

**June Program: Announcing MCCF's 2022 Awardees** | Read about each of the winners:

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*Amanda Farber* | **P. 3**

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**TO PRINT, USE **PRINT VERSION****

## of note

### **Next MCCF Meeting #934**

June 13, 2022, 7:30 p.m. *online via Zoom*. Topic: "Annual MCCF Awards Celebration."

! **Join the Zoom Meeting Here**

[See further instructions on page 2. No password is required.]

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May 9 Meeting #933 **P. 25**

Executive Committee Meetings

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### **Membership Application**

**JOIN ONLINE | MAIL-IN FORM**

## Federation Meeting #934

Monday, June 13, 2022

7:30 p.m.

Online Zoom Meeting

### AGENDA

1. Call to Order/Introductions
2. Approval of Agenda
3. Approval of Minutes: May General Meeting #933 **P.25**
4. Treasurer's Report
5. Announcements
6. June Program: Annual Awards Celebration **P.3**
7. Committee Reports
8. Adjournment

## About MCCF Meetings

**All monthly MCCF meetings are open to the public.** They are held on the second Monday of each month, September through June. Since the beginning of the pandemic, the start time is now at 7:30 p.m.

**The June 13 meeting will be held online via Zoom** (see page 3 for program) at 7:30 p.m.:

■ To be part of the video conference, first **visit the Zoom website** to download the program for your phone or computer.

■ Date and Time: Monday, June 13, 2022, 7:30 p.m. Eastern Time.

■ To **join the Zoom meeting from your browser, use this link.**

■ To participate by phone (audio only), call 301.715.8592. The meeting ID is **870 9903 6057**. No password is required.

We hope you will join us! ■



The **Montgomery County Civic Federation, Inc.**, is a county-wide nonprofit educational and advocacy organization founded in 1925 to serve the public interest. Monthly MCCF meetings are open to the public (agenda and details at left).

The *Civic Federation News* is published monthly except July and August. It is emailed to delegates, associate members, news media, and local, state, and federal officials. **Recipients are encouraged to forward the Civic Federation News to all association members, friends, and neighbors.** Permission is granted to reproduce any article, provided that proper credit is given to the "*Civic Federation News* of the Montgomery County (Md.) Civic Federation."

### Civic Federation News

civicednews AT montgomerycivic.org

**TO SUBMIT AN ARTICLE, SEE PAGE 29**

## The Montgomery Co. Civic Federation Announces Its Annual Award Winners for 2022

The Montgomery County Civic Federation, Inc., is pleased to announce its 2022 Federation Award-wins.

### **THE WAYNE GOLDSTEIN AWARD** **Amanda Farber**

*This Wayne Goldstein Award (formerly known as the Gazette Award and the Journal Cup) recognizes outstanding public service contributions by an individual or group in Montgomery County.*

The Montgomery County Civic Federation, Inc., is pleased to honor Amanda Farber of Bethesda with the 2022 Wayne Goldstein Award.

Amanda Farber's local civic activism really began with walks around her neighborhood. Over the years during these walks, she noted the steady decline of the tree canopy



and the increase in temperatures, and she decided that something must be done about it. But what?

Her background as a pediatric occupational therapist working in schools and early intervention throughout the D.C. area taught her the importance of documentation, having a plan and goals, and working as a team.

By documenting the canopy loss, learning the applicable laws and regulations, connecting with other activists, and working with neighbors and County agencies on tree plantings and care, she has helped build awareness regarding the need for a healthy urban tree canopy. She approached the issue with the understanding that patience and persistence—combined with a little humor and a lot of kind words—were the keys to making progress and reaching goals, and learned a lot

## June Program, cont.

along the way.

She has since used this same advocacy approach on a number of important issues—with a focus on building community, incorporating green space in urban areas, and promoting public health—and her advocacy has expanded to include highlighting the need for broader tree canopy and forest conservation protections throughout the County, providing perspectives on ways to improve new development projects, documenting the problems with artificial turf fields, improving pedestrian safety, and serving on her neighborhood civic association. She is grateful to all the amazing fellow advocates she has met in the “rabbit hole” while working on these issues.

She is Vice President of East Bethesda Citizens Association and



serves on the Boards of Conservation Montgomery, Inc., and Safe Healthy Playing Fields, Inc., and as a member of the Bethesda Implementation Advisory Committee. But, most importantly, she is a mom to two teenage boys.

Like Wayne Goldstein, Amanda Farber is an outstanding community leader who represents the best of Montgomery County’s residents who devote countless hours to making the County a better place to live, work, and play. The Montgomery

County Civic Federation is proud to recognize Amanda’s many significant contributions to Bethesda and the County with the 2022 Wayne Goldstein Award.

### **THE SENTINEL AWARD McKenney Hills-Carroll Knolls Civic Association**

*The Sentinel Award is given to an individual or group, typically outside of government, for a significant contribution to “good government” at the local level.*

The Montgomery County Civic Federation, Inc., is pleased to recognize the McKenney Hills-Carroll Knolls Civic Association in Silver Spring with the 2022 MCCF Sentinel Award.

The McKenney Hills-Carroll Knolls Civic Association (MHCK) is in the neighborhood behind the

## June Program, cont.

Forest Glen Metro Station, from Forest Glen Road to Plyers Mill Road and from Georgia Avenue to Leslie Street in Silver Spring. With two elementary schools—Flora Singer and Oakland Terrace—within their borders, they have become one of the more sought-after neighborhoods in Montgomery County. The 1940s-era neighborhood has experienced a new influx of families with children moving in. The neighborhood has many amenities, including several parks, a nearby hospital, walking distance to Metro, and a neighborhood recreational club with a pool. What they also have is a revitalized civic association with an active board and tons of volunteers.

In 2020, MHCK was a sleepy civic association with a few members, a few events, and quarterly meetings

that were not very well-attended. Then came COVID! What was the civic association to do? Refocus and grow! In 2020, the MHCK board transitioned to a new group of officers who changed the face and director of the association. New life was brought into the website, a Facebook page was created, and interactions on other social media platforms became a way to spread the word and share the new face of the association.

