

## March Program: Montgomery County Executive Candidates Forum

Submit your questions to ask Marc Elrich, Tom Hucker, Hans Riemer, and David Blair | **P. 3**

## Civic Fed Tonight!

MCCF ExCom members with experience in County and community concerns are available to speak at your civic association's meetings | **P. 4**

**OPC Letter to Elrich** | Read the text of MCCF's letter to County Executive Marc Elrich on the importance of funding the Office of the People's Counsel | **P. 5**

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inel Award, and Star Cup | **P. 6**

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**Like our new Facebook Page and follow us on Twitter.**

**TO PRINT, USE PRINT VERSION**

## of note

### Next MCCF Meeting #931

Monday, March 14, 2022, 7:30 p.m. *online via Zoom.* Topic: "Candidates Forum for County Executive for Montgomery County, Maryland."

Join the Zoom Meeting Here

[See further instructions on page 2. No password is required.]

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### Meeting Minutes

February 14 Meeting #930 **P. 14**

Executive Committee Meeting

**FEBRUARY P. 20**

### Membership Application

Join or Renew Now:

**JOIN ONLINE • MAIL-IN FORM**

## Federation Meeting #931

Monday, March 14, 2022

7:30 p.m.

Online Zoom Meeting

### AGENDA

1. Call to Order/Introductions
2. Approval of Agenda
3. Approval of Minutes: February General Meeting **P.14**
4. Treasurer's Report
5. Announcements
6. **March Program:** *Montgomery County Executive Candidates Forum* **P.3**
7. Committee Reports
8. Old Business
9. New Business
10. Adjournment

## About MCCF Meetings

**All monthly MCCF meetings are open to the public.** They are held on the second Monday of each month, September through June. Since the beginning of the pandemic, the start time is now at 7:30 p.m.

**The March meeting will be held online via Zoom** (see page 3 for program) at 7:30 p.m.:

▮ To be part of the video conference, first **visit the Zoom website** to download the program for your phone or computer.

▮ Date and Time: Monday, March 14, 2021, 7:30 p.m. Eastern Time.

▮ To **join the Zoom meeting from your browser, use this link.**

▮ To participate by phone (audio only), call 301.715.8592. The meeting ID is **894 9746 7938**. No password is required.

We hope you will join us! ▮



The **Montgomery County Civic Federation, Inc.**, is a county-wide nonprofit educational and advocacy organization founded in 1925 to serve the public interest. Monthly MCCF meetings are open to the public (agenda and details at left).

The *Civic Federation News* is published monthly except July and August. It is emailed to delegates, associate members, news media, and local, state, and federal officials. **Recipients are encouraged to forward the Civic Federation News to all association members, friends, and neighbors.** Permission is granted to reproduce any article, provided that proper credit is given to the "*Civic Federation News* of the Montgomery County (Md.) Civic Federation."

### Civic Federation News

civicednews AT montgomerycivic.org

**TO SUBMIT AN ARTICLE, SEE PAGE 21**

## March 14th Program: Montgomery County Executive Candidate Forum

Our March 2021 General Meeting will feature a forum for the candidates for Montgomery County Executive. Our guests will be Montgomery County Executive Marc Elrich, Montgomery County Councilmember-at-Large Hans Riemer, Montgomery County District 5 Councilmember Tom Hucker, and businessman David Blair. The primary election is scheduled for June

28, 2022. Early voting will be June 16 to June 23, 2022. The deadline for filing for the 2022 primary election is March 22, 2021. The public is invited to join the Civic Federation General Meeting which will be held online via Zoom.

**Marc Elrich.** County Executive Elrich of Takoma Park has been County Executive of Montgomery County since 2018. He was formerly

an at-large member of the Montgomery County Council, first elected in 2006. Prior to that he served on the Takoma Park City Council for 19 years, representing Ward 5, which covers and incorporates Long Branch and East Silver Spring.

**Tom Hucker.** Montgomery County Councilmember Tom Hucker of Silver Spring represents County

MORE



## March Program, cont.

Council District 5. He served from 2007 until 2014 as a member of the Maryland House of Delegates from District 20, which includes Takoma Park and Silver Spring. Hucker was elected to the Montgomery County Council in November 2014 and re-elected in 2018. He currently serves as Chair of the Council's Transportation and Environment Committee.

**Hans Riemer.** Montgomery County Councilmember Hans Riemer of Takoma Park is an At-large member of the Montgomery County Council. Riemer was elected to the County Council in 2010 and re-elected in 2014 and 2018. He currently serves as Chair of the Council's Planning, Housing, and Economic Development Committee.

