



CIVIC FEDERATION NEWS

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Serving the Public Interest Since 1925

Wayne Goldstein, Guest Editor

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Chuck Lapinski moderates a panel discussion on the County budget with Councilmembers Marilyn Praisner and Steve Silverman, and Joe Beach from the office of the County Executive. —Photo by Cary Lamari

April Program: The MCCF Transportation Plan

—by Dan Wilhelm, First Vice President
and Transportation Chair

For the last four years, the MCCF Transportation Committee has been working to develop a package of projects and policies to address our transportation needs. The membership has approved a large number of these projects and policies and many of them have been adopted by the county. Come to the April membership meeting to learn the details about the MCCF transportation plan and what the county has approved.

The effort began in 2000 with MCCF representation on the Planning Board Transportation Policy Report (TPR) Task Force. This group included citizen, development, business, environmental, and government

representatives. The Task Force produced a report in 2002 and the Planning Board, using those results, produced their recommendations. The County Executive borrowed heavily from the Task Force report in developing his “Go Montgomery” program in the summer of 2002. The Council held hearings and, that

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fall, approved a number of projects for implementation by 2015, based on available funding. MCCF members approved a large number of projects. All parties agree on some 90% of the road and transit projects.

The major adopted policy deals with balanced land use and transit-oriented development. MCCF supports these policies and the Planning Board is developing the details with local citizen input as master plans are updated.

About 10% of the substantial funding needed for the many projects is a county responsibility with the other 90% a responsibility of the state, including federal funding for the state. The Adequate Public Facilities Ordinance and related Annual Growth Policy (AGP) are intended to pace development with the availability of infrastructure required to support it. MCCF has been trying for 15 years to have the AGP actually achieve this objective. MCCF's efforts were a primary reason why the county asked the Planning Board for a comprehensive review of the AGP.

The review resulted in big changes late last year, including substantial increases in the transportation impact tax and the first-ever school impact tax, which are expected to provide much of the money for the county transportation projects. MCCF voted earlier this year to support an increase in state taxes/fees for the state transportation projects. It appears that the Legislature will approve some of the needed increases this year but with a Governor who opposes tax increases, the lack of sufficient state transportation funding will continue.

Delegate Meeting Minutes March 8, 2004

–by Lyle Schofield, Corresponding Secretary

MCCF president Cary Lamari calls the meeting to order at 7:46 pm.

Adoption of Agenda. Follow up on “Senior Flight” requested. Under New Business a “Public Safety Committee” is proposed. Problems with electronic voting machines recommended for discussion under Old Business. Also, a WSSC issue, and Public Financing.

Announcements & Introductions. Introductions of attendees at 7:55, around the room. More attendees have come in. Council Members Marilyn Praisner, Steve Silverman in attendance.

Approval of Minutes. Page 10, nomination for awards. Name “Arny Golden” should be “Arnold Gordon”. Page 11, left column, President’s Report, not “Artie”, its “Arnold”. Senate bill references on top of second column, page 9, should be “165”, not “5-65”. Motion for approval of minutes with these changes passes at 7:58 PM.

Community Hero Award, Mr. Andrew White. President of Kensington Volunteer Fire Department, and Volunteer Firemen for Montgomery County. Statement on line in newsletter and web site http://www.montgomerycivic.org/documents/hero/CHA_200403.asp.

Mr. White made a statement on his award. Appreciative of the award, considers himself a peer and an activist, and this award means a lot to him.

Bylaw Nomination Committee Vote. Nominations from floor to work on this committee. Establishes our officers for the coming year. Must be regular delegates, not a current officer of the Federation. Chuck Lapinski, Gerry Garson, Peggy Dennis, Dick Kauffinger, and Jorge Rivas nominated without dissent. Committee expected to elect its own chairman. Some concern about this process being contested in a previous year, however, the committee selecting its own chairman should take care of this. Motion to adopt committee made and seconded. Passed unanimously without abstentions. 8:04 PM

Program: County Budget – Chuck Lapinski. Panel discussion on the County Budget conducted by Chuck Lapinski. Program early for MCCF this year because county budget still is in flux, and will be final between delegate meetings. So, a little early this year without some things being final. Chuck’s opening remarks were to look at revenue side of equation (real estate taxes, primarily), then look at special fees. Developer community was to provide fees for the impact they have on county needs, but most likely this will not be as lucrative as planned (council members disagreed with this point).

