

“Federation Corner” column
The Montgomery Sentinel, 31 December 2014

The Civic's top ten stories

By Paula Bienenfeld

Forthwith our Civic Fed Top Ten list of civic activist and community stories from 2014 that have an impact on our civic organizations across the county, in no particular order. Thanks everyone who contributed to this list. Each year the civic activists in Montgomery County spend countless volunteer hours pushing for a government that represents the residents and not the big money interests.

It is hard work and can be frustrating much of the time. Sometimes we are all Sisyphus. But sometimes all our hard work pays off. So, thank you and Happy New Year to all of our members and friends. And congratulation on the wins of 2014.

1. Costco Gas Station win: After the case broke the County record for the longest land use hearing ever, the County Hearing Examiner recommended the Board of Appeals deny Costco's special exception for a gas station in Wheaton. The win is due to our Civic Fed members, the Kensington Heights Civic Association, and the Stop Costco Gas Coalition, and the hard work of our Recording Secretary, Danila Sheveiko.
2. The county's progress on #opengov open data initiatives due to work for many years on the part of the Civic Fed. Beginning at least by 2012, the Civic Fed began pushing for a 'checkbook online,' similar to those we see in New York and other municipalities and states around the country. The county government is moving slowly towards a more transparent government budget process and we see the results in the 'budget Montgomery' website. According to the website "budget Montgomery will provide you with a way to understand how our budget is structured and get the answers you need." Of course the real step is not to 'allow' residents and taxpayers to see how someone else structures our budget. It is to restructure the budget process so it is the citizens that create and implement the budget in an open, transparent manner and to our benefit.
3. In the spirit of #opengov, the Historic Preservation Commission (HPC) agreed to webcast their meetings. This was accomplished by prodding the HPC on our Civic Fed twitter account.
4. The Board of Education now webcasts its committee meetings. This happened thanks to the constant attention on the part of Parents' Coalition members Janis Sartucci and Danuta Wilson, who attended almost every meeting, and taped these public meetings so the public can see the public's business. Because yes, ALL meetings are public. Even the lunches and retreats. That's how it works, folks.
5. MCPS expanded its part-time Athletic Trainer (AT) pilot program at 11 of 25 high schools (in 2013) to all 25 this year. For the last two years the program was funded by outside health care providers donating the ATs time. This happened thanks to the hard work of Tom Hearn, who has been pushing to get them funded in the Operating Budget. The Gazette reported a conversation with MCPS Athletic Department staff a few weeks ago saying that this would

happen. If they do it, the Civic Fed could add it to our 2015 list! Now if we could just get them to end school-subsidized football/repetitive brain trauma...

6. New faces at the County Council, the Board of Education and in Annapolis. Welcome to Tom Hucker and Sid Katz at the Council, and Jill Ortman-Fouse at the Board of Education – and of course Larry Hogan at the helm, as our Governor-elect. We look forward to increasing government transparency and citizen involvement in our government. The one ‘by the people and for the people’ Yeah, that one.
7. The first orphan road has now been constructed, thanks to Civic Fed past president Peggy Dennis and neighbors’ constant work and attention for many years. The Montgomery County Department of Transportation Division of Transportation Engineering made improvements to Fawsett Road in Potomac to bring it up to current standards. It is the first road to be upgraded under the Dedicated but Unmaintained County Roads policy, adopted by the County Council in 2009. The policy allows homeowners who live on roads that are not maintained by the County to vote to pay 90 percent of the cost of upgrades. The County pays the other 10 percent. Once the upgrades are completed, the Montgomery County Department of Transportation takes over maintenance of the road, including road repairs and snow removal. There are about 60 roads originally built by developers that did not meet County standards and were never accepted for maintenance by the County. Fawsett Road was a gravel road. It was paved and a storm drain system was installed. The road’s 18 homeowners will each pay \$28,000 over a 20-year period for the improvements.
8. Passage of the county’s Public Campaign Financing Law, thanks to recently retired Council Member Phil Andrews (D-District 3) and the work of Common Cause-Maryland. The law’s intent is to encourage county council and county executive candidates without deep-pocket donors to run for office, by providing some public funding. The bill was passed unanimously, and the law goes into effect January 15, 2015.
9. MCPS eliminated artificial strawberry additive milk from their menu. Many thanks to the very active Real Food for Kids-Montgomery, led by Karen Devitt and Lindsey Parsons, recipients of the Civic Fed Community Hero Award who continue to work to for healthy school foods.
10. And my personal favorite, courtesy of Louis Wilen, our esteemed Civic Fed Public Utilities chair: the Silver Spring Transit Center almost got finished. As he points out, we can use this one next year, too.

So we raise a glass to all our friends and members of the Civic Fed, for all your hard work, persistence and good cheer, and the countless hours and the money you donated in 2014 to push for a better quality of life here in Montgomery County. Thank you. And here’s to Auld Lange Syne.