

**January Program: MCCF Welcomes Marc Elrich** | Join us to hear from our County Executive what is going on—and planned—for Montgomery County | **P. 3**

**MCCF's Fiscal Year 2024 Budget Priorities** | Our President shared this with both Marc Elrich and CAO Rich Madaleno on January 2, 2024 | **P. 5**

**Resolution on Trees, Stumps, and Invasive Plants** | An expanded resolution from what appeared in December | **P. 9**

**Why Montgomery County Needs an Office of the People's Counsel** | Comments by Liz Joyce in support of Bill PG/MC 112–24 on November 27, 2023, before the MoCo Delegation | **P. 10**

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## of note

### **Next MCCF Meeting #949**

Monday, January 8, 2024, 7:30 p.m. *online via Zoom.* Topic: “A Conversation with Montgomery County Executive Marc Elrich.”

! **Join the Zoom Meeting Here**

*[See further instructions on page 2. No password is required.]*

**AGENDA, P. 2 • PROGRAM, P. 3**

### **Meeting Minutes**

December Meeting #948 **P. 12**

Executive Committee Meeting

**DECEMBER P. 13**

### **Membership Application**

**JOIN ONLINE | MAIL-IN FORM**

## Federation Meeting #949

Monday, January 8, 2024

7:30 p.m.

Online Zoom Meeting

### AGENDA

1. Call to Order/Introductions
2. Approval of Agenda
3. Approval of Minutes: December General Mtg. **P.12**
4. Treasurer's Report
5. Announcements
6. January Program: A Conversation with County Executive Marc Elrich **P.3**
7. Committee Reports
8. Old Business
9. New Business
10. 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.

**The January meeting will be held online via Zoom** (see page 3 for program) at 7:30 p.m.:

■ To be part of the video conference, first **visit the Zoom website** to download the program for your phone or computer.

■ **Date and Time:** Monday, January 8, 2024, 7:30 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 **825 6736 4872**. No password is required.

We hope you will join us! ■

# mccf

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**

## January Program: MCCF Welcomes Montgomery County Executive Marc Elrich

Montgomery County Executive Marc Elrich is the featured speaker at the January 2024 meeting of the Montgomery County Civic Federation. He has been a frequent guest of the Civic Federation and is known for his candid and thoughtful analysis of issues facing the County. The Civic Federation shares many of the Executive's priorities and has worked with him to advance a resident-focused agenda aimed at increasing economic opportunities and improving the quality of life in Montgomery County.

Affordable housing tops the list. Creating more affordable housing, long a subject of concern for the County, is critically important. Current policies, he has stated, are not getting the job done. He has emphasized the preservation of existing

affordable housing as well as encouraging new development throughout the County with greater provisions for moderately priced housing. Finding ways to curb and stabilize rent remains imperative as the CE has projected an influx of lower-income individuals and families moving into the area in the years ahead. In 2023, the County Council passed rent stabilization legislation which was signed by the Executive and is currently being implemented. This effort will help to maintain housing for nearly one-third of the County's current residents. We know of his support for re-funding the Office of the People's Counsel and the Civic Federation will continue to support this effort.

Regarding climate change, he has emphasized the development of

a comprehensive flood management plan to address stormwater concerns that have increased significantly due to changes in the climate. He also has highlighted the need to increase the County's use of solar energy and the use of electric vehicles.

With regard to economic development, Elrich has recently announced a contract with the University of Maryland's Institute of Health Computing which has the promise of a dynamic renewal of the White Flint development area. He has also been an longtime advocate of development in the East County and has announced the redevelopment of the Burtonsville Crossing shopping district as well as the establishment of a campus for Montgomery College in that area.

## January Program, cont.

Increasing public safety and an emphasis on law enforcement recruitment continues to rank high in his priorities to better serve the growing County population. Efforts to reduce speeding and make the roads safer include the deployment of many new red light and speeding cameras.

Elrich's transportation priorities focus on support for Metro, Bus Rapid Transit (BRT), and the replacement of the American Legion Bridge and modernization of I-270.

Marc Elrich was elected as Montgomery County Executive on Nov. 6, 2018, and re-elected in 2022. He had previously served three terms (12 years) on the Montgomery County Council as an at-large member, being first elected in 2006. He served as a Councilmember on the Takoma

Park City Council from 1987–2006. For 17 years, he was a teacher at Rolling Terrace Elementary School in Takoma Park.

