



Civic Federation News

February 2012

Serving the Public Interest since 1925

Official Publication of the
Montgomery County Civic
Federation

www.montgomerycivic.org
montgomerycivic@yahoo.com

Peggy Dennis, Editor - Phone: 301-983-9738 - Email: hotyakker@gmail.com
Recipients of the electronic version are encouraged to forward it widely

Program: Montgomery County's Inspector General By Peggy Dennis, President

The program for our meeting on Monday, February 13th will be with the County's Inspector General, (IG) Edward L. Blansitt, III.

The Montgomery County Council passed legislation in 1997 to create the Office of the Inspector General (OIG) to serve as a watchdog to detect and prevent fraud, waste, and abuse in County government operations. The mission of the OIG is stated in the three goals set forth in the enabling legislation.

- Prevent and detect fraud, waste, and abuse in government activities
- Propose ways to increase the legal, fiscal, and ethical accountability of County government departments and County-funded agencies
- Review efficiency and effectiveness of programs and operation of County government and independent County-funded agencies

Although appointed by the County Council, the IG is solely responsible, after carefully considering available resources and the mission of the Office, for choosing topics for review. As such, we will expect Mr. Blansitt *continued on p 2*

February Community Heroes: Judith Higgins and Eleanor Duckett

by Jim Humphrey, Chair, Planning & Land Use Committee

At our February meeting, the Civic Federation will honor Judith Higgins and Eleanor Duckett, two women from the Kensington View neighborhood, by naming them Montgomery County Community Heroes. The award recognizes the volunteer time and effort they expended in monitoring and working to improve the

revision of the Wheaton CBD and Vicinity Sector Plan and the standards in two new, mixed use zoning categories recently created by the County Council, which were first used in that Plan.

Judith Higgins (Judy to her friends) is the Chair of the Land Use and Zoning Committee of the Kensington View Civic Association, and Eleanor Duckett is one of a dozen or so members on the committee. They coordinated work on the Wheaton Plan and new zoning with the Civic Federation through Virginia Sheard, who not only serves on the KVCA Land Use Committee but is their delegate to the MCCF, where she is a member of the Federation's Planning and Land Use Committee. In May 2010, Virginia was recognized for her work when the MCCF awarded PLU Committee members the Star Cup, for volunteer efforts on behalf of the people of the entire county.

The Planning Board and its staff began work on the Wheaton Sector Plan in the fall of 2010. The planning area includes a portion of Kensington View, so Judy and Eleanor, along with Virginia, submitted comments designed to protect their neighborhood. But the Plan was

Mark Your Calendar Now!

Montgomery County Civic Federation's

2012 ANNUAL AWARDS BANQUET

Friday, May 11, 2012

6:00 to 9:30 p.m.

New Fortune Restaurant

Contents

Program: Montgomery County's Inspector General.....	1
February Community Heroes: Judith Higgins and Eleanor Duckett	1
President's Message.....	3
MCCF Needs You!.....	4
Nature's Playground	4
Future Park and Recreation Facilities	6
Budgets: "Whack-a-Mole" or Whack-a-Taxpayer!	7
My Green Montgomery	8
Minutes of the January 9 Meeting	8
Minutes of the January 19 Executive Committee Meeting	10

delayed when the Council asked the Board to first draft a medium density CR (Commercial/Residential) Town Zone and a lower density CR Neighborhood Zone for use in the Plan.

The ladies attended nine Board worksessions on Zoning Text Amendment 11-01, legislation to create the two new mixed use zones, from December 2010 through March 2011. To her credit, Board Chair Francoise Carrier, allowed the women to "come to the table" during worksessions and suggest changes to protect residential neighbors when mixed use is allowed nearby.

The Board submitted the ZTA to the Council in April, and Ms. Duckett and Ms. Higgins attended nine sessions of the County PHED (Planning, Housing, and Economic Development) Committee, from June through September 2011. And again, they were allowed to work with members and staff on improvements to the ZTA, this time by PHED Chair Nancy Floreen. ZTA 11-01 was approved by Council on October 11, 2011.

Meanwhile, the revised Wheaton Plan was approved by the Board in March 2011 and went to Council where the PHED held nine sessions on it, from July to October, with Judy and Eleanor attending and suggesting improvements. The Council approved the revised Wheaton Sector Plan on November 29, 2011.

