



# CIVIC FEDERATION NEWS

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Serving the Public Interest Since 1925

Peggy Dennis, Editor Phone: 301-983-9738 Email: hotyakker@aol.com

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President I. Dean Ahmad and Publicity Officer Stuart Rochester listen as to Montgomery County Fire Administrator Gordon Aoyogi recount the efforts of the Montgomery County Fire and Rescue Services on and after September 11 as Chief Roger Stroock and Chief David Dwyer look on. The three chiefs accepted the Civic Federation's Community hero award in recognition of the day to day services of the men and women, both career and volunteer of the County's fire and rescue services.-Photo by Frances Eddy

## Charter Review Commission Hearings

—George Sauer, Legislative Committee Chair

Our program for January is on Legislative redistricting. Councilmanic redistricting has been taken care of by the Council without much bloodshed. A few nicks in the upper county districts but, unlike ten years ago, no blood on the floor. Congressional districting is in the hands of the Governor who doesn't have to come out with a plan for several months and who seems to be playing a waiting game with Congressman Ehrlich. Ehrlich is waiting to see what his district looks like before he commits to run for either Governor or re-election.

Committed program participants are Ike Leggett (Democratic councilmember) who will have to defend the Governor's plan, as he was a member of the five member advisory committee. In the other corner will be Michael Steele (the chair of the Maryland Republican party) who has been demanding single

member districts. Michael's position has been supported in public comments by no less than Doug Duncan and Roscoe Nix. A third point of view, that of the non-primary parties will be represented by Nicholas Sarwark (chair of the Maryland Libertarian Party).

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Both Glendenning and Mike Miller (another committee member and the most outspoken one) have declared their intentions of wiping out all the Republicans. It seems they have wiped out some other minorities as well. Clarence Mitchell IV is talking about pulling a Bloomberg as Baltimore City lost control of at least two districts. While the timing of the plan's release over the holidays makes it impossible to analyze its effects in detail, it looks like Miller has paid off his lackies. P. J. Hogan's district has shed most of its Republican precincts which now seem to be in the new 14th along with Dana Dembrow. It looks to me as if Bobby Neale's Anne Arundel home is now attached to a 90 percent PG County district.

## ExComm Meeting Minutes December 20, 2001

—by Winifred Klein and Richard Zierdt

Meeting called to order at 7:45 p.m. and quorum is declared by MCCF president Dean Ahmad.

Announcements. Pat Cummings will assess re-districting plans on Maryland General Assembly web site, other links, and other documents.

Minutes from last ExComm meeting are accepted with no objections.

Treasurer's Report. Chris Suzich. MCCF has \$3658 checking, \$4161 savings; \$1285 dues income this year.

8:03 Steve Silverman arrives. Dean yields the floor to him. Mr. Silverman became Council president on December 4. Council awaits TPR report. Transportation is very important. Jan 22 briefing before the full council. Feb 12, 13, public hearing. 3 minutes limit individual or organization. Modified Impact Tax was re-introduced. Public hearings will be held. SS is in favor of it. Favors increased bus infrastructure. AGP will be reviewed. 110% capacity limit for school utilization was reduced to 100%. Development will be allowed at metro centers, i.e., White Flint and Twinbrook. Traffic will have to be reduced at developer's expense. Review of Special Exception process.

Cary Lamari: Senior housing. Already sufficient such housing in MC. County budget is 200M short. SS: sponsored the formation of a task force to look at this,

but was rejected by Council. SS is disappointed in additional appropriations for Hampshire. Housing Initiative Fund is given broad leeway in its distributions. Peggy Dennis: regrets Council decision 10 years ago to move toward privatization of mental health facilities. Could the Council get re-involved? SS: Council is trying to help some of the outpatient facilities. We do have a mental health crisis in this County and State. Urges that questions be asked of politicians.

Charles Pritchard: Legacy Open Space (LOS). Longbranch community. While the situation is OK, Charles wants increased cooperation between police and public. SS: Council can add appropriations to Executive's budget.

Bill Skinner: Reapportionment, MC is still shorted.

Fifa Northrop: New voting machines have been delayed, even though money has been appropriated. SS: 2006 is the deadline for a "touch screen" system. There is no money appropriated by the Council. Maryland has appropriated half the cost. County's goal is the 2002 elections.

Richard Zierdt: Conference Center—Can it be stopped? SS: Not much chance. Would have preferred King farm. Funding is a problem, vis-a-vis Barbara Hoffman, State Senator from Baltimore (head of) appropriations committee. Council often has to support what the County Exec and County delegation begin. If Council balks, the State may not listen to future capital requests. This is not the best system, but it's what we've got at present.

Mark Adleman: Impact Tax. Pedestrian support. What about schools? SS: Subin has proposed an increase in the recordation fee (when property is sold).

Dan Wilhelm. Supports increased bus service. Special Exceptions, religious institutions. What about a zone for this purpose.

Pat Cummings: Police / Citizens Review Board. SS: Steve supports the concept. Police unions may feel this is a "bargainable" issue. Council public safety committee is looking at this.