Shortly thereafter, pop-up events that allowed for social distancing became a way for the neighborhood to get together as well as see the efforts of MHCK. Food trucks, Halloween events, and membership meetings with exciting speakers got the neighbors excited. The real results came when the board and the membership committee decided to spend some of its reserve money and make membership the number one priority.

The membership committee, chaired by Dave Coyne, was the key to the growth in MHCK. Dave had new ideas for how to reach the neighbors who were not members and make them aware that MHCK existed and what they were doing in the neighborhood. Growth was slow at first, but, once the association realized what the problem was, solving it was easy. Signs for the civic association went up all throughout the neighborhood, membership tables were present at all the events, and postcard mailers went out to every house within the borders. The growth boom had gone nuclear! By 2022, the civic association had seen almost 475% in growth. This is almost unheard of in normal times, but amazing considering the COVID pandemic.

In 2021, with the return to nor-

## June Program, cont.

mal, McKenney Hills-Carroll Knolls had its first block party in two years. A bounce-house, petting zoo, a free ice cream food truck, music, food, and fun for all made life seem almost normal. With an attendance of over 250 people throughout the day, it was a wild success! The events kept rolling from there. National Night Out was attended by two fire departments, Montgomery County Police, Montgomery County Park Police, all our local state and federal representatives, and over 150 people. Each time, the board was present and talking to the neighbors about the association. Each time resulted in new growth.

McKenney Hills-Carroll Knolls has shown what new focus, new ideas, and a little effort can do within a civic association and its neighbor-



ELIZABETH JOYCE

hood. Their community conversations have focused on critical housing, transportation, and pedestrian safety issues in the area.

We are pleased to award them the Montgomery County Civic Federation Sentinel Award for their contribution to good government at the local level and their continued dedication to their neighborhood and its citizens.

### THE STAR CUP Elizabeth Joyce

*The Star Cup is awarded to the Federation delegate or committee performing the most outstanding public service on behalf of Montgomery County.*

The Montgomery County Civic Federation, Inc., is proud to recognize Elizabeth Joyce of Silver Spring with the Federation's Star Cup.

Over the past years, Liz has served as the Federation's Second Vice President and as our interim Chair of the MCCF Planning and

## June Program, cont.

Land Use Committee. In these positions, she has contributed greatly to the expansion and effectiveness of the Civic Federation's advocacy on a wide range of issues of importance to Montgomery County residents.

A brilliant writer, she has assisted not only the Federation's Executive Committee in its work, but she has also made important contributions to the work of other citizen organizations throughout the County.

She is the Chair of the Saratoga Village Neighbors in east Silver Spring, where she has closely followed the deliberations of the Montgomery County Planning Board and the Montgomery County Council on land use, the environment, and economic development issues, among others. She has been one of the most

effective and respected voices in our community, calling for more transparency, accountability, and expanded community engagement for public agencies. With a commendable attention to detail, she has regularly highlighted and commented on inconsistencies in County planning documents and helped frame winning arguments to make final County policies more realistic and reflective of community concerns.

She stands tall in a long tradition of Civic Federation delegates who have given their considerable time, energy, and commitment to making the Montgomery County Civic Federation, Inc., a more effective advocate for the residents of Montgomery County. We are proud to recognize her many good works with the Civic Federation's Star Cup. ■

## CIVIC FED TONIGHT!

### *SEEKING POSSIBLE SPEAKERS FOR YOUR CIVIC ASSOCIATION MEETINGS?*

**Members of the MCCF Executive Committee have extensive experience in issues such as transportation, land use and zoning, schools, parks, environmental concerns, taxes, and public spending. Plus, they have a community-oriented perspective on these matters. If you would like an executive committee member to speak at a meeting, contact President Alan Bowser at *president at montgomerycivic dot org*. Include topics/possible dates.**

## MCCF Considers New Membership Management Software, Online Member Portal

MCCF has been evaluating and testing various membership software packages to determine how to serve members most efficiently for membership applications, renewals, and updates. While we are still working out the details, we hope to have the new membership portal available on our website for July 1, the beginning of the new membership year.

The highly rated **Join It** provides membership management software for nonprofits. The software provides a simple database and dashboard interface to monitor membership developments. It also integrates this database context with best in class service providers to automate other essential components of an organization, like payment processing,

email communication, and event organization. This portal will make it easier to make dues payments, allow members to maintain their own infor-

mation and receive automated reminders, our newsletter and event announcements.

We're looking forward to this important upgrade. ■

### An Appreciation

Thanks to all of the Montgomery County Civic Federation, Inc., delegates who have worked hard in support of the Federation's community-serving agenda over the last year. The Civic Federation is only as strong as its Association member organizations and its delegates.

And special thanks to the officers of the Civic Federation who work hard every month to prepare and present all the Federation's monthly programs and this month-

ly newsletter:

**President:** Alan Bowser

**First Vice President:** Joshua  
Montgomery

**Second Vice President:**  
Elizabeth Joyce

**Secretary:** Karen Cordry

**Treasurer:** Jerry Garson

**Newsletter Editor:** Jacquie  
Bokow

**Executive Committee**

**Member:** Sue Schumacher

**Immediate Past President:**  
Bailey Condrey ■



## MCCF County Council At-Large Candidates Forum to be held June 20 on Zoom

On June 20, 2022, at 7:30 p.m., the Montgomery County Civic Federation, Inc., will host a candidates' forum for the Office of Montgomery County Councilmember-at-Large.

All candidates in the contested race for County Council-at-Large have been invited. As of this date, Gabe Albornoz, Brandy Brooks, Evan

Glass, Scott Goldberg, Tom Hucker, Will Jawando, Laurie-Anne Sayles have accepted our invitation and will participate. (Dana Gassaway has not responded.)

The At-Large forum follows the well-attended March 14th County Executive candidate program that the Civic Federation hosted with Da-

vid Blair, Marc Elrich, Tom Hucker and Hans Riemer participating. A [video of the County Executive candidate forum is online here.](#)

Civic Federation delegates are invited to send questions in advance to [president@montgomerycivic.org](mailto:president@montgomerycivic.org).

