



PUBLISHED SINCE 1948 FOR THE TOWN OF GLEN ECHO, MARYLAND ~ CHARTERED IN 1904 ~ JANUARY 2026

TOWN COUNCIL NOTES

Mayor Costello, Town Manager Susan Theis, Council Members Spealman (attending remotely), Tanner, and Wilson, along with two residents attended the December 8 Council meeting at the Town Hall. Council Member Stiglitz was absent.

Electric Bills and Streetlights

Council Member Spealman opened with questions about Pepco costs, noting that the Town has already exceeded its annual electricity budget. Ms. Theis said the apparent overrun is likely an accounting issue rather than a true overspend. She has been coding all Pepco bills to the electrical budget line rather than splitting them between electrical and the separate streetlights line, which has a budget of \$9,000. She plans to recode the charges to the correct accounts and report back.

Resident Gloria Levin raised a concern about a problematic streetlight that

stays on for several hours in broad daylight. She has reported the problem repeatedly over the years, and Pepco has fixed it multiple times, only for the malfunction to return. Ms. Theis said she has contacted Pepco several times since October and will keep pressing the utility. Council Member Wilson noted that, since many residents are regular dog walkers, they could help monitor other streetlights around Town.

Tree Ordinance

The Council revisited the draft tree ordinance, which has been through multiple iterations over the past year. The Mayor emphasized her

goal of making the rules as simple and readable as possible for residents while still giving the Town tools to protect its tree canopy.

The current draft focuses on tree size rather than specific species, with a key threshold at 30 inches in circumference measured 30 inches above the ground. The group discussed whether the ordinance should still give special consideration to native canopy trees, as earlier drafts did. Members of the Green Team had previously developed two lists: one of recommended native species for replanting, and another of canopy trees that would receive extra protection. Mr. Spealman noted that the current draft does not clearly state why a removal permit might be denied, and offered to propose clarifying language

in writing. Several Council Members worried that detailed species lists could quickly become outdated. Ms. Wilson argued that lists are more appropriate for replanting guidance, while removal rules should stay general and size-based.

The Council also discussed enforcement. The ordinance must spell out a sufficient fine to deter violations and support stop-work orders. The Council set a goal to review a more complete draft at the January 12 meeting before asking the Town attorney to convert it into formal ordinance language.



Composting Survey Results

Ms. Theis presented results from the Town's recent composting survey, which drew 60 responses over about three weeks. The survey showed strong resident in-

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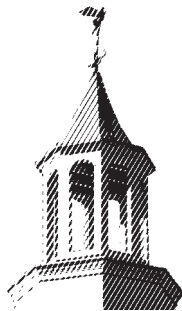
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Letters to the editor are welcome. They must be signed.

Articles for publication are also solicited. Please send comments about *The Echo* to the editor, the Mayor, or any Council Member. Volunteer reporters are always needed.



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Next Council Meeting: January 12, 2026, 7:30 PM

terest in a curbside composting pilot, with roughly two-thirds of respondents supportive of the Town investing in a program. Environmental sustainability and waste reduction were the most common motivations, while pests, odors, and cost were the top concerns. Residents were more split when it came to cost. When asked whether they would be willing to pay for composting service, 22 respondents said yes, 17 said maybe, and 20 said no. Among those willing to pay, acceptable monthly fees ranged from \$1 to \$20. Notably, 13 residents said they would only participate if the service were free. Despite

those cost concerns, support for Town investment was strong: 35 respondents said they were very supportive and another 5 were somewhat supportive, compared to 20 who were neutral or opposed. If a pilot proves successful, 37 said they would support expanding it Town-wide, 7 said maybe, and 16 were unsure or opposed.

The Council discussed a model similar to services such as Compost Crew, with households that opt in receiving a small bin and weekly curbside pickup of food scraps. The plan under consideration for a pilot program would have the Town cover the service



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NEW TO TOWN

fee while residents pay for their bins as a buy-in. Ms. Theis will begin conversations with potential vendors to confirm pricing, minimum household thresholds, and possible discounts. The Council expects to review options early in the new year, invite a selected vendor to a meeting for public questions, and then open voluntary enrollment.

