

"Federation Corner" column  
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### **Increased liquor sales heads list of ideas to boost nighttime economy**

by Jim Zepp  
MCCF Public Safety Chair

Over the past five weeks, the Nighttime Economy Task Force, created by Montgomery County Executive Isiah Leggett in January 2013, has presented their preliminary recommendations to the five Citizen Advisory Boards, in meetings at the county's Regional Service Centers. As a prelude, the Task Force and its subcommittees held regularly scheduled meetings at various locations around the county, from May through October of this year.

The primary focus of Task Force recommendations is on boosting business activity in the county by extending operating hours for bars and reducing their costs for selling alcoholic beverages by loosening food sales requirements. The Task Force also recommends encouraging more outdoor entertainment activities in urban centers of the county by changing the time at which noise restrictions are imposed to midnight.

The Task Force has not addressed concerns about possible increases in crime and other negative impacts that may result from these recommendations beyond general and non-specific remedies. Consequently, we may expect the normal surprise and horror if there are any negative impacts.

Task Force recommendations of possible concern to county residents include the following:

- Extend the hours of operation of venues with beer, wine or liquor licenses from 2 a.m. until 3 a.m. on Friday and Saturday nights, and on Sundays before Monday federal holidays. This is being proposed in order to keep up with the District of Columbia in the belief that it will stem the tide of outmigration of night-time economy patrons, particularly young adults, from the county into D.C.
- Modifying the required ratio of food to alcoholic beverage sales from fifty percent food and fifty percent alcoholic beverages to forty percent food and sixty percent alcoholic beverages.
- Changing the time at which noise restrictions are imposed in the county's urban centers from 9 p.m. to midnight. The Task Force has recommended that prospective home buyers in the affected areas should receive warnings about this, but nothing compensating existing home owners or tenants in rental units for this change has been proposed.
- The Task Force has recommended increased mass transit services to accommodate the anticipated increase in night-time economy activity, but this increase has not been proposed as a required condition for other recommendations to be implemented.
- Increased personnel for police and other county agencies is recommended, but not as a required condition for other recommendations to be implemented. No particular programs, services, or other activities are recommended.
- While late night businesses are encouraged to cooperate with public agencies in alcohol enforcement, no specific coordination or management policies or procedures are offered to prevent disturbances, increased public drunkenness, or other issues which might arise from the recommended relaxation of laws regarding alcoholic beverage sales.

- More land use density is recommended (specifically in and around urban centers, which are traditionally also county transit centers), with an aim to boost the patronage base for venues that sell beer, wine and liquor. However, the Task Force has provided no comments regarding the need for affordable housing in the context of the proposal for increased residential density, giving the appearance that the desired goal is only housing for well-heeled young people who can afford drinking until 3 a.m.

The Task Force held a meeting this past Monday, October 21, in the Executive Office Building in Rockville, to consider comments received on their proposed recommendations as well as the potential work program for agencies involved in aspects of the initiative. The Task Force was charged with delivering a set of policy recommendations to the County Executive within six months of its first meeting, which took place in May. However, no deadline or process has been established for action by the County Executive on any or all of the recommendations made by the Task Force.

The Nighttime Economy Task Force consists of nineteen members representing businesses, residents, and the land development industry. There are also ten ex officio members drawn from the County Council, City of Rockville, the Planning Board, and the offices of our county's Representatives to the U.S. Congress. And a team of five Executive branch staff members was appointed to serve as liaisons and also as ex officio members of the Task Force.

For more information on the Task Force, or to view resumes of its members or its work plan, visit their website at [www.montgomerycountymd.gov/nighttimeeconomy/](http://www.montgomerycountymd.gov/nighttimeeconomy/)

*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 the [montgomerycivic@yahoo.com](mailto:montgomerycivic@yahoo.com)*