**David Blair.** David Blair of Poolesville is the founder and former

CEO of Catalyst Health Solutions and a lifelong resident of Montgomery County. He was a candidate for Montgomery County Executive in 2018. He is the founder of the Council for Advocacy and Policy Solutions in Montgomery County.

MCCF delegates are encouraged to send in questions for the candidates by March 11, 2021, to assist the program organizers with framing questions of general interest. Email your questions to [info@montgomerycivic.org](mailto:info@montgomerycivic.org)

For more information about the candidates, check out their campaign websites:

- [David Blair](#)
- [Marc Elrich](#)
- [Tom Hucker](#)
- [Hans Riemer](#)

For more information about the 2022 elections, visit the [Board of Elections webpage](#). ■

## CIVIC FED TONIGHT!

### *SEEKING POSSIBLE SPEAKERS FOR YOUR CIVIC ASSOCIATION MEETINGS?*

Members of the MCCF Executive Committee have extensive experience in issues such as transportation, land use and zoning, schools, parks, environmental concerns, taxes, and public spending. Plus, they have a community-oriented perspective on these matters. If you would like an executive committee member to speak at a meeting, contact President Alan Bowser at [president@montgomerycivic.org](mailto:president@montgomerycivic.org). Include topics/possible dates.

## MCCF February 24, 2022, Letter to Elrich on Funding the Office of the People's Counsel

The Honorable Marc Elrich  
Montgomery County Executive  
101 Monroe Street  
Rockville, Maryland 20850

RE: Funding the Office of the  
People's Counsel—FY 2023 Oper-  
ating Budget

Dear County Executive Elrich:

On behalf of the Montgomery  
County Civic Federation, Inc.  
(MCCF), I am writing to request  
that funding be restored to the Of-  
fice of the People's Counsel (OPC),  
an agency that is authorized by  
the County Code to represent the  
public interest in the County's land  
use regulatory process.

During the February 14, 2022

MCCF General Meeting, members  
voted to submit a letter recom-  
mending that this funding be re-  
stored in the upcoming Fiscal Year  
2023 Operating Budget. Continu-  
ing to withhold funding for this  
agency is not in the public interest  
and defunding the OPC has led to  
an imbalance of representation on  
issues related to land use.

The Office serves to protect the  
public interest in land use hear-  
ings by promoting full and fair  
representation of relevant issues  
to achieve balanced administrative  
records. The Office also provides  
technical assistance to residents so  
that they can effectively participate  
in the County's land use control  
process. Reestablishing the OPC  
will help to restore a balance of

trust and integrity to the planning  
and public engagement process.

Furthermore, the County Code  
requires that prior to introduction,  
any proposed Zoning Text Amend-  
ment (ZTA) be reviewed by a ZTA  
Advisory Group that includes the  
OPC. One of the reasons often  
cited by the Planning Depart-  
ment for the complete rewrite of  
the County's Zoning Ordinance  
(which was a seven year process)  
was to discourage the use of Zon-  
ing Text Amendments that bypass  
the master planning and land use  
public processes. However, since  
the Zoning Rewrite was adopted,  
there have been over 100 ZTAs  
proposed by a small number of  
Councilmembers. All of the ZTAs

## Erlich OPC Letter, cont.

were proposed without the benefit of the OPC review.

Other Maryland jurisdictions have established People's Counsel including Prince George's County, Baltimore County, and Harford County. It's time to restore Montgomery County's People's Counsel.

Thank you for this opportunity to submit our recommendation on this very important matter of public interest.

Sincerely,

Alan Bowser, President  
Montgomery County Civic Federation, Inc. ■

## UPDATE YOUR DATA!

Montgomery County civic associations and home owners associations are asked to update their information on the County Planning Department's website. Notify MCCF of any changes, too, at [info@montgomerycivic.org](mailto:info@montgomerycivic.org). Let's keep in touch!

## REMEMBER!

County Executive  
Candidates Forum  
@MCCF General Mtg.  
Monday, March 14, 2022  
7:30 p.m. Online

## Who Should Win in 2022?

All MCCF delegates and members should be thinking about individuals and/or groups you would nominate for this year's awards. Here are the descriptions and the rationale for each award:

■ **The Wayne Goldstein Award**, awarded to an individual or group for outstanding service to the people of Montgomery County;

■ **The Sentinel Award**, sponsored by the *Montgomery Sentinel* newspaper and awarded to an individual or group for a significant contribution to good government at the local level; and

■ **The Star Cup**, sponsored by the Federation and awarded to a Delegate or Committee of the Federation for outstanding public service on behalf of Montgomery County.

