

"Federation Corner" column  
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### **Protecting neighborhoods**

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On March 9, the County Council held a worksession on the proposed revision of the master plan for the White Flint area. Council member Roger Berliner (D.-District One) the district in which White Flint is located. Near the end of the session, he asked his colleagues to toughen the language concerning strategies to discourage vehicle traffic from cutting through nearby residential neighborhoods.

Draft language in the plan revision had stated that strategies to prevent cut-through traffic in edge neighborhoods should be designed before much new development was approved in the White Flint area. Mr. Berliner asked that the plan specify that those strategies should be implemented, not just designed, before approval of new development proceeds. Council member Duchy Trachtenberg (D.-At Large), who lives near the plan area, joined with Berliner in seeking to lessen the negative impacts on the edge neighborhoods from the high density development being planned for White Flint.

Residents in the down county are very familiar with the need to protect quality of life in their neighborhoods as increasingly dense development is allowed nearby. Single-family home neighborhoods on the edges of Bethesda, Silver Spring and Wheaton have all experienced increases in cut-through traffic and spill-over parking as taller buildings and denser development have occurred nearby, problems that impact the quality of life and safety in these neighborhoods.

The model for including neighborhood protection strategies in area master plans comes from the County General Plan, a blueprint for all local area plans, which was last updated in 1993. The Housing Chapter of the 1993 General Plan Refinement includes as Objective No. 5 to "maintain and enhance the quality of life and safety of housing and neighborhoods." And the following six strategies are recommended for meeting that objective.

- A. Discourage deterioration of housing through well-funded code enforcement, neighborhood improvement programs, and other appropriate techniques.
- B. Ensure that infill development and redevelopment complements existing housing and neighborhoods.
- C. Mix housing with other uses with special care in ways that promote compatibility and concern for residents' needs for safety, privacy, and attractive surroundings when introducing new uses into older neighborhoods.
- D. Provide for appropriate redevelopment of residential property when conditions warrant.
- E. Protect residential neighborhoods by channeling through traffic away from residential streets and discouraging spill-over parking from non-residential areas.
- F. Use special care to plan uses at the edges of high-density centers that are compatible with existing neighborhoods.

Last year the Planning Board considered a rewrite of the Housing Chapter of the General Plan that was drafted by Planning Department staff. Since the County Council is solely authorized to amend master plans, the Board only approved of the rewrite last fall and sent it to the Council with a recommendation for adoption. Upon receipt of the proposed rewrite of the Housing Chapter of the General Plan, the Council referred it to their Planning, Housing and Economic Development (PHED) Committee. The PHED Committee had scheduled a worksession on the draft rewrite for early April, but since the budget is now the top priority at Council that session has been postponed until later this spring.

Of note is the fact that the neighborhood protection strategies listed above, which appear in the current General Plan, are entirely missing from the revision of the Housing Chapter of the General Plan which was drafted by Planning Department staff and approved by the Board.

County residents should be alarmed that at the same time the Planning Board and Planning Department Director Rollin Stanley are recommending to Council the revision of master plans to greatly increase the allowed density of development in White Flint, Germantown, Gaithersburg West, Kensington, Langley Park and Wheaton, they are also recommending that the strategies in place to protect existing residential neighborhoods on the edges of these communities be removed from the county General Plan.

When I testified on behalf of the Civic Federation at the December 1, 2009 County Council hearing on the draft rewrite of the Housing Chapter of the General Plan, I stated "We believe the objective of protecting single-family home neighborhoods, which occupy 72% of the developed land in the county, should be retained in any revision of the Housing Element." And I added that "Federation delegates believe the Housing Objectives and Strategies, which are currently in effect in the 1993 General Plan Refinement, should be retained and strengthened in any revision of the Housing Element:"

I applaud Council members Berliner and Trachtenberg for asking that neighborhood protection strategies recommended in the General Plan be applied in the revision of the White Flint area master plan. But I hope they realize that the justification for including such protection strategies in the White Flint plan, or any local area master plan, is derived from their inclusion in the Housing Chapter of the General Plan; and I encourage these two council members to fight to retain them in any rewrite of that chapter.

*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](mailto:theelms518@earthlink.net)*