

"Federation Corner" column
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Problems with county Planning Director

by Jim Humphrey
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On March 12, 2012, the Montgomery County Civic Federation sent a letter to county Planning Board Chair Francoise Carrier (on which Council members and the Council Executive were copied) urging the resignation of Planning Department Director Rollin Stanley. The issue was prompted by offensive remarks made by Mr. Stanley as reported in the March-April issue of Bethesda Magazine, the latest in a pattern of behavior that has troubled Federation members for years. The following is the text of that five paragraph letter.

"The members of the Executive Committee of the Montgomery County Civic Federation condemn the remarks made by Planning Department Director Rollin Stanley, as reported in two articles in the current issue of *Bethesda Magazine*.

"Mr. Stanley's dismissive attitude toward county residents is reflected in his comments regarding citizen concern over density of development ("Some of the people living in single-family homes say, 'We don't need any high-rises.' 'I'm sorry, you do,' he declares impatiently..."; *In like Flint*, March-April Bethesda magazine). This mischaracterization of residents' valid concerns and his offensive portrayal of those who disagree with his views ("He has little patience with dissenters. Stanley goes so far as to accuse them of being 'rich, white women...spreading fear.'"; *The future is looking up*, March-April Bethesda Magazine) should not be tolerated by a county government that strives to make citizen inclusion one of its hallmarks.

"Mr. Stanley's comments are particularly offensive given that two of the members of the group of women he disparaged, Neighborhood Montgomery, are former Planning Board Commissioners. His remarks certainly do not send a message that puts the Planning Board in a good light, even given the statement issued from the Board dais on March 8 (which reads, in part, "This agency has a responsibility to the public, to invite public participation in the planning process, to encourage public discourse, to solicit the views of all residents of the county, from all backgrounds, and to remain respectful to those individuals and organizations regardless of the opinions they hold. Unfortunately, Mr. Stanley's comments did not portray these values.")

"We are aware that Mr. Stanley has sent a letter of apology to the editor of the Bethesda Magazine, but it is the residents of the county to whom he should apologize. We believe he has violated the public trust to such an extent that the rebuilding of any degree of trust will take longer than can be afforded.

"In *The future is looking up*, Mr. Stanley is quoted as saying "I'd never planned on doing suburbs." This makes us question whether he was ever a good fit for a county comprised of suburban communities, more densely developed transit centers, and rural areas. The sentiments attributed to Mr. Stanley in these recent articles are indicative of a pattern of behavior that has angered members of the civic community for several years. This latest example of his disregard for citizen opinion and disdain for those who do not support his views and tactics is, for us, the "straw that broke the camel's back." As a result, we believe Mr. Stanley should be asked to resign immediately, and a search should be undertaken for a new Planning Director whose skill set and attitude are a better fit for a county that values the participation of its residents in government planning and decision making."

It is not only county citizens who are targets of Mr. Stanley's dismissive attitude, but members of the County Council and the Planning Board as well.

In worksessions on the growth policy in 2007 then Council President, the late Marilyn Praisner, asked Mr. Stanley and then Planning Board Chair Royce Hanson how the test used to analyze transportation capacity in county communities could be split into two separate tests, one for roads and the other for transit. Their answer was "it is not what we're recommending."

Praisner also asked Stanley and Hanson how the Council could go about reinstating capacity ceilings, a process of setting limits on the amount of development the Planning Board could approve each year, which had been eliminated four years earlier by a pro-growth Council. Their answer was "why would we give you that information? We don't think it's a good idea."

Twice a direct request had been made by the Council that was ignored by Stanley and Hanson. But then they had a pattern of covering each other's...um, posteriors--sort of like "good cop, bad cop", or more accurately "stonewalling Planning Director and more polite stonewalling Board Chair."

The Planning Board has also been the object of Stanley's dismissive attitude toward those who disagree with him. In July Of 2008, the Board voted to recommend all three sections of the Falkland Apartments in Silver Spring for inclusion in the county's Master Plan for Historic Preservation. Following the vote, the Board tasked the Planning Director with drafting a Resolution that reflected the Board's vote. But the Resolution Stanley presented to the Board in September called for preservation of the south and west parcels only, because he had decided on his own that the north parcel should be bulldozed and redeveloped. He disobeyed a direct order from the Board.

Unfortunately, in both cases Mr. Stanley's bad behavior--his failure to provide advice when asked, and violation of a direct order--was tolerated by his superiors.

I believe there's an additional problem with Planning Director Stanley. The author of one of the *Bethesda Magazine* articles states that Stanley "sometimes angers his listeners with statements such as 'congestion is good,' because it forces people out of their cars and onto mass transit." A professional planner should understand that their responsibility is to balance growth with the provision of adequate infrastructure to support that growth. After all, our police cars, fire engines and ambulances are traveling in that same congestion Stanley thinks "is good," as is half our mass transit fleet--Ride On and Metro buses--as well as all vehicles delivering goods and services to consumers.

I don't just think Mr. Stanley is arrogant and dismissive. I think he's a bad fit to be this county's Planning Director and should resign.

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