

## **Amendment to Cheltenham Twp. Home Rule Charter Needed**

As we sat at the curb in our lawn chairs; the anticipation for the 2009 Glenside 4<sup>th</sup> of July Parade could be felt as neighbors and friends arrived for the annual event. The weather was picture perfect; warm, sunny and low humidity. The parade reflected heroism, volunteerism and the multicultural diversity that is The United States of America. There were volunteer firemen, military veterans, Irish dancers, Scottish bagpipers, Latina dancers, reenactors of the Revolutionary War, religious groups, steppers, string and marching bands, scouts and politicians. As the honor guard approached with our flag, people stood up and the din grew softer as this symbol of Independence was carried passed us.

It was inspiring to be reminded of those who fought for Independence and Liberty. This was a treasonous act in the 1700's; to declare Independence and take up arms against the King, and yet, so many willingly fought and sacrificed for a country to be born. Revolutionary skirmishes and battles were fought right here in the Cheltenham area. Today, we have the freedom to speak out against our governing officials, to protest and wage a "war" against those who would come into our community to develop land which will negatively impact our environment and the values of our homes.

Cheltenham Township residents are being assaulted by proposed developments of hundreds of housing units on the former Ashbourne Country Club and Laverock Hill Estate. Additionally, SEPTA has proposed to build an enormous parking garage and transportation center at the Jenkintown-Wyncote station. Envision a couple thousand more cars traveling our small residential streets daily, less open space, more flooding from the run off of paved and developed areas. All of this would drastically change the character of Cheltenham. Resident groups have been formed across the Township to battle this unwanted development.

A group of residents in the Wyncote and Jenkintown area, *Cheltenham Chamber of Citizens*, are working hard to stop SEPTA from building a garage and transportation center at the J-W station. After 11 months of meetings, both Township and SEPTA, it is apparent that the residents' desires have had little to no affect on SEPTA's ill conceived public policy of attracting riders from the outer suburbs to drive into our Township so that they can park and take the train, instead of using their local stations.

Out of our frustrations, a small group of residents, *We The People of Cheltenham*, have pursued the possibility of amending our Township Home Rule Charter to include a Bill of Rights section in hopes to preempt public benefit corporations (like SEPTA) from asserting their rights over those of the citizens in deciding how our community will be developed. This new group has been working with the *Community Environmental Legal Defense Fund*. A petition has been created to place a question on the November ballot to amend our Home Rule Charter. 3,500 signatures are needed on the petition to get the question onto the November ballot. The petition can be viewed at: [www.wethepeopleofcheltenham.com](http://www.wethepeopleofcheltenham.com)

As we recover from the 4th of July Holiday weekend festivities, it is time to think about; Who is deciding the quality of our life here in Cheltenham, Who is making the decisions of what can be built next to our homes and Are we helpless against development that we do not want? The

Spirit of Independence is deeply rooted in the soil of Cheltenham Township's long history of the support of the American Revolution, the Underground Rail Road, the willingness of many to speak to social injustice and in the growth of our richly diverse population.

We ask our Commissioners to represent those who elected them into office by supporting the proposed amendment to our Township's Home Rule Charter. The amendment will begin to establish a Bill of Rights so the residents can decide what is built next to our homes. To take a stand against corporate development is not a treasonous act; it is the right of the people to decide how much development we can absorb without diminishing the quality of our life.

Tom and Olga McHugh  
Wyncote