As a County Councilmember, he was the chief sponsor of several landmark pieces of legislation and programs. He led the successful effort to increase the Montgomery County minimum wage in coordination with surrounding jurisdictions to \$11.50 an hour and subsequent legislation that will eventually increase the minimum wage to \$15 an hour. He was the first elected official to propose building a BRT system throughout the County to address Montgomery's transporta-



tion and environmental problems. Ground was broken in Fall 2018 for the first BRT line, which runs along Route 29.

Throughout his political career, he has been a champion of improving tenants' rights and for making developers pay for a greater share of the infrastructure cost to build schools and transportation solutions. He was a leader in the fight

to preserve Ten Mile Creek in the Clarksburg area by limiting the proposed development that would have threatened the health of Montgomery County's last best stream, which flows into the County's backup water reservoir.

[View the County Executive's Vision Statement here.](#) ■

## Montgomery County Civic Federation's Fiscal Year 2024 Budget Priorities

*[MCCF President Alan Bowser emailed the following to County Executive Marc Elrich and Chief Administrative Officer Richard S. Madaleno on January 2, 2024.]*

The Montgomery County Civic Federation, Inc., appreciates this opportunity to make its recommendations regarding the FY24 Montgomery County Operating Budget. We appreciate the County Executive's emphasis on schools, affordable housing, public safety, economic development, and other critical county services that residents rely on. We also reiterate our endorsement of a previous goal to make county government leaner and more efficient and urge the administration to redouble efforts to make the best use of tax dollars

by examining all spending with an eye to eliminating waste or underutilized services, consolidating services where appropriate, and redirecting dollars to new areas of urgency.

Specifically:

**I Office of the People's Counsel.** The Civic Federation has given high priority to re-funding and re-establishing the Office of the People's Counsel, as described in the County Code. It is our view that, in light of the adoption of a new General Plan and the likely consideration of new land use planning proposals by the Planning Board and County Council, the OPC can provide immense benefit to residents, particularly low income and underserved communi-

ties, in navigating land use issues affecting their neighborhoods. We note that the County Council's Office of Legislative Oversight has recently stated that the OPC would greatly assist these neighborhoods and support social equity and racial justice concerns throughout Montgomery County.

**I Job Creation and Economic Development.** The Civic Federation understands that job creation and economic development are essential prerequisites for a thriving community. We urge the County Government to increase its efforts to support economic development and job creation in all parts of the county by supporting small businesses—especially women-owned, minority-owned, LGBTQ-, and

## Budget Priorities, cont.

veteran-owned businesses—creating new business incubators, and giving special attention to new investments in Silver Spring, Wheaton, White Oak, and the Route 29 corridor.

**I Environment and Climate Change.** The Civic Federation has strongly advocated for effective and innovative approaches to dealing with issues of climate change and environmental sustainability. To this end, we urge Montgomery County to increase canopy tree planting throughout the County, but especially in the existing areas of low tree canopy. Years of neglect in some areas of the county have led to serious decline in tree canopy and heat islands that threaten the health and livability

of communities. One example is downtown Silver Spring: tree canopy has been reduced to 8%—the lowest in the county—and there is no plan in place to effectively ameliorate this problem. There are other areas of the county, particularly on the east side, where tree canopy has deteriorated to an unacceptable level. We also support an enhanced effort to remove stumps and invasive plants along the public rights of way. Increased emphasis on stormwater management programs are critical as the county expands development, with a focus on green infrastructure.

**I Fiscal Policy.** The Civic Federation notes that recent tax increases and fees are impacting residents at a time when the cost of living has increased significantly. These increases hit the hardest on

low- and moderate-income homeowners and those on fixed incomes. It is our view that revenue increasing measures should be postponed or, to the extent that they are needed to fund essential programs, minimized to the greatest extent possible, with a renewed commitment to examine existing budget expenditures and reduce waste and inefficiency and redirect dollars to new areas of urgency.

It is long past time to put transparency measures in place for scrutiny of the enormous allocation of County funds to MCPS. We support maintenance of effort for schools, but note that the spending details for MCPS are opaque, making it impossible to determine if funds are directed toward students and programs of greatest need. The County must regain effective

## Budget Priorities, cont.

tive oversight of the details of the MCPS allocations and expenditures and that must go hand in hand with real transparency on spending.