The online meeting will be open to the public. [Zoom link here.](#) ■



## County Budget Overview: Council Passes MoCo's \$6.5 Billion FY2023 Operating Budget

*By Jerry Garson, Treasurer*

On May 26, 2022, the Council unanimously passed the County's \$6.3 billion Fiscal Year (FY) 2023 Operating Budget and a \$5.3 billion FY23–28 Capital Budget to fund school construction, infrastructure improvements, and community projects.

The budget keeps the property tax rate flat and provides a property tax credit of \$692 for homeowners. Also, the budget maintains the County's long-term commitment to the County's retired employees and the budget fully funds the County's reserves.

Not included in the budget is the People's Council for \$245,000 or Free RideOn bus service for the year starting July 1, 2022.

The Council funded a budget of more than \$296 million for the Montgomery County Police Department. This budget includes 24 new positions. As required by State law, the Council created both a Police Accountability Board (PAB) and the Administrative Charging Committee (ACC) to set up a civilian board that will promote impartiality and accountability in cases of police misconduct.

The Fire and Rescue Services budget is \$251.8 million, an increase of eight percent, and will include 33 new positions added to address Advanced Life Saving deployment and Emergency Medical Services capacity.

The 86-page report from the County Council [can be found here](#).

The costs for the County Government operations are \$727,418,541 and Personnel Costs of \$351,386,105 for a total of \$1,078,804,646. This amount does not include Montgomery County Schools or other agencies such as Maryland National Park and Planning Commission, WSSC, Montgomery College, or other agencies not under control of the County Executive.

This County will make a local contribution of \$1,839,071,460 to Montgomery County Public Schools. The total cost of the Montgomery County Public School budget is \$2,837,768,517.

Details on the Operating and Capital budgets can be found at [Montgomery County Budget](#). ■

## Electric Vehicle (EV) Ownership: Myths and Misconceptions Dispelled by an Owner

By Carole Ann Barth

We bought our Tesla in December 2019, and ever since we've been answering questions from passersby about how EVs work and what it's like to own one. There are many more EVs on the market now than when we bought, and more are coming out all the time. As gas prices rise, more people are thinking about getting an EV. However, there are many myths and misconceptions about EVs. Here are a few of the biggest ones that keep people from seriously considering EV ownership.

**MYTH: All EVs are expensive to buy.** Just like conventional cars, there are expensive luxury EVs (Porsche's EV goes for about \$100,000) and more affordable EVs (e.g., Nissan Leaf with a MSRP of

\$27,400). For the cost of an average conventional SUV (e.g., MSRPs of about \$35,000), there are lots of electric cars to choose from. If you move up to the average cost of a luxury SUV like the Audi Q3 or BMW X1 (\$36,000 to \$38,000), there are even more choices. Depending on what car you choose, you may also qualify for a tax rebate of up to \$7,400 ([check rebate amounts here](#)).

**MYTH: Charging is expensive/difficult.** Charging an EV is cheaper than buying gas, even in areas with high electric rates. This makes a big difference in cost of ownership over time. *Consumer Reports* compared the nine most popular EVs priced less than \$50,000 with the "best-selling, top-rated, and most efficient vehicles in their

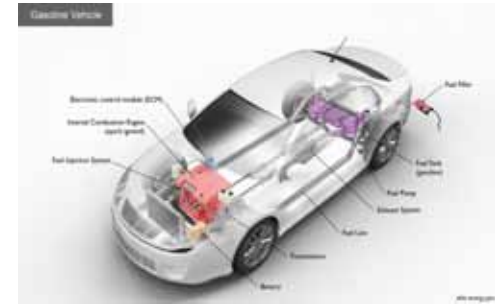
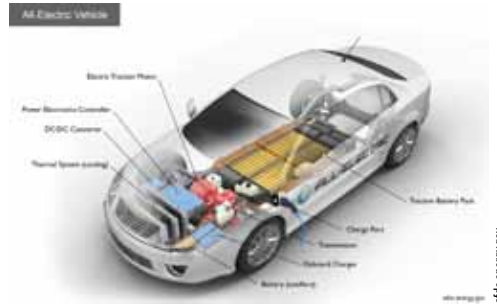
class." For the EVs analyzed, the study found that fuel savings can be at least \$4,700 over the first seven years. The lifetime ownership cost savings were estimated at \$6,000 to \$10,000.

Eighty percent of EV owners charge at home using regular household current. Charging off your regular house current is the simplest and most popular option. Charging an EV has about the same draw as a large microwave oven, so while it is noticeable on your bill, it is not crazy high. (However, PEPCO and BG&E have introduced [special pricing for EV owners who charge during nonpeak hours](#)). When charged at home, the average EV will cost you about 3 cents per mile in electricity (or \$7.50 for our 250-mile range).

## Electric Vehicles, cont.

This type of charging (called Level 1) gets you between 3–5 miles of range per hour of charging. So, if your commute is 40 miles or less, you can replenish that charge in about 8 hours.

Using a Level 2 charger will get you about 14–35 miles of range per hour. You can install a Level 2 charger at home, but it is pretty expensive even with BGE or Pepco rebates. A Level 2 charger draws about as much power as central air conditioning, so most people need to upgrade their electrical system to handle the additional load. Most of the over 45,000 charging stations available nationally are Level 2 chargers. Some are free or only have a nominal charge (e.g., \$1 per hour). Others will charge around \$3 an hour. So, the same commuting pattern as our



earlier charge-at-home example could cost you about \$6 at a Level 2 charger and would take about 2 hours. Many shopping centers have Level 2 chargers so you can charge while you shop or dine.

Finally, there are the fast Level 3 chargers. We have only used the Tesla superchargers, so we can't speak to other brands. A Tesla supercharger can give you a 250-mile charge in 20 minutes. This is what you use for long trips. The car calculates when and where you will

need to stop as well as showing how many chargers are free or in use at the charging site. Supercharging to "fill the tank" from almost 0 to the full 250 costs us \$13.