Haven't renewed? [See page 1!](#) ■

## Reflections on ‘Upzoning’ as the Solution to the Housing Crisis

No one would dispute that there are real issues with creating enough affordable (or even “attainable”) housing in this area. Housing costs have been rising faster than income for a long time and COVID has only accelerated those effects. As a result, everyone is looking at how to reverse or at least lessen those trends, and one trendy solution has been the notion of “upzoning,” i.e., raising the number of homes that can be built in a given area of land. In a vacuum, that is simply standard economic theory: increasing supply lowers per-unit costs. The question, though, is whether that simple assumption is valid—or merely simplistic.

That is at the heart of a discussion that has been going on for the last eighteen months as part of the County’s work on updating its mas-

ter plan under the name of “Thrive 2050.” The analysis actually kicked off when Council Member Wil Jawando introduced a proposed Zoning Test Amendment (ZTA 20-07) that would have revised the zoning code within R-60 single-family zones near downtowns and transit to broadly allow multifamily options (duplexes, triplexes, quads, and so forth). Thrive 2050 itself did not propose specific zoning revisions but clearly supports these upzoning concepts as part of a concept of “Missing Middle” housing, i.e., the idea that there used to be a range of housing options from single-family homes to townhome communities to apartments at a wide variety of scales and we have lost a number of those mid-range options.

Again, looked at in a vacuum,

few would disagree that, if starting with undeveloped land (or land to be redeveloped, as in the White Flint area), providing all of those options is a good idea. The problem is that Montgomery County doesn’t have many large parcels left, so the question is where can added housing be placed and how do we keep that housing within economic reach? Those issues involve not just housing but also economic growth, since businesses will be reluctant to locate here if their employees can’t afford to live here. So, we return to the notion of whether “upzoning” existing single-family housing areas is the solution and, if so, what sort of changes need to be made to allow that.

That issue has been one of the major topics of discussion over the last



## Upzoning Solution, cont.

year and certainly has been quite controversial. Those in favor of this approach—which includes groups such as the Coalition for Smarter Growth and the Sierra Club—have suggested at times that opposition is based on NIMBYism and have pointed to the past history of single-family zoning as being tied in many cases to racially exclusionary policies. Those who have concerns with this approach—which includes many neighborhood groups, towns, and the like—reject that view (noting, among other points, that, whatever their history, the areas that would be most affected are already more racially and economically diverse than those that would not be covered). They, in turn, suggest that the real beneficiaries of this upzoning process are developers who want to buy existing, naturally occurring

affordable housing (NOAH) and build expensive units that will serve only to gentrify these areas. Examining the experience of others can help decide who has the better argument on these points and how to set a better course.

The Planning Board held a meeting on Feb. 24, with a panel that included a federal official from HUD and three communities that had been actually trying to implement such changes. The discussion was actually quite illuminating. (It is available [here](#), starting at about 3:18 on the video.) The HUD official, Dr. Regina Gray, gave somewhat the standard line, i.e., that zoning has been used to exclude groups, that restricting supply and imposing parking restrictions can push up costs, and that governments should counter both of those aspects and allow more by-right development, with a push back against alleged NIMBYism. Other less controver-

sial points, though, are the value of looking at ways to reduce barriers from inconsistent and overly restrictive construction regulations, on the one hand, and to encourage the use of modular and off-site construction methods and research on technically advanced materials to reduce costs and speed up the assembly process. (As a person who has had a house built using “structurally insulated panels” where the entire outer skin (plywood panels on either side of insulation) arrived on a truck and was merely bolted together, I can attest to the value of such approaches.)

Lisa Bender, the next speaker, was President of the Minneapolis County Council in 2018 when it voted to abolish single-family zoning city-wide. She noted that, at the same time, they also implemented their MN 204 Master Plan, which was intended to try to



## Upzoning Solution, cont.

get the long-range results right, including with a strong goal of ensuring racial equity. The new plan allowed up to three units everywhere (including the use of “Accessory Dwelling Units” which Montgomery County separately authorized a few years ago) and reduced parking requirements near transit. It also worked to allow small and medium apartment developments that had been held back by high parking requirements before. The overall project also included a number of changes to protect tenants with respect to these changes. The whole discussion is worth watching but what is perhaps most interesting is that it has not been the small-scale projects that are been done, but rather apartment buildings in the 10–40 unit range have been moving forward and getting tenants. They have had 60

duplexes and 14 triplexes approved since the plan was initiated but most of those were merely legalizing existing buildings. There has not been a lot of builder interest in doing new units (and, conversely, neighborhoods that were worried have not seen a lot of impact). She did make clear that it took a lot of hands-on work and just passing the ordinance wasn’t enough.