Chris Suzich: Redistricting. Does not feel as close to the at-large Councilmember as he does to the local Council member. SS: Local issues should be addressed to the district representative. Macro issues could be

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taken to both the local representative and at-large councilmembers. At-large members can give support to local districts that may happen to have weaker representation.

Annual reception. Dean has Myrna's report. 92 attendees. 1326.64 expenses. \$1,111 income, resulting in a \$215.64 MCCF expenditure. Aspenwood charged \$14 per person, \$2 less than last year. Myrna also expended \$30 for stationery, \$54 for wine, \$7 for sodas, \$13 for postage stamps, and gifts for Aspenwood staff who helped the reception. Chris moves that **half of the \$403 Myrna paid be reimbursed to Myrna.** Seconded. Discussion flowed around the ExComm's not having an opportunity to examine the expenditures beforehand. Motion passes. Richard: Now is not too soon to begin looking for sites for next year's reception. If we're happy with Aspenwood, we should book now. If not, then begin looking at alternatives. Myrna wants to take a break for next year. Fifa Northrop will look at alternatives.

Dues structure. Peggy Dennis. Increases in printing costs warrant a new look at dues. Hardcopy expenses may be itemized (with a surcharge for hardcopy, mailed, version of the newsletter). Dean has suggested lowered dues in exchange for online distribution. Pat Cummings: raise dues, but then offer a corresponding reduction in dues in exchange for the online copy only. Dick Strombotne: Dues currently cover the cost of the newsletter. Dean: the more organizations that take online copies (only), the more the MCCF benefits financially. Bill Skinner: hardcopy is important. Charles Pritchard: online version (only) will destroy the newsletter. Hardcopy is important. Fifa Northrop: hardcopy is important, and some modems are slow. Peggy: some organizations reduce dues when members do not take hardcopy. Also, newsletter production is onerous. Motion: place Dean's proposal on the agenda at the January delegates meeting. Pat: substitute motion: Offer two plans (1) Keep dues, but charge extra for hard copy, or (2) Raise dues, and offer discount for online newsletter. Substitute motion is defeated. Now Peggy's motion is **raise dues enough to send the newsletter 1st class, but offer a discount if the newsletter is obtained online.** Passes. Charles Pritchard has offered to help assemble the newsletter "for pretzels."

Referendum Reform. Dick Strombotne. Committee consisting of Dick, Mark Aldeman, Pat Cummings, Jerry Garson, Wayne Goldstein, Dave Michaels, George Sauer, and Bill Skinner. Group has dissolved

itself, reporting that a new independent organization, independent of the MCCF has been formed to reach these political goals.

Community Hero Award. Dean nominates David Brown for community award. ExComm consents. Bill Skinner: reductions in State capital money are a problem. This is an opportunity to kill State funding for the Conference Center. Bill will write article. Richard will write about Dave Brown.

County Redistricting. Dean moves that **the number of councilmanic districts be increased from 5 to 7.** Seconded. Bob Abrahms: would prefer a specific recommendation regarding the total number of Council members. Dan offers an amendment: **the number of Council members should remain at nine.** Jean Goldstein: more Council members would require additional staff, at tremendous cost, and at greater likelihood of gridlock. Cary: more councilmembers would make for a more dynamic council. Dan: smaller groups are more efficient. Amendment passes. Resultant motion: the ExCom refers to the delegates, with favorable recommendation, to increase the number of councilmanic districts from 5 to 7 and to keep the total number of councilmembers at 9. Passes. Articles on this issue will appear in the newsletter.

Education. Mark Adleman. distributes flyer and report.

Environment. Charles Pritchard. Anacostia cleanup is two-thirds done. Purchase of Boyds property for LOS is a fortunate acquisition.

Legislation. Dean Ahmad. Legislative score card: MCCF should keep this in mind.

Membership committee. Dean received an updated membership list from Steve Howie.

Transportation committee. Dan Wilhelm. TPR report is on the web.

Organizing Standing Resolutions. Bill Skinner transcribed motions from 1996-98.

Pat Cummings: Citizens Review Board (of police). January 10 meeting will have this on the agenda.

10:50 Meeting is adjourned.

Respectfully submitted  
Richard Zierdt and Winifred Klein

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## Proposal For a New Dues Structure

–by I. Dean Ahmad, President

It's been nine years since we raised our dues. In that time postage rates have gone up, printing costs have gone up, and we've begun paying for our layout. At the same time it has become harder to get people to volunteer for the tedious tasks of preparing the mailing and dealing with the bureaucracy at the bulk mailing center. And some of our members have complained that the bulk mailed newsletters do not reach them until after the meetings. One might think it was time to increase our dues. However, the increased availability of e-mail during that period gives us an opportunity to improve service while minimizing a dues increase—even reduce dues in some cases—by instituting a restructuring that rewards organizations whose delegates are willing to switch to an e-mail version of the newsletter. We already post a printable PDF version of the newsletter available for download on our website. The Executive Committee has placed the following proposal for a new dues structure before the general membership at our January meeting.