**MYTH: EVs cost a lot to maintain.** EVs do not have timing belts, fuel pumps, spark plugs, fuel lines, fuel tanks, mufflers, motor oil, catalytic converters, or oxygen sensors to maintain. That's a big savings when you consider that even a simple oil

## Electric Vehicles, cont.

change costs on average \$35–\$75, or \$65–\$125 for synthetic oil. We have had our Tesla for almost three years, and the only maintenance required so far has been keeping the wiper fluid and tires filled.

Argonne National Laboratory has compared the cost of ownership of EVs versus conventional cars. The research team estimated that scheduled maintenance for fully electric vehicles costs about 40% less than for gas-powered cars.

### **MYTH: EV are worse for the climate than gasoline cars because of the power plant emissions.**

In fact, EVs typically have a smaller carbon footprint than gasoline cars, even when accounting for the electricity used for charging. EPA and DOE's [Beyond Tailpipe Emissions](#)

[Calculator](#) can help you estimate the greenhouse gas emissions associated with charging and driving an EV or a plug-in hybrid electric vehicle (PHEV) where you live.

### **MYTH: EVs are worse for the climate than gasoline cars because of battery manufacturing.**

The greenhouse gas emissions associated with an electric vehicle over its lifetime are typically lower than those from an average gasoline-powered vehicle, even when accounting for manufacturing, according to

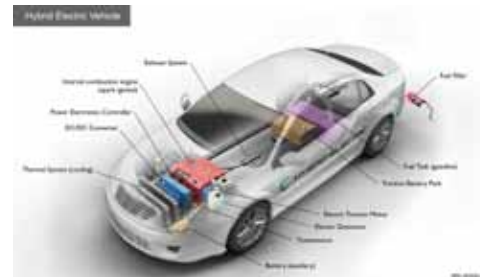
research by the Argonne National Laboratory.

### **MYTH: EVs don't have enough range to handle daily travel demands.**

EVs have sufficient range to cover a typical household's daily travel, which is approximately 50 miles on average per day. The majority of households (roughly 85%) travel under 100 miles on a typical day. Most EV models go above 200 miles on a fully charged battery

### **MYTH: EVs are slow like a golf cart.**

Unlike gas-powered cars, EVs have instant acceleration. Our Tesla goes from 0 to 60 in 3.5 seconds and has a top speed of 162 mph. There are even EV pickups and SUVs that can go 0–60 in 3 seconds. Bottom line, most EVs have more than enough pickup to outperform conventional vehicles. ■



## **WSSC's Poor Governance, Mismanagement Imperil Water and Sewer Service** *What County Leadership Is Ignoring*

*By Gordie Brenne, Treasurer Montgomery County Taxpayers League*

How much can you afford to pay for water and sewer?

■ Current WSSC charges for 1,000 gallons range from \$13.36 to \$22.75.

■ WSSC will increase rates by 6.5% next year and wants 8.5% more the year after.

■ Read below about why poor governance and mismanagement have let costs spiral out of control.

■ Think about our recommended solutions for solving these problems and the risks of failure.

■ Contact your County Council member and tell them we need a restructuring contingency plan.

■ Ask candidates for County offices what they plan to do about these issues.

Is WSSC too big to fail? No, it's too big to succeed without reforms to governance and management practices. **Our opinion piece last November** summarized a state benchmark survey done last fall, and made an argument for breaking WSSC in two, by County, to achieve these reforms. Since then, risks of a near-term recession have increased, and Fitch Ratings, Inc., (the rating agency) has downgraded WSSC's outlook from stable to negative. WSSC's problems have been festering for nearly two decades but, if the economy slows and WSSC's financial condition weakens further, water and sewer operational efficiency will decline. Also, WSSC's ability to sell bonds to raise cash for maintaining the aging system, to meet its payroll, and pay

its bills will be more difficult and costly.

The Counties—Montgomery and Prince Georges which WSSC serves—just approved a rate increase of 6.5% for next year, predicated on another rate increase of 8.5% in fiscal year 2024. This puts a band aid on a revenue shortfall symptom, but doesn't deal with the cause: out of control costs and misplaced priorities. WSSC is one of the largest water and sewer utilities in the nation. This huge monopoly's operating and capital cost structures have gobbled up every available resource since 2005 when its negotiated cost controls with the state were abandoned, leaving little for preventative maintenance or reserves for

## WSSC Reform, cont.

downturns. Current costs were not cut in formulating the approved rate increase. However, planned spending was postponed for preventative maintenance to water and sewer pipes, valves, and operations improvements, increasing service interruption risks and resulting in triage maintenance. Reducing operating costs and slowing debt increases would offset the need for increased revenues and increase funds for preventative maintenance. But management incentives to do that are weak or non-existent.

The approved budget for next year is already “tight” according to Deputy GM Joe Beach (April 28, Montgomery County Council budget hearing). Any changes to planning assumptions made in WSSCs March 1 forecasts, like higher interest rates,

inflation, emergency costs, uncollectible customer bills, or lower cash reserves (which have declined every year as costs have spiraled out of control) will require a new plan to avoid insolvency and service interruptions. **Total debt now stands at a record high \$3.6 billion, an increase of 29% since 2017.** Annual debt service of \$324 million—added to increasing payroll, contract, and other operating costs—uses up projected revenues with only a little left over for emergencies and preventative maintenance.

If there’s a recession, economic slowdown, or further rating agency decline, the State may have to take over because they would have more flexibility than the Counties to raise emergency funds to tide WSSC over until WSSC’s debt can be restructured and revenue and cost structures rebalanced. WSSC’s

enabling legislation provides for *ad valorem* increases [proportionate to the estimated value of the goods] to customer’s property taxes for a cash infusion, but this will take time and isn’t based on individual water demands. Once a WSSC surcharge appears on property tax bills, it likely will be a permanent line item, generating revenue from property owners unrelated to water use for years into the future and removing what modest cost discipline is currently exercised by WSSC’s ratepayer-based income constraints. WSSC’s statutory potential access to the massive two-County property base has resulted in its artificially high AAA bond rating—now at risk according to Fitch—which, together with the low-interest rate environment, has encouraged WSSC’s irresponsible reliance on debt financing which, in

## WSSC Reform, cont.

turn, has permitted spending extravagance, poor cost controls, and a massive debt-servicing burden.