**I Affordable Housing.** The Civic Federation recognizes that there is an unacceptable shortage of affordable housing in Montgomery County and serious work must begin quickly to effectively address the problem. There are 32,000 people on the HOC waitlist for housing, a projection of 200,000 more people moving here, with the majority making less than \$50,000 and a growing homeless population. We must have deeply affordable housing in every area of the County. An effort of this magnitude will require assistance from

the State.

We understand that the affordable housing shortage is a complex issue and involves some factors that are out of the County's control, such as mortgage interest rates that have limited the ability of moderate income and communities of color to purchase homes, wage stagnation—which is a national problem—and increases in construction costs. Nevertheless, there are potential areas of action for the county and we urge the Executive and Council to work together to support programs that have a record of success, including increasing the percentage of MPDUs in new development, the preservation of existing affordable housing to the extent possible, the co-location of affordable housing on public properties, and more support for the Montgomery Hous-

ing Partnership.

We also urge a cooperative effort to look at program successes in other jurisdictions and identify best practices and promising approaches to creating affordable housing. Significant changes in the built environment will require political will that comes from community consensus and, for this reason, we strongly support resident input and participation in land-use decisions affecting neighborhoods in the spirit of engaging communities to participate in formulating policies that improve life for everyone.

**I Pedestrian and Bicyclist Safety.** The Civic Federation continues to strongly emphasize and support efforts to improve pedestrian and bicyclist safety in our neighborhoods. We are and

## **Budget Priorities, cont.**

have been long-term supporters of Vision Zero programs and policies. We advocate for enforcement of red light and speed camera violations and special attention to pedestrian safety and traffic enforcement around elementary, middle, and high schools.

**I Public Safety.** The Civic Federation recognizes public safety as one of the primary responsibilities of government. We are concerned about staffing shortages in the Montgomery County Police Department and the shortage of 911 operators. We support the increased use of technology to assist law enforcement to do their jobs to keep our communities safe. We support the hiring and deployment of more mental health specialists to

assist law enforcement professionals in their contact with residents. We call on the County Government to consider and implement measures, including subsidies, to support housing for law enforcement personnel in our communities as well as other measures that might improve recruitment of police officers.

**I Transportation and Roads.** The Civic Federation commends the Montgomery County Department of Transportation for its work. According to the housing report, the majority of low-income housing is being located up-county, where there is a severe lack of infrastructure: no sidewalks, no bus shelters, unreliable/infrequent bus service, and no Metro Access, which is too expensive for most low-income residents. In margin-

alized communities, pedestrian safety has been, and continues to be, low priority and, in light of the State and County budget constraints, creating safe walkable streets around schools and underserved communities must take precedence. We support accelerated maintenance of County roads and accelerated sidewalk construction in areas without sidewalks and where residents support the need. We support timely replacement of the American Legion Bridge and continue to support free “Ride On” for County residents.

We thank the County Executive for highlighting the importance of these priorities in the budget request to the Council and we look forward to working with the Council as the process continues. ■



## MCCF Resolution Urging County on Trees, Stumps, and Invasive Plants

*[For consideration at the January 8, 2024, General Meeting of the Civic Federation]*

**Whereas** the Montgomery County Civic Federation, Inc., views conservation and environmental sustainability as priority objectives for government and community action; and

**Whereas** trees, particularly mature trees, are vital to healthy communities and fighting climate change; and

**Whereas** the Civic Federation has strongly advocated for the removal of stumps and greatly increased tree planting on public and private lands throughout the County; and

**Whereas** the Civic Federation has recognized that dead and dying trees along our County roads are a public safety hazard;

**Therefore, be it resolved** that the Montgomery County Civic Federation, Inc., calls upon the Montgomery County Department of Transportation to consider volunteer programs and policies to encourage residents to participate in the removal of invasive plants affecting trees along the public right of way; and

**Be it further resolved**, calls upon the Montgomery County Government to increase its efforts to plant new trees throughout the County on public and private properties; and

**Be it further resolved**, calls upon the Montgomery County Government increase its advocacy with the Maryland State Government to replace trees removed by State Government on account of its transportation infrastructure projects; and

**Be it further resolved**, calls upon the Montgomery County Government to substantially increase its budget for stump removal so that new trees can be planted and maintained along the public right of ways.