Here is the **current** dues structure:

Membership Type	Number of Households	DUES	# of Delegates
Individual Associate	(not applicable)	\$15	1
Neighborhood Organization	Less than 300	\$35	2
	301 to 600	\$50	3
	More than 600	\$65	4
Umbrella Organization	Less than 500	\$35	2
	501 to 1000	\$50	3
	More than 1000	\$65	4
Municipality (Town/City)	(any size)	\$65	2
Business Associate	(not applicable)	\$65	2
Nonprofit Organization	(not applicable)	\$35	2
Public/Govt. Organization	(not applicable)	\$65	4

We propose to raise the basic dues from \$15/35/50/65 to \$20/45/65/85 with a \$10 discount for each

member who wants no mailed copy of the newsletter. This will result in an increased net income of from \$385 to \$865 depending on how many members take advantage of the e-mail option, while resulting in a change of dues paid per organization ranging from \$10 less per year to \$10 more, totally under the control of the subscribing organization. (Individual members would pay from \$5 less for e-mail delivery to \$5 more for first class.) I suspect that even those that end up paying \$10 more because they want all their members to get first class mail would think the switch to first class mail worth the \$10 per year. But the choice is theirs in any case. With the production crew spared the burden of meeting the postal services bulk mailing requirements, it will be easier to maintain volunteers to do the mailing. (It should be noted that a switch to first class mail is not a formal part of this proposal, but that the proposal would enable us to do that if we wished. Alternatively, the extra money could be used to hire professionals to do the tedious bulk mailing.)

## Update on the Transportation Policy Report

–by Dan Wilhelm, 2nd Vice President & Chairman, Transportation Committee

As you probably know, the TPR Task Force made its recommendations to the Planning Board. The Planning Staff has prepared its recommendations for the Planning Board and the Board held two work sessions in December. The upcoming schedule is as follows:

Jan. 3	Planning Board work session
Jan. 10	Planning Board final work session
Jan. 22	Planning Board presents its recommendations to the Council
Feb. 12/13	Council hearings (3 minutes per speaker, including organizations)
Feb.-May	Council considers items related to this years budget
June-July	Council addresses remaining issues

I encourage all delegates and members to get copies of reports at the TPR web site: [www.movemontgomery.org](http://www.movemontgomery.org). Presently, there are the TPR recommendations; a Task Force list of projects

with pros and cons (in draft); point-counterpoint on the ICC; Planning Staff report; and other documents. The Task Force is still working on its report to go with the recommendations, which will be completed by mid-January and placed on the web site. The draft list of projects will also be updated. Remember to check the website through mid-January for the new documents.

I strongly encourage reading the first part of the Staff report, which describes the competing sets of values that marked the Task Force dialog. There are two ways of addressing congestion: address supply or address demand. The supply emphasis is on building more roads and bridges while the demand emphasis is to use more public transportation, adjust land use for future development to encourage more use of public transit, and protect the environment and existing communities. Task Force members values ranged from one extreme to the other and many different mixtures of both in between.

Since MCCF will start developing its recommendations at its February 11 meeting, I encourage you to read these reports and think about how you believe the county should proceed. The decisions made over the next six months will help set the direction of the county for decades in the areas of transportation and land use.

## Update on Referendum Reform

*–by Dick Strombotne  
Vice-President for District 2*

MCCF members established an ad hoc committee for referendum reform at the November 13, 2001 meeting. Eight members signed up to serve on the committee. Recall that at the February 12, 2001 meeting, the membership passed a resolution stating that MCCF will support and work for a charter amendment in the November, 2002 general election to reduce the number of signatures needed for a referendum to 10,000 from the current requirement of five percent of registered voters. Five percent corresponds to about 22,600 voters. The purpose of the charter amendment is to make it easier for citizens to put an issue on the ballot so that the voters can make the final decision on some laws passed by the County Council.

Six members of the ad hoc committee for referendum reform met on December 6, 2001, to start its work. They selected Dick Strombotne as chairman. They reviewed the applicable election laws and found that the committee filing the petitions for a charter amendment basically has to be independent with its own treasurer and report on its income, expenses, and debts when it submits the 10,000 plus valid signatures to the president of the County Council.

Consequently, the members of the ad hoc committee decided to form the independent organization **Citizens for Referendum Reform** (CRR) to manage the petition gathering process. CRR's first goal is to get about 13,000 signatures of Montgomery County's registered voters to satisfy the requirement for 10,000 valid signatures. CRR will be requesting help from MCCF and from other organizations to collect the needed signatures. It will also be requesting donations to pay the expenses of preparing, distributing, and collecting petitions and for other expenses.

Volunteers are needed to serve on CRR, collect signatures, prepare talking points, etc. Contact Dick Strombotne at Phone/Fax: 301/540-9597 or email: [rlstrombotne@ieee.org](mailto:rlstrombotne@ieee.org) to volunteer. Donations to help defray expenses should be made out to Citizens for Referendum Reform and sent to PO Box 528, Clarksburg, Maryland, 20871-0528

The draft language for the charter amendment has been reviewed by the attorney for the County Council. His suggested revisions have been included in the latest version. The plan is to have blank petitions available for members to pick up at the January 14, 2002 general membership meeting to take back to their own civic associations.

