

**May Program** | A conversation with Adam Ortiz, Director of the Montgomery County Department of Environmental Protection, about the State of the County | [P. 3](#)

**Officer Elections** | A roster of new MCCF officers for the 2020–2021 fiscal year is proposed; elections will take place at the June online meeting | [P. 4](#)

**Awards Announced** | MCCF announces the recipients of its 2020 annual awards | [P. 5](#)

**COVID-19's Impact on CO<sub>2</sub>** | Data on atmospheric carbon dioxide levels shows little improvement during the pandemic | [P. 6](#)

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**What the Trees Are Trying to Tell Us** | A plant physiologist with a microphone can literally hear the trees screaming | [P. 8](#)

**PLEASE NOTE THAT THE MAY MEETING WILL BE HELD ONLINE USING THE ZOOM APP. SEE THE LINK AT RIGHT OR CALL-IN NUMBER ON PAGE 3.**

**Like our new Facebook Page and follow us on Twitter.**

**TO PRINT, USE [PRINT VERSION](#)**

## of note

### Next MCCF Meeting #913

Monday, May 11, 2020, 7:45 p.m. *online via Zoom*. “The State of the County Environment”

■ [Join the Zoom Meeting Here](#)

[See further instructions and required password on page 3]

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### Meeting Minutes

April 13 Online Meeting #912 [P. 10](#)  
Executive Committee April 23 Online Meeting *Unavailable*

### Membership Application

Join or Renew Now [SEE FORM](#)

## Federation Meeting #913

Monday, May 11, 2020

7:45 p.m.

Online Zoom Meeting

### AGENDA

- 7:40 Zoom “Doors Opened”
- 7:45 Call to Order/Introductions
- 7:50 Approval of Agenda
- 7:51 Announcements
- 7:55 Approval of Minutes, April 13th Online Meeting [P. 10](#)
- 7:56 Treasurer’s Report
- 8:00 Program: The State of the County Environment [P. 3](#)
- 9:25 Committee Reports
- 9:35 Old and New Business
- 9:45 Adjournment

## About MCCF Meetings

*All monthly MCCF meetings are open to the public.* They are held on the second Monday of each month, September through June, at 7:45 p.m.

**The May 11 meeting will be held online via Zoom** (also see page 3 for further topic details):

■ To be part of the video conference, download the [Zoom Client for Meetings here](#).

■ Meeting Name: “My Meeting.”

■ Date and Time: May 11, 2020, 7:45 p.m. Eastern Time.

■ To [join the Zoom meeting from your browser, use this link](#).

■ To participate by phone (audio only), call 301.715.8592. The meeting ID is 852 9894 6715. A password is required: 479405.

We hope you will join us! ■

The **Montgomery County Civic Federation, Inc.**, is a county-wide nonprofit educational and advocacy organization founded in 1925 to serve the public interest. Monthly MCCF meetings are open to the public (agenda and details at left).

The *Civic Federation News* is published monthly except July and August. It is emailed to delegates, associate members, news media, and local, state, and federal officials. **Recipients are encouraged to forward the *Civic Federation News* to all association members, friends, and neighbors.** Permission is granted to reproduce any article, provided that proper credit is given to the “*Civic Federation News* of the Montgomery County (Md.) Civic Federation.”

### Civic Federation News

civicednews AT montgomerycivic.org

**TO SUBMIT AN ARTICLE, [SEE PAGE 14](#)**

## A Conversation with Adam Ortiz, Director of the Dept. of Environmental Protection

By Alan Bowser, 1st Vice President

The topic of the May meeting of the Montgomery County Civic Federation is “The State of the Environment in Montgomery County.” And we couldn’t have a better speaker to address the broad range of environmental issues, challenges, and opportunities in the County than Adam Ortiz.

Adam Ortiz is Director of the Montgomery County Department of Environmental Protection, a \$140 million agency with 300 employees and contractors. The Department oversees programs for recycling and resource management, watershed restoration, greenhouse gas reduction, renewable energy, sustainability, and environmental compliance.