Coordinated planning requires any change to WSSC operations or capital plans be approved by both Counties to fit their different service needs and growth rates (Prince Georges gets 87% of growth-related capital spending in the latest CIP plan). Any rescue should also be predicated on restructuring WSSC to improve its governance, management, and operations efficiency to prevent a reoccurrence of structural issues, but that will take time to hammer out. In the interim, there could be more service interruptions or environmental sewage spills. A better plan is needed.

Intervention by the State to rescue WSSC last took place in 1998,

when WSSC's ability to pay its debt service costs were similarly imperiled. That took two years to work out, and WSSC went without rate increases for 6 years. Breaking WSSC in two by County was evaluated but rejected by WSSC management, which agreed instead to cut costs by 30%. Over time, County governance controls were relaxed and, by 2005, WSSC was back to getting annual above-market rate and fee increases, boosting revenues in the short run to pay for long-run operations expansions and environmental compliance settlement costs.

Right now, the two Counties are looking at ways to increase customer fixed fees to boost and stabilize revenues yet again without cutting current costs. In principle, fixed fees should be set to match fixed account-related costs. But all pretense of cost-matching will be abandoned;

the new objective is simply squeezing out a larger and more stable revenue stream from customers. Unfortunately, this also avoids replacing the discriminatory inclining block rate structure that has larger customers subsidizing smaller households (even though small households—often higher-income empty nesters—have higher individual fixed costs according to the 2017 Cost of Service Study). More to the point, fixed fees won't solve underlying management, governance, or cost control problems.

Here's what you need to know to convince the County Executive and Council to prepare a contingency plan that will work and the State delegation to sponsor an independent review of those problems and alternative solutions. The independent review should determine if the solu-



## WSSC Reform, cont.

tion requires restructuring WSSC's debt and if breaking WSSC in two by County would result in more effective oversight of each of the two new water/sewer entities, lower costs, and higher performance.

**1. Operating Costs are Too High. Solution: WSSC's strategic plan should have annual performance targets to improve productivity and that tie to the budget and to management compensation agreements.** WSSC has a very high-cost operating structure when scaled down and compared to Fairfax County, which is half its size. The State benchmark survey, [cited above](#), showed WSSC has excessive costs for payroll, contract labor, and IT. A 2016 benchmark study also showed excessive staff counts

in management, engineering, and IT. Why doesn't WSSC cut current operating costs? The answer to this mystery has not been made public by governance leaders in the Counties or Commissioners appointed by County Executives. One clue is that the number of employee work years has remained around 1,700 for the last 10 years. Surely there is room to improve productivity.

**2. Per Capita Water Use Has Declined. Solution: A new Cost of Service study should consider a uniform rate structure to reward customer efficiency at lower rates than 55 gallons per day/per person, and to improve equity between smaller families and larger families.** Customers are using water more efficiently, a long-running trend that will continue. But, shouldn't customers be rewarded

with rate and fee decreases for their conservation? Rates have been increasing by more than the rate of inflation for 15 years, and larger families of five or more persons who are less prepared to absorb these increases are penalized with higher rates no matter how they conserve under the current inclining block structure. Fixed fee increases are also not tied to conservation.

**3. Revenue Structure is Broken. Solution: In addition to considering a uniform rate structure, SDC charges should be increased to reduce new debt.** Fairfax had just a 3% delinquent customer rate last year according to the state benchmark survey compared to 19% for WSSC. Uncollectable customer receivables of \$17 million have already been written off and there's more to come.

## **WSSC Reform, cont.**

Billing write-offs during the lockdown have reduced revenues. The new rate structure implemented in 2019 is an unstable revenue source when demand shifts, in this case because teleworking has shifted consumption to lower tier rates from the highest tier rate. To balance costs with revenues, WSSC will continue to raise volumetric rates and fixed fees to cover costs. As has become customary, there will be **no capturable cost reductions** (capturable cost reductions exclude transfers of spending from one area to another, or cuts to planned spending that hasn't even occurred). Growth costs which should be covered by charging developers higher Systems Development Charge (SDC) rates produce less revenue than growth spending. That gap is financed with more debt.



SDC rates have remained unchanged for more than 20 years, presumably to accommodate Prince Georges' growth objectives.

**4. Operations and Capital Investments Not Tied to Strategies. Solution: Create strategies for every problem and performance targets. Revise capital plan standards to achieve an appropriate rate of return before capital projects are approved.** There are weak strategies to fix deteriorating balance sheet debt and underperforming assets, and to control revenue losses

and operating cost excesses noted above. Management has known for decades that some of the largest customers use old flow meters that underbill and have not fixed the problem. Planned operating and capital cost reductions of \$133 million proposed by management from earlier plans (not current costs) jeopardize service continuity. Low rate of return projects like Prince Georges' Piscataway bio-energy and upgrade projects (the largest projects in the current capital budget) crowds out pipe, valve, and trunk sewer projects needed for preventative maintenance.

**5. Governance Model is Broken. Solution: Breaking WSSC in two along County lines would be a first step towards improving governance by eliminating conflict-**

## WSSC Reform, cont.

***ing objectives, strengthening accountability, and resolving insurmountable coordination challenges in County oversight.*** There's no industry or credentialed financial management experience among the County Executives, Council oversight, or Commissioners. Further, the enabling legislation requirement that both Counties agree on the budget and rate increases (or default to WSSC's requested budget and rate increase) results in brinksmanship for approval just before the annual mid-May bi-County meeting.

WSSC proposed a 9% rate increase last fall, but that was whittled down to a more politically acceptable 6.5% by deferring resolution of the "structural" issues noted above to next October when the budget cycle

begins again. There is no public involvement planned for resolving "structural" issues and no outside industry advice is planned. The two Counties have different growth and service objectives and different operating models for sewage treatment. The spending control process just looks at rate increases, not cost structures, and overly relies on management's analyses.

