

West End Citizens Association Washington, D.C.

Boundaries: 15th Street on the East • Potomac Park on the South
Rock Creek and the Potomac on the West • N Street on the North

Lucille Molinelli Reflects on Half a Century of Life in the West End

It is a pleasure to share with you a brief history of the West End Citizens Association.

Established as a non-profit organization in 1910, we are the second oldest citizens association in the District of Columbia. Our boundaries include the White House, and Presidents Wilson, Taft, Coolidge, and Franklin Delano Roosevelt were members. In our archives is a penciled note that President Wilson sent in with his WECA membership dues payment in 1919.

Throughout the years, we have had many, many struggles, heard loud and clear, to preserve our residential status. We have enjoyed some important victories, and we have suffered some difficult defeats. Our members of yesteryear could not have envisioned that blocks of residential homes and small business establishments, who worked so hard with sacrifices and pride, would be targeted for demolition. They were to be displaced by private and Federal institutions and real estate developers' buildings, massive structures of masonry and glass.

At one time, our neighborhood was full of small businesses, mom-and-pop stores, restaurants, K Street Market, and our neighborhood Circle Theater, and these served almost all of our daily needs and desires within walking distance. In the 1950s and 1960s, financial powerhouses began a serious push for development with a view to purchasing homes and businesses to demolish and rebuild. To name just a few of these:

The State Department, Civil Service Commission, Columbia Plaza, Watergate complex, World Bank, International Monetary Fund, the PEPCO main office building, and expansion and development of The George Washington University.

In our longstanding battle to preserve the residential character of the West End, we have achieved a number of important victories that are worthy of mention:

The West End Citizens Association

Our purpose, as stated in our bylaws, includes:

- Providing informational meetings for the membership on topics of community interest;
- Maintaining liaison with appropriate agencies of the District of Columbia to obtain necessary services for the community;
- Supporting historic preservation efforts in the West End neighborhoods;
- Applying for historic landmark status or historic district status for such West End buildings and areas meriting such status; and
- Representing the Association on the Federation of Citizens Associations.

- * One of our first victories was against the practice of developers condemning private home properties and buying them for a "song." This injustice angered the leaders of WECA, who banned together and appeared at a hearing before Congress to plead their case. Congress subsequently passed a law that market value (or higher) prices must be paid for residential and mom-and-pop properties; thereafter, competitive bidding was in place.
- * Another victory was saving historic Grant School (now School Without Walls) from development takeover and destruction. Once again, WECA leadership appeared before Congress and won the case.
- * Fire Engine Station No. 23 on G Street has been threatened with closure several times. WECA rallied to strongly support the crucial need to keep this safety facility intact. In existence since 1907, the station has not been closed.
- * Added to our list of winners is the historic 1925 F Street Club, targeted for demolition by the World Bank, which sought to purchase the Club along with the rest of the block. A battle ensued, with WECA joining forces with prestigious Club members to save this famous neighborhood landmark.
- * In more recent years was the battle over 2000 Pennsylvania Avenue (Red Lion Row), with its distinctive and historic Victorian façade. This was a long process involving strong convictions that these old-time homes be spared the wrecking ball. In the end, West End Citizens Association leaders achieved what we consider to be a fair compromise: sections of the original building were retained as a streetscape facade, and a business promenade and high rise office structure, owned by the George Washington University, were added.

Over the years, the West End Citizens Association has forged alliances with like-minded organizations seeking to preserve D.C. neighborhoods. Soon after being organized, the West End Citizens Association became a long-standing, influential member of the D.C. Federation of Citizens Associations, which embodies a unified power of recognition in our city and Federal governments. Closer to home, WECA has developed a meaningful relationship with the local Advisory Neighborhood Commission (ANC-2A), which was created by law in 1975. WECA also has close ties to the Foggy Bottom Association, which was organized in the late 1950s with boundaries very similar to those of WECA. Numerous residents are members of both associations, which frequently join hands to accomplish mutual endeavors and goals.

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With courage, faith, and steadfast purpose, the West End and the West End Citizens Association have survived. We have successfully maintained and preserved our community -- a safe, proud, and environmentally attractive place to be. We strive for individuality, independent survival, and a historic, colorful character within our [congested?] urban community. We reach out to newcomers, with a large percentage of our population now residing in condominiums and apartments.

We welcome you to join the West End Citizens Association and become an active participant, sharing your inspirations, knowledge, and constructive views as a member. We encourage you to open your home and open your heart to the West End, one of the friendliest and most attractive neighborhoods in our nation's capital.

(Lucille Molinelli, Treasurer of the West End Citizens Association, has resided on F Street in the West End since 1948.)