Prior to joining Montgomery County, Mr. Ortiz was the Director

of the Department of Environment for Prince George’s County, Maryland, from 2012 through 2018, where he oversaw stormwater management, recycling, waste management, animal services, and sustainability programs. He launched several industry-leading initiatives, including the largest municipal organics composting facility in the country, a \$100 million public-private partnership for green infrastructure focusing on small and local business development, and various partnerships with faith,



nonprofit, and business sectors.

Mr. Ortiz served in the administration of Governor Martin O’Malley from 2007 to 2012. He focused on workforce, higher education, and veterans’ affairs as Deputy Chief of Staff for Lt. Governor Anthony Brown; prior to that, he worked on workforce and immigration policy and StateStat, as Special Assistant to Secretary Tom Perez at the Department of Labor, Licensing, and Regulation.

From 2005 to 2011, he served three terms as Mayor of Edmonston, Maryland. In this role, Mr. Ortiz was recognized as a Champion of Change by the White House and received a Bright Idea Award from Harvard’s Kennedy School of Government for building the country’s

MORE

## May Program, cont.

first complete green street.

Earlier in his career, he worked as an advocate working on equity and human rights issues, including as a Soros Justice Fellow at the American Bar Association to abolish the death penalty for juveniles, which culminated in the landmark 5-4 U.S. Supreme Court decision, *Roper v. Simmons*. Mr. Ortiz was also Deputy Director for Amnesty International’s Midwest Office, which worked to abolish the death penalty, stop police brutality, improve prison conditions, improve fairness for asylum, and release prisoners of conscience.

Mr. Ortiz has a B.A. in Public Policy from Goucher College in Towson, Maryland. ■

## Election of Civic Federation Officers for 2020–2021

Elections for new officers for 2020–2021 will be held during the MCCF online meeting on June 8. The meeting will be held online because of the Covid-19 emergency.

Terms are for one year. We’d like to thank outgoing President Bailey Condrey for his work and leadership during the past two years.

The MCCF Nominations Committee has made the following recommendations for officers for the 2020–2021 fiscal year.

- President: Alan Bowser
- First Vice-President: Tim Willard
- Second Vice-President: Sue Schumacher
- Secretary: Karen Cordrey
- Treasurer: Jerry Garson

Nominations from the floor may also be made during the meeting and

must be seconded by Delegates from three different member associations. If you are interested in serving as an officer, member of the Executive Committee, or on a committee please contact us at [info@montgomerycivic.org](mailto:info@montgomerycivic.org). ■



## Montgomery County Civic Federation Announces 2020 Annual Award Recipients

### THE STAR CUP

The Star Cup was presented by *The Washington Star* newspaper to the Montgomery County Civic Federation on March 14, 1927, to be awarded by the Civic Federation to the committee or delegate performing the most outstanding public service on behalf of Mont. County.

**Recipient** | *Jacque Bokow, MCCF Newsletter Editor and Web Publisher*

**Recognition** | *For her many years of service to her civic association and the Civic Federation*

### THE SENTINEL AWARD

This award, which had been sponsored by *The Montgomery Sentinel* newspaper, is given annually by the Civic Federation to an individual or group, typically outside government, for a “significant contribution to good government at the local level.”

**Recipients** | *Lynn Kapiloff, the Kapiloff Family, and The Sentinel Newspapers*

**Recognition** | *For many years of excellence in local journalism and service to the community*

### THE WAYNE GOLDSTEIN AWARD

This award recognizes outstanding public service contributions by an individual or group in Mont. Co. Instituted in 1984 by *The Journal*, it was called “The Journal Cup” until 1998, when *The Gazette* newspaper assumed sponsorship. In 2010, it was renamed in honor of MCCF Past President Wayne Goldstein, who passed away in 2009.