The absolute deadline for submitting the 10,000 valid signatures requesting that a charter amendment be placed on the November ballot is August 12, 2002. That late date does not leave much time to organize the campaign to approve the proposed charter amendment for referendum reform. It is important to get all the required signatures early so that the election campaign can start officially.

Dick Strombotne is the chairman and Pat Cummings is the treasurer of CRR. Other initial members are Mark Adelman, Jerry Garson, Wayne Goldstein, Dave Michaels, George Sauer, and Bill Skinner.

## **Both Sides Now: Two Views on Councilmanic District Reform**

### **Smaller Districts Mean Better Representation**

The recent redistricting, the subject of the program at our January meeting, has demonstrated that each of the existing five districts has now grown to where the population represented by each member is 15% greater than it was ten years ago. This growth is expected to continue throughout the coming years. Reducing the size of the districts will increase the accountability of the members without increasing the overall size of the council. Ironically, the value of this may have been most articulately expressed by a firm opponent of councilmanic districts, Mr. William Hanna who, having served as both a district representative and an at-large representative, testified to the Charter Review Commission that district council members feel too much pressure from their constituents. We at the Civic Federation have never thought that it is bad for council members to be sensitized to their constituents and I anticipate the motion to be approved by the Federation. It is also important to realize that smaller districts will enable the redistricting process itself to be more responsive to the desires of local communities.

Some have argued that every voter in the county now has five representatives, his or her district council member and the four at large. This is simply not the case. I don't mean to put down the at-large members, some of whom have been quite responsive to the Federation and who sincerely try to listen to any constituent that calls on them. But as Mr. Hanna's testimony suggests, the pressure that they feel from the local communities is dwarfed by the pressure they feel from certain larger interests (and I don't mean the Civic Federation). Good council members who listen to concerns from citizens of the county at large do so whether they are elected from districts or at large.

I do not expect arguments about how we each have five representatives now to carry the day with activists like our members. My only real concern is that some well-meaning, but impractical members may try to substitute a motion to elect all nine members from districts. Much as this idea appeals to me, I think we must face

the political reality that the powerful interests who benefit from the existence of at-large delegates aren't going to give them up without a fight. If we demand the entire pie, we will place ourselves in the position of the irrepressible but impractical Robin Ficker who quixotically thought to convert the council into all councilmanic districts last time out. His failure was predictable for the same reasons that ours would be if we gave in to idealism and sought to move to an all district representation now.

*–I. Dean Ahmad, Ph.D.*

### **Why We Should Keep the Current County Council Configuration**

The delegates of the Civic Federation are scheduled to vote on a motion to endorse an increase in the number of single-member Council districts to seven. I strongly oppose this move. First, under the current system, each voter elects four at-large seats and one district seat, a total of five candidates. Increasing the number of single-member Council districts to seven would give the voter only three choices: two at-large candidates and one district candidate. Thus, the individual voter's choices are diluted. Only three, rather than five Council members, would be responsible to any voter in the county. Second, having only two Council members answering to the whole county electorate could initiate a highly parochial voting process. With seven of nine members concerned with actions particularly affecting their limited constituency, there is a clear danger that Council member votes would be primarily cast in deference toward implications for the next election. Concern for impact on the health of the entire county could sharply diminish. Why should the member representing the lower county of Silver Spring / Takoma Park agree to expenditures for park or road development in Damascus? Why should the Council member from Bethesda / Potomac agree to expenditures to improve public transportation in Silver Spring or Wheaton? If they would agree to such appropriations, they would run the political risk of "giving away" the tax money of the people they represent. It is better to have four members critically reviewing all aspects of legislation and who would be held responsible to all voters rather than only two.

Seven single member Council districts would likely induce legislative gridlock in Council deliberations. Granted, it costs too much money to run for countywide office. That is a separate issue of election reform that is not under discussion, at least not yet, and should not be

a basis of contention in proper demographic representation of the people of Montgomery County. The current method of four countywide Council members and five Councilmanic members appears to optimize the total interests of the county. On the whole, it has worked well in getting effective legislation and commitment of resources. Let's not fix somethin' than ain't broke!

–Bob Abrahms

## Legislature Adds Capital Debt

–by William J. Skinner, MCCF Past President

On December 18, 2001 Maryland's Spending Affordability Committee (SAC), adopted two overall spending increase formulas and made recommendations about handling capital debt. Spending affordability increases in the General Fund were limited to 3.95%. But \$200 million was added to the capital debt limit.

Montgomery County has three people on the SAC: Senators Ida Ruben (D) and P.J. Hogan and Delegate Robert Kittleman (R) who also represents Howard County. Kittleman and Delegate Martha Klima (R-Balt. Co.) voted against the increases and against the report, along with one public member, H. Furlong Baldwin, whose vote does not officially count.