For insuring that all residential neighborhoods are protected by standards in the new mixed use zoning, and for their dedication to improving the Wheaton CBD Sector Plan, the Federation is proud to name Judith Higgins and Eleanor Duckett each as a Community Hero. Please attend the February 13 meeting and help us thank these women for their hard work.

Program—MC Inspector General *Continued from p 1*

to discuss the OIG's Work Plan for 2012-2013. An additional topic of interest should be a

discussion of the Advisory Committee as described on the IG's website:

"In one of my initial meetings, members of a community group recommended that this OIG form an informal advisory group consisting of 5-7 County residents to assist in selecting important oversight topics. Having concluded that independence concerns might arise from asking the County Executive and Council to formally create and appoint such a committee, it is my intention to instead create a charter that will serve as the basis for an informal advisory group whose recommendations will be incorporated in future updates to our work plan. I will consult with appropriate County officials and the Council Audit Committee during the development of the proposed charter. " We will want to learn how Mr. Blansitt has fared in moving this charter forward.

Upon leaving his position, former Inspector General Thomas Dagley made the following comment: "Montgomery County would benefit from a cultural change that encourages residents and employees to ask tough questions on difficult issues — and forces leaders to answer." We should discuss some very thorny questions along this line: how does he interpret the legitimate function of the OIG, versus that of the County government? Does he foresee the same kinds of difficulties prying information out of some departments under the Executive? Does his jurisdiction include oversight for contracts between the Executive branch and private contractors who are used to carry out many functions of government and the County's contracting processes and requirements? What will it take to expand his mission and jurisdiction to include audits and financial issues concerning Montgomery County Public Schools and Montgomery College whose combined budgets account for over half our county's expenses. There is also the question of the budget for MNC/PPC. So, please plan on coming to the February meeting to learn more about how the OIG is working to insure that our county taxes are well and wisely spent, and raise pertinent questions to discuss with our independent expert. Our Q&A sessions are always lively.

President's Message

By Peggy Dennis

On transportation: I'm pleased to report that the study of Montgomery County's "Orphaned Roads" – publicly dedicated but privately maintained and in many cases, unimproved – is on the verge of bearing fruit. This study was carried out in 2007 under the auspices of the Civic Federation. The study was very fact-based and detailed. It saved the County \$250,000 that would have otherwise gone to a private consultant to produce an "estimate" of the number and condition of the Orphaned Roads and the cost of their improvement and future maintenance. The study resulted in the appointment of a "working group" to further study the issue and draft a policy on how to fairly and equitably manage the improvement of these roads. That took another year. Then it took a year to get the draft past the Executive and approved in final form by the council. After passing the policy, the Department of Transportation held several public information meetings to explain the policy and its procedures to all property owners on the affected roads. When all was said and done, only the property owners of Fawsett Road petitioned the government to build their road to County standards and assume its future maintenance. In the interest of full disclosure, this is my road. It is a dirt and gravel road with significant stormwater erosion problems. After extensive work with the engineers in DOT and a refined cost estimate, 85% of the property owners voted to have the County proceed with the construction, and the Executive's CIP budget contains a line item for our project. Fawsett Road will be the guinea pig – the test case to see if the policy is workable.

On deer: The Council's Public Safety Committee met on January 26 to discuss the FY 2012 Annual Report and Recommendations of the Montgomery County Deer Management Work Group. I attended this meeting which was open to the public and very well attended by interest groups and especially by residents of Potomac who live near the C & O Canal National Historic Park (deer hunting is not allowed there) and by residents of the Sligo Creek area. Citizen input was solicited and

thoughtfully received. The County has had a Deer Management Work Group in affect since 1993 to study the statistics and ramifications of the deer problem - Deer Vehicle Collisions (DVC), destruction of crops in the Ag Reserve and landscaping in suburban and urban yards, environmental degradation in parks, and the rising incidence of Lyme disease. Managed hunts have been carried out in some county and state parks since 1999, and the culling of the herds has resulted in lower collision rates on roads in adjacent areas. Hunting is controlled and permitted solely by the Maryland Department of Natural Resources (DNR) which has recently relaxed regulations to permit hunting in some suburban neighborhoods, but under very tight restrictions which still make implementation very difficult.

The full packet presented at the committee meeting is very informative and it can be accessed at <http://tinyurl.com/mcdeerpak>. Information on DNR's current restrictions and regulations on hunting is on the website: <http://tinyurl.com/mcdnrdeermgt>

Members of the public attending the meeting called for further rationalization and relaxation of the DNR's regulations with the view toward more effectively and safely diminishing the number of deer in residential neighborhoods to environmentally sustainable numbers. Towards this end, I offer the following resolution for consideration at our February meeting.