Kellie Brown was next, from the Arlington Planning Department. They did a missing middle housing study, looking at smaller and starter homes, and noted that 3-bedroom homes were the sweet spot for rentals. Accessibility and private outside space were also much prized. They started their study last year and expect to be sharing a report draft this spring with something being passed this summer. Their goals are to reduce costs and add to supply while maintaining tree canopy, sustainable land use, neigh-

borhood connections and diversity. In Phase 1, they are studying a variety of housing types up to 8-unit multiplexes and townhouses with respect to design parameters, price points, and locations, all with the use of an equity lens. In Phase 2, they will look at how to balance the trade-offs compared to business as usual and how to design for compatibility. They are working hard to reach everyone to get feedback from all sides.

Erin Dey, is the Real Estate Director at DevNW, a Community Economic Development Corp. in the Oregon area. Oregon did a state-wide change in 2019 to add multiplexes in all single-family zones, but gave localities until July 2022 to implement regulations. DevNW has worked with planning efforts across the state to design and build projects at a variety of scales and income levels, although

## Upzoning Solution, cont.

they tend to focus on projects at 60-120% of AMI. Even with those income levels, they still need to pick up a lot of public funding and philanthropy to make the projects work. There's a lot more change, she warned, of projects not getting done rather than too many because this is a complex process to manage. She did note it was critical to separate the decisions over the basic project goal from the important design decisions and to give the community time to raise and work through those concerns.

There were a number of questions and issues raised about gentrification with infill, which was conceded to be a tough question. They noted there is already the option to buy NOAH to substitute a single-family home as large as the multifamily option (although one would assume that

the number of people who can afford million-dollar-plus homes is somewhat self-limiting compared to those who want and need the smaller, more affordable homes, whether as single-family or multiplexes). [Link to Post article about developers buying up homes in diverse neighborhoods nationwide.]

One main take-away from the discussion was that it takes lots of work and effort in terms of planning ahead, working with neighbors, and putting in governmental support in order to get for these projects to come together in a way we hope to see. As we have noted before, the Field of Dreams—"Pass an ordinance and they will build what we want"—approach is unlikely to produce anything but high-priced units that will still be out of reach of most people in the county *and* will tend to push up prices for nearby properties. The other point that was

repeatedly emphasized was the need for comprehensive future planning as to where development would be best placed and most needed. That is another point many have been emphasizing currently; until COVID, it was assumed new development should always be in close proximity to existing town centers and transit to reduce sprawl and unneeded driving. But, since then, we have seen that our assumption may have to change on a dime and it's still far from clear how soon if ever we will go back to our old ways of working and shopping and what that will tell us about where we should be living.

And, that makes for the third point of the program – we shouldn't lock ourselves in too quickly. Rather, these are ideas we can experiment with and adjust to as we go to try to make sure that we *actually* get better housing options for all of us. ■

## Council Pauses Thrive Montgomery 2050 Process to ‘Get It Right’ on Racial Equity

*By Elizabeth Joyce, Second Vice President*

The County Council’s 2/15/22 work session on Thrive Montgomery 2050 spotlighted remaining conflicts about Thrive’s deficiencies, especially about engaging people of color, and set a new course for improving the plan. Citing the “interest, correspondence, and passionate feelings” generated by Thrive, Council President Gabe Alborno stressed the plan’s importance and the need to “get it right” before bringing it to a vote. The Council agreed to “do a deep dive” into Thrive, said Council Vice President Evan Glass, to ensure its fairness to the entire community.

Elaine Bonner-Tompkins, Ph.D., senior analyst at the Office for Legislative Oversight (OLO), explained her 2/9/22 memo responding to the

Council’s request for Racial Equity and Social Justice (RESJ) analysis of Thrive. Her staff analyzes all legislation and zoning text amendments to assess the policies—historic and present—that contribute to racial disparities and whether the legislation is aligned with the best practices to mitigate them. Without the involvement of affected populations in developing such laws, she said, equitable policies are unlikely to result. But conducting their usual RESJ analysis was not possible, she said, because the plan lacks the specifics—such as current as well as historic drivers of inequity—to do the required study.

