

"Federation Corner" column
The Montgomery Sentinel - August 21, 2003

What's happening here?

by John Warnock
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The GBCCC is in good shape, having just staged a successful membership and donation drive. We distribute two publications annually throughout our area that usually bring in additional members and donations. For this membership drive we focused on an issue of particular interest to our community--the opening of the trestle over Rock Creek.

For those who haven't seen it yet, they owe it to themselves to take a walk on this segment of the Trail, and enjoy the spectacle of a view from the treetops over Rock Creek and the Park. For pictures and additional information, our website is www.savethetrail.org.

Naturally, the opening of the trestle has introduced a new set of collateral problems, such as cleaning up the Trail and new traffic patterns. We are getting ready to launch a clean-up campaign in the summer, and a vine clearing operation after the first killing frost.

Otherwise, our problems and challenges seem to mirror those of the other community civic associations, but each with their own perspectives, creating a situation rather like that of the parable about the five blind men trying to describe an elephant on the basis of the part they could touch. So we need to share more information and insights with one another.

When Civic Federation delegates recently met for a brainstorming session, one thing that we all seemed to share is a strong dissatisfaction with the work of the Planning Board and the amazingly elastic nature of the Master Plans. There seems to be a consensus that the County Council gets the kind of reports from the Planning Board that the Board knows it wants. In other words, Park and Planning staff tend to do what they must do to collect their paychecks, so they produce plans that meet the political demands of the developer-driven County Council. A Master Plan should be sensible and well enough thought out to stand up and speak for itself. If it can't, then it is something that is, in a very profound sense, corrupt.

This kind of politically directed "planning" is precisely what destroyed state socialism. As Lech Walesa said, "If they introduced central planning into the Sahara, they'd run out of sand in five years."

We are also interested in the discussion of redistricting the County Council seats so as to abolish the at-large members. It has been pointed out that the constituencies of the County's at-large seats are larger than the average congressional district. That means that campaign funding becomes all-important and that means a continuation of the status quo.

CORRECTION: The August 14 Federation Corner column contained statements asserting that some developers have received height or density bonuses in exchange for providing Moderately Priced Dwelling Units (MPDUs) in their projects, and then bought out of providing those units while retaining the bonus. The Planning Board staff maintains that there are no cases in which this has occurred.

The column also mistakenly stated that Council Member Steven Silverman supports the Floreen/Subin bill (Zoning Text Amendment (ZTA) 03-24, to lift the building height limits on MPDU projects county wide. He does not.

The Civic Federation is pleased to learn that Councilman Silverman does not support ZTA 03-24. This amendment would have many adverse impacts throughout the County, including circumventing the master plan process and thus undermining the time and hard work residents invest in the process.