

"Federation Corner" column
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A great big load of thanks

by Jim Humphrey, Chair, MCCF Planning and Land Use Committee

Thanksgiving is the national holiday on which we have a chance to pause and reflect on the things for which we can be thankful, and express our gratitude to the people who have made our lives better in some way. With tongue firmly in cheek, I present my list for Montgomery County.

Thank you, County Executive Leggett, for realizing that your campaign promise to institute a 311 call system, whereby one could dial 3-1-1 on a telephone to report any problem, ask a question or register a comment with county government, was the one proposal that would make county residents' lives markedly easier. And thanks for promising to have it up and running by January 2008...no, wait, by January 2009...no, wait, now by March 11, 2010, more than three years after you took office. It's cute that you plan to start up the system on 3/11 next year, but if there's money in this year's budget to kick it off next March then we'd prefer you begin it immediately.

Thank you, County Council, for passing a law that declares illegal the recreational vehicle or trailer that grandma and grandpa keep in the driveway for use every summer when they travel to visit the family, if it sits unused for more than two months. And historic car buffs would like to thank you too, since this law also makes their cherished vehicles, which they drive only occasionally in parades or to car shows, illegal and subject to being towed if they are not used for a two month period.

Thank you, County Council, for enacting a law that requires an energy audit be conducted for my home before I can sell it. (Copies of utility bills provided to the prospective purchaser weren't good enough?) My home was built in 1940 and will most certainly be bought as a bash-and-build, to be demolished moments after the ink is dry on the sales contract. So thanks for that useless, added expense that will lower the amount which owners will make from the sale of their homes.

Thank you, Planning Board Chairman Hanson, for stating that there is a need for more affordable housing in the county, and that the first thing we need to do is protect the affordably priced sale and rental units we have and preserve them in good condition. And thanks to the Board for then recommending upzoning--allowing increased density--for property after property on which affordably priced rental housing now exists, almost guaranteeing those units will be demolished. The residents of the 397 units in the Rolling Hills garden apartment complex in Germantown would especially like to thank you for recommending upzoning of their property when that area's master plan was recently revised, since it all but guarantees that in the near future the residents will all be looking for a new place to live so the existing buildings can be torn down and replaced with high rise luxury apartment towers. And, while we're on the subject of Germantown...

Thank you, County Council, for approving in July the revision of the Germantown master plan to allow 10,800 more housing units and 25,800 more jobs to be created than currently exist in the area, but only after you removed the provision that would have required the Corridor Cities Transitway (CCT) to be built from Shady Grove Metro station to Germantown before that growth could occur. Just a few miles north, approval of multiple projects have allowed 10,000 to 12,000 new housing units to be built in Clarksburg, which is advertised to homebuyers as a transit oriented community even though the transit--the CCT--will not arrive until after the year 2030. So thanks, Council, for claiming you learned the lesson of Clarksburg and would never repeat that mistake.

And thank you, Planning Board, for recommending in the White Flint master plan revision that 300 foot tall buildings be allowed from Old Georgetown Road south on Rockville Pike to past the Metro station, skipping

right past the 200 foot building height in place around nearly every other Metro station in the county. Just think of the gridlock the traffic from a bunch of 30-story tall buildings can generate during rush hour each day. Golly, I sure hope the pro-development majority on the County Council approves your plan.

Thank you, State of Maryland, for requiring "maintenance of effort" funding for Montgomery County Public Schools, which mandates that the MCPS budget never drop below the level for the previous year. Heaven forbid we ever find ourselves in an international financial crisis which required the county to cut back on funding of all programs, including schools. Gosh, teachers might be forced to use blackboards again, instead of interactive Promethean boards costing \$2,000 each, and teach from books. Remember books? Back when I attended public school in the county in the mid-1960s, several county high schools were listed among the top ten academic high schools in the nation while, amazingly, books and overhead projectors were as high tech as we got.

And thank you, former County Executive Doug Duncan, for leaving current County Executive Ike Leggett with a 20-year backlog for maintenance and replacement of infrastructure that included public buildings with leaking roofs and outdated heating and cooling systems, cracked sidewalks and roads, and under-equipped police and fire departments. If the maintenance and replacement budget could be doubled each year, it would still take until 2025 or so to retire the backlog. And that's not going happen with a predicted \$400 million budget shortfall for next fiscal year. Mr. Leggett inherited a mess, but he's an honest and intelligent man who is trying his best to keep this county afloat. We can all be thankful for that.

The views expressed in this column do not necessarily reflect formal positions adopted by the Federation. To submit an 800-1000 word column for consideration, send as an email attachment to theelms518@earthlink.net