While praising the Council for passing its racial equity law, Dr. Bonner-Tompkins stressed the need for more outreach to people of

color and lower-income residents to genuinely engage them in producing a final plan. And she agreed that to achieve the greatest integrity and legitimacy in this effort, the County could benefit from outside experts to conduct the outreach.

Planning Board Chair Casey Anderson and Director Gwen Wright resisted further revisions, insisting that general plans like Thrive are *supposed* to lack specifics about implementation. Wright’s slide presentation included a list of organizations that “work with housing on the ground” and want Thrive passed right away. She noted that previous plans, like the 1964 Wedges and Corridors, did not include specifics (such as the Agricultural Reserve) that were enacted decades later. But

## Thrive Paused, cont.

she did not mention that the 1964 plan devoted an entire section to “policies needed to implement the plan (staff report, p.10).” *In other words, Montgomery County has not always omitted details on implementation from its general plans.*

Anderson also argued that Thrive lists 72 recommendations for racial justice, includes metrics on the issue, and mentions race and racial equity 153 times! American University government professor David Lublin finds such arguments unconvincing. “Many words about equity does not mean that the process was inclusive or that the substance meaningfully addresses the issue,” he wrote in a recent blog. “While Anderson and Wright vehemently defend their work product, they would be in a better position to do so if they had

such an analysis,” Lublin observed. “Instead of deciding that they know what constitutes equity, they would have an informed and impartial analysis to buttress their claims that they had done this the right way and addressed all RESJ issues.”

CM Sidney Katz also raised concerns about equity and the Planning Board’s messaging about Thrive—such as the claim that Thrive has nothing to do with zoning. Thrive promoters do not tell the “complete story” about the plan, he said, because, for the changes recommended to happen, zoning will need to be changed. He also criticized the Planning Board for including only the views of Thrive supporters in their presentations. “And part of the problem becomes that people believe, rightly or wrongly,” he said, “that you are only listening to the one side rather than both sides. This

is such an important plan. This is such an important document that we need to make certain people are comfortable that they believe—that they know—that we are listening to all sides.”

CM Navarro, chief sponsor of the County’s racial equity law, rejected the Planning Board’s resistance to further community engagement. “We need to “flip the script,” she said, because we can no longer be satisfied with a list of (pro-Thrive) organizations and think that because we have done that, we are good.... If we don’t own the fact that the people who live here must be sought to give their feedback... I myself don’t feel comfortable saying, all these things are going to help you, people of color. So just take it at face value.”

Not only does the Office of Legislative Oversight have serious con-

## Thrive Paused, cont.

cerns about Thrive, but the Planning Board apparently ignored another red flag in an **August 16 memo to CM Riemer** by the Office of Racial Equity and Social Justice (ORESJ), an executive agency, according to the above blog by David Lublin. “But, as far as I can tell,” Lublin wrote, “Planning did not follow either the Council or the Executive’s model and identify a staffer or establish an office with the requisite skills” to modify Thrive in accordance with ORESJ recommendations.

After hearing from other colleagues, the Council agreed to conduct further outreach to people of color and limited income, despite the objections of the Planning Board and several Councilmembers. The process of choosing a qualified consultant and conducting outreach to

targeted communities is likely to take several months. Although Thrive was scheduled to be reviewed by March 30, said senior staff analyst Pam Dunn, the Council can seek repeated 60-day extensions, even into the next Council term, if they believe such extensions are necessary. Yet the goal is to vote by the end of October, according to Council President Albornoz.

This pause to reconsider Thrive’s support for racial equity is crucial—not only for the affected residents but for those who have questioned whether the plan genuinely advances racial equity. “Many of the same people who rush to label others who have concerns about Thrive as racists or classist aren’t coping well,” wrote Lublin. An objective analysis of Thrive’s racial equity claims is long overdue and should be welcomed by all champions of fair public policy. ■

## Proposed Bylaws Change: Article IV, Section 9

The Executive Committee of the Montgomery County Civic Federation, Inc., proposes the following change to the MCCF bylaws.

### Article IV. Officials and Organization. Section 9. Eligibility.

■ *Proposed:* An Executive Committee member’s eligibility to serve as an elected or appointed official shall immediately terminate upon the Executive Committee member’s election to public office.