Leaf Pickup

The Council returned to the familiar seasonal topic of fall leaf collection. Ms. Wilson reported hearing from residents who feel buried in leaves between pickups, while others with few trees wonder why trucks are rolling through when there is little to collect. This year's schedule changed as the season unfolded in an attempt to match actual leaf drop. The Mayor noted that the core problem is that leaf fall is driven by weather, not Town calendars. The first pickup this year came when there were still relatively few leaves on the ground; a long gap before the next pickup prompted different complaints.

Council Member Tanner reiterated her concern that the Town is essentially throwing away free compost by vacuuming up leaves, trucking them away, and then buying bagged compost later. She floated the idea of some sort of Town leaf-mulch or compost area

but acknowledged it would be hard to pull off implementing such an approach. Next year, the Mayor plans to schedule pickups before the holidays at the end of October, November, and December.

Odds and Ends

Ms. Theis is preparing an RFP for new Town Hall doors. Also, electrical work was recently completed upstairs in the Town Hall, including new outlets and circuit breaker repairs. The hope is that the coffee maker will no longer blow a fuse at the holiday party. The Town Holiday Brunch on December 20 will include the usual Mr. Omelette, along with gluten-free pancakes, gingerbread houses, a cookie exchange table, and Manna food collection.

The Mayor reported calling Park Police about a car racing around the Glen Echo Park parking lot. She said they were responsive and handled the situation. She has not seen Montgomery County Police in Town as frequently as they had indicated they would patrol, but at least the Town is on their radar.

In what the Mayor described as a historic moment, the Irish Inn lease has been finalized after 19 years of negotiation. The Town received two months of back payment and will move forward with an increased rate.

Resident Karim Khalifa

There are new folks at 6102 Princeton—one of the handful of remaining original Glen Echo bungalows, now freshly spruced up with a newly fenced yard. The newcomers are Ian Marshall and Olivia Marsh and their mini golden doodle, Biggie.

Ian and Olivia have been in the area since 2022, a busy year that saw their wedding, Ian's medical school graduation, and the start of his residency and military service. He is an orthopedic surgery resident at Walter Reed National Military Medical Center. Olivia is a nurse and recently began a position at the Sibley Hospital Emergency Room. She also has a business doing custom calligraphy for wedding invitations, menus and more—check out Roc Pen and Ink online to see her beautiful work!

The couple connected as high school seniors in Rochester, NY, and have stayed together through college,



medical school, and nursing school, always in different cities.

Their jobs don't leave a lot of time for hobbies, but Ian golfs when he can and Olivia loves to bake—she made hundreds of holiday cookies for friends and family. They appreciate the warm welcome they have received from neighbors and look forward to meeting more as they are out walking Biggie.

—ANGELA HIRSCH

mentioned that his sustainability report for Glen Echo Park has been filed with and accepted by the National Park Service. However, because the Park is on federal land, any funding would require federal approval, and no one appears eager to seek that approval at the

moment. Mr. Khalifa plans to present the report at the next Council meeting on January 12.

Town Expenses

In November, the Town paid \$3,653 to Key Sanitation and \$1,000 to Mr. Omelette Caterers. —BILL VINCENT

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IN YOUR BACKYARD

In between the Winter Solstice and New Year's, there's a little known holiday that few people celebrate, though in my opinion, more should. I'm not talking about Boxing Day or Kwanza, but the extremely real and not-made-up holiday of **Duckmas**.

Duckmas falls on any day you like during the winter holidays. To celebrate Duckmas, you go for a walk along the Potomac and look for the bounty of winter duck species who spend the colder months in Glen Echo. Binoculars are optional, though encouraged. Bringing along a thermos of coffee—perhaps spiked with something stronger—is required. A coat pocket stashed with leftover holiday cookies is also recommended.