**Recipients** | *The Safe Healthy Playing Fields Coalition*

**Recognition** | *For their years of research, education, and advocacy regarding the costs and effects of synthetic playing surfaces on people, the environment, and our local communities* ■

**DUE TO THE COVID-19 EMERGENCY, THE 2020 MCCF ANNUAL AWARDS WILL BE PRESENTED ON JUNE 8 VIA A VIRTUAL MEETING ON ZOOM. WE LOOK FORWARD TO HAVING YOU JOIN US TO CELEBRATE THE OUTSTANDING WORK OF THESE AWARDEES.**

## The Novel Coronavirus’ Impact on Atmospheric Carbon Dioxide (CO<sub>2</sub>)

*By Bailey Condrey, President*

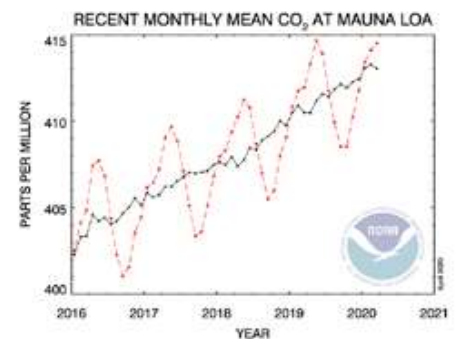
The National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration runs Earth System Research Laboratories, which oversee the work at Mauna Loa Observatory where the concentration of carbon dioxide in the atmosphere is constantly monitored and has been for decades. The group also monitors other

potent greenhouse gases, such as methane and nitrous oxide. The science of climate change has taught us that this concentration has staying power as CO<sub>2</sub> cycles out of the atmosphere at a snail’s pace.

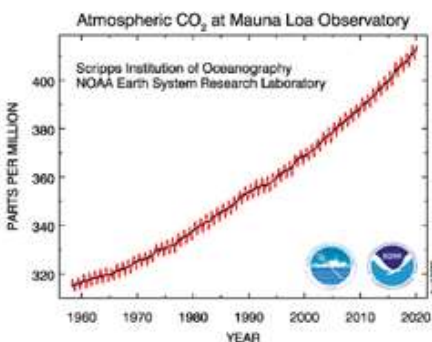
The world’s oceans have absorbed a significant level of CO<sub>2</sub> as it has continued to rise, leading to increased acidification of seawater, among other dynamics. This has profound effects on marine species.

The COVID-19 pandemic has shuttered the economies of numerous nations due to social distancing protocols and resulted in precipitous drops in air and water pollution, but what effect, if any, have these had on **atmospheric concentration of CO<sub>2</sub>**?

The answer, sadly, is “next-to-nothing.” In May of 2019, the



atmospheric level of CO<sub>2</sub> stood at 414.7 parts-per-million. As of March 2020, it has barely slipped to 414.5 ppm. The staying power of this greenhouse will adversely affect our lives for many decades to come and the lessons we take away from dealing with COVID-19 may help us finally put the brakes on this runaway train. ■





## Climate Change: Most Life Forms Are Being Affected on Every Part of the Planet

By Bailey Condrey, President

[The following is an excerpt from the Abstract in a warning newsletter from scientists. *The entire consensus statement can be downloaded here.*]

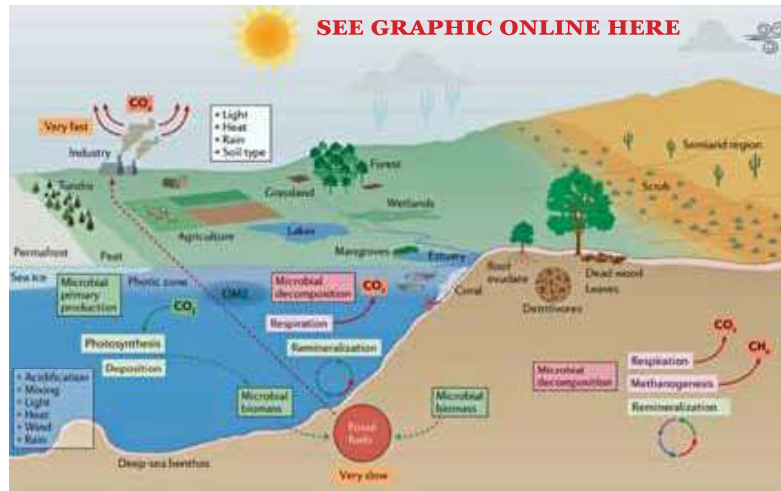
“In the Anthropocene,\* in which we now live, climate change is impacting most life on Earth. Microorganisms support the existence of all higher trophic life forms. Trophic relates to those life forms that require nutrition. To understand how humans and other life forms on Earth (including those we are yet to discover) can withstand anthropogenic climate change, it is vital to incorporate knowledge of the microbial ‘unseen majority.’ We must learn not just