*Adopted this 8th day of January 2023.*

—Elizabeth Joyce, Acting Secretary ■

## Why Montgomery County Needs an Office of the People's Counsel

*[The following comments were made by Elizabeth Joyce, MCCF Second Vice President, before the Montgomery County Delegation on behalf of the Civic Federation in support of PG/MC 112-24 on November 27, 2023. They were inadvertently left out of the December newsletter.]*

Thank you for the opportunity to speak in favor of Senator Kramer's PG/MC 112-24 to require the County Executive to appoint a people's counsel to represent the public interest in land use planning. As previously constituted, the Office of the People's Counsel (OPC) helped promote full and fair administrative proceedings, produce sound land use decisions, and provide residents crucial informa-

tion about complex land use policies that affect their lives.

Although the Montgomery County OPC's two-person staff operated only between 1999 and 2008, it accomplished a great deal. From 2002 to 2007, the OPC participated in 267 land-use proceedings and provided 18,281 instances of technical assistance on 135 different subjects, as well as 47 mediation sessions. Its annual budget ranged from \$104,000 to \$250,000 (a mere .0004 % of the County's 2023 budget). Martin Klauber, the first People's Counsel, prided himself on deescalating conflicts, amicably solving problems, and preventing expensive delays and legal challenges. "I really believe people can sit down and negotiate their differences. It's

one of the things I try to encourage," he once said.

A 2008 report from the Office of Legislative Oversight (OLO) included considerable praise for the OPC, which most government respondents supported. They praised the OPC's explanations of the land-use decision process in advance of hearings, which better prepared residents to participate, to present relevant and legally significant testimony, and even to develop suggestions that may influence the final design or conditions placed on land-use approvals. Land use attorneys complimented the People's Counsel's success in promoting a complete record, his moderating influence on hearing participants, and success in mak-

## OPC Testimony, cont.

ing proceedings run more smoothly.

The OLO report also dispelled fears that OPC favored residents at the expense of other parties. The OPC's charge, as the statute made clear, has been to serve the public interest—not the County nor petitioners nor residents involved in the process. A report from 2007 cited by OLO showed the OPC “most often appeared in support of an application or remained neutral” (p. 21). Therefore, fears of OPC working on behalf of residents who want to “stop projects” are baseless.

The OPC has also helped low-income and minority residents to access needed help. According to a recent racial equity/social justice (RESJ) analysis of the bill by

the Office of Legislative Oversight (4/18/23), “As advocates for the public’s interest in land use decisions, Office of the People’s Counsel can be uniquely positioned to advocate for the interests of BIPOC and low-income constituents not typically represented in land use decisions.” OLO urged fully funding the OPC and requiring RESJ reviews for all land-use proposals. Because the law now requires RESJ analyses of all new laws and ZTAs, a funded OPC could help the county avoid challenges and even lawsuits over perceived civil rights violations.

Despite the OPC’s impressive successes and low cost, the Montgomery County Council fiercely opposes funding the agency (and resists allowing the Maryland National Capital Park and Planning Commission [M-NCPPC] to

do so). At a November 27 hearing, one councilmember falsely charged that the bill would require the County to fund the OPC. Yet Subtitle 4E of the bill states, “The Commission shall include in its annual operating budget proposal adequate funding for the OPC.” Council Vice President Andrew Friedson described the bill as “dangerous” and “extremely adversarial.” So much for the public interest.

Only the General Assembly can restore this valuable service enjoyed by the residents of Prince George’s County, the only other jurisdiction under the M-NCPPC.

The Montgomery County Civic Federation respectfully urges the Delegation to advance this reasonable and needed legislation.

—Elizabeth Joyce

Second Vice President ■

## Minutes of the MCCF General Meeting #948, December 11, 2023, 7:30 p.m. Via Zoom

*By Elizabeth Joyce, Acting Recording Secretary*

**Call to Order.** The meeting was called to order by Alan Bowser, President, at 7:34 p.m. The meeting was recorded.

**Approval of Agenda.** The agenda for the December 11, 2023, meeting was adopted, as amended.

**Approval of Minutes.** The minutes of the November 2023 meeting were approved.

**Treasurer's Report.** The Treasurer's Report was received.

### ANNOUNCEMENTS

■ Alan Bowser reported the sad news that Karen Cordry, President

of the Kensington Heights Civic Association and Secretary of the Montgomery County Civic Federation, Inc., had passed away on November 20, 2023. She had served as Chair of the Wheaton Redevelopment Advisory Committee and as a member of the County's Pedestrian, Bicycle and Traffic Safety Advisory Committee, and the Montgomery County Planning Department's Advisory Committee on Missing Middle Housing. There was a moment of silence in her memory.