The 3.95% is a come down from the 6.95%, 6.90%, and 5.90% of the last three years. Claiming that state tax supported debt outstanding should not exceed 3.2% of Maryland personal income and debt service on State tax supported debt should not exceed 8% of revenues, Maryland's debt capacity is now an additional \$1.2 Billion for FY 2003. Without a decrease in expenditures or an increase in taxes or revenues, operating expenses will exceed revenues by \$1.3 Billion and could reach \$1.6 Billion by 2004. Some people had suggested that the State simply borrow some money and wait out the economic recovery.

If Maryland were to borrow \$1.2 Billion now to help balance the expected spending deficit for FY2002 and FY2003, to repay this amount would cost approximately \$1.84 Billion over 15 years. The Capital Debt Affordability Committee in August 2001 recommended authorizing \$520 million for FY2003. Comptroller Schaeffer told that Committee in a letter in

August that they were making a farce of spending affordability. However, the SAC on December 18, raised the capital debt level by another \$200 million and said this money was limited to previously designated PAYGO projects.

Reasoning that many of the PAYGO projects in the previous budgets were placed there because of priority reasons, without the increases in general revenues that were expected at the time of approving these plans, the PAYGO projects cannot be built. Members of the SAC said they had authority to cut regular budget items, then set their own priorities for capital spending in an attempt to straighten out the revenue shortfall problems now facing the state.

Also recommended was excluding the FY2002 homeland defense costs, payment of FY 2001 Medicaid and mental health bills, BWI and Port Administration activities and the State Lottery from the Spending Affordability process. This change is believed to reduce restrictions on revenue generating activities, and "encourage accuracy rather than subterfuge in the budget process." A new "true-up" provision is intended to correct costs that have been understated for years allowing the legislature to make reductions on sometimes erroneous estimates which are then corrected in budget amendments after the session. The SAC said both the Governor and legislature would have to adhere to a rule that said "reductions to special funds should not as a rule authorize the amounts to be subsequently restored by budget amendment." Adherence to this rule might eliminate some pork, along with late-April bragging rights.

In the debate over increasing the State debt by \$200 million, Delegate Nancy Kopp (D) said that interest rates are the lowest in a long time and the spending will stimulate the economy. Senator P. J. Hogan (D) asked why \$200 million was a good number, and Fiscal Policy Staff Director Warren Deschaneaux responded that \$200 million sounds good, and we don't want it to be at \$500, \$600 or \$1,200 million. Senator Robert Neal (D-AA) commented that in the debt program the legislature can target cuts, then reset priorities and add to the budget. He was also concerned that Maryland higher education would not be capable of accepting all of the students currently in elementary and high school unless we start to fund projects now.

In the debate over the level of increase of spending in the General Fund, Senator Barbara Hoffman (D-Balt. Co.) said that even with the 3.95% spending level cap,

the legislature will have to cut \$300 to \$320 million out of current spending to get the budget close to balanced. Delegate Klima said she was against a 3.95% growth rate, since this will allow the gap between revenues and spending to grow. “Our job is to set priorities,” she said, “we can’t address future needs if we can’t address current needs.”

Delegate Kopp said there are differences between now and 10 years ago. “We now have the rainy day fund, and the dedicated purpose fund,” she said. “3.95% means no enhancements; it means cutting on-going programs and it is prudent to do this, since we don’t know what the budget for June 2003 will look like.”

H. Furlong Baldwin, retired president of the Mercantile Bank, said, “I am concerned that this [report] is inaccurate. It is flawed. This is only one-third of the fiscal year. Maybe by the end of March, you’ll have a better picture. You could use 2%, but you don’t want to do that. The script has been written, but I recommend 2%.” Senator Hoffman said it will take two years to straighten this out. Delegate Klima said that the rainy day fund was set up because of the revenue shortfall, but now it is difficult to cut spending because of the \$1 Billion gap.” Senator Neal said, “We did not get where we are in one year. The March revenue estimates will be worse and we can make an excellent case for not making any recommendation at all. Part of our problem is that we go so high one year, then so low, but we need to solve this with a balance. The \$200 million borrowing recommendation moderates this.”

Following the meeting, Jeff Hooke, a financial author and one-time university finance teacher who lives in Chevy Chase, commented on the meeting, saying, “They have changed accounting methods, and decided to borrow their way out of the hole.” Another commented that this is like having Arthur Anderson telling Enron that the company is in trouble just before the company values disappear, leading everyone to wonder why the regulatory controls do not work.

The SAC plan recommended to the Governor is to take money from reserves, make further reductions in the budget, and adjust current tax laws. Also, the rainy day fund and general fund balances would be consolidated to a total of 5% at the end of the budget period. Finally, the Committee recommended that vacant positions under the current freeze be examined to see if they can be permanently abolished without seriously harming operations of State Government. Creating

new positions in 2002 should be limited to public safety and homeland security, facilities scheduled to open in 2003, and addressing workload increases in higher education and essential services at 24-hour facilities.

Montgomery County Council President Steve Silverman told the MCCF Executive Committee on December 20 that the Council is often faced with funds being designated by its state delegation or the Governor in Annapolis before the Council has taken a position on the project. Silverman is worried that not accepting State money would set a precedent that would damage Montgomery County’s chances of getting money in the future.