how microorganisms affect climate change (including production and consumption of greenhouse gases) but also how they will be affected by climate change and other human activities. This Consensus Statement

documents the central role and global importance of microorganisms in climate change biology. It also puts humanity on notice that the impact of climate change will depend heavily on responses of microorganisms, which are essential for achieving an

environmentally sustainable future.”

\*Note: “Anthropocene” refers to the current geological age, viewed as the period during which human activity has been the dominant influence on climate and the environment. Some geologists argue that the Anthropocene began with the Industrial Revolution. ■



## Hearing the Trees Scream: What the Trees are Trying to Tell Us

By Bailey Condrey, President

Peter Wohlleben’s groundbreaking work, *The Hidden Life of Trees*, presents the results of astounding research into the lives of these fellow organisms that have literally helped make life on Earth possible for humans. Trees make rain, he says on page 106. What seemed like science fiction in 2009 when James Cameron presented the movie “Avatar,” actually happens to be much closer to the truth.

Trees, in fact, live in community groups, they communicate with one another over distance, and they provide one another with water and nourishment. They even wage counterinsurgency efforts against



other species competing for light, water, and nutrients.

They also live in symbiosis with numerous species of fungi and, when they die and decompose, they create soil. They are a total package for sustaining life on Planet Earth.

In many respects, we have treated them as an afterthought and, with the worsening effects of climate change becoming ever more undeniable,

it’s time we paid greater attention to what we are doing to them. Without them, we are literally through.

The April 25, 2020, edition of *Inside Climate News* has run a piece by Bob Berwyn

on research by Tim Brodribb and others that further delves into what the trees are telling us: **‘We Need to Hear These Poor Trees Scream’: Unchecked Global Warming Means Big Trouble for Forests.** From the article:

*Tim Brodribb has been measuring all the different ways global warming kills trees for the past 20 years. With a microphone, he says, you can hear them take their last labored breaths. During blistering heat waves and droughts, air bubbles invade their delicate, watery veins, cracking them open with an audible pop. And special cameras can film the moment their drying leaves split open in a lightning bolt pattern, disrupting photosynthesis.*

## Hearing the Trees, cont.

*“We really need to be able to hear these poor trees scream. These are living things that are suffering. We need to listen to them,”* said Brodribb, a plant physiologist at the University of Tasmania who led a recent study that helps identify exactly when, where, and how trees succumb to heat and dryness.

The study, published April 17 in the journal *Science*, reviewed the last 10 years of research on tree mortality, concluding that forests are in big trouble if global warming continues at the present pace. “Most trees alive today won’t be able to survive in the climate expected in 40 years,” Brodribb said. “The negative impacts of warming and drying are already outpacing the fertilization benefits of in-



creased carbon dioxide.”

My own experience with trees dates to my youth when my father taught me how to care for the white pines and hemlocks we imported to Virginia Beach from Floyd County in the mountains of southwest Virginia. Neither of these species are native to the area, but they thrived

under our care. Many were planted as privacy screens on the property lines and grew to more than 50 feet. It was my responsibility to stave off the hoards of bag worms, prune dead limbs when necessary, and ensure that their overall health remained good. Over the four decades that I embraced these trees, their greatest enemies became the power company tree-trimming crews and hurricanes with Isabel in 2003 pushing many of them out of the ground.