If you do celebrate Duckmas this year, here are some of the species you might be able spot:

If you see a duck that looks like it's wearing a cotton ball for a hat, you've found a **bufflehead**. These tiny, zippy divers are the smallest North American ducks—and maybe the shyest. If you can get close enough, the males are dazzling: a stark white body contrasts with a large, black head that sports a triangular white patch stretching from the eye to the back of the



Bufflehead

neck. The females are duller but still distinctive, with a dark gray-brown body and a white cheek patch. Look for them just about anywhere on the main channels of the Potomac, though I often see them in the plain above Little Falls. They are constantly on the move, diving abruptly and popping back up like corks, before they fly off to nest in the tops of sycamores.

The **hooded merganser** is perhaps the most elegant and striking of the winter lineup. The male is instantly recognizable by his namesake: a brilliant, collaps-



Hooded Merganser

ible black and white crest, or hood. When flared, the hood forms a bold semicircle with a dramatic, wedge-shaped white patch in the center, framed by black—a totally stupefying and unmistakable hat. The females are equally stylish but more

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subtle, sporting a lovely, shaggy reddish-brown crest that trails down the back of the head. Like all mergansers, they have a thin, pointed bill designed for grabbing

a surprisingly bright white bill that terminates in a little reddish-brown knob on the forehead. Their most endearing feature, however, is their feet: they have lobed



American Coots

fish, giving them a perpetually determined look. You'll find these ducks in quieter, more sheltered areas along the river, usually in the inlets between the islands—places where the water is clearer and calmer for fishing.

While not technically a duck (they are actually rails), **American coots** float, dive, and look enough like ducks that they are often lumped into the same category. Their identification is simple: They are, in my mind at least, the avian equivalent of a 15-year-old gray minivan. They have a sooty-gray/black body and

toes that make them clumsy on land but excellent swimmers. Look for them in large, loose “rafts” that drift across the water, often mixed in with true ducks. They favor the shallower, more vegetated parts of the river and ponds along the C&O Canal, where they can be seen “tipping up” to grab submerged plants. They can be quite territorial, so if you see a fight breaking out between ducks, it's likely a mean, old coot.

Happy Duckmas to all, and to all a good Duckmas!

—CHARLOTTE TAYLOR FRYER

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HOUNDS ABOUT TOWN

Let's face it, some of Glen Echo's most popular residents walk on four legs. With this issue of *The Echo*, we are introducing a new column that will profile the dogs of our neighborhood, providing background and anecdotes on some of Glen Echo's friendliest faces. This month's column profiles a particular goldendoodle who lives on the corner of University and Yale. While her roots tie her to West Virginia, **Lola Khalifa** is no stranger to Glen Echo having moved here eight years ago as a puppy. Her favorite spots range from the green field at the end of University to Clara Barton House, however after a run-in with a wasp's nest this summer, she may be keeping her distance from the historical landmark. Her owners, Karim and Joci Khalifa, describe her as loyal, intelligent, gentle with children, and “kind of needy.” With Lola perched on the couch, Joci admits, “She needs a lot of attention.” Still, her adventurous spirit shines through: Lola loves swimming and “running free” on the Cabin John Trail. Her love of water may come from living on the high seas during the pandemic. During those months, Lola was the Khalifas' trustworthy first mate and swimming companion, learning to swim behind Joci for up to 30 minutes. Her best friends include Willow, Tuck, Chewy, and Bear, but the truth of the matter is that this golden-doodle is probably fonder of humans than her fellow four-legged friends. —LIAM DOBSON



