



# Civic Federation News

*Official Publication of the Montgomery County Civic Federation  
Serving the Public Interest Since 1925*

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WWW.MONTGOMERYCIVIC.ORG

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October's Program: "The Great Debate on Ballot Question C" featured Councilman Phil Andrews arguing FOR question C and Council President Steve Silverman arguing AGAINST.

## November's Program: Housing and Urban Policy in Vienna

by Pam Lindstrom

In January, the Montgomery County Civic Federation co-sponsored a public forum featuring Wolfgang Forster, a high official from the Housing and Planning Department of Vienna, Austria. His visit coincided with a 3-day ice and snow storm, so we missed his stories and pictures of Vienna's remarkable strides in affordable housing, streets for transit, pedestrians and cars, gee-whiz public facilities, and general livability.

Urban "infill" provides an increasing share of development in Montgomery County. The best European cities exemplify the state of the art in modern

urban planning. Vienna is successfully competing with its own suburbs as a place to live and do business. We should study how they do it.

I have visited Vienna, met with Forster, and read his books. Ever since the January debacle, people have talked about my giving his presentation, as well as I can. My version of the Vienna story will be the program for the Federation meeting on Monday, November 8. Please come!

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October's Community Hero, Laura Van Tosh, and First Vice President Wayne Goldstein

## President's Message

By Dan Wilhelm, Civic Federation President

On October 11, 2004 the Washington Post contained a story entitled "Comcast's Perks to Montgomery Leaders Criticized." According to the story, "Comcast's generosity toward elected officials - including campaign contributions and free television time - has resulted, critics say, in lenient regulatory treatment by the county, despite persistent complaints of rude employees, missed service appointments and lengthy waits for representatives to answer the phones." Steve Silverman was quoted as saying that Comcast's "lobbying is no different than any business." Howard Denis said, "They present their case the way everyone else does." Apparently, Comcast's practices are used by many businesses. Other councilmembers are growing uncomfortable with some company perks, such as tickets to University of Maryland basketball games at the Comcast Center. Tom Perez said such dividends don't pass the smell test.

Montgomery County's ethics law states, "our system of representative government depends in part on the people maintaining the highest trust in their officials and employees. The people have a right to public officials and employees who are impartial and use independent judgment. The confidence and trust of the people erodes when the conduct of County business is subject to improper influence or even the appearance of improper influence."

Some councilmembers need to re-evaluate their practices in light of the damage they do to our form of government. Where I work, we have a code of ethics that requires that we avoid any actual or perceived conflict of interest in personal and business relationships. Accepting perks, as some in the Council apparently do on a regular basis, would likely lead to my unemployment.

MCCF worked to get Question C on the November ballot largely because of questionable ethics situations, such as the undue influence large campaign contributors have over the at-large councilmembers. Voting "YES" on C will not eliminate such influence, but it will substantially reduce it because all councilmembers will

need to raise much less money, and campaign dollars will have a smaller impact since it will be easier for local citizens to better know their councilmembers. I urge everyone to vote for Question C.

The best way to address the impact of campaign contributions is to provide public financing of campaigns. As of this time, the state legislature has not given Montgomery County that authority. The Civic Federation will continue to lobby for such authority in order to further reduce the influence of special interest groups in our county. I hope the County Council and political parties will join us in this effort.

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## Why Join the Civic Federation?

By Lyle Schofield, Membership Chair & Corresponding Secretary

### Overview

For almost 80 years, the Montgomery County Civic Federation has been the "umbrella" organization uniting neighborhood associations, civic and citizens' groups. It is a forum for groups and individuals who want to work together and cooperate on "civic and social betterments". But why should an association or a person join?

### For Groups

If you participate in a neighborhood association, or any kind of group that is trying to promote positive change in the county, having your group join the federation can be a great way to promote your ideas and your issues.