Councilpersons Marilyn Praisner and Steve Silverman, and Joe Beach from county executive office.

Joe Beach started with general overview of current budget planning -- Largest source of revenue is property taxes, then income tax, transportation tax, then “intergovernmental” (state aide) that is mostly directed toward schools. \$3 billion mark was crossed in expenditures in FY2004. This in part to rising assessments (increased property tax growth), which is expected for near future. Some fall off with income tax revenue, in large part due to volatility of equity market (a large part of income tax was capital gains related). Joe feels that the county is in good shape compared to other counties, with growth of spending around 6% per year.

To compare to past years, the volatility is the largest part of unpredictable areas of budgeting. In past, volatility was extra income (which is easy to deal with), but now is lower income. Property tax growth is still growing, driven in part by refinancing of homeowners.

Fee structures (additional funding) has increased (telephone, energy, wireless phones) at or near budget expectations. Current fiscal year shortfall is mostly income tax (38M short), and investment income by the county is also a decrease. Some extra expenditure related to “Hurricane Isabel” (not specified), and state aid reduced as well.

General Assembly is another large uncertainty – lots of state activity that could influence community college and school aid, energy aid, and some other programs. This is a somewhat large amount – (120M?).

Councilmember Steve Silverman. Some overall comments. He was elected in 1998, county was awash in cash at the time. Was told that it’s hard when you have a lot of money because you have a lot of requests. His observation was that it’s harder when you don’t have cash (humor).

Came from private sector in a small law firm. Was surprised how little of the budget the council actually deals with. Big thick document, look at the changes for 2 months. But there is no “zero based budgeting”. Maybe 10% of the budget is actually looked at by the council in any given year – no time to look at the whole thing. Restricts ability to delve into the budget – not a very transparent document. Talked about the “master gardener program” which uses volunteers to help them become master gardens to help other citizens. Program took a hit last year, and then had 250 or so angry messages in support of the program, which they were unprepared to deal with. This is typical – very small

areas of the county budget get large amounts of attention, simply because of a vocal constituency.

Historically, the council approves 90-95% of the county executive’s recommendations on the budget. Some things get some scrutiny. 500 county employees turnover each year, and he thought that not enough was done to use this to help balance budget issues.

Not happy they exceeded the charter on property taxes last year, but thought the county could not have handled the reduction of services from this. Would have hurt the schools too much. But, difficult to find a whole program that can be eliminated – especially when the executive branch is not bringing many useful suggestions to the process. Process is just not able to have macro cuts, or macro revenue increases from the view and time given the council to review the budget.

Schools are a particular problem (\$1.6B is school budget!). Labor negotiations and healthcare costs seem to make this hard to find savings.

Not as bad as it has been. Libraries not on chopping blocks, parks and planning not being decimated, etc. Community at large is not interested in these kinds of cuts. He thinks that federal and state tax cuts have helped to take some of the bite out of the county increases, particularly with the more affluent parts of the county.

Prompted about the “strategic view” – what does it take for the council to take a new view of things? Short answer, a huge challenge to understand a \$200M agency and the impact of cuts as an example. At a disadvantage in terms of information – either stumble over things or take out a meat cleaver (which pleases no one).

Council is at mercy of county executive, who delivers the information that they deliver. But, he thinks Montgomery is in a better place than other counties.

Councilmember Praisner. Other counties have shorter cycles, but they have less complex budgets. Some counties the same people are executive and council, so they are more intimately familiar with the information and facts – less layers to deal with than this county deals with. She thinks they have structured things to the point that they have themselves in knots. Process is not successful for council members as well as citizens of the county.

Marilyn thinks problems are our own making – state is not the issue – budgets are growing faster than the revenue. She had voted for extra taxes in the past, then scaling back on increases when times were flush, and is an advocate of this kind of approach. Still, gaps with projections for the future. So, there is a structural problem and as a community we have not faced it.

In 1993 we had \$12M more than anticipated, and instead of putting an ongoing expense with this they built a technology innovation program (details missing). Fund is now nothing (was raided for on-going funding obligations), and this is where we get into problems moving forward. A 2-month review period is not enough time to look at the kinds of things they need to look at.

