

"Federation Corner" column
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A modest proposal: government by the people

by Cary Lamari
MCCF President

Montgomery County is and has been under attack. It isn't an attack from terrorists, but from a small yet highly effective number of individuals who make up a group I like to call the Golden Club. They are the developers and other special moneyed interests who we read about in the papers. They are the same businesses that get lucrative contracts from our county government, buy our public lands for bargains or get special consideration through specially tailored zoning text amendments. They receive windfalls of bonus building density or get MPDU buy outs for a song. They are also the ones that appear to have contributed significantly to the county executive and all of our at-large councilmembers to the tune of over \$1.5 million during the last election.

What is most amazing about these individuals is their indifference to public opinion; they even boast of their control of Montgomery County to whoever will listen. I learned this past month about an International Builders Show held in Las Vegas that included a Power Point presentation created by a Montgomery County consulting firm that demonstrated how the development community can and should manipulate and control the government to promote their agenda.

They speak of controlling elections and of building coalitions with whoever will help them in their end goal to increase building density and optimize development options (affordable housing advocates, realtors, soccer moms, PTAs, etc.—to use their words). What I found most amazing were the many examples cited that were from Montgomery County. The link to this site may be accessed through the Neighbors for a Better Montgomery web page (www.neighborspac.org).

At the site you will find marketing strategies suggesting the creation of market niches for affordable housing, senior housing and workforce housing to promote growth in different parts of the country. We have been hearing these buzz words here. Shortly after I learned of the Power Point presentation, I attended a Greater Olney Civic Association meeting where Ms. Elizabeth Davidson, director of the county Department of Housing and Community Affairs, was speaking on the justification of selling a county-owned former school site to create "workforce housing." I almost fell on the floor.

What is truly unfortunate is that there are real challenges we face in providing affordable housing. However, the rhetoric proffered by Golden Club members simply diminishes any working relationship that should occur. We have all heard the labels: citizens who fight to protect the quality of life in their neighborhoods are labeled as extremists, obstructionists or NIMBYs. Now we can see that there really is an organized effort to divide communities and control government.

This unconcealed conspiracy demonstrates why there is a need for a government that is communitybased. Government is supposed to be of the people, for the people and by the people, and the word by isn't spelled BUY; Montgomery County is not for sale.

This is why the Federation is making such an effort to change the makeup of the County Council through the referendum process. The Federation wants to help create a county legislature that is made up entirely of single councilmanic districts so that the council members will be more connected with and accountable to county residents. And such a connection to the community will make it much more difficult for special interests to buy elections.

This effort will not be an easy one; however it is unquestionably one of the most important efforts the civic community has made in decades to ensure that Montgomery County will continue its legacy of Good Government—a legacy to pass on to future generations.

We need your help. I am requesting volunteers as well as a person to organize a Rally to collect signatures for the Federation's Ballot question. Please contact Cary Lamari @ 301-924-2746 if you are able to help.

—From the April Newsletter

On Bill 01-04: Overkill Against 'Disruptions'

Well folks, sometimes elected officials enact legislation that on its face seems to be for a good public purpose, but when you read the language, you see how the law can and will be abused, and has all the elements that could prevent people from participating in government (or at least intimidate some people into not speaking when they feel it necessary).

That's the problem with bill 01- 04. The county Executive sent a bill to the County Council president to enact into law that could and probably will be abused. This law grants powers to directors in service centers, public libraries and any county building where that agency director feels a person is being disruptive. There is no definition for disruptive behavior, and if you feel you have been unfairly classified as disruptive the only person you could appeal it to would be the director of that office—the person who made the call in the first place.

What particularly troubles me is this. The County Executive, in a letter to the County Council, stated that the ACLU had reviewed the legislation and concluded that the bill stating as written does not impact on your constitutional rights. We now learn the ACLU agrees with the Civic Federation that this law as written could be abused and, because of its vagueness, should not be approved. I am concerned whenever legislation is developed that could affect the freedoms this country has and is shedding blood to protect. There are already laws that protect all people from abusive behavior: the police should be expected to do their job, and it is their function to serve and protect the public—including public employees.

I do not think it is appropriate that a county employee not trained in the area of policing should be required to put himself in a position that could jeopardize his safety. You may still be heard on this proposal by writing County Council president Steven Silverman at 100 Maryland Avenue, Rockville, Md.

The Sentinel Newspapers have offered the Montgomery County Civic Federation an opportunity to present the issues and opinions of affiliated community organizations. The viewpoints expressed may not necessarily be those adopted by the Federation. Any resident who would like to contribute to this column should contact Federation Delegate Alyce Ortuzar at 301-774-6617.