We recall Gov. Schaefer giving \$70-some million for a light rail from Silver Spring to Bethesda when the County had not asked for it. We did not build this and had to struggle to keep the money. Then the Delegates from District 16 and elsewhere fought for State funds to build the Conference Center and got the money approved before the County had selected a location and made a decision to build. Even when the Council had voted to build a new jail in Clarksburg, MCCF asked Gov. Glendening not to fund it.

In these tough economic times, Montgomery County might want to figure out ways to eliminate or delay projects like the Conference Center. That project is still in the Courts after six years, and the County has survived without it. The millions of dollars designated and held by the State for the Conference Center could be spent for something that is really needed now. This is a matter of setting priorities rather than setting aside more money.

The temptation for Council Members and State Legislators to spend without priorities is overwhelming. In the 1992 recession, the SAC made the recommendation that the State increase spending by zero (0) %, and the Governor and General Assembly blithely increased spending by 10.0%. Better is always more and visa versa, and “affordability” is a dead word in Maryland.

**Do we have your correct address?**

Send all address corrections to Steve Howie  
phone: 301-972-2736;  
e-mail: [stevehowie@aol.com](mailto:stevehowie@aol.com)

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## Community Hero: David Brown

–by Richard Zierdt

David Brown has managed to do what public outrage has not: Stop the Conference Center, at least for now.

Just about every civic group in the County, and most businesses oppose this monstrosity as well. When pro-road and slow-road advocates agree on the same issue, you know it's universal. The Center would put the County Government in the hotel business, and gives Marriott a taxpayer-funded hotel for Marriott's use. The traffic this thing will generate, its impact on Rockville Pike, already known throughout the Washington region as one of the worse traffic spots, will be a disaster. The Center won't even provide what it was originally intended for, namely, a place where large conventions of people can meet in Montgomery County. The Center is too small for that, and will only supplement (and take business away from) what is already available in Bethesda and Silver Spring.

Dave Brown, through his own efforts alone, has filed two suits to stop this project, and is contemplating a third. His time and efforts are Herculean, and should be inspiration to all citizens. He is fighting city hall with all he's got.

However, as everyone familiar with this project knows, the Courts so far have rejected Dave's motions for reconsideration. So what's the big deal? A citizen files a lawsuit and gets shot down. Happens all the time, yes? Well, sometimes no. What Dave has won is time. Time to put doubts in the minds of some financiers who are reluctant to finance projects in litigation, and time for us, the citizens of this County to stop State funding, and Council support, of this project. The MCCF Ex-Comm has re-iterated its opposition to this project, and our State delegation should be made fully aware of this. Also, State Senator Barbara Hoffman from Baltimore, member of a State appropriations committee, should re-examine State funding of this project so opposed by Montgomery citizenry. This is one case where money not spent in Montgomery is better.

As Council president Silverman explained to the MCCF Ex-Com at its December 20th meeting, the Council sometimes approves to projects initiated by the County Executive or State delegation, even when the Council feels that it is not in the County's best interests,

because the Council does not want to stop something that asks for, and is appropriated (but not spent) State support. The Council wants to be a "team player," even when it is ignored.

What this says about Council-Executive-State relations is alarming. Reading between Councilman Silverman's remarks, the Council is essentially not involved in some projects initiated by the Executive and some State delegates. This practice should stop, and a good way to do this is to stop the Conference Center. How about it, Council?

Dave Brown has provided a last-chance window of opportunity for the citizens of Montgomery to stop a disaster. We should support him fully.

## Letter On Property Tax Assessments

*The following letter was sent to the County Council on behalf of the ExComm. At the January meeting the membership will be asked to revive the ad-hoc Committee on Property Taxes to review this issue and to appoint Fred Thomas to chair the committee.*

Dear President Ewing and Council Members:

The Civic Federation has become aware of community concern over property tax assessment challenges as conducted by the County's Department of Finance. Specifically, there is a concern that the County is targeting recent homebuyers for Petitions for Review out of the normal 3-year assessment cycle. We are especially concerned by claims that the practice is selectively applied to homes of a particular price range and that the range to which it applies has been expanded without notice. New homebuyers, unaware of this practice are caught by surprise with unexpected tax-liabilities in a manner that appears to be unfair.

This letter is to alert you to the Civic Federation's interest in this matter and, on behalf of our Executive Committee, to encourage all Councilmembers to support Councilmember Howard Denis' desire to conduct a review into the Department of Finance's practices. Given our interest in this issue, the Civic Federation's Executive Committee is proposing to form a special committee to further investigate the County's Petition for Review practices. We request that you

kindly keep our Executive Committee informed of the proposed Council review and any other pending action. Thank you for your attention to this important matter.