Resolution on White-tailed Deer

Whereas the Deer Management Work Group has been in effect since 1993, and managed hunts in selected parks have taken place since 1999, and

Whereas the County's population of white-tailed deer has increased despite these management efforts, and

Whereas upward trends in deer population coincide with increased Deer Vehicle Collisions, pervasive destruction of natural habitat in parks and stream valleys and landscaping in private yards, and increasing incidents of Lyme disease including sufferers living in suburban areas,

Therefore, be it resolved that the Montgomery County Civic Federation urges our county and

state officials to work collaboratively towards liberalizing appropriate regulations to extend the hunting season for deer and facilitate controlled and safe hunting on both public and private lands.

MCCF Needs You!

By Peggy Dennis, President

I know we are all busy people, but nothing gets done without volunteers stepping up to do the work. And this is not hard work! We welcome new blood, interested beginners and old hands alike.

We need volunteers including a chairman to serve on our Nominating Committee. This involves no travel, no meetings, and most discussion will be done by phone. There are a small number of elective positions to be filled, so some familiarity with our delegates is helpful!

We also need folks to serve on our 2012 Awards Committee. Our Annual Awards Banquet on Friday, May 11, is just around the corner. The work of this committee -- accepting nominations for award recipients, evaluating those nominations and making final recommendations on the awardees -- should be of short duration and may also be done largely by phone. The committee will be confirmed at the February Executive Committee meeting. Please also start thinking now about individuals and/or groups you would like to nominate. Here are the descriptions of the awards and the rationale for each award:

- The Wayne Goldstein Award: awarded to an individual or group for outstanding service to the people of Montgomery County.
- The Sentinel Award - sponsored by the Montgomery Sentinel newspaper and awarded to an individual or group for a significant contribution to good government at the local level.
- The Star Cup - sponsored by the Federation and to be awarded to a Delegate or Committee of the Federation for outstanding public service on behalf of Montgomery County.

Please contact Peggy Dennis at 301-983-9738 or by email: hotyakker@gmail.com if you are willing to serve on either or both committees. We cannot do it without your help!

Nature's Playground

By Carole Ann Barth, Chairman, Parks & Recreation

Communities around the country are moving away from equipment playgrounds in favor of natural playgrounds. A natural playground is a miniature landscape where kids can climb, dig, crawl, build, play house and use all their senses. Instead of play equipment purpose-built for a single function, children interact with natural elements creatively, in ways only limited by their imaginations.

Natural playground styles vary considerably. Some look like a conventional park, except that the play "equipment" is created from natural materials such as logs and playhouses made from trained vines. Others create the illusion of a totally wild area. Most fall somewhere in between. Some even have water features, such as a small "stream" that can change course as kids manipulate rocks and sticks.

In addition to encouraging imaginative play, natural playgrounds invite youngsters to interact with nature. Too few of today's children have the opportunity to experience nature through independent and self-directed play, and that lack has been dubbed "nature deficit disorder". The disassociation of children and nature has been linked to a wide range of behavioral and health issues, including childhood obesity, attention deficit disorder and depression.

Indeed, there is a growing body of research on the benefits of unstructured play and time spent in natural surroundings. For example, academic performance improves measurably after time spent in nature. As these benefits have become better recognized, pediatricians have actually begun to write "prescriptions" for nature play.

Natural playgrounds are also cost-effective. Because they take advantage of existing terrain

and “found” materials, construction costs are low. In contrast, conventional playgrounds feature very expensive equipment that is often replaced after only a few years to comply with evolving safety standards.

Still, natural playgrounds do need to be designed. In addition to safety concerns, natural playgrounds need to be appropriately designed for the level of use. Thus, a high-use playground in a heavily-populated urban neighborhood would need a different design than a lightly-used playground on the grounds of a small daycare center. Having specially-designated play areas also protects sensitive natural areas like wetlands from the impacts of too much foot traffic

The State of Maryland has recognized the importance of natural play in its Partnership for Children in Nature and Governor O'Malley's Proclamation, Maryland Children's Outdoor Bill of Rights. As part of the Partnership, the Department of Natural Resources has helped create a number of natural playgrounds.

In Northwood Four Corners, we were ahead of the natural playground curve without knowing it. Nine years ago, our community-generated conceptual plan for Rachel Carson Meadow in North Four Corners Park called for a nature trail, story circle, and other interactive features made from natural and recycled materials.

