

"Federation Corner" column
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Schedule of land use issues

by Jim Humphrey
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Summer is upon us. Another school year is over, affording students a break from studies. And their working parents are looking for a brief respite from their jobs, too. The attention of most county residents turns, however briefly, to the treasured summer vacation. Even the Montgomery County Civic Federation takes a summer break.

Civic Federation delegates from neighborhood citizen associations across Montgomery County hold no monthly meetings in July or August. But someone has to "hold down the fort", so the MCCF Executive Committee continues to function throughout the summer. Federation officers and committee chairs remain on the job monitoring the activities of county government and weighing in on behalf of our communities and their residents when needed.

The following are some key land use issues which the Civic Federation committee I chair, the Planning and Land Use Committee, will be monitoring in the upcoming summer months and beyond.

The County Council will hold a public hearing on June 19 at 7:30 pm on Zoning Text Amendment 12-07. If approved, this proposed legislation will require so called "mega gas stations" that dispense more than 3.6 million gallons of fuel a year to be located at least 1000 feet from schools, parks, playgrounds, hospitals or other public uses, or uses categorized as recreational, entertainment, or cultural. A Federation representative will present testimony on ZTA 12-07 at the Council hearing.

County Executive Isiah Leggett has stated that by the end of June he expects to announce the date for a public hearing on the recently released Transit Task Force Report. In their Report the Task Force members made their recommendations on creation of a county rapid transit vehicle (bus rapid transit) system, specifying their preferences for route alignments and possible funding mechanisms for the construction and maintenance of a 160 mile RTV system that would be the largest, and most expensive, in the country. The Federation eagerly awaits the opportunity to weigh in on the Task Force Report, especially the increased tax burden for the system that could be shouldered by county homeowners still reeling from the 2008 economic downturn, now labeled the Great Recession.

On June 21, the county Planning Board will hold a public hearing on a proposed Zoning Text Amendment to change the standards and procedures for approval of accessory apartments. Once the Board approves their recommended text, they will transmit the proposed ZTA to the County Council for introduction, which will likely occur on June 26. The Council is then expected to hold their public hearing on the accessory apartment ZTA on July 31, and a representative of the Civic Federation will be in attendance to provide the Council with the MCCF position on this legislative proposal.

The Planning Board could submit their recommended 2012 Subdivision Staging Policy to Council before the August break. Many years ago the Subdivision Staging Policy was known as the Annual Growth Policy; and once a year the Council would decide how many more housing units and square feet of commercial space could be constructed in each of the county's planning areas in the ensuing year. It was then decided that the work effort was too time consuming to conduct on an annual basis so the Council moved to approving a Policy every two years.

In 2009, the Council decided to rename the Growth Policy and move to a four year cycle, approving the new Subdivision Staging Policy in the second year of each four year Council term. The Council's public hearing on the draft 2012 Policy will likely take place in September, and MCCF Planning and Land Use Committee members will spend at least part of their summer studying the proposal the Planning Board will transmit for Council consideration in the fall.

The Planning Department staff expected to submit their draft of a complete rewrite of the county Zoning Ordinance to the Planning Board in September. We have been told that the Board will hold a series of public hearings and worksessions on the different sections of the proposed new Ordinance starting in September and extending over the following three months. The Board recommended draft Zoning Ordinance could be sent to County Council by year's end, with the Council public hearing taking place in early 2013. Civic Federation members will be studying the several sections of the draft ordinance over the summer in preparation for the Planning Board's hearings this fall.

The Planning Board's master plan work program also calls for them to transmit three master plans to the County Council by the end of the year. In April of this year, the Council tentatively scheduled their public hearings to take place on the Burtonsville Community Plan in early September, on the Chevy Chase Lake Sector Plan in early November, and on the Long Branch Sector Plan in early 2013. Federation delegates will study the proposed revisions of these area master plans and consider transmitting comments to Council.

We are still awaiting a County Council hearing to be scheduled on a revision of the county Housing Policy. We understood the Executive Branch had transmitted their draft text to Council earlier this year, but the Council has not scheduled a hearing. Now we hear the draft revised Housing Policy is expected to be transmitted to Council after their August break and a public hearing scheduled for the fall.

The officers and committee chairs of the Montgomery County Civic Federation will stay on the job throughout the summer. Should we think it necessary to call residents to action in the next few months, to weigh in on decisions being considered by our county officials, we will communicate with you through our website--www.montgomerycivic.org--or through this weekly column.

Enjoy your summer break and we will see you at the next monthly meeting of the Civic Federation on September 10.

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