

City History and Community Character

A Sole Distinction

Manassas Park has the distinction of being the last city to be incorporated in the Commonwealth of Virginia. This distinction may be responsible to some degree for the sense of independence and pride that the residents feel and express when talking about the City.

The road leading to independent city status was based on the desire of the founders to select the form of government that would best serve the needs of the residents.

Early Growth: Breeden Farm

Early in 1955, one thousand “low priced” homes were planned on a tract of land known as the I.J. Breeden Farm by builders Offutt & Register. Included in the development were 12 acres of land donated by I.J. Breeden for the purpose of building a school. By April, the model homes were ready and the builders were busy with the construction of the first section of 200 homes. This housing development would be known as “Manassas Park”. The first homes sold for between \$7,000 and \$7,200. Advertisements in the Journal Messenger Newspaper were directed at veterans, who were especially interested because

the 30-year mortgages only required a \$43- monthly payment and no down payment. The advertisements claimed that the two-bedroom homes were only a 45- minute commute from Washington, D.C. Stanley Rowland Realtors handled the sales of the first units. The modestly-priced homes proved to be popular. Seventy-two homes were sold the first week of April 1955 and by the end of the month 215 units had sold. By September 1955, the Prince William County Board of Supervisors approved the construction of more homes, bringing the total units to 1,571.

Developing a Local Identity

In 1955, the Manassas Park Citizens’ Association was formed. The first meeting of the Association was held on December 9, 1955, when 23 families met to discuss issues of general concern.



Figure 3.1 1957 Newspaper Advertisement

Community Becomes a Town

At a November 1956 meeting of the Association, residents approved a proposal to incorporate. The Association justified the decision by claiming incorporation would protect assets and that incorporation was a logical and vital step for the growing community. In January 1957, the Association petitioned the General District Court of the Commonwealth of Virginia to become an incorporated town. Its request was approved and the citizens elected a Mayor and Town Council. The general feeling and circumstances at the time indicated that such a change would be economically beneficial regarding the financing and operation of a sanitary sewer collection system, a water distribution system and other vital urban services. As a town, Manassas Park boasted a population of 2,500.

It's More than "Just a Name"

As Manassas Park continued to establish its own identity, the similarities between the names of Manassas City and Manassas Park were often confusing to outsiders. The Association sought to eliminate the confusion by proposing that the Town of Manassas Park change its name. In the fall of 1961, the Association selected four names as

possible alternatives to the name *Manassas Park*.

Stonehaven

This alternative was chosen because of the similarities of size between Manassas Park and a small town in Scotland named Stonehaven.

Redstone or Redrock

This name was chosen due to the earthen characteristics of Manassas Park.

Lomond Park

This alternative was a combination of the names of the Town of Manassas Park and the community of Loch Lomond.

McLor

This name was created from the initials of five people who had helped start the town:

- **M:** Ted McLean, former Mayor
- **C:** Colonel George Carl, first Mayor
- **L:** Charles Lucas, former Mayor
- **O:** George Offutt, first builder
- **R:** Lindsey Rowland, real estate salesman

As a result of the Association vote, "Stonehaven" was the most popular choice. However, action was deferred pending a study to

determine the cost of all the necessary changes. The Governing Body never acted on the name change.

In retrospect, retaining the name “Manassas Park” was a fortuitous development. The name “Manassas Park” is indicative of the strong beliefs of most residents today to retain the “Park” in Manassas Park. *It is definitely more than just a name.*

1960 Census – Larger than Manassas

The 1960 Census indicated that Manassas Park had a population of 5,228 residents, while Manassas had 3,529 residents.

First Business

When the Manassas Park Shopping Center opened in 1963, the entire town budget was funded by real estate taxes. Real estate taxes in Manassas Park at the time were \$4.35 per \$100 of assessed value.

The First Annexation

In 1974, the town annexed 600 acres of land from Prince William County and doubled the size of the community. By this time, the town was providing many public services. The question of what would be the best form of government for the citizens began to surface again in

1975 when many residents began to question the financial burden of dual taxation by the town and Prince William County. There was also concern about the quality and responsiveness of services being provided by the county.

Conner Center – Light Industrial & Commercial Development

The creation of the 200-acre Conner Center Industrial and Business Park became the primary commercial and light industrial development for the town. This was located adjacent to Manassas Park between Euclid Avenue and the Southern Railroad. Development within this area, combined with additional commercial development adjacent to Virginia Route 28, provided an excellent balance between commercial, industrial and residential land uses within the town.

The “City” is Born

In early 1975 it appeared likely that a statewide moratorium prohibiting towns with less than 10,000 residents from seeking independent city status would be adopted by the state legislature. The citizens of Manassas Park, sensing that their chance for independence from Prince William County was in jeopardy, petitioned the Court of the 31st

Judicial District of Virginia for independent city status. On June 30, 1975, the City of Manassas Park was formally incorporated.

As an incorporated city, Manassas Park assumed full responsibility for the construction and development of its own school system as well as the establishment of the Departments of Public Works and Social Services. The Police and Fire/Rescue Departments were also upgraded over the next year to provide increased services to city residents.

Final Annexation?

In 1990 the city signed an agreement with Prince William County to annex 463 acres of vacant land east of the Southern Railroad. This new annexation provided further opportunities for residential development and expansion of the city's commercial tax base.

One proviso of the annexation was that the city would not be allowed to annex any additional land for 25 years. As this latest annexation is almost fully developed, smart growth and development are critical. This smart growth decree is the impetus for the urgency in the successful update of this comprehensive plan.

As of the drafting of this plan, the moratorium on the city's ability to annex land is still in effect.

Virginia Railway Express

In 1992, the Virginia Railway Express (VRE) began service to Manassas Park and opened up a tremendous commuting option for many citizens. Many new residential developments may not have developed without the rail service.

Manassas Park Today

Today, Manassas Park is an exciting place. A wide variety of residential communities have developed over the last decade. These include the single family home developments of Blooms Crossing and Blooms Station, the townhouse developments of Belmont Station, Mosby Ridge and Mosby Ridge II, and the city's first apartment complex, the 350-unit Haverhill Apartments, which began leasing units in late 2003. The 148-unit Park Place Senior Apartments community was completed in 2003 and offers a unique housing type for the area. Finally, construction of the Manassas Park Station condominium and townhouse development underway, providing yet another housing alternative to residents. This expanded housing base is expected to complement the most innovative development to date – Park Center.

Park Center

The concept of a town center was introduced in the 1990 Comprehensive Plan Amendment. In November 1999, the City sponsored a charette to explore options for a new mixed-use development. For three full days, over 60 citizens worked with consultants and produced the vision of the future community, resulting in the adoption of the Manassas Park Urban Design Concept.

The Park Center Advisory Committee (PCAC) was formed in 2002 to work with the design firm Strategic Land Planning, Inc. (now Sympoetica, Inc.), to develop the detailed Park Center Design Standards & Guidelines for the site that would become the Park Center. This document was adopted by the Governing Body in 2003 and was

subsequently awarded the Outstanding Plan Award for a Site Specific Plan from the Virginia Chapter of the American Planning Association.

Park Center will provide approximately 275 jobs, space for retail, businesses, and professional offices, and multifamily residential condominiums.

The Park Center development is defined in more detail in Chapter Eleven, Land Use & Urban Design.

Underlying Objective

Throughout Manassas Park's short history, the underlying objective of its government has remained the same: *to provide the highest quality of public services to its residents through a government structure that is responsive to the needs of its citizens.*

Map of Public Facilities on next page