Marilyn has been looking at other counties, and some are in other parts of the country. Problem is that counties are wildly different in what they do around the country. Montgomery manages schools, police, fire, and transportation. Many other counties across the country have none of this, or just courts or a hospital. Looking at one county near Phoenix, one in California. Trying to look toward “program budgets”. Thinks we need to focus on some of the large departments, school system, and reviewed personnel costs; council would have a better understanding of the financial facts of the county. Not worry so much about the small stuff.

County Executives are at a natural disadvantage. They have to produce their budget before the State government has finished their work, which has a drastic impact on revenue for the county. Forces them to put in as much of the budget into state aid as they can, and this is always optimistic. Shortfall right now is at least 27M. In the 90s it was worse, since cuts came in waves requiring mid-year adjustments.

County is self-insured, which saves a lot of money, but creates need for risk management from county budget. Out of control Workmen’s Compensation in this category. Healthcare costs also. Unknowns like snow removal, etc. With a healthy reserve you can deal with this, but we don’t have this currently.

Q: Lamari – testified once (and not received well) that problems were consequences of decisions in the past. “Go Montgomery” is a duplication of transportation services, budget is equivalent of inspector general. Affordable housing also. What decisions can be gone back to and reviewed? A: Silverman: disagreed with some elements, as he thought that there was lots of

oversight on housing spending. When housing policy came out a couple of years ago with new categories, semi-annual reviews of this were instituted with reports of every expenditure. This is probably one of the most accountable programs in the county. A very transparent program. Invited us to review the documentation, reviewed probably three times a year. Praisner: Housing is defined ahead and reviewed later. There are sometimes changes, such as when a property requires some large unexpected repairs. “Go Montgomery” is a 2 person program at this point, small and negligible. Some are concerned about sustaining current infrastructure and not building new infrastructure. Lamari – what is the point of this separate from normal department? A: Only 2 people now, just some promotion and information.

Q: 84% of budget is salary and compensation. If not addressed, can’t deal with this. 9% increase for teachers. This cannot be sustained (salary doubles in a few years). 163 pages of teacher agreement, too complex. Without addressing this, other expenditures are minor noise. COLA was adjusted down last year in a cost cutting measure (18M, great effort), but less than 1%. This is not sustainable. Comments? A: Silverman: 140,000 children in schools, which creates a lot of structure based on class size needed. 17:1 staff to student ratio currently. All-day kindergarten in some schools now, 1.7M proposed to expand this program to 17 more elementary schools. Professional development was a large component, hundreds of staff positions. Question becomes whether we’re prepared to make tradeoffs in number of bodies, more of an issue than compensation. No culture to reduce personnel. 40% of teachers are maxed out from COLA compensation.

Q: Presentation on “cutting” and “trade offs”. Thinks more an issue of planning. Jail, “Soccer-plex”, Strathmore Hall, Block Rock, all examples of spending on things that aren’t needed and unaffordable. Turning volunteer firemen into paid employees with little except faith that this is a better solution or solves problems unspecified. When will they owe up to “going to the future”? Double dipping of retirement (county employee retires than works for park and planning as an example). A: Silverman – each thing is either symptomatic or looked at in isolation. Impact taxes are highest on new construction in Maryland (although lower than Fairfax). We are projected to get 44M in impact taxes a year. If it turns out that those are not the numbers, then we cut back on transportation or schools, or increase tax. Concerning fire fighter, he is not sponsor of legislation, so could not defend position.

Burden of proof is on those that want to change the system, and he has yet to be convinced. Felt volunteer fireman bill is sucking up a large amount of time that is better spent elsewhere.

Q: Intensive budget review is good idea, but hope it is not during 2-month budget cycle. Should take a certain section each year and intensively review – with orders from this the next year. Why not? A: Beach – County is (by law) an executive structure and not commission management. It is in the county charter – this proposal could not be done in the legal framework of the county. Would require structural changes.

Q: Wilhelm – couldn't figure out budget and testified for need for plan and list projects and budgets on operating side. Updated annually, so budget would just pick off projects. A: Not a question, apparently, no response.

Q: Nancy Wendt – Talking to other jurisdictions about “zero based program funding”. How could the county get there? A: Praisner – can't be done with whole budget and probably shouldn't for everything (overkill for smaller programs), but could be done with specific departments where it would have a large impact. Gave an example of looking at CIP in Wheaton, and very difficult to get information or answers. Very few states have county governments as comprehensive as Maryland's, and Montgomery in particular. No one has a magic bullet, but can get ideas from them. Worth exploring at least with specific sections.