Since the park's existing playground is a “tot lot, we also requested a playground suitable for older kids and a seating area with chess boards and other features for the Seniors. Finally, our plan included managing the exotic invasive vines in the park to improve safety and visibility. We hired Dr. Marc Imlay to assess the property and devise a control program. His report indicated that simply by controlling the invasive vines, we could go from only 20% visibility through the tree canopy to 80% visibility.

This year the facility planning process for the Park resumes. So far, the Montgomery County Parks Department is still determined to spend 5-6 million dollars to remove our existing soccer field, cut down the meadow's rolling hills and fill the valley with more than 20 feet of fill dirt to create a new soccer field and 50 car parking lot.

This despite the fact that the same money could renovate at least 12 existing playing fields, thus actually increasing the number of playable fields. Parks wants to build this field even though there are flat park parcels in the area where existing fields could be expanded or new fields built for a fraction of the money they plan to spend in North Four Corners Park. And for the final irony, there is another group (less than 3 miles away) that is trying to get a park with a playing field on the site of the old Maryland School of Art and Design on the western side of Georgia Avenue.

The group, called "Green Space on Georgia" includes residents from the communities of Plyers Mill Crossing, Plyers Mill Estates, Carroll Knolls, and McKenney Hills who have joined together to advocate for a park with active recreation since there are no such resources on that side of Georgia Avenue. They've been at it for several years, and are equally frustrated with the Parks Department.

But there is hope. Nine years ago, we struggled to communicate our vision of a local neighborhood park with a sustainability theme. We tried to explain that there is a middle ground between leaving the meadow the way it is and obliterating it. We felt sure there was a way to design a landscape that feels like a natural area. We were convinced that the park could be improved without losing its essential character.

We also believed it was possible to create a space that encourages and nurtures what Rachel Carson called “The Sense of Wonder”. We believed that having such a space in an accessible, densely populated location like North Four Corners Park would benefit families with young kids, older kids and seniors alike.

Today, we can point to the natural playground movement and say, “that's what we're talking about.” Today, we can work with the Partnership for Children in Nature and the No Child Left Inside Coalition to pursue our vision.

But we need your help. If you are willing to lend a hand, call me at 301-593-7863 or email cbarth@mindspring.com. There is alot to be done from lobbying the County Council to cutting invasive vines. We also need volunteers

for our Rachel Carson Meadow Festival on May 19th. This great event showcases how the landscape “rooms” in the meadow create a multi-functional space.

Future Park and Recreation Facilities

What Do We Want, What Do We Need, and What Can We Afford?

By Carole Ann Barth, Chairman, Parks & Recreation

What are the park and recreation needs for the next 10 years? How will those needs be met? The 2012 Park Recreation and Open Space (PROS) Plan Update estimates future needs and explains the strategy for meeting those needs. For example, the draft PROS includes the following strategy for soccer fields: “Maximize field use and minimize wear with the installation of synthetic turf”).

The PROS includes sections on:

- Recreation and Aquatic Centers
- Natural Areas
- Trails
- “Traditional Park Facilities” (athletic fields, playgrounds, tennis and basketball courts, picnic shelters, and ice rinks)
- “Facilities Associated with Emerging Trends” (cricket, dog parks, community gardens, skateboard facilities, and volley ball.)

The PROS plan is an important step in the facility-development process. Suppose the plan estimates we will need (with “need” based on the number of County residents theoretically within the age-range for hang-gliding and the maximum number of people that can hang-glide per mountain per day) 5 hang-gliding mountains by 2022. Suppose the plan also notes that the eastern part of the County is flatter than the western part of the County, and therefore the need is greater in the eastern County. So the plan recommends building 5 mountains over the

next ten years, giving priority to potential sites in the eastern County.

Down the road, suppose Parks submits a CIP (Capital Improvements Program) budget to the County Executive and Council which contains a \$50,000 project for planning a hang-gliding mountain in the eastern county. The justification for that project would be, “This project helps meet the critical need for hang-gliding mountains documented in the 2012 PROS Plan.”

While this example is fictitious, it shows how the PROS plan estimates are cited as indisputable needs in the CIP process. Thus it’s important to look very closely at what’s included in the plan and how the estimates are derived.

We also need to look beyond the individual facility types and consider the plan’s totality. In these tough financial times it’s important to develop consensus on what we really need and what we can afford. Do we need state-of-the-art facilities for every conceivable sport and hobby? Is it more important to have convenient, nearby facilities or is it more important to have regulation-sized facilities? Should we be building new facilities when many existing facilities cannot be adequately maintained?

