

"Federation Corner" column  
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### **Incumbent protection squad**

Charles Wolff  
MCCF Historian

"Circle the wagons, County voters are about to charge." That could have been the battle cry of our County Council as it struggled to find negative wording for a ballot question that 13,000 serious citizens have petitioned to referendum. The citizens are seeking smaller, community-based districts for the Council so that money does not automatically determine who gets elected.

In a smaller district, a candidate can become well enough known with the help of friends and supporters so that negative advertising by a well-financed opponent will just backfire. In a smaller district, the candidate will actually know a greater portion of the constituents, and thereby will be more likely to heed their advice when elected. In a smaller district more people will dare to run, providing the electorate with some fresh faces and a better selection of candidates over the years.

But competition is exactly what an incumbent politician does NOT want. In its morning session (Tuesday, July 27th) the Council took the simple idea that those 13,000 citizens had signed up for, "An amendment to change the composition of the County Council to elect all 9 members from separate districts," and roughly tripled its length, casting a negative cloud over it. As Councilman Subin said, people tend to vote against long or confusing questions on the ballot. To their credit, members Perez, Andrews, and Denis voted against adding the extra language because it also argued against the question and amounted to editorializing in the voting booth. But they were voted down 6 to 3. Then all members figuratively formed a circle, as if for mutual protection, and voted for the new language except for Mr. Subin, who wanted to protest some tangential aspect of state law.

Representatives of the Montgomery County Civic Federation (MCCF), which has sponsored this petition drive, immediately complained to the press. In all probability, this got back to the Council during its lunch break because they reopened the subject in the afternoon session and shortened their additions. The new wording made it less obvious that their maneuvers were an attempt to kill the question's chances at the polls.

On Monday August 2nd, the MCCF held a press conference to formally present the bulk of its petition signatures to the County Council as required by law. Then they go to the Board of Elections for verification that there are at least 10,000 valid signatures of registered voters. The MCCF turned in 12,505 signatures on August 2 and expects the total to exceed 13,000 signatures by the final deadline on August 9th.

About seventy volunteers from all over the County have gathered signatures for this drive. Not surprisingly, a number of board members of the MCCF did outstanding jobs. But there are also several volunteers not closely involved with MCCF that deserve special mention. Alan Rundquist and Lois Sherman (both of Stonegate Citizens' Association) gathered a combined total of over 800. The Sierra Club gathered over 300, primarily by Betsy Johnson. And an 85 year-old lady from Ashton dutifully went to many meetings and gathered her age in signatures.

On November's ballot, our proposal will be called "Question C". It will eliminate the Council's four At-Large seats and thereby remove the huge financial burden of appealing to about 1,000,000 constituents for election. It will also cut the size of the current five districts almost in half. All nine members of the new Council would then be equal and each would only have to raise funds to campaign in one ninth of the County.

By voting for question C this November, we can break through the forming battle lines of the opposition: The land use lawyers, commercial developers, and incumbent Council members, some of whom are heavily financed by the development community.

### **Get acquainted meeting with Chief Manger**

Charles Pritchard

Member, MCCF Public Safety Committee

The MCCF has recently created a Public Safety Committee, which has been organized in several sub-committees that concentrate on police, fire, homeland security, budget, outreach and judicial policies.

On June 21st the newly established Public Safety Committee met with the new County Chief of Police J. Thomas Manger to exchange views on police policies and operations. The meeting at the home of Committee Chairman Fernando Bren was both an amicable and frank discussion of existing polices and operations.

The following topics were discussed:

- Funding of the county budget for the police department (Chief Manger pointed out the need for additional police officers)
- Traffic problems
- MCCF proposal for a county police helicopter unit
- Juvenile and young adult gangs
- "Weed and Seed" program
- Police-public partner committees
- Citizen oversight of civil rights policies, including profiling of minorities and illegal aliens and County detention of persons suspected of being threats to homeland security under the Patriot Act.

Chief Manger answered the questions openly, pointed out some problems associated with them, took notes and promised to get back on some issues. He also expressed his enthusiasm and pleasure at being appointed to his new position.