■ *Existing language states:* “An Executive Committee member’s eligibility to serve as an elected or appointed official shall immediately terminate upon the Executive Committee member’s announcement or filing for elected political office.” ■

## Minutes of February 14, 2022, MCCF General Meeting #930, Virtual Zoom Meeting

*By Karen Cordry, Recording Secretary*

*Due to the COVID-19 outbreak, the General Meeting was held virtually. A total of 34 persons attended on the Zoom platform.*

**Call to Order:** Alan Bowser, President, called the Meeting to order at 7:33 p.m.

**Approval of Meeting Agenda:** Moved, seconded, and approved by voice vote.

**Approval of January Minutes:** Moved, seconded, and approved by voice vote.

**Treasurer's Report:** Jerry Garson reported that, since July 1, we had receipts of \$1,150, with total

expenses of \$735, for a net positive balance of \$417. Post office box was \$182. We received \$175 in the last 30 days. Current bank balance is \$9,406.

### ANNOUNCEMENTS

■ The Civic Fed, in joint letter with the MC Taxpayers League, sent a letter to the Attorney General asking for alleged violations of lobbying and open-meeting requirements. The letter was sent out on Jan. 27; MCCF received a response from Katherine Thompson, who has invited representatives of the Civic Fed to meet with them to discuss and we will follow up on that.

The office of the Maryland Attorney General referred us to the State Ethics Commission and the Maryland Open Meetings Board. They said we

needed to file a formal complaint with the open meetings board.

■ Peter Franchot has asked to meet with us on upcoming tax season.

■ Tomorrow at 1:30 p.m., Council will be having work session that will take up Thrive 2050 and several other issues, including downtown Silver Spring plan.

■ We will be looking to put together Nominations Committee for new officers and we also need people to participate on Awards Committee to decide on recipients for awards.

### PROGRAM: EDUCATION IN MONTGOMERY COUNTY—SCHOOLS IN A TIME OF COVID

Brenda Wolff, President of Board of Education did the initial introduction and hello, saying they are

## February Minutes, cont.

grateful for their partnership with the Civic Fed. It's been a very hard two years and the epidemic has highlighted a lot of those issues they are continuing to work on.

Our speakers:

■ Helen Nixon and Robyn Rosenbauer, Office of Human Resource Development;

■ Everett Davis, Niki Hazel, and Diane Morris, Office of Teaching and Learning;

■ Seth Adams, Department of Facilities Management; and

■ Jimmy D'Andre, MCPS Chief of Staff.

## Presentation Topics

■ Student Mental Health and Well-Being

■ Individual School Transitions to Virtual Learning

- Clean and Safe Buildings
- Sustainability
- Mitigating Learning Disruptions
- Office of Human Resources and Development

*Everett Davis, Acting Assoc. Supt. Student Services*

■ Student Mental Health has been a crisis nationwide and we are no exception. We have also worked very hard on getting 22,000+ students vaccinated. Stephanie Iszard is Student Health Coordinator.

■ Five directors report to those two covering areas such as behavioral management, attendance management, student well-being and achievement, international enrollment for foreign students coming in, and psych services.

■ *Be Well 365*: System-wide initiative for all students and staff looking at six categories of physical, social,

and psychological welfare. They also have a series of universal support programs for students, staff, and family pitched at several different age levels, as well as targeted support programs looking to help particular persons with problems and crises.

■ Md. Safe Schools Tip Line 833.632.0723 and MoCo Tip Line 301.738.2255.

*Diane D'Ambrosio Morris*

■ Described their program to decide if particular schools might need to move back to virtual learning temporarily. Until November, they thought they were getting back to normal, but Omicron changed things. They looked at data points—such as absences of students, faculty, or staff—to see if some schools needed to switch back to virtual tem-



## February Minutes, cont.

porarily. As part of the process, they also made sure that teachers and students had the necessary equipment. Since Feb. 11, they have been able to get everyone back in, buses are at 100%, and substitute needs are way down.

### *Seth Adams*

■ Talked about keeping buildings clean and safe. Increased ventilation and improved filters to highest levels available. They have also added air cleaners to some 7,000 classrooms and doing CO<sub>2</sub> monitoring to check on progress. There is a lot of expertise in the County and they have been working with parents and others to tap it. They are using electrostatic cleaning, which lets them do full-scale disinfection at every school every day, and they are also trying

to maximize outdoor time to extent weather allows for periods such as eating and recess.