Q: Arnie Gordon – Asked about sources of revenue. To what extent are we frozen by the state on transfer taxes, and but what rules can be change this. Many states of seen leakage of court tax, and as inflation impacts cost of property. If ABC owns a building and wants to sell, they would form a subsidiary; transfer the subsidiary with no property deed change. This is a loophole. A: Praisner – we are prohibited by state law. Tried to get through, passes in house and stalls. 30M to local government, 10M to the state. Estimates done to date to calculate additional revenue. Now in front of general assembly again. If loophole eliminated would have to be spent on school construction. House Bill 1 – Speakers Bill. Montgomery County Council is in favor of this bill.

Q: MPDU program for county workers. Could this be for county workers with 4 years in service & 1st time homeowner. A: Silverman – can be done, not sure if we want to do this as a policy. Looking at this in the

spring. Looking at closing cost assistance program. Also discussion about publicly owned land for public employees. Some real challenges with public employees – many are not being paid much. Most new construction is “from the 400's”. Next week, “from the 500's”. Discussed how builders are upping new construction costs each week based on high consumer demand, but still pay same flat rate on impact fees.

Q: Does council have authority to look at school programs? Without Strathmore, etc. etc., would it make a difference in budget outlook? A: Praisner – (1st – School Board question). some yes, some no. Conference Center all being paid by Motel/Hotel tax. Could argue that this tax could be for normal budget, but it is a separate program. Silverman – Strathmore was Baltimore/Governor/County Executive driven project. Forced on the county by holding school money hostage by state government representatives. Housing moratorium in White Oak for 20 years – probably held (no legal challenge) because other parts of county to build in. Either downzone, or pay people to not develop their lane.

Q: Peggy Dennis – Numerous experiences with many county employees are “calcified” – example, library does not take donated books. Why not have merit program for employees who expand revenue or services? A: Silverman – called “Gain sharing”. Thinks it makes a lot of sense. Never anything that's been part of the collective bargaining process. Probably we need to look at those types of options. Praisner – presentation on this in Baltimore, couldn't get anyone else on the council to do this. “City Stats” is another initiative to tie accountability and record keeping. Basic stuff on potholes and things. Charles County negotiated an agreement to budget 5% in county share if school system would create improvements in schools. They have had success in this and continue to go forward.

Q: Dick – Trying to get tax relief for seniors. Looked at reviews of tax systems of other states. Thinks tax code is in need of comprehensive review to complete before 2006 election? A: Praisner – initiative was sponsored by previous speaker, but election stopped this (speaker is no longer there). Has heard individuals talk about trying to do this. This is really a state legislature issue. Silverman – could be a review. No lack of ideas, but there is lack of political will. Penny on sales tax doesn't cover services, only goods, probably need to figure out how to get sales tax on services.

Program concluded 9:33 PM.

Public Safety Committee, Discussion of Chair and Duties. Committee used to exist, but was rolled into environment committee. President discussed how population has grown and that the need for a Public Safety Committee has returned. Fernando asked to chair committee for initial. Needs bylaws change to redefine this committee? Fernando would define mission for committee and organize its focus and direction. Could take a few months for this to be established. Should this really be called “Police, Fire, and Public Safety”? Committee would be very specific in its statement, and would also include “Homeland Security”. Committee existed in 1974 in the bylaws, but was later removed. George Sauer commented that members would benefit from “Police Citizens Academy”. Suggestion directed to the Chair. Motion to create temporary committee to explore this, seconded, and passed.

Old Business

Task Force on “Migration of Elderly”. Presented earlier SB 122 passed to study this (45-2), and HB 966 in house. Hearing held on 3rd of March, expecting to be reported out to general assembly for approval this year.

Electronic Voting. Deborah Vollmer: Legislation pending on paper audit trail requirements. Concerns that in some of the races one needed only 15% to send a delegate. Small threshold. Reports of glitches with machines, lots of anecdotal reports of concerns. Organization called “True Vote” working on this. Question about getting report from board of elections. Ballots are not clearly explaining that ballots pass over to two pages. Sample ballots should be used. Arnie discussed that machines have paper trail internal (2). One posted, one sealed. At the end of the day another tape is made, creating a paper trail. Cannot vouch for the inside of the computer, but based on numbers seen thinks little chance of problems. Not same as voter verifiable paper trail.

