

**PCGCA Project at Cedar Park Neighbors
Marilyn Sprague
April 9, 2019 Weeder Meeting**

Cedar Park Neighbors is a 501-c-3 organization of diverse residents and businesses in the Cedar Park neighborhood of West Philadelphia. They collect dues of about \$10 a year to pay the rent in Calvary Church and pay for liability insurance for the public events held in the neighborhood.

The neighborhood started to grow when the Pennsylvania Railroad commuter line was completed, with a station at 49th Street and Chester Avenue. Suburban housing developments replaced farms, with many Queen Anne semi-detached homes, or twins, attractive to city dwellers because of broad tree-lined streets and porch-front houses with bay windows and balconies. Many fine churches were built in the early 1900's to serve the growing community, including Calvary United Methodist Church, which has two large signed Tiffany windows in the sanctuary. It was the home of the area's Methodist bishop. Today that church is the home of the West Philadelphia Mennonite Fellowship and buildings hold offices for many community organizations and a performance space (Lorraine Wallace's son was in a production there). Many businesses were attracted to the area, around 490-52 at Baltimore Avenue, and a firehouse was built (now the home of the popular Firehouse Market). A triangle of land was developed at Baltimore and Catharine at 50th, now Cedar Park, described in 1908 as "one of the beauty spots of West Philadelphia." Today it is included in the National Register of Historic Places.

The community has changed and become more diverse. The Cedar Park Neighborhood group has been active for over 50 years, working on community safety, housing and development, zoning, recycling, communication, education and neighborhood clean-ups. They developed a low-interest loan program for renovating property, development of the Firehouse Farmers Market, energy weatherization program, etc. – all committed to making Cedar Park a satisfying place to live and work.

The park itself came into disrepair, and drug use was a problem for young families in the area who wanted to use the park. A new playground now has a fenced-in space and great equipment. A Veteran's Memorial at the other end has been turned into a peace garden, and PCGCA has helped with the plantings in that area. A turning road in the middle of the triangle was closed off, and planters were used to cordon off the area so it is safe from vehicles.

There are many challenges in the area, such as vandalism, and neighbors with differing needs from the park. It is a major congregating spot for adults with differing purposes than the parents with young children – and both were in evidence when PCGCA took us on a visit to the project. There was a mentally challenged youth, who, in spite of probably meaning no harm, was uprooting plants on a routine basis. Despite all of this, the park continues to be a positive influence on the area, and young families are attracted to the interesting old homes in the area. There is even a small lending library stall in the park, used by the neighbors. There are events in the park that insure the cohesion of the neighborhood.

Our \$2,500 for plant material is a real boost to the small budget of the neighborhood organization, and everyone who visited the site agreed that this donation makes a huge difference in what the neighbors can provide.



Cedar Park Neighbors Park Committee: \$2,500

The Cedar Park Neighbors Park Committee project involved doing a complete redesign of the 1911 garden beds around the World War 1 Veterans Memorial monument in the "village green" located at 49th and Baltimore Ave.. A restoration (which we helped to fund) of the original plantings was done in 2004 with the hopes of cleaning up the area in order to deter inappropriate behavior. However, 14 years later, the planting scheme was no longer sustainable so a fresh start was needed. They worked with a landscape firm to design a more appropriate formal Peace Garden surrounding the War Memorial and surrounded it with a low decorative wrought iron fence for protection. Power Corps PHL provided the labor for the planting.

Community volunteers help with the weeding and watering throughout the year. Additionally, the University City District organization has installed many very large pots of colorful plants to enliven the neighboring streetscapes and the entrance to the park. Large granite block and benches provide seating at the entrance, which was once open to traffic.

The Cedar Park Neighbors organization has worked hard to enrich and enliven the entire community, attracting restaurants and retail businesses to help support the neighborhood.