■ He also noted that the county is working at the same time to promote sustainability and working to bring the system in line with the County Climate Action plan. They are working to engage both staff and students to reduce GHG, actively managing energy/water consumption; convert fleet to all-electric going forward; updating construction standards; and teaching sustainability.

These policy changes have been approved by the Board and are now in their public comment period; final action is expected in May.

### *Niki Hazel, supt. for curriculum and instructional program*

■ She discussed how are they mitigating learning issues from COVID. Every school has detailed plans of

how to accomplish goals and bring everyone to grade level or above. Working on continual assessment, and looking to how to accelerate learning to get people caught up on what was missed and doing a lot of high-dosage tutoring outside of regular school day to bring those who are below grade level up to speed and to provide on-demand tutoring.

### *Dr. Helen Nixon, strategic initiatives in Office of Human Resources around staffing and substitute teachers*

■ Focused very much on recruiting at colleges, etc., and are now able to get back into face-to-face meeting which we have found works better for us, makes us more attractive to those we interview. Have been building links to HCBUs and other schools with large numbers of

## February Minutes, cont.

teacher candidates to help them increase diversity, among other goals. Looking to bring in student teachers who want to stay with us permanently. Have a couple of recruiters who are on the road virtually every day. Talked to 1,600 candidates and will be starting to hire new ones going into May college graduation.

■ Substitutes have been a huge need for us. They have processed 1,200 applications and hired 500; in the process they have been able to increase pay and better ensure sustained work. Omicron has been a real challenge but as it subsides, they have been getting back to normal fill rates. It's typical to have 600–800 teachers out from the 15,000 total and they are getting back to be able to fully covering that from the 2,000–3,000 sub pool.

■ They are also promoting “Grow Your Own” efforts to get middle and high school students interested in a career in teaching with MCPS, or being interested in working with them in any capacity in the school system (from buses to cafeteria, to anything else). They are also pushing to increase status of teaching (and the available compensation levels).

### SELECTED QUESTIONS AND DISCUSSION

*Are we competitive on teacher salaries? And is housing affordability a drawback to being able to hire?*

■ Dr. Nixon said our salaries are competitive and we are committed to moving to a \$60,000 level for a bachelor's degree which will be very competitive as well as providing excellent benefits. Nixon is also on Workforce Montgomery, which is having conversations within that group and with

the counsel about housing issue since we are hearing concerns from new teachers so we would like to develop a housing benefit.

*Weren't having mental health professionals part of the tradeoff from removing SROs?*

■ Mr. David stated there has been a supply shortage on hiring but they are trying to be innovative in using existing resources, including moving 10-month employees to 12-months and looking at telehealth options, etc. They are looking to work with local colleges including Catholic U. and U. Md. to encourage students including in that field to come in as interns, student folks, etc., but they are definitely competing nationwide. On the EAP side, they only have two counselors and are trying to add two grad student folks to assist.

**February Minutes, cont.**

*Another question followed up on the question of school security with the removal of the SROs.*

■ D'Andre noted that they do have access to Community Engagement Officers (primarily at the high school level) but these are police officers who are dispatched as needed, not permanently stationed at schools. They have assessed the program and are trying to make the CEOs more involved in all the schools and be more of a presence in the "Officer McFriendly" sort of approach.

■ In regard to the on-demand learning, it was noted that they have sent information home about how to sign up for it, it's on the school board website, and has also been on social media about how to sign up to take it. Usage has been steadily increasing.

*Building Maintenance Issues*

■ Adams noted that they have assessed the HVAC in each building and deployed all the tools they have, such as air cleaners, to the buildings with the worst problems. They are still paying attention to other issues, too, such as working on water quality, adding filling stations, etc. They are spending less time on the "nice to haves" like floor refinishing to make sure the "must dos" get done. They are still advocating for more funds.

**COMMITTEES***Environment*

■ **Synthetic Turf.** Bailey Con-drey noted that the Walt Whitman High School athletic field was already failing within three years so that they need to remove the field and decide what to substitute, which may require not using the field for a couple of months. Alan Bowser not-

ed that the Civic Fed was supporting "chain of custody" legislation.

*Land Use*

■ Thrive and more is at the forefront. The Council's first session has been moved up from March to tomorrow for first hearing. It was noted that the Office of Legislative Oversight said they couldn't do a racial and social justice analysis because Thrive didn't have enough details. It was also noted that the Silver Spring plan had been drafted, as if Thrive were already agreed to.