WSSC Issue. Brought up to county executive a while ago. Prior position by MCCF to support subpoenas power & oath to investigate (Aug 27, 2002). Would like this modified and sent back in. Councilmember Michael Subin already requested inspector general to look into this. Motion to reaffirm this position. Seconded. No opposition.

Budget. Luella Mast. Reports on table in the back of the meeting room. Movement to approve. Seconded. Passed with one abstention.

Election Reform Committee: Dale Tibbitts. Some petitions signed. Several hundred already. Close to 750 mark. August is deadline for 10,000 signed petitions. Packets in the back of the room with explanation and petitions to sign. Question about single districts – did we ever have them? No – never had single districts. MCCF was instrumental in creating 5 districts (wanted 9, but didn’t get signatures). Deadline firm of early August. But, earlier the better. Do not want to get into the summer months, since its harder to get signatures. And, want people talking about this prior to election.

GOCA has endorsed this position. Comment, “this is the most important thing we have ever done.” Will impact the county for years to come. At-large seats have been captured by developer interest, and will never of taken again. Lots of work attending meetings of charter commission, especially by Dale Tibbitts. We are obligated to make this successful. Peggy Dennis got 200 signatures, Dale about 100. Must be a registered voter. Want smaller districts, want more responsive council members, and “big money” is easier to overcome in smaller council districts. This just puts it on the ballot. Still needs to be voted on in the election. Delegates should take petitions to their representative member organizations. NeighborsPAC.org web site shows percentage of campaign contributions by big-money interest.

Public Financing. Hearings in Annapolis on public financing bill. Need signs of strong grass-roots support for campaign finance reform. Can’t wait weeks for this to take place.

Committee Reports:

Bylaws: on page 7 and top of 8 in the newsletter are a list of proposed bylaws changes. Will be voted on during April meeting.

Environmental: Dam being renamed for Rachel Carsons. 12 May, ICC forum will be held with people from both sides. Article on “ICET” program for funding transportation projects.

Finance: County is almost broke. Awards committee should have a past president on the committee for continuity.

Legislative: concern among dept of transportation on whether to put ICC on current plan. Pushed to 21st of April for testimony. Without inclusion on regional transportation plan cannot get federal funding. Committee for Montgomery has not taken a position; outside of supporting Montgomery County transportation plan. This would lead to all agenda projects, including Purple Line, ICC, etc.

New Business

MCCF took position in support of volunteer firemen. Chief of career firefighters has responded to this article in a lengthy document. Largest issue from paid firefighters is that there are 19 chiefs in volunteer organization, while there is 1 for the paid firefighters.

Announcement: Historic Tax Credit is under threat to have caps or to be replaced with a grant program. Problem is that grants need appropriation every year.

“Mansionization” conference, April 17th at Red Brick Courthouse. 9 to 3. Washington Post columnist Roger Lewis is keynote speaker. Other planners from around the area. Conservation districts & overlay zones, and other methods to help preserve character of a neighborhood to be discussed.

MCCF opposed ambulance fees last year. This position stands. No new action.

Meeting adjourned 10:21 PM EST.

Respectfully Submitted,
Lyle Schofield, Corresponding Secretary

ExComm Meeting Minutes March 18, 2004

–by Richard Zierdt, Recording Secretary

MCCF president Cary Lamari calls the meeting to order at 7:50 PM

Announcements

Charles Wolff – got a call from the Sentinel about the ICC

Steve Silverman is sponsoring Monday, March 22, 2004, 7 – 9:30 PM, Kensington Town Hall, Education

Agenda: Add: Idea for a forum on land use planning.

Minutes of the February 19, 2004 ExComm meeting minutes approved.

Treasurer’s Report. Luella Mast. Saved a lot of money on the newsletter because of reduced mailing expenses. MCCF has about \$7K in the bank. Treasurer would like the MCCF to have the financial resources to get our message out. Suggests various fund-raising events. Chamber of Commerce luncheon, \$40/seat. Big event. We need a bigger presence.

Ambulance fee. How would fees be distributed between volunteer and County services. Peggy moves that the MCCF contact all media to reaffirm the MCCF position. Seconded. Petitioner withdraws her motion. Cary will take action using MCCF’s position.

Electoral Campaign finance reform. Dale Tibbitts. Dale was in Annapolis and testified against multiple corporation loopholes (in favor of HB 931, a bill that would close it). Peggy Dennis also testified regarding public financing.

