sled in the winter . . .

Tersh Boasberg mimics the skeptical voices as he gestures across Con-

necticut at the long low line of stores: "People say, 'This is historic? This crap is historic?'"

Even after Kathy Wood has pointed out the art deco panels on the façade of the Roma Restaurant, the urns perched above several of the stores, the Aquia Creek sandstone behind the discreet McDonald's logo (the same stone used in the Capitol)—the question may still remain. The commercial strip with its Peoples Drug, plastic signs and supermarket with a selection so limited it's referred to as "the Soviet Safeway" is not easy to appreciate as historic. These aren't grand buildings with columns and gardens where famous people lived and important things happened. Nothing picture-perfect for post cards to send back home.

But over the years the idea of historic preservation has been greatly expanded to include the less-than-monumental remains of the not-so-distant past. Preservationists are increasingly interested in protecting buildings and communities that document the growth of cities and the way people live in them. They also emphasize the importance of looking at buildings in their cultural context and retaining the texture of an area.

To them, Cleveland Park is a fine example of the self-sufficient neighborhoods, the "streetcar suburbs" that grew up along the lines of the streetcar routes in the early decades of this century. Residents followed the new mode of transportation, and stores followed the residents.

"The issue there quite clearly is style and density," says Robert Peck, president of the D.C. Preservation League, which endorsed the historic district application. "There is a certain style of building and a certain density and it characterizes that part of downtown. What we've said is we're going to fight for that scale of development."

Of the Park and Shop, Peck says ruefully, "For a lot of preservationists and people who care about cities, it's the first of a kind of structure people feel killed off the city. It's the beginning of big parking lots. Some of us would like to forget those strips ever

happened, but it did and we don't just rewrite history."

But the developers and some others have little sympathy for such urban anthropology, and they have recruited their own artillery of experts.

Peter Smith, an architectural consultant, who testified before the Review Board on behalf of Cafritz, describes the Park and Shop simply as "lousy architecture." He says it was designed to serve commuters from Chevy Chase rather than Cleveland Park residents and isn't important enough to be saved anyway.

"I think what's happening is the people who've filed the petition have been very careless or maybe clever in their effort to try to fan the flames of the neighborhood," says Collins, whose firm, Wilkes Artis Hedrick and Lane, represents Mazza Gallerie creator Olga Mazza, who owns all but one of the properties across the street from the Park and Shop, as well as Cafritz.

The Park and Shop lot is now zoned for two to three stories, and if the historic district is not approved, Cafritz plans to request a change in the zoning in order to build something larger. But neither Cafritz nor HDS will talk further about their plans for the lot.

Bobby Abbo's family has been serving spaghetti and manicotti at the Roma Restaurant on Connecticut between Porter and Ordway for 55 years.

"It's a wonderful place to live," says Abbo, who now owns the family business. "The schools are good. There are playground facilities. Everything you want without the congestion of downtown. But it's 1986. It's not 1936. I don't think you can have the luxury of a nice sleepy community anymore."

The debate over the historic district has divided the business community of Cleveland Park from the residential, although the lines between the two camps are not absolute. Residents argue that the merchants who support development are naive—that growth in Cleveland Park will bring higher rents and the current stores will be priced out of the market.

Merchants claim that the Metro stop, which promised more shoppers, is underused, that business is slow and that stores will close unless something is done.

Abbo is president of the Cleveland Park Business and Professional Association, which was, he says with a laugh, "dormant" until the Historical Society filed its historic district request. About 35 of the 65 or so neighborhood businesses are involved in the association, Abbo says, and he testified against the historic district at a

Review Board hearing on behalf of the merchants he represents.

"We've enjoyed a wonderful relationship with our neighbors, but from 9 in the morning to 5 o'clock at night, most of them are downtown," Abbo says. "The merchants are willing to take the chance that more people will offset the rise in rents. For most of them, it's pretty marginal right now."

But beyond economic considerations, there is the philosophical issue of freedom.

"It just ties your hands," Ted Pedas, who owns the art deco Uptown Theatre, says of historic designation. "Let's assume the Uptown Theatre is no longer economically profitable for companies to supply with movies. What do we do with the theater? It's a single-use structure. I close the doors. You have a historic designation with no use. What good is that?"

When promised anonymity, some merchants who oppose the historic district say commercial Cleveland Park is letting itself fall apart. Dusty windows. Understocked shelves. No incentive to make a place look nice.

But decay to some is old-world charm to others.

"It's a little slower paced here," says Valentini of the Safeway. "Not like those larger stores where it's slam-bang, in and out. We may not be as efficient, but I don't think a majority of the people mind it. A little recognition means a lot, a smile, a hello."

Seymour Weinstein, owner of the Cleveland Park Valet, says he can understand both sides of the issue.

"I feel for the mom and pop shop," he says, "because I'm the last mom and pop."

"Listen, this is progress, I agree," says Weinstein. "But I've seen too much of it—once a neighborhood starts modernizing itself, things change in the neighborhood and not just one block. A lot changes."

Weinstein and his wife Florence greet many of their customers by name, and the Cleveland Park Valet is the kind of place where business is sometimes turned away: "Instead of paying \$2 for a shine, get yourself a Meltonian cream and rub it in. It'll be beautiful."

The Weinstains opened their shop here 23 years ago and he still smiles lovingly when he talks about Cleveland Park.

"Even some 20 years ago," he says, "it was the last of the really nice neighborhoods. Connecticut Avenue always had something about it like Fifth Avenue, New York. At the Kennedy-Warren [apartment building]—I remember when the people who worked the desks wore tuxedos. It had glamor to it, it really did. I don't want it to change. I want it kept that way."