Lastly, there has been no effective Office of Inspector General oversight for waste and abuse, although a much-anticipated report on IT spending controls for the \$50 million spent on the new billing system requested by the new Commission Chair is pending.

**6. Diseconomies of Scale Prevent Cost Savings. *Solution: A State-sponsored review should consider how breaking WSSC in two would increase***

***incentives to reduce operating unit and overhead costs and to prioritize critical infrastructure like replacing old pipes and valves that leak or are about to fail.*** One indicator that WSSC is too large is the fact that **Fairfax Water charges customers economical water rates that are half of WSSC's**, and Fairfax County has a sewer rate that's half as well (uniform residential rate of \$7.72/thousand gallons vs. WSSC's tier 4 rate of \$13.96/thousand gallons). Fairfax also has uniform rates for water and sewer that are more stable. Nor does Fairfax's rate arbitrarily penalize large families or businesses.

Another indicator is WSSC's excessive staffing reported in the State benchmark survey, which is more than double Fairfax's (1,695 vs. 763). Diseconomies become

## WSSC Reform, cont.

even more evident when looking at nonrevenue water production (“Lost Water”), which is 20% vs. 8% for Fairfax, further decoupling costs and revenues. Focusing on sewage treatment, the largest operating cost area, WSSC’s sewage treatment has higher unit costs because of Prince Georges County’s preference to operate three sewage treatment plants (vs. two smaller plants in Montgomery County), sending only 45% of Prince Georges waste to the economical Blue Plains sewage treatment plant (vs. 85% of Montgomery County). Blue Plains will charge WSSC only \$60 million next year, **which is only 12.5% of WSSC’s total sewage treatment operating costs** (\$480 million). The huge difference is largely attributable to less-efficient plants in Prince Georges. ■

## *Nothing’s Ever Simple* The Complex Tale of the Wheaton Gateway Project

*By Karen Cordry*

Much of the discussion about the County’s Thrive 2050 master plan project has focused on its emphasis on increasing housing in general and affordable housing in particular. Thrive’s discussion has also been linked to for Zoning Text Amendments made by various County Council members and an Affordable Housing Strategy Initiatives effort initiated by the Planning Department in March 2021. A common theme has been an emphasis on increasing density near transit corridors, commercial centers, and other planned growth corridors. That has raised considerable controversy with respect to proposals to allow duplexes, triplexes, and quadplexes “by right” in specified areas.

Those proposals would generally require that new buildings follow a “pattern book” to make them “house scale” so they would “blend in among the single-family homes.” There are significant concerns, though, that an uncontrolled “by right” process would destroy many existing, reasonably affordable homes and replace them with much bigger homes in which each unit might even be more expensive than the original house and, at least for triplexes and quadplexes, would probably only create rental housing. Allowing such unrestrained development could also put upward pressure on the prices of all of the existing homes and set off a spiral of investor buyouts and rebuilds. Other concerns are

## Wheaton Gateway, cont.

about how increases in the number of households could strain schools and other public facilities, as well as make traffic and parking and traffic more difficult on narrow neighborhood streets. Another concern is the extent to which denser housing would increase impervious surfaces, thereby exacerbating stormwater issues. (See the report on the May Civic Fed meeting in this newsletter which discussed the issues the County already faces in that regard.) One counter to the “by right” nature of these proposals was that zoning changes should be made, instead, during the sector plan process so that increases could be more closely tailored to the needs of a particular area and allow for needed infrastructure planning.

In the middle of those discus-

sions, the “Wheaton Gateway” project proposed for the University Blvd./Veirs Mill Road corner in downtown Wheaton was of much interest. It is a joint venture of the Housing Opportunities Commission (HOC) and private firms to buy up and replace several properties (including the empty Ambassador Hotel, which had previously provided 162 efficiency apartments for low-income tenants) with three new buildings to create 800 new apartments. It has many attractive points, including that it could quickly create far more units in a controlled, accountable fashion than the one-at-a-time infill proposals otherwise being discussed. And of those 800 units, the proposal is that 30% would be Moderately Priced Development Units or MPDUs, far above the minimum requirement of at least 12.5% for such projects. The builder also proposed a high qual-

ity, state-of-the-art design to provide great environmental benefits and create an “iconic signature gateway” building for Wheaton on that corner. Each building was in a “CR” zone—i.e., a “commercial-residential” mixed use—so there would be retail on the first floor and residential units above, which could help create the walkable communities that we strive for.

This project was not proposed in a vacuum; shortly before, Kensington View, the community surrounding that site, had worked closely with the County on the provisions of the Wheaton Sector Plan that would directly affect their neighborhood. While that drafting was going on, a new variant of the CR zone was created: a Commercial Residential Neighborhood (CRN) zone that would allow closer tailoring of the CR structure for zones that would directly abut an

## Wheaton Gateway, cont.

existing neighborhood. The net result of that process was that the area along East Avenue (parallel to and west of Veirs Mill) was designated as a CRN zone with a maximum height of 45 feet. That contrasted with the zoning for the areas on the main roads which were placed in standard CR zones and could be built much higher. Bottom line, Kensington View thought they were guaranteed that, at most, they would only face a four-story building.

At the same time, though, the County was also passing other legislation aimed at the same goals of allowing added density as a way to increase affordable housing. ZTA 18-06, passed in 2018, set new standards for allowing additional density based on including above-minimum numbers of MPDUs and is now incorporated

into the County's Zoning Ordinance in Chapter 59, Division 4. Although most changes were structured so to explicitly allow additional density in "optional method" developments, Section 59.4.5.2.C was written in a way that could be read to take off the limit in any zone on how much added density could be obtained. (The added density has previously been limited to the first 15% of overall MPDUs). Thus, until that change, a community facing a CRN zoned lot could have assumed they knew the maximum height limit. There is still an argument being made by Kensington View that the higher limits do still only apply in areas using optional method zoning, but it is less clear than it was.