Respectfully,  
I. Dean Ahmad, Ph.D.  
President, Montgomery County Civic Federation

## Letter to the Editor

### An Open Letter to Federation Delegates

I fear that the Civic Federation is proceeding in territory that is not in the best interests of the citizens we represent. Specifically, I refer to the three articles in the December Newsletter regarding charter review, referendum reform and the county property tax. Reduction of the number of signatures required for referenda by more than 50% is against the best interests of the public for the following reasons. All of us strongly believe in a republican form of government. When the voters are satisfied with what our legislators and executive are doing, a majority vote continues them in office. When voters are disappointed in their performance, we oust the incumbents. If voters are unhappy with the laws and regulations and their administration, they vote for new representatives who will promise to repeal or amend them. Additionally, it should not be easy to call for referenda. When a group is opposed to an existing law, it takes efforts by many to convince 22,500 people to sign a petition. It would take far less effort to get 10,000 names. It should be hard to get 5% of the electorate to sign petitions because multiple issues on the ballot create chaos. The ballot would be overburdened with minutiae (it already has too many issues on it). Intelligent voting on these issues would disappear. Additionally, a restructure in the signature requirement would spawn clones of Fickerites who would place almost every legislative action on the ballot every two years. Retaining the 5% requirement for petitions is in the public interest. In the November Executive Board meeting a complaint about property tax assessment outside the three-year cycle was heard. Not stated in the newsletter article is that the County targets recent home buyers for reassessment only if the resale of the property exceeds the former assessment by \$150,000 or more. I believe it was premature for the Executive Board to formally recommend that the County Council, namely Councilman Howard Denis, review the practice, especially since our own committee on property tax assessment is inactive

and is only now being revived to study this issue. Councilman Denis has subsequently introduced a bill to prohibit the county from challenging assessments outside the three-year cycle. The Civic Federation Executive Board jumped to conclusions without having heard all the facts, including those which could be presented by the County Department of Finance.

–Bob Abrahms

## Editorial

### Future Changes to Newsletter Mailing

Sending the Newsletter by bulk mail results in some financial savings to MCCF, but these savings are more than offset by other problems. A five sheet or 10 page newsletter costs \$84.00 to send to our current 385 recipients by bulk mail. Using first class postage would increase the cost to \$131 or an added \$47.00.

The procedures required to send by bulk mail add considerable time and effort to the work of the editor, or more specifically, the “production editor”. As address labels are put on, the newsletters must be sorted according to zip code, counted, carefully bundled with USPS rubber bands, and put into special containers. A complicated USPS form must be completed showing the numbers of pieces in various pricing categories, subtotals, totals, etc. Then the whole kit and caboodle must be taken to the Shady Grove USPS bulk mail center, counted, weighed and fussed over before it is accepted for processing.

Using bulk mail requires an extremely tight deadline for submissions to the newsletter editor. And no matter how quickly we put the newsletter together and get it to the Postal Service on the following Thursday morning, we still receive many complaints that people are not receiving their copies until the date of or the day after the general meeting. In short, bulk mail is too slow. For these reasons, I believe that we should abandon bulk mailing and use first class mail for at least a trial period. Fiscally, we can afford to do this.

Beyond arguments about what kind of postage to use and its relative costs and merits, the time and energy required to produce 385 pieces for mailing is substantial. MCCF President Ahmad has found a new firm which, in addition to copying, is also collating and providing one fold for about the same price we were

2001-2002 MCCF Officers					
Office	Name	home	office	fax	email
<b>President:</b>	I. Dean Ahmad	301-951-0539	301-656-4714	301-656-4714	deanahmad@yahoo.com
<b>Past-Pres.:</b>	Jorge L. Ribas	301-258-1910	<not available>	301-258-1909	sfristoe@erols.com
<b>1st Vice-Pres.:</b>	Cary Lamari	301-924-2746	301-924-2558	<none>	wlamari@lmi.org
<b>2nd Vice-Pres.:</b>	Stanley D. Schiff	301-530-6455	same	<not available>	stanschiff@msn.com
<b>2nd Vice-Pres.:</b>	Jeanne Goldstein	301-652-3064	same	<not available>	<none>
<b>2nd Vice-Pres.:</b>	Dan Wilhem	301-384-2698	same	<not available>	djwilhelm@erols.com
<b>2nd Vice-Pres.:</b>	Pat Cummings	301-977-6004	301-840-0921	301-840-0967	<call first>
<b>Treasurer:</b>	Chris Suzich	301-417-9522	same	<not available>	jsuzich@erols.com
<b>Rec. Secretary:</b>	Richard Zierdt	301-881-0283	703-464-1617	<not available>	richard.zierdt@landmark.com
<b>Corres. Sec.:</b>	Winifred Klein	301-654-8084	same	<not available>	w-wklein@webtv.net
<b>Dist. 1 V.P.:</b>	Fifa Northrup	301-984-9424	<not available>	301-984-0147	breo_@hotmail.com
<b>Dist. 2 V.P.:</b>	Dick Strombotne	301-540-9597	<not available>	301-540-9597	rlstrombotne@ieee.org.
<b>Dist. 3 V.P.:</b>	Myrna Taylor	301-869-4499	202-429-2163	<not available>	MyrnaJT@aol.com
<b>Dist. 4 V.P.:</b>	Bob Abrams	301-946-7291	<not available>	<not available>	robertabr@aol.com
<b>Dist. 5 V.P.:</b>	Mark Adelman	301-942-6893	301-295-3208	301-942-4108	adelman3@erols.com

paying before. This is a big help, but it still takes many hours to make additional folds, secure and label such a large number of newsletters. In addition to the wordsmithing I do as “editor”, I have been shouldering the work of the “production editor” for the last year or so. I could not do it without the help of my husband and one or more MCCF volunteers and frankly, I am not willing to continue handling a task this onerous indefinitely.