The federation acts like a "United Nations" for all the various civic groups in the county. Like the UN, each group sends delegates to discuss and vote on various positions the federation takes on issues that affect the quality of life in the county. Many issues are those which affect your neighborhood or group in a very direct way, such as transportation, county budgets, schools, zoning and master plans, public safety, and campaign reform. You will get the opportunity to hear from various advocates and activists on issues, and help form opinions and communicate information to your group.

The federation is also a fantastic place to network with

other groups and associations. Delegates from all parts of the county come together regularly, giving you the opportunity to exchange ideas and meet those from groups you can work together with to create a stronger position. Many delegates have spent years advocating their groups' positions, and can help you understand the best ways to move your ideas forward. They can also help you understand the complex world of government operations and how to find the correct county officials to address issues you may have.

Finally, the federation allows you to join together to create strength in numbers, advocating ideas to help make the county better, and to push and promote our local governments to provide more responsive, representative services to the citizens that they serve. The process of civic advocacy is a skill your group can put to better use by aligning with other groups in the county, and bringing these skills back to your association to make it more effective in its work.

### **For Individuals**

The federation is not only for groups! Individuals may join the federation, and there are special reasons to do so. While individual members are not voting members, they can participate in all the sessions and committees that delegates participate in. For many people, individual membership in the federation can be a great first step into learning more about civic advocacy.

Each month the federation has a general meeting that includes a program of interest. We also have a number of committees that spend their time focusing on topics such as public safety, education, housing, transportation, the environment, and land use. Individual members can participate in these committees, helping with research and programs, and presenting on topics during public hearings. This is an excellent way for those with an interest in a topic, or an expertise, to help other citizens understand these complex issues. For individuals who want to make a contribution to the county, membership in the federation is a great way to get started!

To learn more and join the Civic Federation, go to our website at [www.montgomerycivic.org](http://www.montgomerycivic.org).

## **Committee Meeting Dates**

### **Bylaws Committee**

Monday, November 15, 7:00 p.m.  
Matamoros Restaurant, 2322 W. University Blvd.  
Wheaton

For more information, please call Peggy Dennis,  
301-983-9738 or email [hotyakker@comcast.net](mailto:hotyakker@comcast.net)

### **Public Safety Committee**

Monday, November 29, 8:00 - 9:30 PM  
Red Brick Courthouse, Room 105  
For more information, please contact Fernando Bren at  
301-299-0899 or email [FernandoBR@aol.com](mailto:FernandoBR@aol.com))

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## **Federation Meeting Minutes: Monday, October 11, 2004**

By Richard Zierdt, Recording Secretary

MCCF President Dan Wilhelm calls the meeting to order at 7:58 pm.

Community Hero Award. First Vice President Wayne Goldstein presents the MCCF Community Hero Award to Laura Van Tosh, who created the Office of Consumer Affairs with Health and Human Services.

Announcements. Deborah Volmer distributes a flyer for TrueVoteMD.org

Program: "**Great Debate**" on Question C (QC):  
County Council members Steve Silverman, con; Phil Andrews, pro. Dan Wilhelm presides over the debate, and explains the rules of the debate.

Mr. Andrews begins with his opening remarks. Thanks the MCCF. He describes a Council out of touch with the people, but instead leaning toward developers. Traffic test eliminated. Jobs to be created faster than housing. Campaign finances are very large. Andrews was able to knock on enough doors because he ran in a local district. Campaign money would not be enough to derail a good local effort.

Mr. Silverman begins his opening remarks. Thanks the MCCF. Names several diverse groups that oppose Question C. Describes a 'balanced' approach to national and local government. MC needs a range of representation. Local districts create parochialism. The revitalization of Silver Spring and the agricultural reserve would not have been possible with local districts. Would take away the voting power of citizens by eliminating their ability to vote for a majority of the Council. Development interests are not going away - this will only shift donations to local races.