That possible change is of great interest to neighbors of the Wheaton Gateway project which, based on the planned 30% MPDU levels,

proposes to add two extra floors (24 feet in height) to not only the two CR buildings on University and Veirs Mill (which would already be 100 tall or more) but also to the third building in the CRN zone fronting on East Avenue. That change would raise the building height there from 45 to 69 feet, more than a 50% increase! Not surprisingly, the neighborhood is concerned with that proposal and has raised questions about whether that added density was allowable in a CRN zone, particularly after the height limit for that zone was so carefully negotiated in the Sector Plan. To date, though, the Planning Board has taken the broad view of the new provisions and approved the initial sketch plan at the end of May with that added height. There are other neighborhood concerns about the project as well including the impact

## Wheaton Gateway, cont.

of greatly increased traffic on East Avenue, a narrow local street that often already backs up as cars try to exit into the onrush of traffic on University Boulevard. And there are questions as well about the impact of this very large development on the already crowded neighborhood schools, but none of those issues are dealt with at this “early” stage of the planning process. And that is true even though it has been well over three years since the basic design was presented to the public.

These types of localized—but very valid—concerns are one of the most troubling and, to a large degree, insoluble problems of solve County-wide issues on a neighborhood scale. There are few who disagree with the value of providing additional housing in general, and more moderately

priced units in particular, so that all who live and work in this community can find decent housing. We probably also all agree that going out further and further to find undeveloped land to build can have adverse effects on the environment, so there is value in concentrating development in limited, already developed areas. (That said, with the sea change in work habits over the last two years arising from the impact of COVID and the rise of telework, some of those considerations may be subject to change and planners need to start taking those new facts into account going forward.)

But, when one goes from the global to the actual, the burdens of achieving those public “goods” usually falls disproportionately on a small group of neighbors. And, when they raise their concerns, they are often dismissed as mere NIMBYs.

And, to be sure, there may be some element of that, but it is also true that those adverse impacts typically only fall on the literal back (and front) yards of an unfortunate few. Careful, attentive planning and consultations can often mitigate those impacts, but that doesn’t always work. Here, the community negotiated a height limit under the Sector Plan but, if one is going to encourage additional affordable housing, it may well turn out that that limit can be overridden with little or nothing being provided to the community in return. In short, there is no easy answer in meeting the needs of both the whole and the few. The one clear need is for real attention to be paid to their valid concerns and to try to provide benefits to them to make up for what they are being asked to bear.

And, no, that’s not a simple process. ■

## County Council Denies Funding for the Office of the People's Counsel

After receiving hundreds of letters and petitions from residents, including live testimony and letters from MCCF, the County Council voted to deny County Executive Elrich's recommendation to restore funding to the Office of the People's Counsel (OPC). This important office was established in the County Code in 1990.

The OPC was not funded in FY 2011 due to the budget constraints resulting from the Great Recession. Funding for the OPC has yet to be restored, while new positions for Development Liaisons and Development Ombudsmen have been created and funded. In 2016, Councilmembers Hucker and Berliner proposed a Bill to eliminate the OPC and replace it with a public information officer. Residents fought back and that proposal failed.

The total amount of funding for the OPC is a meager \$224,598 out of a \$6.3 billion operating budget.

According to the County Code, the purpose and authority of the Office is:

*(a) **Purpose.** Informed public actions on land use matters require a full exploration of often complex factual and legal issues. An independent People's Counsel can protect the public interest and promote a full and fair presentation of relevant issues in administrative proceedings in order to achieve balanced records upon which sound land use decisions can be made. In addition, a People's Counsel who provides technical assistance to citizens and citizen organizations will encourage effective participation in, and increase public understand-*

*ing of and confidence in, the County land use process.*

*(b) **Authority; duties.** To protect the public interest and achieve a full and fair presentation of relevant issues.*

Furthermore, the County Code also requires that an Advisory Group comprised of various representatives of County offices review any proposed Zoning Text Amendments (ZTAs) before introduction and that Council Staff consult with each member of the Group before writing any staff reports for ZTAs. One of the members of the ZTA Advisory Group must be from the OPC, according to the Code. As we know, dozens of ZTAs have been introduced during the time period since the OPC funding was paused, but those ZTAs were



## OPC Not Funded, cont.

never reviewed by the OPC to protect the public interest.

As the MCCF has often noted, other Maryland jurisdictions—including Prince George’s County, Baltimore County, Howard County, and Harford County—have successfully funded their People’s Counsel positions for many years without interruption. For example, [Prince George’s County provides \\$250,000 for its People’s Counsel](#).

After the PHED Committee (Councilmembers Hans Riemer, Will Jawando, and Andrew Friedson) voted 3–0 on May 2 to recommend denying funding for the OPC, MCCF passed a resolution on May 9 asking the County Council to fully fund the Office of the People’s Counsel [[read resolution here](#)] and sent a letter to the County Council on May 10, 2022,

as they took up the FY 2023 Operating Budget [[read letter here](#)].

Unfortunately, on May 11, the full Council voted as a Consent Agenda (no discussion) item to deny the funding for the OPC. MCCF and other community groups will continue to advocate for the restoration

of funding for this critical Office to help achieve balanced records upon which sound land use decisions can be made. Once funding is provided, we hope public confidence and trust in the public process will also be restored. ■

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## Minutes of May 9, 2022, MCCF General Meeting #933

*By Karen Cordry, Recording Sec.*

*Due to the COVID-19 outbreak, the General Meeting was held via Zoom as a virtual meeting. A total of 17 persons attended via Zoom.*

**Call to Order:** Alan Bowser called the meeting to order at 7:33 p.m.

**Approval of Meeting Agenda:** Moved, seconded, and approved by voice vote. Added emergency motion for resolution regarding funding

for Office of the People’s Counsel.

**Approval of April Minutes:** Moved, seconded, and approved by voice vote.

**Treasurer’s Report:** Jerry Garson reported that, since July 1, we had annual receipts of \$1,537, with \$50 in the last 30 days and total expenses of \$1,438 for a net balance of \$99. Current bank balance is \$9,088.

