

"Federation Corner" column  
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### **Program for June Federation meeting on Zoning Ordinance Re-Write**

by Jim Humphrey  
Chair, MCCF Planning & Land Use Committee

The topic of the program for the June 11 Montgomery County Civic Federation meeting is the Zoning Ordinance Re-Write project. The meeting will be held in the first floor auditorium of the County Council Building in Rockville, and will begin at 7:45 p.m. The program is scheduled to begin near the start of the meeting, following introductions and some brief business items.

Speakers for the program will include two members of the Planning Department staff--Rose Krasnow, Interim Director of the Department, who will explain standards and uses of the proposed zones; and Joshua Sloan, Planner Coordinator, who will address proposed changes to the administration and procedures sections of the ordinance. We also hope to have members of the Zoning Advisory Panel participate in the program to offer their comments on the Re-Write. A question and answer session will follow the presentations.

A revision of the county zoning laws was first considered in the 1990s, when the first of a pair of consultant studies was conducted. In 2001, Clarion Associates Inc. of Denver, Colorado was commissioned to recommend appropriate first steps for a zoning law revision, and advised that the revision should begin with the commercial zones.

The current Zoning Ordinance Re-Write project was initiated with funding in the county's FY2008 Operating Budget. The Planning Board in consultation with the County Council established the scope of the work, and ordered a process for collecting community input and for setting the sequencing and tentative time line for the project.

In a July 2008 memo to the Council's Planning, Housing, and Economic Development (PHED) Committee, then-Director of the Planning Department, Rollin Stanley, listed the goals for the Zoning Ordinance Re-Write project as follows:

- streamline the ordinance--all aspects of the document from the number of districts (zones) to the number of processes outlined in the various sections;
- simplify all aspects of the document;
- improve the organization of the document;
- rationalize/update provisions to reflect the changing development climate with a greater emphasis on infill development;
- create predictability in the standards as well as the format; and,
- promote "green" land use policies.

In March 2009 the Zoning Advisory Panel was formed and a group of unpaid citizen volunteers was appointed to offer critical review and analysis of the Re-Write as it proceeded. The ZAP has met monthly since that time. Appointees are a mix of community representatives, those involved in development--architects, engineers, land use attorneys, and builders--and land use planners and consultants. A few

months after the ZAP was formed, the Planning Department hired the Code Studio of Austin, Texas to help in drafting the language of the new zoning ordinance.

Although the Planning Department held a series of 6 Open Houses throughout the county last month to educate and update residents on the Re-Write project, each Open House educated residents only on the proposed new zones that will impact the master plans in the area of the county in which the event was held. The Federation's program will be an overview of the entire proposed Zoning Ordinance Re-Write so that rural residents can be informed of proposed zones for urbanized areas, and residents living downcounty can be educated on proposed rural and agricultural zones.

In addition, at the time the Open Houses were held the sections related to floating zones, overlay zones and agricultural zones were not yet drafted. We hope Planning staff will be able to provide us information on these sections during our June program, and share their ideas on how the new zoning ordinance might be implemented following Council approval.

We also hope staff will confirm the schedule for the upcoming public process on the proposed Re-Write. A tentative schedule calls for the Planning Board to hold its public hearing this September, followed by 3 months of worksessions culminating in Board transmittal of their recommended Re-Write to Council by end of the year, and the Council public hearing would take place in early 2013. The Council PHED Committee members will hold one or more worksessions on the proposed Re-Write, make whatever changes they think necessary, and report out their recommended version for full Council consideration and vote.

Plan to attend the Civic Federation meeting the evening of Monday, June 11, and learn about this important issue that will affect every property in the county.

*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](mailto:theelms518@earthlink.net)*