Finally, the PROS Plan matters because it serves as the County’s Land Preservation, Parks and Recreation Plan (LPPRP). LPPRP is a planning document required by the State of Maryland, which must be submitted every six years for a county to remain eligible for Program Open Space (POS) funding. POS is the primary State funding program for the acquisition and development of parkland. The State of Maryland utilizes local LPPRP’s to assist with the formulation of a statewide parks and recreation plan that is required at the federal level.

So let the County officials know what you think – especially about your local neighborhood park:

PROS Plan Project Coordinator: MCP-
PROSPlan2012@Montgomeryparks.org

MOCO Parks Dept. Director, Mary Bradford: 301
495 2500 Mary.Bradford@mncppc mc.org

MOCO Recreation Dept. Director, Gabriel Albornoz: 240 777 6800
Gabriel.Albornoz@montgomerycountymd.gov

Here is the schedule for the plan's development.

- Open House Public Meetings - January 2012
- Draft Plan Discussed by Planning Board and submitted to State - March 2012
- Public Hearing - Spring 2012
- Work Sessions - June 2012
- Plan Approval by Planning Board - June/July 2012
- Final Local Plan Submission - July 2012

Here is a link to the PROS update web page:
<http://tinyurl.com/prosupd>.

Budgets: “Whack-a-Mole” or Whack-a-Taxpayer!

By Charles Lapinski, Chair of Public Finance and Utilities

Most of you remember the whack-a-mole game played by our kids/grandkids at the game arcades and Chucky Cheeses. Just grab a bat and bop the mole as its head emerges from one of a dozen or so holes before it goes back into the hole and tries to emerge from another before it gets bopped. Now we taxpayers are the metaphorical moles except three bats wielded by the Governor, President of the Senate and Speaker of the House are trying to hit one mole; you the taxpayer. The three bat-wielders are trying to hit us with a number of increased taxes and fees, and shifting major expenditure liabilities from the State budget to the Counties.

The following is summary of some of the increased taxes and fees and transfer of expenditure liabilities that are addressed in the Governor's budget and “on the table discussions”:

- Change the tax brackets so that singles making more than \$100K and married filing joint returns of \$150K and more could see reduced personal exemptions

and deductions and/or be taxed at the millionaires' tax rates

- Increase in the sales tax by up to 1% for certain items such as internet fees and/or equipment and services
- Increase the gas tax and further increases in highway and bridge tolls (the initial proposed legislation does not stipulate that these increases in revenue go directly into the Transportation Trust Fund and not the General Fund)
- Increased fees for State Parks and other items
- Increased taxes and fees on utilities to fund a Wind Energy Farm off the Maryland Coast
- Increased flush taxes and fees on rural septic systems that already pay up front installation fees to the State
- Shift at least 50% of the teacher's pension costs from the State (an 85 year old responsibility of the State) to the counties which could mean an \$60-80 million hit to Montgomery County on top of its current projected deficit of \$135 million

If any combination of the proposed tax and fee increases take place, it will be the 6th year in a row of increases since 2007 when sales and other tax increases produced a whopping \$1.747 billion in added revenues. More troubling, with all these increases, there has been little or no change in the year-to-year structural budget deficit. The counties had to make significant changes and cutbacks, so why not the state? Moreover, the pension and health insurance liabilities continue to increase and are underfunded by at least \$17 billion each.

From the counties' perspective, none of them are in a good position to take on the increased teacher's pension and health expenses. It is unlikely that if all of the proposed tax and fee increases were to pass, the return to the County in other State grants and expenditures clearly would not cover the cost of the pensions. There is also the effect of the continued decline in real estate property valuations and property tax revenues. We experienced a small increase in the tax rate this past year, but properties near the ICC experienced a decrease in value

generally in the \$50-100K range and in some instances by more than \$150K. It will take some weeks of analysis by the County to understand the true potential impacts of all the State's proposed changes.

These other questions need some good substantive debate and answers:

- What are the alternatives if real estate valuations continue to decrease?
- Why is the State choosing to back a technology in the form of a wind energy farm? National and state governments are notoriously bad at choosing to promote new technologies without saddling the taxpayer with increased liabilities. When is the State going to account for all the likely costs and the risks of cost overruns and environmental impacts including transmission from wind to power conditioning stations, and State debt?
- How will the legislature guarantee that all increases in the name of transportation will be deposited directly into the Transportation Trust Fund Account and be equitably distributed to the counties? Approximately \$300 million has been borrowed from the Transportation Trust Fund and has not been repaid by the State? Why were the proceeds from past transportation taxes and fees deposited into the General Fund and not into the Transportation Trust Fund?