Petition Drive: Cary encourages that a petition drive be started. Contact him if interested. Charles Wolff encourages petitioners to collect 100 signatures a month.

President’s Report. Cary: Encourages MCCFers to support the MCCF’s Charter Amendment Petition. Talk it up; write letters to editor, contact other groups, etc. Cary met with volunteer fire department.

Wayne Goldstein. Montgomery Preservation is sponsoring a forum, a Countywide Community Preservation Conference, Saturday, April 17, 2004, 9 AM – 3 PM, at the Red Brick Courthouse, 29 Courthouse Square in Rockville. More information, call Wayne at 301-942-8079.

Federation programs for April (Baltimore Citistat) and May (transportation).

Strategic Plan for Economic Development. Pam Lindstrom. FED held a work session on it. Steve Silverman’s aide told Pam that a vote is scheduled for March 30. Doug Duncan’s plan envisions that employment should be greater than housing growth, among other things. Pam encourages MCCF to write letters to the Council to postpone a vote until a public hearing is held. Office of Economic Development, Tina Benjamin, 240-777-2000, wrote the document. Dan

moves that MCCF urge the County Council to postpone action on this until a public hearing is held. Seconded. Passes unanimously.

Community Hero award for April: Nancy Wendt.

Bylaws Committee. Dan Wilhelm. Next meeting is Thursday, April 15, 2004, 7:30 PM at Dan Wilhelm's to finalize changes published in the March Newsletter.

“Designer legislation“ article in the Sentinel by Jim Humphries. Housing Subcommittee.

Website policies and procedures. Cary Lamari distributes a proposed policy on policy and procedures written by Lyle Schofield.

Membership Committee. Wayne Goldstein suggests that MCCF members have MCCF membership applications ready when sympathetic groups or people are met (for example, at public hearings or forums).

Public Safety Committee. Jim Humphries: Disruptive behavior bill. Meeting at Fernando Bren's.

Transportation Committee. Dan Wilhelm. State Highway Administration is trying to get ICC CLRP changed from a study project to a construction project. Without such a change, federal funding is not possible. Cary: Does Sam Raker's encouragement of this bill represent a conflict of interest?

Environment Committee. Charles Pritchard. Forum on ICC, May 12, at the Southwood Avenue Recreation Center from 7 pm to 9:30 pm. Three presentations will be given. Speakers will represent both sides. Second topic: On Saturday, Northwest trail to be renamed to Rachel Carson Greenway Trail. Charles' civic association urged that the trail not be paved, and succeeded in keeping it a natural surface. Third topic: Northwood High School will re-open in September.

Education Committee. Mark Adelman. Attended Board of Education hearing regarding the surplus of currently unused school lots.

Proposed Forum on County Trends in Land Use Planning. Jim Humphries. Suggests that the MCCF cosponsor this forum with Neighbors for a Better Montgomery. Charles Wolff: this is an excellent idea, but suggests that the Forum be held in the fall. Dan: Forum should Focus; not be too broad in scope.

George Sauer. Affordable Housing Conference is this Monday, March 22, 2004, 8 am to 2 pm.

Meeting adjourned at 9:50 pm.

Respectfully submitted,
Richard Zierdt, Recording Secretary

Bylaws Changes

–by Dan Wilhelm, Bylaws Committee Chair

The March newsletter (pp. 7-8, available on the web at www.montgomerycivic.org/newsletters/200403.pdf) identified proposed Bylaw changes. The changes are not modifying the substance of the Bylaws but rather are improving its organization so that information is easier to find. The Bylaws Committee is also proposing adding some missing information that reflects current practice. According to the Bylaws, proposed changes are presented one month and a vote taken the next month. You are asked to formally adopt the changes at the April meeting. The Bylaws Committee is now working on substantive changes. The next meeting is on April 15, 7:30 PM at my house. All are welcome. Call me for directions.

New Public Safety Committee

–by Fernando Bren,
Public Safety Committee Chair

The Cary Lamari has announced the formation of an ad hoc Public Safety Committee and has appointed Fernando Bren to serve as chair. Bren is a Past President of the Civic Federation and a Former Montgomery County Fire and Rescue Commissioner. This committee will have broad responsibilities to monitor the mission, goals, policies, and practices of public sector agencies in the arenas of police, fire and rescue, corrections, public safety-related judiciary, and homeland security. During the next three months, the Public Safety Committee is focusing on writing a Mission Statement, identifying Preliminary Goals & Objectives, and listing Identifiable Tasks for the near-term and mid-term. Anyone interested in serving on the Public Safety Committee or suggesting ideas should contact Chair Fernando Bren at ph. 301-299-0899, fax

301-299-9455, cell 301-318-6921, or e-mail FernandoBR@aol.com.