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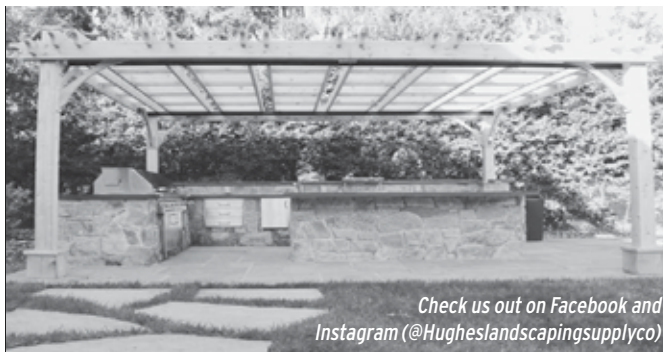
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The Avalon: In November, I recommended the quiet, beautiful meditation on life and death that is *Hamnet*, which I've now seen and highly recommend if you can catch it before it leaves the Avalon and other theaters. But if you're more into the classic play that inspired the movie, Hiran Abeysekera is performing as HamLET in a National Theatre Live performance that you can catch on January 25 and 27. *Is This Thing On?* will also continue to play into January.

It's written and directed by Bradley Cooper (who did well in those roles with *Maestro* and *A Star Is Born*), and it stars Will Arnett and Laura Dern who give honest, emotional performances as a couple whose marriage is on the rocks—driving Arnett's character to try his luck at stand-up. And if you enjoy writer/director Richard Linklater's work (*Before Sunrise*, the excellent

THE CINEMANIAC

Blue Moon that came earlier this year) as much as I do, then don't miss your one chance to catch his paean to the inventiveness of French New Wave cinema, *Nouvelle Vague*, only on the 21st. The



King:
A Filmed Record

black and white film follows influential director Jean-Luc Godard as he makes his first feature.

AFI Silver: It's a tradition here in Glen Echo to honor the memory of Martin Luther King Jr. with our annual Day of Service making lunches for the unhoused. (Please join us in the Town Hall on January 19 at 9 AM.) Afterwards, my family tends to watch one of MLK's speeches, and last

year we attended AFI's annual free showing of *King: A Filmed Record ... Montgomery to Memphis*. With a runtime of 200 minutes (including the intermission), it's not a small commitment.

But it is a stunning document of King's legacy; and highlights some of his most moving speeches. That includes his own eulogy, which he pre-recorded himself, and which plays touchingly over scenes from his funeral. Also, if you haven't seen it yet, *It Was Just an Accident* is still playing at AFI after debuting in October. Which is not surprising, given its reviews and its win of the Palme d'Or at Cannes. In the film, an Iranian man, who was once imprisoned by the authorities, thinks that he has run into his torturer years later, but there are doubts that

complicate his desire for revenge. AFI is also continuing to show *Song Sung Blue* this month, which features well-reviewed performances by Hugh Jackman and Kate Hudson, who have to deal with the ups and downs of being in a Neil Diamond tribute band. Also running into January is *The Secret Agent*, which explores the 70's Brazilian dictatorship through the eyes of a man trying to escape with his son from the country without getting killed.

The Alamo: *The Secret Agent* is also playing at the Alamo at the start of January. But the main movie to look out for there starting January 8 is *No Other Choice*, about a Korean man who will do almost anything to get a job. Director Park Chan-wook (*Oldboy*) is known for going to some pretty dark places, so don't expect this job hunt to go smoothly. This may or may not be your bag, and it may depend in part on how much the current DMV economy is getting to you. —DAN SPEALMAN