Mr. A: A majority of the Council can now be elected from the same street. Mr. S: The views of the entire County will be heard by at-large members. Local members would not need to understand other areas of the County. At-large members must answer to all citizens. Mr. S to Mr. A: You wanted the Rockville Town Center, and you needed at-large members to get it. Mr. A: Most county-wide initiatives originate from local members. RTC and SS both enjoyed a majority of the Council. Fairfax and Baltimore have mostly local districts. Most large counties have all local districts. Local members will think outside their districts. Mr. A: Opponents say Question C (QC) will not advance representation by minorities, yet only one minority has been elected in the last 50 years. Mr. S: Supported the 5 local members created in 1990. QC will not help; minorities are evenly split throughout the County. Drawing minority lines will be nearly impossible. Mr. A: The PG NAACP opposes at-large districts in their County. There are significant concentrations of minorities in the County. Districts could be drawn that would create opportunities. Mr. S: Minorities should identify and encourage minority candidates. Mr. S: How would development interests have less influence in local districts? Mr. A: Ran at-large in 1994 and lost. Ran locally in 1998 and unseated a 16-year incumbent by talking directly to the voters instead of spending hundreds of thousands of dollars.

Q&A. How many at-large citizens? 950,000 people in the County now; 9 local districts would have about 110,000. If QC passes, 9 local districts would be drawn by the Council. Can candidates be elected without developers' money? Mr. S: Yes. Sierra Club, teachers, police, are also special interests. Blair Ewing and Neal

Potter got elected Mr. A: We live in a different time now. Hundreds of thousands of dollars are spent; the County is much more populous. Rose Crenca ran on \$9K. This is impossible today. Q: How could an at-large candidate get to know 1 million County residents? Mr. A: They can't, and local members are just as interested in county-wide issues as at-large members. Mr. S: Easy task knocking on doors. At-large candidates can meet with groups that represent many citizens. He tries to meet with as many groups as he can. Some local members know little outside their districts. Q: Why did the Council not take Ike Leggett's offer? Mr. S: Mr. Leggett did not make a written proposal with the Council. There were many proposals. Mr. A: An all-local council is best. Q: There are many other special-interest groups in the County besides developers. Mr. A: We're all responsible to the County, not the political parties and not the special interests. It is also important to listen to those who are not represented by special interests.

Q: SS revitalization? Mr. S: Silver Spring revitalization and Blair High School could not have occurred without at-large members. Mr. A: The record will show that all the local members voted for SS. Developers can distort the feelings.

Q: What about citizens outside Mr. A's district? Mr. A: Just met with the Olney Coalition. Will meet with all groups from all over the County, and will meet with citizens who are not members of any group. Reaches out. Mr. S: Meets with everyone. Has met with many citizens in this room. Volunteer Firefighters. Q: PG County has all local districts. It has been reported that this system has not worked; too parochial. Mr. S: There are development interests everywhere. If you want a high school in one district, you better vote for a new school in every other district whether it is needed or not. Log rolling. Mr. A: The history of a county is paramount on how a council is going to work, and who is elected.

Q: Would Council committees work cooperatively with local districts? Mr. A: Yes. Mr. S: Yes.

Q: Editorialize the question? Mr. S: Ask Ms. Praisner. The concern was whether the citizens would know what they are voting for. Citizens are not that focused. Mr. A:

The vote was 6-3 in favor of the wording. Other words could have been added. It was clearly an effort to defeat the issue.

Q: Wouldn't it be easier for a minority to run in a local district? Mr. A: Yes, and easier for anyone. Mr. S: Yes, but it will not make it easier for a minority. The way to get minority representation is to identify and promote minority candidates.

Q: How would change to local districts affect decisions about unattractive projects? Mr. S: The Ag reserve would be endangered by all-local districts, since most members would not want development in their districts. Mr. A: The Ag preserve is an example of the failing of the current system: both the new jail and the trash incinerator wound up in the Ag preserve.

Q: The at-large block needs only one local member to get a favorable vote. Mr. A: The premise of the question is that at-large members may not take local concerns into account. He agrees with that. Local members are more in touch with their communities. Mr. S: We're talking about re-structuring the Council. Right now, he has to be responsible to the entire County. Mr. A: Where the difference is seen is in general development. (AGP and jobs/housing).