Civic Federation Co-Sponsors Conference On the Challenges of Teardowns on April 17

—by Wayne Goldstein, Guest Editor

MCCF joins the National Trust for Historic Preservation, Preservation Maryland, Maryland Association of Historic District Commissions, Montgomery County Historic Preservation Commission, and the City of Rockville Historic District Commission as cosponsors with Montgomery Preservation, Inc. of a Countywide Community Preservation Conference on April 17 from 9 am to 3 pm at Rockville's Red Brick Courthouse. For more information and to register for the conference, go to the website at <http://www.montgomerypreservation.org>.

Please feel free to put up links to it on your websites or to pass the website address along to others.

Contact Wayne Goldstein at 301-942-8079 or waynengoldstein@hotmail.com for more information.

Forum on ICC and Purple Line

—by Charles Pritchard,
Environmental Chair
and Northwood-Four Corners CA

In February, the Northwood-Four Corners Civic Association decided to sponsor a forum on the ICC and the "Inner Purple Line." The association has never taken a position on these projects perhaps because neither one passed through the Four Corners area. The membership wanted to hear both sides of the recent protracted debate on the projects based on cost and environmental factors.

The forum is scheduled for May 12, 7 - 9:30 pm in the North Four Corners Park recreation center at the top of Southwood Avenue off Route 29. This special session

will begin with presentations on plans for the ICC by the State Highway Administration, by ICC supporters, and by ICC opponents. There will be time for rebuttal by both sides and for Q and A from the audience. There may or may not be an immediate vote to support, oppose or remain neutral on the projects or a delay until the June meeting. The forum is open to the public and its primary purpose is to provide information rather than be a formal debate.

Newsletter Policies

We strongly encourage articles to be submitted to the editor by e-mail (hotyakker@aol.com). They can be in any standard word processing format (MS Word97 is preferred) and ideally should use the format you see in the final newsletter (11-point Times New Roman font, etc.). All articles MUST be received by noon on the second Saturday preceding the delegate's assembly to be announced in the newsletter. Unless an article is mandated by the Bylaws or by the Executive Committee, the Editor has complete discretion as to whether or not it is published. Unless submitted by the Executive Committee, articles advocating only one side of an issue must either conform to a position taken by the Federation or be accompanied by a balancing article. The Editor may make spelling and grammatical corrections. Further, the editor may make changes for space, stylistic, or other reasons unless the author appends a request "Please make no major changes without consultation" to the article. Any such request will be honored, but may reduce the article's chances of appearing. Where space prohibits an article from appearing in the current issue, but the article is of continuing interest, it may be deferred to a future issue.

Community Hero: Nancy Wendt

—by Jim Humphrey, District 1 Vice President

The April Community Hero award will go to Olney resident Nancy Wendt. Like many of us, Nancy became involved in civic activism as a result of her concern over the disposition of a property, in this case, literally

in her backyard. Everyone, including MNCPPC staff, believed that the property was a future school site. They were shocked to discover that MCPS had long since given the property to the county, which had selected the site for high-density housing. Coming from a background as a program management consultant with some of the nation's top corporations, Nancy set about applying her career skills to the local issue.

Nancy researched the land use, zoning, housing and environmental issues at play. She then rallied her neighbors to action to try and ensure their concerns were addressed. The result was the formation of the Olney Coalition, a group of individuals and community organizations desiring to preserve the semi-rural, residential character of the area.

Since its founding, Olney Coalition has partnered with the Upper Rock Creek Coalition, GOCA, and other area civic groups to develop recommendations for revision of both the Upper Rock Creek and Olney Master Plans. As Nancy says, "Why settle for working on one master plan when you can work on two simultaneously?" Visit their website, www.olneycoalition.org, for a list of the group's current activities.

A relative newcomer to the world of civic advocacy, Nancy Wendt "hit the ground running" and hasn't slowed yet. Congratulations to our newest Community Hero.

