

"Federation Corner" column  
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### **Federation endorses Carrier for Planning Board Chair**

by Peggy Dennis, MCCF President

*The County Council will soon appoint the successor to Planning Board Chairman Royce Hanson, whose term expires in mid-June. The Civic Federation sent the following letter to the Council detailing our recommendation for appointment of Francoise Carrier as the next Chair.*

The Montgomery County Civic Federation has a long tradition of interviewing candidates for appointment to the Planning Board, a responsibility we take very seriously. Seven citizens from different areas of the county, each with a long history of participation in zoning and land use issues interviewed the five candidates under consideration. The 45+ minutes allowed each candidate gave them ample time to them to answer our set of questions and allowed us to follow up with a more wide-ranging discussion of their responses and other issues. We came away with a good understanding of each person's background and experience, depth of knowledge, and understanding about the Chairman's role.

Although we do not claim to have found a candidate who is perfect in every respect, nor was our initial decision unanimous, we now conclude that Ms. Carrier stands head and shoulders above the others in being uniquely qualified to assume this position. Our reasons follow.

The Chairman of the Planning Board must have a comprehensive and detailed knowledge of the County's land use zoning law, regulations and procedures. The Board's regulatory role requires the application of existing law and regulations. Ms. Carrier has demonstrated an excellent and detailed understanding of the County's land use and zoning laws, master plans, processes and policies repeatedly during her eight years as our Chief Hearing Examiner. This is a position that does not allow for inexperience or on-the-job training, and the other candidates do not come close to her in this respect.

The new Chair must assume the job with a profound understanding of her multiple roles starting with her relationship to other Board members. If not having served on the Board, the new Chair should at least have a history of successful dealings with the Board. Ms. Carrier has this. She must have a clear understanding of her relationship to the Planning and Parks Directors and their staffs. Ms. Carrier's years as Hearing Examiner have given her many opportunities to forge good working relationships with a number of Park & Planning staff members and we believe her to be well regarded by them. Finally, the Chair, on behalf of the Board, has an advisory role to the Council (and to a lesser extent Executive) where knowledge of what works and doesn't work and what has been previously presented in terms of policy recommendations will be invaluable. Ms. Carrier understands the role she will play and the past history and practices. Other candidates had some idea of these important multiple roles, but little working experience that leads us to believe they would be as successful as she.

The Chair must be able to expertly run public meetings and hearings. She must insure that all procedures are properly followed, all relevant information is clearly presented, and that all points of view and perspectives are aired and listened to in a respectful, fair and impartial manner. Ms. Carrier's tenure as Hearing Examiner gives her an enormous leg up in this area. Many of our members have come before her in hearings, and have come away with a profound respect for her knowledge, her ability to grasp and elucidate complex issues, her exactitude in listening carefully to both sides in a fair and impartial manner, and her ability to render a judgment that is seen by all to be reasonable, fair and articulately worded. None of the other candidates have anything like her experience, nor do they hold the respect and esteem of the public that she has earned over the last eight years.

The next Chair will have to carry on the very difficult and exacting job of overseeing the revision of our zoning ordinance. Ms. Carrier's previous experience in private practice doing legal writing, plus the eight years she spent applying the current zoning ordinance, put her in a position to be uniquely well qualified to oversee this important task of writing law. It is one thing for a candidate to know that this is important. It is quite another thing to hit the ground running, know exactly what needs to be done and why, and have the stamina and leadership to get the job done.

The next Chair must be a consummate leader and administrator of the M-NCPPC. This starts with treating the Board as a team and making the most of each member's intellectual knowledge and capabilities. The chair must also provide leadership and effective guidance to the Directors of Planning and of Parks and their staffs. We believe that staff morale has not yet recovered from the enforcement problems in the recent past (e.g. Clarksburg). The draconian cuts expected to the FY11 budget will result in substantial staff reductions that may degrade morale even further. These staffing cuts will force the agency to modify its processes in order to carry out their mission with fewer staff than ever before. Strong but supportive and encouraging leadership and management skills are especially critical at this point in time. While none of the five candidates have experience supervising such a large staff as M-NCPPC's, we believe Ms. Carrier's years running the Office of Zoning and Administrative Hearings will serve her in good stead in managing this larger organization. We believe she will know how to delegate, but also how to provide the needed oversight to get the best from her staff.

Finally, the next Chair must have both the knowledge of how the County has developed, understand that the county is in a transitional period moving from green field development to some in-fill and much redevelopment, and have a vision of how the county should develop in the future. This vision for the future should blend the ideal with the common sense to deal effectively with realities on the ground. We believe Ms. Carrier has demonstrated both the background and vision for the future growth that will serve us and future generations well.

In short, Ms. Carrier's excellent legal education, relevant work experience, the high regard in which she is held by those who have had professional contact with her, and her quiet but assured demeanor lead us to conclude that she is the most highly qualified and best person for this very important position.

*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)*