## May Minutes, cont.

### MAY PROGRAM

Bailey Condrey and Ken Bawer were the speakers on stormwater issues. Ken is with the West Montgomery Citizens Association and is a member of the MoCo Water Resources Advisory Committee. He spoke on stream restoration projects and how they are (and mostly are not) working. [His PowerPoint is available here.](#)

He asked people to urge officials to ban “stream restorations” since, while they are ostensibly being done to stabilize erosion, the projects rarely bring a stream back to a natural state and may cause more damage than cure. The more crucial task is to do upstream storm water management and deal the issue of runoff from impervious surfaces by

doing in-place retention. There were a number of questions including about experiences in PG County, and what MoCo was doing to address the stormwater issues upstream which they are starting to work on. It was noted there were areas like highway medians or road edges that could be used as retention areas. It wouldn’t be cheap but it could be cheaper than constantly redoing projects. DOT and DEP need to start working together.

The rain garden landscape program for homeowners has been successful but they ran out of money last year and this year and need to increase funding. There isn’t a huge amount of Council interest so this is definitely an area where increased community pressure would help, either locally or through MCCF. We can also work with the State legis-

lature to push on these issues and particularly to look at funding for small-scale solutions since engineers always tend to look at large engineering solutions. Alan Bowser suggested we should put together an MCCF position on the various options to control this runoff and look to identify supporters in the Council/State Delegation.

Bailey Condrey did an additional presentation on general environmental issues locally. The stormwater issues are one part of the larger challenge from climate change that needs to be attacked at all levels, including micro projects, such as rain barrels, for homeowners. The Thrive proposals are pushing for more development in already dense areas but without a requirement for mandatory green practices, that can just increase the problem. It was noted

## May Minutes, cont.

there has been a significant loss of tree canopy, particularly in urban areas, with tree plantings not keeping up with tree cutting (and with loss of trees to the deer overpopulation). Alan Bowser noted discussions with Del. Lorig Chardoukian about doing a Tree Summit as a Civic Fed idea. There were other concerns expressed about the lack of clear focus in the Thrive 2050 plan on these environmental issues.

### RESOLUTION

There was a motion for **resolution asking County Council to fully fund Office of People's Council**. We had taken a position in support of that change; Elrich had included it in his proposed budget but the PHED Committee recommended against the funding. The motion was sup-

ported by members from six associations and it passed on a voice vote.

### COMMITTEE REPORTS

#### *Legislation*

■ **May newsletter article on our legislative positions**; some successes but some didn't pass. (Chain of custody and penalty of perjury were among those that didn't go forward. This is important enough and the language was reasonable enough that we should make a big push on this issue next year.)

#### *Public Safety*

■ It was noted that we don't have enough police officers, many can't afford to live here, and it's been hard to recruit additional officers.

#### *Land Use*

■ They haven't hired a consultant yet for the RE/SJ study yet, which was to be due by the end of Au-

gust. Council and Planning Dept. seem to be focused on the DTSS study instead and the proposal to annex 106 acres of residential area and turn it into a mixed residential/commercial area. The review process seems to be moving at a fast pace, although Elrich has raised some concerns on the matter.

#### *Transportation*

■ The state is saying it's restarting the Purple Line project. It's about 4 years behind/\$2 billion over budget. This will likely cause some real disruptions as it goes forward.

### JUNE MEETING

The next meeting will be the MCCF Awards program.

**Adjournment:** Meeting adjourned at 9:34 p.m. ■

## Minutes of the May Executive Committee Meeting, May 19, 2022, 7:00 p.m.

*By Karen Cordry, Recording Secretary*

**Attendance:** Alan Bowser, Jerry Garson, Karen Cordry, Joshua Montgomery; Liz Joyce. Peggy Dennis joined later.

### **JUNE PROGRAM**

The June Program will be on June 13 and will be the awards ceremony. There are three awards: Wayne Goldstein award for outstanding public service; the Star Cup and the Sentinel Award. There was agreement on the persons to be given the awards. We will ask U.S. Rep. Jamie Raskin to be the principal speaker for the program.

There are plaques for the Goldstein and Sentinel award winners; we will retrieve the Star Cup from

last year's winner and get it engraved with the new winner's name. We will do this program as a Zoom meeting, but will think about going back to in-person or hybrid meetings in the fall.

### **NEW OFFICERS**

We still need to recruit some additional persons to run for office starting in September, particularly for the Presidency. The election can be held in the fall but we do need to have candidates lined up by that meeting, so we welcome expressions of interest. We will revisit the issue further at the June 23 ExCom meeting.

### **OFFICE OF PEOPLE'S COUNSEL**

The Council's PHED Committee and the full Council voted to deny

funding for the Office of the People's Counsel. County Executive Elrich had recommended funding the Office at \$224,598 and MCCF testified and wrote the Council in support. [\(See story on page 24\).](#)

**Treasurer's Report:** same as for May general meeting.

### **AT-LARGE CANDIDATES FORUM**

We will be having a forum on June 20 at 7 p.m. for at-large Council Candidates. We have asked the same two moderators to lead the discussion again.

### **NEWSLETTER ARTICLES**

There was discussion about doing articles on several local land use issues and their impacts on

## May ExCom Mtg., cont.

surrounding neighborhoods. These articles can talk about the different approaches in the three areas.

The deadline for receipt of articles for the next month's newsletter remains the 26th of the current month.

**Adjournment:** The meeting adjourned at 8:10 p.m. ■

## UPDATE YOUR DATA!

**Montgomery County civic associations and home owners associations are asked to update their information on the County Planning Department's website. Notify MCCF of any changes, too, at [info@montgomerycivic.org](mailto:info@montgomerycivic.org). Let's keep in touch!**

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### Montgomery County Civic Federation

[www.montgomerycivic.org](http://www.montgomerycivic.org)  
*info AT montgomerycivic.org*  
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## cfn

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**Submit contributions for the next issue by the 26th of the current month.** Send to CFN at [civiefednews AT montgomerycivic.org](mailto:civiefednews@montgomerycivic.org).

**Send all address corrections to membership AT montgomerycivic.org.**

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