From the President

Montgomery County is and has been under attack. It isn't an attack from terrorists but from a small yet highly effective number of individuals who make up a group I like to call the Golden Club. They are the developers and other special moneyed interests who we read about in the papers. They are the same businesses that get lucrative contracts from our County Government, buy our public lands for bargains or get special consideration through specially tailored zoning text amendments. They receive windfalls of bonus building density or get MPDU buy-outs for a song. They are also the ones that appear to have contributed significantly to the County Executive and all of our at-large Councilmembers to the tune of over \$1.5 million during the last election.

What is most amazing about these individuals is their indifference to public opinion; they even boast of their

control of Montgomery County to whomever will listen. I learned this past month about an International Builders Show held in Las Vegas that included a PowerPoint presentation created by a Montgomery County consulting firm that demonstrated how the development community can and should manipulate and control the government to promote their agenda. They speak of controlling elections and of building coalitions with whomever will help them in their end goal to increase building density and optimize development options (affordable housing advocates, realtors, soccer moms, PTAs, etc., to use their words).

What I found most amazing were the many examples cited from Montgomery County. The link to this site may be accessed through the Neighbors for a Better Montgomery webpage (<http://www.neighborspac.org>). At the site you will find marketing strategies suggesting the creation of market niches for affordable housing, senior housing and workforce housing to promote growth in different parts of the country. We have been hearing these buzz words here. Shortly after I learned of the PowerPoint presentation, I attended a Greater Olney Civic Association meeting where Ms. Elizabeth Davidson, director of the county Department of Housing and Community Affairs, was speaking on the justification of selling a county-owned former school site to create work force housing. I almost fell on the floor.

What is truly unfortunate is there are real challenges we face in providing affordable housing; however the rhetoric proffered by Golden Club members simply diminish any working partnership that should occur. We have all heard the labels; citizens who fight to protect the quality of life in their neighborhoods are labeled as extremists, obstructionists, or NIMBYs. Now we can see that there really is an organized effort to divide communities and control government. This unconcealed conspiracy demonstrates why there is a need for a government that is community-based. This is why the Federation is making such an effort to change the makeup of the County Council through the referendum process. The Federation wants to help create a county legislature that is made up entirely of single councilmanic districts so that the councilmembers will be more connected with and accountable to residents and such a connection to the community will make it much more difficult for special interests to buy elections. Government is supposed to be of the people, for the people, and by the people. The word **by** is not spelled **BUY**; Montgomery County is not for sale.

This effort will not be an easy one; however it is unquestionably one of the most important efforts the civic community has made in decades to ensure that Montgomery County will continue its legacy of Good Government, a legacy to pass on to future generations. We need your help. I am requesting volunteers as well as a person to organize a Rally to collect signatures for the Federation's Ballot question. Please contact Cary Lamari @ 301-924-2746 if you are able to help.

Thank you!

–Cary Lamari

Petition Form Reminder

When you download the petition form from the MCCF website (www.montgomerycivic.org), make sure that the two pages of the form are printed on both sides of every sheet of paper. Any completed petition forms that do not have the information on the other side will be automatically disqualified by the Board of Elections.

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Federation Meeting
Monday, April 12–7:45 p.m.

**1st fl. Auditorium
County Co. Office Bldg., Rockville, MD**

AGENDA:

- 7:45 Call to order, Cary Lamari presiding
7:48 Adoption of Agenda
7:50 Announcements and Introductions
7:55 Approvals of Minutes
8:00 Community Hero Award, Ms. Nancy Wendt
8:05 Bylaw Nomination Committee Vote
8:10 Program: Federation Transportation PowerPoint Presentation
9:10 Old Business
- Budget Luella Mast
 - Electoral Process Committee Dale Tibbitts
 - Committee Reports
- 9:30 New Business
9:45 Adjournment

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: 11 p.m. Saturday, April 25. 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, 1111 Fawsett Road, Potomac, MD 20854.

Please send all address corrections to Dan Wilhelm, 904 Cannon Road, Silver Spring, MD 20904, 301-384-2698, or djwilhelm@erols.com.

Next Executive Committee Meeting

Thursday, April 22, 2004, 7:45 p.m.

Red Brick Courthouse

29 Courthouse Square, Rockville

(Note: there is parking lot in front of the courthouse.)

**Montgomery County Civic Federation
Dan Wilhelm, Database Manager
904 Cannon Road
Silver Spring, MD 20904**

Address Service Requested

First Class Mail