

"Federation Corner" column
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Federation committee duties--Part 2

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This is the second of two articles detailing the regularly occurring and "as needed" duties of the nine standing committees of the Montgomery County Civic Federation, to further the MCCF mission to preserve and improve quality of life for county residents. The first article, on the Planning and Land Use Committee, appeared in the August 30 column.

It is the duty of each standing committee of the Federation to monitor, evaluate, and report on the status and activity of matters within its assigned purview. Committee reports and recommendations are submitted to the MCCF Executive Committee for approval and any further action, and recommended positions are routinely introduced for consideration and vote by the delegate assembly at monthly meetings of the Federation.

Education

Current MCCF Education Committee Chair Paula Bienenfeld scrutinizes the policies and activities of the county Board of Education, Superintendent of Schools, and Montgomery County Public School (MCPS) system. Committee responsibilities include analyzing the annual MCPS budget, as well as the impact of the state schools budget and Maintenance of Effort requirement on the county school budget.

"As needed" duties of the MCCF Education Committee include evaluating issues such as the Pearson contract with MCPS for curriculum development, cost/benefit considerations of proposed classroom materials purchases, and evaluation of reports and analyses of MCPS activities and processes by outside agencies like the Office of Legislative Analysis or the county Office of the Inspector General.

Environment

Under the leadership of Chair Ginny Barnes, the Federation Environment Committee considers county and state laws, and Executive Branch and Park & Planning Commission policies and practices, with regard to their impact the natural environment in the county. The committee also tracks legislative and policy proposals, such as the prolonged initiative to revise the forest conservation laws of the county and the associated effort to preserve and increase tree canopy coverage, especially in urbanized areas.

The MCCF Environment Committee also monitors Planning Board enforcement actions related to conservation easement violations. And it is examining county efforts to meet stormwater management requirements imposed by the state.

Legislation

MCCF Legislation Committee Chair Dan Wilhelm considers all state legislative proposals as to their impact on Montgomery County. Mr. Wilhelm also serves as the current Federation representative to the Committee for Montgomery, a coalition of organizations devoted to betterment of the county, and this year was elected Chairman of the CFM.

Parks and Recreation

Committee Chair Carole Ann Barth reviews the actions and policies of the M-NCPPC Parks Department, considering the ability of that Department's annual operating and capital budgets to maintain and improve our parks, which contribute so much to the quality of life of county residents. The MCCF Parks and Recreation Committee also measures regularly occurring policy processes, such as interaction between

the Parks Department and the Executive Branch Recreation Department, the bi-annual revision of the county's Park, Recreation and Open Space (PROS) Plan, and the Legacy Open Space program.

Public Finance

Current MCCF Finance Committee Chair Chuck Lapinski monitors the annual county Operating and Capital budget processes. The committee also coordinates an informational program on the budget for the March or April monthly Federation meeting each year, hosting a panel that traditionally includes the county Chief Administrative Officer, the Director of the Department of Finance, and the Chair of the County Council Budget Committee. And the committee Chair provides Federation testimony at the annual Council hearings on both the Operating and Capital budgets.

The Federation Finance Committee also analyzes and comments on the state budget and any other state legislative proposals which might significantly impact the county budget.

Public Safety

Chair Jim Zepp coordinates the Federation's Public Safety Committee efforts to examine policy and budget issues impacting criminal and juvenile justice concerns in Montgomery County. This includes the array of County, State, and Federal agencies and public officials involved with crime prevention, law enforcement and prosecution, adjudication, and corrections.

The Public Safety committee also seeks to improve the quality and extent of communication between citizens and public safety agencies because this contributes to greater cooperation, reasonable mutual expectations, and more effective efforts at making Montgomery County a safe community in which to live and work. An essential component of these communications is timely and accurate information on criminal incidents, strategic and tactical responses to emerging crime problems, and assessments of the effectiveness of these efforts.

Transportation

Under current Chair Dan Wilhelm, the MCCF Transportation Committee monitors, evaluates, reports, and makes recommendations concerning the construction, operation, financing, and maintenance of public transportation facilities and services. It shall be concerned with public and private parking, state and county roads, the Metro system, public bus and taxi systems, and private traffic mitigation programs developed to comply with County requirements.

Mr. Wilhelm also serves as the Civic Federation's representative on the Transit Task Force created by County Executive Isiah Leggett, which earlier this year recommended building a 160 mile Rapid Transit Vehicle (RTV) system to enhance public transit service in the county.

Utilities

MCCF Utilities Chair Chuck Lapinski looks into county laws, regulations and policies affecting all of the utilities serving the county (electrical service, telephone, cable television, and Washington Suburban Sanitary Committee water and sewer service) and their impact on residents. The MCCF Utilities Committee also reviews actions of the state Public Service Commission, which has recently come under scrutiny related to their actions in attempting to improve the reliability of electrical service provided in the region.

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