Proposals will be presented at the next MCCF meeting.

My Green Montgomery

In these tough economic times, it is difficult to find the cash to make energy saving improvements to your home. But what if those improvements could pay for themselves and help the environment? Find incentives, programs and local resources to help you save money and "green" your lifestyle in one place: <http://www.mygreenmontgomery.org>. This site was developed by the Department of

Environmental Protection with support from several county agencies and departments, and non-profit partners. The project is funded by the American Reinvestment and Recovery Act.

MyGreenMontgomery.org is open to all local information with an environmentally-focused or sustainability-related message. The site is constantly being updated to remain current and relevant to users. This site is open to all County and community content that can help residents decrease their impact on our environment. If you administer a program or initiative, know of one that would be good to include in the website or if you have completed a green community project that would be great to share, submit it through the Contribute Content page.

Minutes of the January 9 Meeting

By Sue Schumacher, Secretary

Call to Order: President Peggy Dennis called the meeting to order at 7:45 pm and introductions of those present followed.

Agenda: The agenda was approved.

Announcements: President Peggy Dennis announced that volunteers were need for both the nominating committee and the awards committee.

Minutes: A motion was made to suspend rules to correct the bill number [in the December 5th minutes] from Bill 29-11 to Bill 39-11. The motion was seconded and passed, then the minutes as corrected were approved.

Treasurer's Report: Bill Schrader reported that 51 associations and 18 individuals have paid their dues.

Community Hero Award: Paula Bienenfeld, Chair of the Education Committee introduced Janis Zink Sartucci, a strong advocate of transparency and accountability in the Montgomery County Public Schools. Ms. Sartucci was presented the Civic Fed Community Hero Award and spoke briefly about

the Parent's Coalition of Montgomery County, Maryland.

Program: Paula Bienenfeld introduced the presenters who would be discussing the cell tower application process, the program for the evening. The presenters were Dan Abeyta, the Assistant Chief of the Spectrum and Policy Division of the FCC, Bob Hunnicutt of CTC Communications a contractor to the County, and Sue Present an opponent to cell towers in her neighborhood. Marjorie William, who chairs the County's Transmission Facility Group, was with us but not a presenter.

Mr. Abeyta discussed what the FCC does. He said that most towers are built. What is needed now are broad band micro towers for smart phones, lap tops, schools and hospitals and in many cases this is done by adding on to existing towers. He explained that the Federal Government does not get involved unless there is impact on Wildlife (such as threatened or endangered species) or historic properties such as historic buildings, historic districts, or archaeological sites. Other than that it is the State and local authorities who are in charge.

Mr. Hunnicutt, as a contractor assists the County in evaluating proposals for cell towers. He said that towers are allowed in both commercial and industrial areas. The County does not allow speculative towers to be built. Those who require tower space are required to use an existing facility, or if one must be built it is to be as unobtrusive as possible.

Ms. Present who organized her neighborhood suggested that neighbors organize, but not officially. As she explained organizing officially would require the hiring of an attorney. She also explained how the window for filing complaints is quite short, and the panel members stressed that it just can't be a non-specific complaint. Ms. Present recommended the community be curious and cautious, and question everything.

There was an extended question and answer period. There was concern about the difficulty for citizens to learn that a tower application is pending until after it is approved by the Tower Review Committee and then goes to the Board of Appeals, if a special exception is required.

Resolution: The resolution to Oppose Reductions in MARC Rail Service as it appeared on page 2 of the January Newsletter. It was moved to urge MTA to retain the same number of stops, or more, at stations in Montgomery County and seconded. The vote was 10 for, 0 opposed, and 2 abstentions. The resolution was adopted.

Committee Reports

Planning and Land Use: Jim Humphrey reported that the Kensington Master Plan is on hold in the Council's PHED Committee, while Planning Department and the Town of Kensington assemble requested information. In addition, he stated that PHED action on the Tacoma/Langley Master Plan was awaiting additional input from the City of Tacoma Park. The next Master Plan up for review will be Long Branch. Lastly, Jim said that Growth Policy (now called Subdivision Staging Policy) for the County is coming up this year, and that the Zoning Code Rewrite Project is considering limited residential use in the current office park zone.