Q: Will you acknowledge that big contributors influence votes.? Mr. S: campaign finance money will influence elections. Campaign finance reform is the answer, not changing the makeup of the County Council. Mr. A: We need both campaign finance reform and locally-elected members. By reducing the size of the districts, special interest influence is reduced. The County is just too large now. Mr. S: There are many special interest groups. Mr. A: The reason the development special interest is so important: It is the elephant in the room.

Q: Can citizens contribute to other district races? Mr. S: Money in politics is inevitable. Mr. A: Yes, there will always be money, but its influence will be reduced, even if the money is more.

Mr. S: League of Women's Voters hearing will be held later. Key point: Each voter can influence the makeup of a majority of the County Council. Money influence will not be reduced - only shifted. Campaign finance is the real answer. Many mainstream groups believe QC will weaken the County.

Mr. A: The bond between the voter and elected officials: QC will promote the common good. Opponents of QC are defending a system overrun with developer money which has only elected one minority in 50 years. Reform the Council and make it more responsive to the citizens. The dominant color of At-large elections is not black, white, or brown. It's green.

9:42 PM business meeting resumes.

Agenda. Wayne: MCCF supports Oct 21 open house. Ways to fight invasive plants. 5 seconds.

Approval of minutes of the September Federation meeting accepted as printed.

By-laws Changes. [Refer to October Newsletter, page 4] Public Safety Committee. Passes 14-0-0. Awards committee. Passes 14-2-0. Selection of Recipients. Passes 12-1-1. Follow-up Responsibilities. Passes 13-1-1.

Quorum is declared present by the president after a count.

Ambulance Fees. Fernando Bren. Moves that the MCCF oppose the proposed Ambulance Fee bill 33-04 (\$350 per incident) and reaffirm its opposition to ambulance fees. Seconded. Fee is per incident. Passes with one abstention.

Invasive plants. John Warnock. Ask the MNC/PPC to support reasonable funding to remove such alien plants. Seconded. Passes 11-2-2.

Adjournment. 10:06 PM.

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**Closing Statements.**

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## **Executive Committee Minutes: Thursday, October 21, 2004**

By Richard Zierdt, Recording Secretary

MCCF 2nd Vice President Mark Adelman calls the meeting to order at 7:54 pm. Due to simultaneous LWV forum on the three ballot questions, 4 are present: Luella Mast, Richard Zierdt, Lyle Schofield.

Minutes from the ExComm meeting on September 22, 2004 accepted as printed in the Newsletter.

Budget. Luella Mast. Distributes treasurer's report. Bank balance is \$8,946.37. MCCF will be offering a course on government processes and civic interest. Treasurer's report is accepted.

Community Hero. There may be no recognition for November's Federation meeting.

Vote Yes on C: Luella Mast. Donations are coming in.

Education Committee. Committee is meeting the 1st Monday of each month at Mark Adelman's home. Committee invited the Montgomery Taxpayers League to look at ways the school system might control costs. The Board of Education has not responded to the Committee's position, sent to the BOE, that the BOE should not give up any school property to non-BOE uses. BOE Candidates Forum went well.

Membership. Lyle Schofield. Ask District VPs to call errant civic associations. Lyle will write a "Why Join" article for the Newsletter. The attractive look of MCCF's website is noted. VPs could visit at least two CA's meetings. MCCF meetings or committee meetings might be mentioned in public information vehicles.

Public Finance and Utilities. Chuck Lapinski sent a report via e-mail. WSSC remains a very serious issue.

Program. Art Wallenstein needs to be contacted for the November program.

Meeting adjourned 8:57 pm

## **Colesville "Meals on Wheels" Needs Volunteer Drivers**

We serve the needs of the homebound in the Woodmoor, Four Corners, Burnt Mills, White Oak, Colesville, Calverton and surrounding areas. We deliver meals five days a week from 10:30 to 12:30. Your commitment will only be 2 hours a week, and we do not deliver when schools are closed due to snow .

