

"Federation Corner" column  
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### **Time for growth to pay for itself**

by Jim Humphrey  
Chair, MCCF Planning and Land Use Committee

It appears that Montgomery County officials have just awakened to the fact that the county is facing critical transportation infrastructure challenges with little or no money to put toward solutions.

The cost for a countywide Rapid Transit Vehicle (RTV) system would be at least \$18 billion, as proposed by a task force created by County Executive Isiah Leggett. The price tag stands at more than \$49 million for the Corridor Cities Transitway project designed to link Clarksburg, Germantown and the Great Seneca Science Corridor to the Shady Grove Metro station. And the cost estimate for the Purple Line stands at \$1.92 billion. Add to this the fact that for the past six years the County Executive and Council have only just managed to balance the budget by making significant cutbacks in the county workforce and the funding for most programs and services, and you can sense the scope of the problem.

In response, the County Executive is resurrecting his idea for a county tax on gasoline, an idea he has floated before. Council President Roger Berliner seems to be endorsing Leggett's proposal for a 7 cent a gallon county tax on gasoline, which would be levied in addition to the existing State tax of 23 cents per gallon, stating that pennies from heaven won't provide the solution. However some have calculated that this proposal would raise around \$42 million in revenue each year, only enough to pay the debt service on \$380 million in bonds--not nearly enough to cover the "Big 3" planned transportation projects.

Remember that it was the Council that approved the master plans for Clarksburg (many years ago) for downtown Germantown (in 2009), and for the new "Science City" west of Rockville and Gaithersburg (only two years ago), plans which greatly increased the amount of development allowed in those areas along the I-270 corridor without there being a concrete plan in place to fund the transit system needed to support the level of permitted growth.

It was the Council that approved an amendment to the downtown Bethesda master plan in 2006 (I suppose because they felt there wasn't enough development crammed into that relatively small area), and which is planning to reopen the plan again next year to cram in even more density. The Council approved the rewrite of the Twinbrook master plan in 2009. The Council approved the revision of the White Flint master plan that allows 15,000 more housing units and enough commercial development to generate thousands and thousands more jobs in that area. And it was the Council that just recently approved increased growth in the Wheaton, Kensington and Langley Park master plans.

While we're on the subject of approving growth in master plans, bear in mind that this Council is still firm in its desire to try and revise 3 or 4 master plans each year, all of which will include proposals for greatly increased density of development. The Council has its sights set on increasing the amount of allowed growth in the Chevy Chase Lake area along already congested Connecticut Avenue, in the Glenmont area, in the "East County Science Gateway" area near White Oak, the northern section of the White Flint area, and on and on.

It would seem to be puzzling that things got so out-of-kilter, considering the Council must make a finding that each master plan revision they approve achieves a balance of proposed growth and infrastructure to accommodate that growth. But the fact is that the proposals for transportation

improvements that would support the increased growth in revised master plans have not been accompanied by a requirement that the development industry (which profits from the growth) pay the price for the needed improvements.

Another problem is that the Council did away with development moratoriums in 2003. Until then, if the infrastructure in any given area of the county--especially the schools, road and transit capacity--could not accommodate additional growth, then a moratorium was placed on new development approvals until the county could fund the needed additional infrastructure.

Actually, moratoriums do still occur if the projected classroom capacity in any school cluster is not sufficient to handle Planning Board approval of any more residential development in the area. But these usually only last a matter of minutes, or days at the most, until the Council manages to find the money to fund future classroom additions in the cluster needing added capacity.

It's a shame the Council doesn't use the same process of instituting moratoriums in areas where roads or transit capacity is projected to be inadequate to handle any more development. I'm guessing if the county still imposed transportation based moratoriums that prevented any more new development from being approved, then we'd see the development industry scramble to help the county fund transportation improvements. I'm sure the public would find that a more acceptable solution to the transportation infrastructure problem than a 7 cent county gasoline tax.

*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)*