Public Finance: Chuck Lapinski reported that the County will have a \$150M shortfall and the State will have a one to one to one and a half billion shortfall.

Legislation: Dan Wilhelm reported that there is discussion about the gas tax increase being applied only to urban counties.

Transportation: Dan Wilhelm indicated that the Park and Planning Board is holding discussions with the Planning Staff about the revision to the Master Plan of Transportation and the Transit Task Force desire to reserve right-of-way (ROW) for expansion of the proposed system in 20-30 years. It looks like little ROW will be needed initially.

Meeting Adjourned at 9:45 p.m.

Minutes of the January 19 Executive Committee Meeting by Sue Schumacher, Secretary

Call to order at 7:50 by President Dennis at the home of Bill Schrader. Attendees: President Peggy Dennis, Bill Schrader, Sue Schumacher, Ann McDonald, Virginia Sheard, Dan Wilhelm, Jim Humphrey, Jim Zepp, David Shaw, Chuck Lapinski, and Carol Ann Barth. The **agenda** for the January ExComm meeting was approved, and the December ExComm **minutes** were approved.

Treasurer's Report: Bill Schrader reported that there are currently 52 local associations, 1 umbrella association, one regional/County-wide association, and 18 individuals who have paid the 2011 dues. There was discussion on the costs incurred with printing and mailing paper copies of the newsletter. Starting with the next membership year, we will plan to send the newsletter to past presidents electronically and charge a fee for hard copies to be mailed.

Special Guests: President Dennis introduced Joseph Horgan and Danila Sheveiko. They talked about the Civic Fed starting a blog: how it could be done; what could be included, and who could host it. They strongly recommended The Patch (owned by AOL/Huffington Post). If hosted by The Patch, there would be no administrative cost to the Civic Fed. There was talk concerning training and management. Mr. Horgan and Mr. Sheveiko will build whatever we want once we have done our homework and figured that out.

Programs: President Dennis is in charge of the February meeting where the guest speaker will be Inspector General Edward Blansitt who has been in office since July. President Dennis suggested that some written questions be submitted prior to the meeting. The discussion centered on what the Inspector General does. The March program being organized by Dan Wilhelm will be on the Transit Task Force's final recommendations and roll-out of the BRT/RTV system. Chuck Lapinski is in charge of the April meeting which will be on the County's Operating Budget, which comes out March 15.

Suggestions for future meetings include the zoning code rewrite (this will not be out until October), the Economic Development Office with Steve Silverman, Marc Elrich and Nancy Floreen, and the issues surrounding Artificial Turf playing fields

Community Hero: Jim Humphrey will organize the February Community Hero citation for Judy Higgins and Eleanor Duckett for their work on the Wheaton Sector Plan and the work they did on the CR Zone legislation. Ann McDonald will organize the March Community award going to the leaders of the Little Falls Watershed group.

Discussion Topics:

On the **ICCB garage** being built on Sangamore Road (where the old Defense Mapping Agency was, next to the Washington Waldorf School). The ExComm will write a letter to the Defense Intelligence Agency endorsing the compromise the neighbors have worked out reducing the garage to 1,800 cars and slightly repositioning.

Transportation funding issue: There is a \$13 million taxpayer funding for Clarksburg Village and Arora Hills Development. This is being paid out of the County Executive's office for reimbursement to the developers who improved roads leading to the developments but which were not within in the developments and goes forward in lieu of a \$25 million tax credit that would have otherwise been given to the developers.

Date For Next ExComm Meeting: Tuesday, February 21 via teleconference (Dan Wilhelm to organize).

Committee Reports

Public Finance: Chuck Lapinski reported on the Governor's budget that includes such things as the "millionaires tax" that will affect singles making \$100k and married couples making \$150K; an 1% increase in the sales tax; as much as 50% of the teachers' pension funds being transferred to the counties where the teachers are employed; a utility tax to help fund the off-shore wind energy farm; and an increase in the "flush tax". In addition, the State needs to repay approximately \$260 to \$280 million to the State Transit Trust Fund which has been raided

to fund non-transportation projects over the years and never replenished by the “borrowers”. Discussion ensued over the need for a resolution for the Montgomery County State Delegation to get together with other county delegations and “push back” on the teacher pension issue.