Time is short, and we need these sentinels to help sustain our presence here. Hugging them isn’t necessary, but learning what they need may inform our own survival and help us all to understand that they aren’t just consumer products. ■

## Minutes of April 13, 2020, MCCF General Meeting #912, Virtual Zoom Meeting

*By Karen Cordry, MCCF Recording Secretary*

*Due to the COVID-19 outbreak, the General Meeting was held online via Zoom as a virtual meeting.*

**Call to Order:** President Bailey Condry called the meeting to order at 7:46 p.m. and attendees provided introductions.

**Adoption of Meeting Agenda:** It was moved and seconded that the agenda as printed in the newsletter be adopted. The agenda was unanimously approved, with a revision to allow the main program to begin immediately in light of the large number of interested attendees (a total of about 65 people joined via the Zoom app).

### **Approval of March Minutes:**

It was moved and seconded that minutes of the March meeting, as published in the newsletter, be approved. The minutes were unanimously approved.

### **APRIL PROGRAM**

The topic for April was a presentation by Rich Madaleno, MoCo Budget Director on the county’s current economic status and the budget process for the upcoming year. The planning process, he noted, started the prior fall with a number of community forums and a proposed operating budget is supposed to be published by March 15 and passed by the week before Memorial Day. Unfortunately, March 15 was just about the day when everything changed.

Mr. Madaleno began with slides indicating the normal budget breakdown with schools being the largest chunk of the budget (about 48%), followed by public safety (about 10.5%), then debt service, followed by a number of smaller categories. Revenues for the budget come from about \$4.1 billion in local taxes (property and income), \$1.25 billion from state aid for schools, and about \$133 million for various fees, licenses and fines.

Property tax rates are controlled by a 30-year old charter provision that provides that the tax rate must be set so as to produce revenues that equal those collected the year before with an inflation adjustment. When inflation has been low, as it has been for some time, this severely

## April Minutes, cont.

limits revenues in ways that may not directly correlate to changes in housing prices. If assessments increase by more than inflation (only 1.27% last year), the tax rate has to decrease. That limit can only be exceeded by a unanimous vote of the Council. State law does allow a separate tax for schools and the County Executive did propose a 3¢ additional tax on that basis.

He also presented charts showing the overall revenue projections for the last several years, showing that the charter provision pushes the rate down and then the Council adjusts it upward. As of now, the rate per \$100 of assessed value is lower than it was in 2000, and dramatically lower than it was in the 1980s, although assessments are much higher, which balances it somewhat.

He also noted that the rate was lower than in all of our neighboring counties.

Mr. Madaleno then moved to discussing the effect of the COVID virus; somewhat surprisingly, he indicated that it was not necessarily likely to have a dramatic effect on county revenues immediately. State income tax revenues are likely to drop by as much as 20%–25% per month while the lockdown is in place, but it was not clear yet how much or when federal aid would provide. Unemployment benefits are taxable and the federal CARES Act increases the monthly benefit maximum that employees can receive (and, therefore, the amounts) that are taxed.

Property tax assessments for Maryland were made in December, before any of this hit and tax bills will go out in July. At this point, it's

not expected that the virus this year will have much of an effect on those revenues, but more may happen in FY 2022 if the economy remains in a deep recession for an extended period. (There should be less effect than in the 2008 recession since that was directly related to a collapse in property values.) The tax rate is not set for the year yet, but, under the charter, the Council can raise the rate by 1.2¢ and still remain under the limit. (One problem is that, two years ago the rate was set too low, which put a lower base in place for future years).

In terms of commercial property, rates are set by looking at both the value of the land and income produced by the buildings, so some landlords may look to reduce their taxes if rents go unpaid, but, again, federal aid is supposed to be going

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## April Minutes, cont.

to businesses to help them with such costs, so it is hard to say at this point if there will be much effect. Recording taxes might actually go up if there is a wave of refinancing from lower mortgage rates.