■ Harriet Quinn noted we had been getting a number of requests to ask the Council to resume funding the Office of People's Counsel which was cut off in 2010. It might have been very useful during the last year's activity. Alan Bowser agreed we should push for that as a Civic

## February Minutes, cont.

Fed position. It was moved and seconded that we should send a letter to the Counsel taking that position and the motion passed by voice vote with North Woodside abstaining.

■ There was also discussion about the proposed meeting with the state person about the ethics issues that we had raised with respect to the Planning Board actions. Alan Bowser states that the meeting would probably be with the ExCom and he would keep that effort moving. It was also noted that the state counsel would like to be furnished with any evidence that people wanted to submit about inappropriate behavior.

### *Legislation*

■ There was an extensive discussion of upcoming issues in the Feb. newsletter and Peggy Dennis and

Jerry Garson have testified on various issues.

■ Alan Bowser noted that Sen. Korman had done an excellent job at the hearing on the Purple Line of holding people's feet to the fire. He was totally prepared and noted that most people working on it now weren't there initially and there is no institutional memory. They are still 3-4 years and multiple billions of dollars from finishing. DOT needs to hire someone else from outside to actually finish up the project.

### *Public Safety*

■ It was noted that there was a continuing debate about the role of the SROS/CEOs.

■ In regard to pedestrian safety, it was noted that is an ongoing problem with deaths and a Vision Zero meeting was held on Saturday to commemorate them.

■ There was also discussion about whether DOT and the Parks Department were doing a good job of managing weekend traffic closures for bikes and/or bike traffic on the main roads. Beach Drive, for instance, is closed every weekend and pushes traffic out to the neighborhood without a lot of planning on implementation. DOT does have several million dollars to work on bike lane issues over the next several years and wants another \$1 million to cover work in "equity areas."

■ MoCo Volunteer Center accepting nomination for the County Serves award. Google them if you want to make any nominations.

Next month will be the Chief Executive Forum. As of now, Elrich, Blair, and Hucker will be attending.

**Adjournment:** Meeting adjourned at 9:50 p.m. ■

## Minutes of the February Executive Committee Meeting February 24, 2022, Via Zoom

*By Karen Cordy, Recording Secretary*

**Attendance:** Alan Bowser, Karen Cordry, Bailey Condrey, Elizabeth Joyce, Jacquie Bokow.

**Approval of the Agenda:** The meeting agenda was approved.

**Treasurer's Report:** In the absence of the Treasurer, there was no Treasurer's Report.

### **MARCH PROGRAM**

■ The program for the March General Meeting will be a candidates forum featuring the announced candidates for Montgomery County Executive: County Executive Marc Elrich, County Councilmembers Tom Hucker and Hans Riemer, and

David Blair.

■ Members discussed the format for the program, possible moderators, and possible questions. It was suggested that we invite the MCCF membership to submit questions in advance.

### **APRIL PROGRAM**

■ The April General Meeting will focus on the FY23 County Budget.

■ Montgomery County Chief Administrative Officer Rich Madaleno has been invited to discuss the budget.

### **MEMBERSHIP**

■ Members discussed how to improve the Federation's membership renewal processes, including the adoption of new association software.

■ There is a related need to recruit new people to chair and co-chair the Federation's standing committees.

### **AWARDS/NOMINATIONS**

■ Members discussed outreach to get MCCF delegates to serve on the nominations and awards committees.

### **BYLAWS PROPOSAL**

■ A proposed change to the Federation's bylaws was discussed to permit members of the Executive to run for elected office, but prohibiting their eligibility to serve in a Federation elected or appointed office if they were elected. Language for a proposed bylaw change will be included in the March newsletter.

## ExCom March Mtg., cont.

### MONTGOMERY COUNTY HOUSING POLICY

Members commented on the Planning Board's discussion on affordable housing issues earlier at its regular Thursday meeting. The importance of community engagement and racial equity and social justice issues were highlighted.

### NEWSLETTER

There was discussion about articles and topics for the March newsletter. The deadline for story submission is, as always, the 26th of the preceding month.

### EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE MEETINGS

We will follow up potential meetings with the Maryland Comptroller, the State Ethics Commission, and

the Maryland Open Meetings Board.

**Adjournment:** The meeting was adjourned at 9:10 p.m. ■

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### Montgomery County Civic Federation

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**Submit contributions for the next issue by the 26th of the current month.** Send to CFN at [civicfednews AT montgomerycivic.org](mailto:civicfednews@montgomerycivic.org).

**Send all address corrections to membership AT montgomerycivic.org.**

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