

"Federation Corner" column
The Montgomery Sentinel - July 22, 2004

Who is the Montgomery County Civic Federation?

By Dan Wilhelm
MCCF President

The Civic Federation was formed in 1925 to promote civic, community and general welfare in Montgomery County. MCCF is the only county-wide umbrella group of civic associations. We strive to protect and improve the quality of life for all county residents.

With a government as large as Montgomery County's, the voice of the people--even close to a million people--can often be drowned out in the discussion of important issues by the more politically persuasive voice of special interests (those after a financial gain). These special interests, such as the development community in this county, often make large contributions to political campaigns that result in their having greater influence over the decisions of government than the average citizen or even community. MCCF is able to at least place another side of the issue on the table to be heard.

The Federation is effective in providing a voice to governments at the County, State and occasionally the Federal levels because we represent many different associations and associates. We address issues of a regional or county-wide nature. Local issues remain the purview of local associations or local associate groups. We bring together diverse views from members to arrive at a consensus. Government officials know that our positions synthesize various viewpoints, which are valuable to them in sorting out the wide range of opinions they hear. We pride ourselves in the thoroughness of our deliberations.

Citizens typically do not coordinate their positions with the result that some are for a proposal and some against it. These voices tend to cancel each other out which increases further the effectiveness of the special interest. The Civic Federation is the only group that represents citizens from across the county and is able to develop consensus. On most issues we achieve a high degree of consensus. To the degree individual groups follow our lead, we can present a more unified voice.

In recent years, we have given attention to schools, transportation, land use, recreation, the environment, public safety, and the budget.

The Federation is nonpartisan and does not endorse candidates for public office.

Benefit to You. The benefits to you and your association or group include the following:

- Develop a network of friends and contacts with common interests and problems.
- Learn about the issues, views, and strategies of your counterparts. The issues may be impacting you and you may not yet be aware of it.
- More effectively present issues to your association or group.
- Most effectively represent views to government officials
- Work toward a consensus on issues in order to create an effective citizen voice.

Membership. The Civic Federation membership consists of three categories: association, Individual and associate group. The vast majority of the members are associations, be they local, umbrella, or regional/county wide. Local associations go by

many names including civic, citizen association, homeowner and municipality. An association representation varies from two to four delegates based upon its size and are selected by the member organization, Only association delegates can vote. All members can participate in debates, receive the newsletter, and serve on appointed committees. The membership year runs from July through June.

If your association is not already a member, please join us. If you are not part of an association, please join as an associate. Membership forms with rates can be found on our web site – montgomerycivic.org.

Meetings. Most regular membership meetings consist of a program lasting about an hour followed by a business meeting, where positions are taken. All delegate meetings are open to the general public. The regular membership meetings are held at 7:45 PM on the second Monday of each month except July, August, and December. If that Monday is a holiday, we meet the next evening. The membership meetings are nearly always held in the first floor auditorium of the County Council building, 100 Maryland Ave, Rockville. The Executive Board meetings occur on the second Thursday after the membership meeting and are currently held in the Red Brick courthouse across the intersection from the Council Building – 29 Courthouse Square.

Taking Positions. The Bylaws provide that all formal positions taken by the Federation are established by approval of a resolution or motion at a regular meeting. Our bylaws require that positions be adopted by an affirmative vote at membership meetings, which is 60% of those voting. Normally, the proposed resolution is printed in the newsletter prior to the meeting. Often, articles “for” and “against” a proposed resolution are included. Resolutions on new subject matter, proposed by a motion from the floor and seconded by delegates from two member associations, will be referred to the appropriate committee for recommendation and will be included in the agenda for the next meeting. Emergency resolutions, seconded by five other member associations may be added to the agenda by affirmative vote and acted upon at that meeting.

MCCF Organizational Structure. Elected officers and appointed officers and committees are responsible for most of the Federation's activities subject to guidance and confirmation by the Delegates. Elected officers consist of the President, First Vice President, four Second Vice Presidents, one District Vice President from each of the five councilmanic districts, a Recording Secretary, a Corresponding Secretary, and a Treasurer. Appointed offices are Historian, Newsletter Editor, Parliamentarian, and Public Relations Officer. The standing committees are Environment, Education, Legislation, Membership, Planning and Land Use, Public Finance and Utilities and Transportation. We also have Special Committees for specific subjects and committees at select times during the year dealing with nominations, awards, and financial audit.