

"Federation Corner" column
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Update on transportation issues

by Dan Wilhelm, MCCF Legislative Chair

Roadside Solicitation

Montgomery County Civic Federation members voted in March of this year to support a state bill that would have given our County Council the authority to pass a law requiring individuals and groups to obtain a permit to solicit money or donations while standing on a median divider or sidewalk adjacent to a roadway. After our vote, the Council requested that the state bill be modified to also give them the authority to completely ban roadside solicitations.

County Executive Isiah "Ike" Leggett opposed a complete ban, as did the career firefighters union which wants to be able to continue their annual "Fill the Boot" campaign. Council member Phil Andrews (D.-Dist.3), representing the Council, pressed the Montgomery County Delegation to the State General Assembly for the modification. MCCF supported the modification based upon the sentiment expressed by the delegates at the March meeting. In the end, however, the state bill was withdrawn.

At the April meeting, MCCF members voted to support County Bill 12-11 which would ban county employees from standing in a roadway, median divider, or intersection to solicit money or donations while on duty.

Under existing Executive Regulations, the County Fire and Rescue employees could still solicit while on-duty at other locations such as shopping centers, maybe along the lines of the Salvation Army's annual holiday collection. The bill would not affect what the firefighters do while on their own time.

I testified at the May 3 Council public hearing on Bill 12-11. My testimony and that of others who supported the bill said it was needed for public safety reasons. The County Executive, Firefighters Union, and Muscular Dystrophy Association (MDA) indicated that the "Fill the Boot Campaign" was needed to raise funds for MDA. I and others indicated that the campaign could continue and still be successful, but would need to be relocated to collect donations in shopping centers and other public places. And the collection would need to have only one or two firefighters at a site at one time rather than many people at an intersection.

In response to questions from Council member Andrews, the Fire Chief said he was not aware of firefighters being in the street during the campaign, which is already against state law. Many people pointed out to the Fire Chief that firefighters were illegally in the street and that he needed to provide them direction.

Now that the county budget for the fiscal year beginning July 1 has been approved, the Council will be taking up Bill 12-11. I urge you to email and/or call your council members about supporting the bill, which is about one thing--public safety. Bill 12-11 is only a first step, but it is a meaningful step towards addressing the larger problem. We really need to get state legislation passed to give the council the authority it needs to enact effective legislation regarding roadside solicitations. The "Fill the Boot Campaign" as presently conducted is the main impediment.

Transit Task Force

In February, County Executive Leggett appointed eighteen people to a Transit Task Force (TTF) with the mission of making a comprehensive rapid transit system a reality in Montgomery County. The TTF members include two Council members, the Director of the County's Department of Transportation (DOT), Chair of the Planning Commission, a senior WMATA representative, a senior Maryland DOT representative, senior business leaders and civic leaders representing diverse interests. There are also seven ex officio members

on the TTF including an assistant chief administrative officer, state senator, state delegate, and three staff members for different congressional representatives. I am one of the eighteen appointees to the Task Force, and I am representing the MCCF largely because of my involvement on transportation issues for the Federation in the 1990s and early 2000s and on the Transportation Policy Report (TPR) effort with the Planning Department that concluded in 2002.

The Task Force has been meeting twice a month (generally first and third Wednesdays) since March 23, and will continue on this schedule through September. We have had presentations that included the County DOT bus rapid transit (BRT) study; MC DOT on the performance of the Ride-On facilities and services; the Governor's Blue Ribbon Transportation Commission; and various public-private partnerships. We have also had a discussion about our vision for a rapid transit system.

The material from the TTF meetings is posted on www.montgomerycountymd.gov/apps/cex/transit. I encourage everyone to review the material, especially the briefing by the county DOT on bus rapid transit. They have identified sixteen possible BRT routes. The Planning Board is expected to start work on a transportation master plan beginning next fiscal year that would include transit facilities. The county DOT bus rapid transit study will surely be considered by the Planning Department staff in the development of that master plan. Once the final BRT report is released by the county DOT, it will be posted to the web site noted above as well.

The views expressed in this column do not necessarily reflect formal positions adopted by the Federation. To submit an 800-100 word column for consideration, send as an email attachment to theelms518@earthlink.net