For more information, please call Sarah Day at 301-384-5735

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## **Volunteers Needed for Rock Creek Watershed**

Volunteers are needed to create a community organization that will protect and restore the Rock Creek watershed in Montgomery County and Washington, D.C. Initial meetings to form the citizen's group will take place November 13 at Redland Middle School in Montgomery County and November 20 at the Audubon Naturalist Society's Woodend Sanctuary in Chevy Chase. The meetings will focus on how citizens can participate in forming a "Friends of Rock Creek" organization.

For additional information, see [Volunteers for the Rock Creek Watershed](http://www.montgomerycountymd.gov) at <http://www.montgomerycountymd.gov>. Click on news, then news releases, and look under October 25.

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## **Community Web** by John Nelson, Founder, Community Web.

*(Community Web hosts the Civic Federation website. This article describes their offerings for other community organizations. The following information does not constitute an endorsement of Community Web.)*

Community Web, the Bethesda company that has built a network of state-of-the-art neighborhood association

websites used by several Civic Federation members, has just completed work on its newest software upgrade: the membership, dues, and directory manager. This module is designed to make the life of the volunteer much easier by making admin tasks a snap.

Neighborhood officers can now have their residents enter directory information and pay dues by credit card online, eliminating most data input and check processing chores. The resident can check his dues status at any time and see exactly when he paid last-so he doesn't have to bother you. She can also preview her directory listing to see exactly how it will look when printed-again no more calls for last minute changes.

Authorized officer(s) can then view and edit resident contact and dues information from any computer. The interface includes a report summarizing total dues received by street, and percent of households contributing by street. After reviewing/editing the information through an easy-to-use window, the officer can pick different formats and generate a directory preview. Another click and you get an MS Excel file ready to send to the printer, or save as a backup. Community Web can help save you money by bundling your printing job with dozens of others to achieve volume discounts. And, when it's time to transition officers, you just change the site access permissions, and everything is right there and ready for the new

group.

The annual membership charge per community is still (5 years running) only \$50 (including domain name), and the fee for accepting credit cards is an additional \$50 to \$100 per neighborhood, depending on size. Minimum dues amount is \$10 to accept credit card payments, though you can still use the system to manage dues received by check. If our group buy program is active in your area, the donations we give to the community will often cover these costs. Additionally, people typically give more when paying by credit card. The system can also be used for umbrella groups.

You can find your community site at [www.mycommunityweb.org](http://www.mycommunityweb.org). Just a few of the features you'll find are completely redone graphics, searchable list of family events, bulletin boards, email groups, area service company ratings and powerful guides to find extracurricular activities, camps, places to go and more--search from thousands of listings.

If you already have a site, send us an email at [jnelson@communitywebinc.com](mailto:jnelson@communitywebinc.com) so we can add your site to the network. You can still use our admin tools, and you'll be on our list as we continue to roll out new features.



The Great Debate on Question C. Councilman Phil Andrews, Council President Steve Silverman and MCCF President Dan Wilhelm.

## **Federation Meeting**

Monday, November 8, 2004  
7:45 3rd Floor Auditorium  
County Council Office Building.  
Rockville, MD

### **Agenda**

7:45 Call to Order  
7:46 Announcements & Introductions  
7:55 Adoption of Business Meeting Agenda  
8:00 Program: Vienna's Affordable Housing  
9:00 Approval of Minutes  
9:10 Old Business  
9:30 New Business  
10:00 Adjourn

The **Montgomery County Civic Federation** is a county-wide nonprofit educational and advocacy organization. It was founded in 1925 to serve the public interest. Its monthly Delegates meetings are open to the public and are held on the second Monday of each month (except for holidays, July, August and December) at 7:45 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.**"

Submit contributions for the next issue by: **Midnight, Sunday November 21**. Prepare submission as an MS Word, Word Perfect or text-only document, **attach** it to e-mail, and send it to hotyakker@comcast.net 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, November 18, 2004, 7:45 p.m.

#### **RED BRICK COURTHOUSE**

29 Courthouse Square, Rockville

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

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