

"Federation Corner" column
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A big waste of money for nothing

by Peggy Dennis
MCCF President

Over the past three weeks, each of the County Council committees has held worksessions on items proposed in the Capital Budget for Fiscal Year 2013 (starting July 1) which fall under their jurisdiction. Separate from the Operating Budget, the county's Capital Budget includes items that involve construction of facilities or other public works projects.

This year the Council committees have recommended funding \$170 million more than the total amount of money available in the budget. As a result, they must cut that amount from the FY13 budget in what is called a "reconciliation" action. I have a suggestion for the first item that should be cut--a project proposed by the Parks Department which is a huge waste of money.

First, I wish to thank Council members Marc Elrich (D.-At Large), Valerie Ervin (D.-District 5) and Nancy Navarro (D.-District 4) for supporting the local community and fiscal common sense in their previous discussions. Second I ask that, when the reconciliation of the Fiscal Year 2013 Capital Budget goes forward, all members should join Council members Elrich, Navarro and Ervin to remove PDF 078706 from the budget. This Capital Budget project would cost \$5-6 million to create a soccer field in the North Four Corners Park, located near the intersection of Colesville Road and University Boulevard in Silver Spring.

Under the proposal a soccer field would be built on the site of the Rachel Carson Meadow, a passive recreation area sited adjacent to an existing soccer field in this neighborhood park. Then the existing soccer field would be eliminated to create a new passive recreation area. The expenditure, therefore, would not increase the number of soccer fields in the area--but it would destroy the Meadow, a gem of an environmental resource beloved by the residents in the community.

This costly project is strongly opposed by the local community. For a much more modest amount, the Parks Department could and should rehabilitate a number of the badly neglected and deteriorated playing fields already under their control.

Should you have any doubts about this issue, please read the following comments excerpted from an article written by Carol Ann Barth, Chair of the MCCF Parks and Recreation Committee, which appeared in the April 2012 Civic Federation newsletter.

"On March 20th, the County Council held a Capital Improvements Program (CIP) worksession for the Parks Department budget items, which included PDF 078706 - North Four Corners Park. The community along with other Four Corners neighbors and sympathetic friends from around the County lobbied strongly to have this project removed from the budget. Those opposed to the project included myself; Caren Madsen from Conservation Montgomery; Ed Levy, our Democratic Precinct Chair; Howard Kohn, Commissioner, Takoma Soccer; and many Northwood-Four Corners and county residents who helped with this effort.

"In emails to the Council, residents described all the work they are doing to maintain and improve North Four Corners Park, and offered to create a natural playground in the Meadow at no out-of pocket expense to Parks. Sadly, this too was completely ignored. Most jurisdictions would be thrilled to have such community involvement, and grateful to have the kind of expertise offered by our residents.

"Although Council members Marc Elrich, Valerie Ervin, and Nancy Navarro spoke strongly in favor of redirecting these funds to other CIP projects given competing needs, the Northwood-Four Corners community's opposition, and the value of preserving a valued natural green space for our community, the remaining Council Members voted to retain the project in the CIP.

"The Council and Parks staffs were allowed unlimited access and opportunity to present their arguments, while the citizens were told that they could not speak to the issues. For example, in support of the claim of the need for more ballfields in this portion of the county, the staff cited a survey conducted last year as part of the Parks and Recreation Departments' *Vision 2030* report. What they neglected to tell the Council members was that this was a survey of agency staff.

"The same report also contains a citizen survey that placed a much higher priority on natural areas and trails than more ballfields. They failed to mention that a statistical analysis of neighborhood access to ballfields shows the southeastern portion of the County service, in which our community is located, is at 100% level of service and other areas are at lower levels of service.

"In another stunning example of spin doctoring, staff claimed that a majority of North Four Corners Civic Association residents support the proposed soccer field. The staff briefing packet included several letters of support, but no mention was made of the petition to save the Meadow and oppose the soccer field which was submitted with over 600 signatures. This was truly a disappointing experience in poor public policy and decision."

I ask that all Councilmembers take a much more careful and critical look at this issue and vote to defund this line item.

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