

"Federation Corner" column
The Montgomery Sentinel - May 12, 2011

Montgomery Bicycling Conference set to roll out on May 14

by Peggy Dennis
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The Montgomery County Civic Federation has organized the first ever Montgomery Bicycling Conference, which will take place on Saturday, May 14, from 9 a.m. to 1 p.m., in the first floor auditorium of the Executive Office Building, located at 101 Monroe Street in Rockville. The event was created as a forum for exploring ways to make the county a safer and more inviting environment for bicyclists of all ages and experience levels. It is also the kick-off for "Bike to Work Week."

This will be a proactive meeting to bring cyclists together with elected officials and government planners to brainstorm on how to get more people to use bicycles for routine trips such as commuting to transit and work, running errands, traveling to entertainment and recreation destinations, and getting to and from school and after-school activities. Conference cosponsors are the Montgomery County Department of Transportation and the Maryland-National Capital Park and Planning Commission (M-NCPPC).

Sign-in, along with coffee and light refreshments, will take place from 8:45 to 9 a.m. At this time, and during the 11 a.m. break and at the end of the conference, James Mackay's film "International Scan on Pedestrian and Bicyclist Safety and Mobility" will be shown. The film was shot in Sweden, Denmark, Germany, Switzerland and the United Kingdom.

The conference agenda is broken down into several issue-oriented segments. Following the opening remarks, speakers from the county Pedestrian and Traffic Safety Advisory Committee, the Police Department, and the Maryland Bicycle Pedestrian Advisory Committee will speak on "Safe Bicycling in Montgomery County."

The next topic to be addressed is "Policies, Planning and Implementation for Bicycling--Where Are We Today?" Speakers on this issue will be from Transportation Planning and the Parks Department at M-NCPPC, the county and state Departments of Transportation, the State Highway Administration, and the Washington Metropolitan Area Transit Administration Long Range Planning Office.

Following a short break for tea, coffee and juice, a staffer from the county Department of Transportation will explain the Safe Routes to School program, after which the Chair of the Rockville Bike Advisory Committee will present a Case Study of a Bicycle-Friendly Municipality.

The next conference issue is titled "Where Do We Want to Go? Visions for the Future of Cycling," with speakers for this segment being a bicycling advocate and planner, and a Board member from the Washington Area Bicycling Association. This will be followed by "How Do We Need to Do to Get There? Action Planning for the Most Effective Improvements," an open forum for idea sharing moderated by a member of the Toole Design Group.

Closing remarks for the conference will be offered by Francoise Carrier, Chair of the Montgomery County Planning Board, and by County Council President Valerie Ervin. Information will also be available at the conference on various credit and non-credit courses on bicycling offered by Montgomery College.

At 1 p.m. there will be a one-hour break for lunch, during which James Mackay's film will again be shown. Then, at 2 p.m. Bill Michie of the Rockville Citizens Bicycle Advisory Committee will lead a Bike Tour of Rockville. Plan to BYOB (bring your own bike) and experience Rockville's bicycle-friendly features on

this tour that will begin on the asphalt area by the entrance to the County Council multi-level parking garage, at the corner of East Jefferson Street and Monroe Street.

The Bike Tour is designed to familiarize cyclists with on-road bike routes, bike paths, the Millennium Trail, cut-throughs, signage and bridges. The purpose is to demonstrate to riders how such facilities create safe bicycling routes that are suitable for many everyday trips. Bill will stop several times during the ride to point out various features that enable and enrich safe bicycling. He will stress that most adult bike trips for everyday purposes are shorter and easier than this Bike Tour, and can be done in everyday clothing--not the high-tech cycling gear that he normally wears.

How long the Bike Tour takes will depend on the capabilities of the least able cyclist. The route that Bill has in mind does have hills that people who have biked very little may find difficult. But novices should rest assured that Bill will not leave the slowest and least fit behind. It promises to be fun for all.

Spread the word about the Montgomery Bicycling Conference and plan on attending. It should be interesting, informative and constructive. Also check out the website for the Metropolitan Washington Council of Governments, at www.mwcog.org/transportation/activities/planning, for more information on planning for greater integration of pedestrians and bicyclists into the transportation mix.

The views expressed in this column do not necessarily reflect formal positions adopted by the Federation. To submit an 800-1000 word column for consideration, send as an email attachment to theelms518@earthlink.net