As far as current budget planning, they are right in the middle of the process and trying to adjust on the fly to an enormous number of changes. They are getting the quarterly reports for March and working with those to see what they can project out to June. One saving grace he noted is that there are numerous expenses that the County is not incurring—such as building costs, transit costs, etc.—while there are, of course, a variety of new expenses. One helpful fact is that the County does have a “Rainy Day Fund” with approximately \$500

million in reserves to help deal with a crisis like this. There are further federal stimulus funds in the \$500 billion being proposed and Hogan is hopeful that about \$10 billion might come to Maryland to make sure we keep police, fire fighters, teachers, etc., being paid. MoCo should be eligible for about \$184 million in direct assistance from the first bill to reimburse for direct response costs to the virus. Fiscal Year 2021 is a lot harder to predict since no one yet knows the shape of the recession—a sharp downturn and a quick recovery? Or a long slow recovery from the dropoff?

In terms of possible cuts, there are contracts with the County employee unions and the County Executive must propose those budgets; they only include pretty minimal (1–1.25% raises) in any case. If they do need to make cuts going forward,

there was already a \$10 million “lean government” initiative trying to find opportunities for restructuring and the like and the employee groups have supported that, but probably a considerably larger effort may be needed. In Maryland, counties have a wide range of responsibilities (more than in some other states) so this leaves them with a lot of areas they need to fund. County Executive Elrich has been holding quarterly meetings with each department to discuss metrics on what is needed and how to meet those needs more efficiently or which ones to just drop. County law doesn't give the County a lot of flexibility to cut spending or disappropriate money; changes have to be made item by item.

There was some discussion about some of the transit programs that had been in the works, such as the

MORE



## April Minutes, cont.

Bus Rapid Transit (BRT) and the “Flash” service, both of which are somewhat on hold at this point, but are unlikely to be discontinued. Mr. Madaleno noted that Virginia counties were already doing BRT, although we started discussing it first. One reason for this is that they have much higher commercial property tax rates, which lets them devote more funds to infrastructure and the business community is willing to support that because they see the value of the work.

He also noted that the Kirwan Commission plans were passed by the legislature and were waiting the governor’s signature when the virus hit. At this point, his understanding is that Governor Hogan will not sign but will let it go into effect without his signature. The funding and

formulas under that bill are pretty much already in place for FY 2021. Again, for FY 2022, the state is still trying to look at what is happening with the downturn and how that may affect it. This has been a long-term process to address achievement gaps and they don’t want to abandon it.

As far as hazard pay for employees, the standard for short-term emergencies was double time, which the Unions agreed wasn’t feasible for a long-term process. They agreed to an extra \$10 per hour for those in direct hazardous condition and \$3 an hour for others. That should add up to about \$14 million per pay period but would be covered by the federal reimbursement funds.

In terms of some possible structural changes, Mr. Madaleno returned to the issues with respect to the Chapter provision. County Executive Elrich is considering a proposal

to change it to give more flexibility while retaining some predictability. One change might be to switch to limits on how much assessments could rise. The basic problem is that the inflation rate doesn’t correspond with rises in school population (the biggest part of the budget) or necessarily other needs.

## ANNOUNCEMENTS AND OTHER BUSINESS

### Treasurer’s Report

As of April, revenue from dues was a total of \$1,298. Total expenses have been \$2,671. We will be receiving a refund of amounts paid for meetings at the County building, which will not be held due to the virus. Further details are contained in the Treasurer’s report in the newsletter.

MORE

## April Minutes, cont.

### Traffic and Transit

■ There has been a 55% decrease in traffic on the Beltway on weekdays and 75% on weekends. As it becomes clear that teleworking works, that decline might be permanent, which may affect plans for the toll lanes and so forth. And, as of note, transit usage is very low.

### Legislative and Political

■ The State will send out absentee ballot to all for the June election. There will be a very limited number of in-person polling sites for voting and drop off of ballots.

## NEW BUSINESS

■ Bailey noted, at the community’s request, Beach Drive will be closed from Friday to Sunday 6:00 p.m. to 6:00 p.m. from Knowles to Connecticut Avenue to allow more ability for it to be used for outdoor activity while maintaining social distancing.

## Adjournment

Bailey called for and received unanimous approval for adjournment at 9:50 pm. ■

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Montgomery County Civic Federation

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