I strongly believe that we must find a way to decrease the number of hard copy Newsletters we mail out, both to decrease costs and lighten the burden on the Production Editor. As the Newsletter is available to everyone on the MCCF website at the same time it is being printed out prior to mailing, and as Richard Zierdt has a procedure for electronically alerting every member that it is available, this should not be hard. We simply need an incentive and a procedure that will encourage members to agree to download their copies of the Newsletter electronically.

Some months ago, President Ahmad put forth a proposal to raise dues but allow member organizations and associate members to receive a discount if they agree to receive their Newsletters electronically. I put forth a slightly different proposal at the last ExComm meeting involving a surcharge for each hard copy of the Newsletter mailed out. I think the issue of whether we need to raise dues should be considered separately from which incentive - discount or surcharge - we choose to use to promote electronic distribution. But the issues should be discussed and necessary changes agreed to.

–Peggy Dennis

## From the President

2001 promises to be a very busy year for our organization. We have a full agenda for our January meeting, adequately described throughout this newsletter. If the ad-hoc committee on real estate taxes is approved, as urged by the ExComm, I shall be nominating its former chair, Fred Thomas be appointed chair of the revived committee.

Hey, folks! This is the last chance for delinquent organizations to renew for the current year (July 2001 – June 2002) before losing voting status. If you miss renewal this year you must pay TWO years dues to renew next year. Avoid that problem and renew NOW. Download a copy of the application form from our web site ([www.montgomerycivic.org](http://www.montgomerycivic.org)) to renew your association's membership to the Civic Federation. The Civic Federation is your means to effectively enhance and protect the quality of life in Montgomery County. Send your renewal to: Steve Howie, P.O.Box 325, Clarksburg, MD 20871.

Would you like to get your copy of the newsletter on line NOW, no waiting? The MCCF newsletter is available by the first of the month at our web site [www.montgomerycivic.org](http://www.montgomerycivic.org). To get an e-mail notice of its availability with “click here” access send an e-mail to Richard Zierdt at [richard.zierdt@landmark.com](mailto:richard.zierdt@landmark.com) asking for automatic notice of availability.

Happy New Year, everyone!

–I. Dean Ahmad, Ph.D.

## *Delegates Meeting*

**Monday, Jan.14–7:45 p.m.**

**Auditorium**

**County Council Office Building, Rockville, MD**

### **AGENDA:**

- 7:45 Call to Order, I. Dean Ahmad presiding  
7:50 Adoption of Agenda  
7:55 Announcements, Introductions  
8:00 Community Hero: Michael Brown  
8:10 **Program: Redistricting**  
    **Isaiah Leggett** (County Councilman Dem-at large)  
    **Mike Steele** (Chair, Md. Republican Party)  
    **Nick Sarwark** (Chair, Md. Libertarian Party)  
9:10 Approval of Minutes, Officers' Reports  
9:15 Old Business  
9:25 New Business
- Redistricting Motions
  - Charter Amendment (pp. 3, 6)
  - Property Tax Committee (pp. 2, 11)
  - Property Tax Assessments (pp. 2, 9)
  - Dues restructuring / newsletter mailings (pp. 3,4)
- 9:55 Adjourn

The **Montgomery County Civic Federation**, a nonprofit, educational, and advocacy countywide group, was founded in 1925 to serve the public interest. The monthly Delegates Meeting is open to the public and it is held on the second Monday of each month (except for holidays, July, August and December) at 8:00 p.m. in the First Floor Auditorium, County Office Building, Rockville, MD.

The **Civic Federation News** is published monthly. It is mailed to Delegates; associate members; news media, and local, state, and federal officials. Permission is granted to reprint any article provided proper credit is given to the "*Civic Federation News* of the Montgomery County Civic Federation." Deadline for submissions for the next issue: 5 p.m. Saturday, Jan. 26. Attach submission to e-mail to: Hotyakker@aol.com file in fully justified 11-point Times Roman font (preferably as a Word document.) Send editorial content to Peggy Dennis, 11115 Fawsett Road, Potomac, MD 20854.

**Please send all address corrections to Steve Howie**, P.O.Box 325, Clarksburg, MD 20871, 301-972-2736, [stevehowie@aol.com](mailto:stevehowie@aol.com).

## **Next Executive Committee Meeting**

Thursday, Jan. 24 2002 7:45 p.m.

### **Bethesda-Chevy Chase Services Center**

4805 Edgemoor Lane in downtown Bethesda

(Note: there are two entrances to the parking garage—one on Edgemoor Lane and another on Woodmont Avenue.)

**Montgomery County Civic Federation**  
**Steve Howie, Database Manager**  
**P.O. Box 325**  
**Clarksburg, MD 20871**

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