Planning/Land Use: Jim Humphrey reported on the Chelsea School rezoning for townhouses, which is not a recommended use for the land. There will be too much density and the plans have been sent back for revision. Jim wants to weigh in on behalf of the MCCF to argue that the developer should not be allowed to use the Riggs-Thompson property [of about 1.4 acres] as a part of the calculations for the number of townhouses allowed. Dan Wilhelm informed the ExComm of a chance meeting with Council Member Marc Elrich who informed him that a zoning text amendment has been introduced that gives churches as a matter of right the use of their commercial kitchens and up to 5% of their building to provide commercial restaurants as an accessory use to churches and other development in R-60 and R-90 Zones. PLU will investigate. Lastly, Jim brought up the PD zoning for Battery Lane

Public Safety: Jim Zepp reported that the “flash mob” bill is not going to be enacted. He indicated that there are enough laws in existence that cover the problem. He also reported that Jamie Raskin is proposing legislation to make possession of marijuana a

lesser offense. There was discussion on the need for more police officers in the county. Jim Zepp mentioned that studies show that the number of officers has nothing to do with the amount of crime: it is the judicious use of the officers’ time that affects crime rates.

State Legislation/CFM: Dan Wilhelm reported that the proposed gasoline tax must be dedicated to the Transportation Trust Fund

Transportation: Dan Wilhelm reported that the BRT program is really a hot topic before the Planning Board. A consultant’s report to the Task Force proposed a system that will not need to increase the amount of right-of-way required except maybe to accommodate some stations. President Dennis mentioned a bill being drafted by Sen. Frosh that would facilitate walkers and bikers using the paths in public utility (PEPCO and gas company) rights-of-way. This would increase the connectivity of safe bicycling paths for commuters.

Parks and Recreation: Carol Ann Barth had emailed the ExComm about the upcoming meetings on future park and recreation facilities.

Old Business/New Business: None

Newsletter Assignments were made

Adjournment: 10:00

VICTORIAN LYRIC OPERA COMPANY

Presents

Die Fledermaus

By Johann Strauss

Shake your winter blues with this merry romp! Everything old is new again with love affairs, betrayal, deception and a battle of the sexes, all conjured with contagious laughter, flowing champagne and a classic score of charming songs and delightful music.

Friday, Feb. 24 & March 2 at 8 p.m. Saturday, Feb. 25 & March 3 at 8 p.m., Sunday, Feb. 26 & March 4 at 2 p.m.

At the F. Scott Fitzgerald Theatre, located in Rockville Civic Center Park, 603 Edmonston Drive, Rockville, MD 20851. There is plenty of free parking on the park grounds, and tickets are very affordable.

Theatre Box Office/Tickets

240-314-8690

<http://www.rockvillemd.gov/theatre>

Federation Meeting

Session 833

Monday, February 13, 2012
7:45 1st Floor Auditorium
County Council Office Building.
100 Maryland Avenue
Rockville, MD

Agenda:

7:45 Call to Order & Introductions
7:50 Approval of Agenda
7:52 Announcements
7:53 Approval of Minutes of January 9 meeting
7:55 Treasurer's Report
7:55 Community Heroes: Judith Higgins & Eleanor
Duckett from Kensington View
8:00 Program: Inspector General Blansitt
9:15 Resolution in support of deer management
9:20 Committee Reports
9:40: Old Business / New Business
9:45 Adjournment

The **Montgomery County Civic Federation** is a county-wide nonprofit educational and advocacy organization. It was founded in 1925 to serve the public interest. The monthly Federation meetings are open to the public and are held on the second Monday of each month September through June at 7:45 p.m. in the First Floor Auditorium, County Council Office Building, 100 Maryland Avenue, Rockville, MD.

The **Civic Federation News** is published monthly, except in July and August. It is mailed to delegates; associate members; news media, and local, state, and federal officials. Permission is granted to reprint any article provided proper credit is given to the "**Civic Federation News of the Montgomery County Civic Federation.**"

Submit contributions for the next issue by: **Midnight, Sunday, February 26.** Prepare submission as an MS Word, Word Perfect or text-only document, **attach** it to an e-mail, and send to: **hotyakker@gmail.com**

Please send all **address corrections** to Dan Wilhelm, 904 Cannon Road, Silver Spring MD 20904 301-384-2698 or diwilhelm@verizon.net

NEXT EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE MEETING

DATE: TUESDAY, FEBRUARY 21

7:45 P.M.

VIA TELECONFERENCE



Official Publication of the
Montgomery County Civic Federation

Dan Wilhelm, Database Manager

904 Cannon Road

Silver Spring, MD 20904

DJWILHELM@VERIZON.NET

First Class Mail