■ Patricia Tyson of the Lyttonsville Community Civic Association announced that there would be a program on fire prevention held at the Gwendolyn Coffield Community Center in Lyttonsville on Thursday, December 14 at 7 p.m. Everybody was welcome to attend.

■ Jim Michaels, Chair of the Montgomery County Charter Review Commission, discussed the mission and activities of the Charter Review Commission. He expressed sadness over the passing of the Commission's Vice Chair, Karen Cordry, who was a very engaged member of the Commission. He noted that she had strongly advocated for the Commission to take up the issue of incorporating the Office of the People's Counsel in the County Charter. He encouraged the public to contact the Commission with ideas about issues to consider by emailing the Commission at [charterreview.commission@montgomerycountymd.gov](mailto:charterreview.commission@montgomerycountymd.gov).

### MONTHLY PROGRAM

Montgomery County Police

## December Minutes, cont.

Chief Marcus Jones was the featured speaker at the December meeting. Chief Jones reviewed recent Montgomery County crime statistics, noting concerning increases in carjackings, robberies, and homicides in the County. He discussed juvenile crime issues as well as MCPD staffing and recruitment and the use of new technologies for public safety, including the new drone program. He answered questions from MCCC Delegates and guests, and urged civic and homeowner associations to take steps to secure their property to protect against opportunistic crimes and to contact MCPD as appropriate. Video of Chief Jones remarks are [online on YouTube here](#).

### NEW BUSINESS

A Resolution, and proposed

alternative, on a proposed volunteer program to remove invasive plants from trees in the public right of way were read and discussed. Members agreed to table consideration of the Resolutions until the January 2024 General Meeting.

### COMMITTEE REPORTS

Members commented on several issues that merited attention, including State efforts to incorporate an Office of the People's Counsel in State legislation, plans related to the replacement of the American Legion Bridge and the construction of toll lanes from the bridge to I-370, the Governor's plan to cut \$3 billion from the State transportation budget, and the health impacts from highway construction.

**Adjournment.** The meeting was adjourned at 10:00 p.m. ■

## Executive Committee December 21, 2023, Minutes

**1.** Call to Order. The meeting was called to order at 7:03 p.m. Members present: Dan Meijer, Jay Elvove, Kim Persaud, Peggy Dennis, Elizabeth Joyce, Jerry Garson, Jacquie Bokow, and Alan Bowser.

**2.** Treasurer's Report. The Treasurer's Report was unchanged from the December General Meeting.

**3.** December 2023 Meeting Review. Members commented on the presentation by MCPD Chief Marcus Jones who reviewed public safety statistics in the County and reported on efforts to increase police recruiting and retention and the use of new technology for public safety.

**4.** January 2024 Meeting. Montgomery County Executive Marc

## Dec. ExCom Minutes, cont.

Elrich will be the guest speaker at the January General Meeting.

**5.** Discussion of Budget Issues. Members discussed themes and specific recommendations for a Federation letter to the County Executive. Members emphasized the importance of public safety, environmental protection and climate change, affordable housing, pedestrian safety and traffic enforcement, and economic development. Members were unanimous in their advocacy for funding the Office of the People's Counsel. Alan Bowser will draft a letter for comment by the Executive Committee.

**6.** Resolution on Trees, Stumps, and Invasive Plants. Members discussed the proposed Resolutions on trees, stumps, and invasive plants and agreed to present an amended

Resolution to the membership for a vote at the January meeting.

**7.** Housing Issues. Alan Bowser discussed plans for the formation of the Housing Issues Committee.

**8.** Awards and Nominations Committees. Volunteers are needed for the Awards and Nominations Committees.

**9.** Karen Cordry Memorial. No date has been set for a memorial observance for former MCCF Secretary Karen Cordry.

**10.** Committee for Montgomery Legislative Breakfast. Jerry Garson, Peggy Dennis, Elizabeth Joyce, and Alan Bowser attended the 2023 Legislative Breakfast of the Committee for Montgomery and reported on the program.

**11.** Newsletter submissions are due December 31, 2023.

**12.** Adjournment. The meeting was adjourned at 8:10 p.m. ■

## cfn

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**Submit contributions for the next issue by the 26th of the current month.** Send to CFN at [civicfednews AT montgomerycivic.org](mailto:civicfednews@montgomerycivic.org).

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