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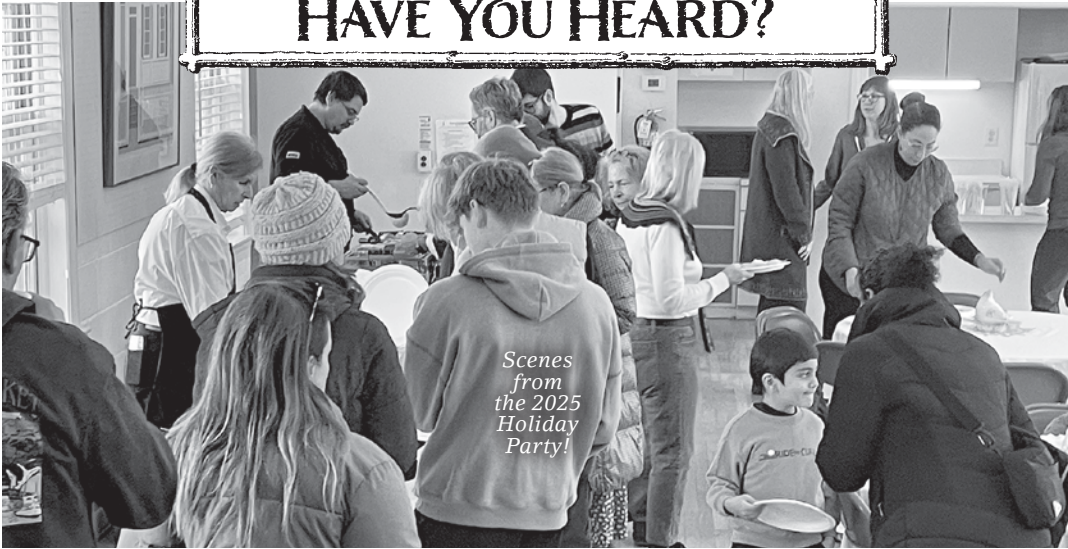
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HAVE YOU HEARD?



Scenes from the 2025 Holiday Party!



On Monday, January 19, the Martin Luther King Jr. **National Day of Service** invites Americans to honor Dr. King by serving their communities. Glen Echo will again take part: The Event Squad is organizing 200 meals for the Montgomery County Coalition for the Homeless, marking the fourth year our Town has supported the shelter in this way. Please consider donating money or volunteering at the Town Hall from 9–11 AM on January 19 to help assemble and pack lunches—just 20 dollars covers the cost of five meals, and your support makes a real difference. **Dan Speelman** is the event treasurer and will be collecting monetary donations including

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Real Estate
The two rentals mentioned last month—6008 Bryn Mawr and 5808 Oxford—have both been rented, so look out for new neighbors.

OUR TOWN PARK

As I reach the halfway point of my one-year term as President of the Board, I'm especially grateful to help steward a place that feels nothing short of magical and remains open and welcoming to all. I'm also energized by several exciting efforts now underway. Work that reflects both the Park's history and its future, which I look forward to sharing with the Town in the months ahead.

The past year was one of real growth and renewed energy, with more people than ever choosing the Park as a place to learn, gather, create, and celebrate. In FY25, Glen Echo Park saw double-digit growth in participation. From record summer camp enrollment to packed social dances and festivals that drew tens of thousands of visitors. Art exhibitions reached new highs, with Labor Day weekend alone generating over \$100,000 in art sales for local and regional artists. The historic Dentzel Carousel welcomed more

than thirty thousand riders, while expanding access by offering free tickets to Title I schools and youth-serving organizations.

Behind the scenes, important groundwork was laid for the Park's future. Environmental and cultural landscape studies advanced planning for everything from sustainability initiatives to the Crystal Pool site.

As 2026 begins, Glen Echo Park remains what it has always been: a living, breathing Town gathering place. It's where couples dance on a Friday night, children discover new passions, artists find community, and history is honored through daily use.

Whether you return week after week or bring a friend for the first time, each experience helps sustain the creative spirit that defines this place. And there is much to look forward to, including the reopening of the beloved Dentzel Carousel on May 2 for the 105th year since its first opening and a sparkling spring gala on May 16 celebrating the Park's past, present, and future. — **Mona Kishore**

GOINGS ON

Town Hall Events

January 7, 14, 21, 28 8–10:30 PM, FSGW English Country Dance, Wednesdays, free to Town residents

January 19 9–11 AM, MLK Day of Service, come help make 200 meals for Montgomery County Coalition for the Homeless

Glen Echo Park Events

January 2–4 6–8 PM, The Holiday Art Show and Sale, final days

January 3 10 AM, 45-minute, ranger-led Civil Rights Tour starting at the carousel, free

January 8, 15, 22, 29 11 AM, kids story time at the Aquarium

January 10 9:30 AM, Four-mile ranger guided history hike starting at the Carousel

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Jan. 15, **Riya Kishore**, 10
Jan. 29, **Sally Ellis**, 5

