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CIVIC FEDERATION NEWS

OFFICIAL PUBLICATION OF THE MONTGOMERY COUNTY CIVIC FEDERATION, INC.

OCTOBER • 2025

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TO PRINT, USE PRINT VERSION

of note

Next MCCF Meeting #967

October 13, 2025, 7:00 p.m. *online via Zoom*. Topic: "A Conversation with Amanda Farber."

Join the Zoom Meeting Here

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

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Membership Application

JOIN ONLINE | MAIL-IN FORM

Federation Meeting #967

Monday, October 13, 2025
7:00 p.m.
Online Zoom Meeting

AGENDA

1. Call to Order/Introductions
2. Approval of Agenda
3. Approval of Minutes: September General Meeting P.7
4. Treasurer's Report
5. Announcements
6. October Program: Amanda Farber, Co-Chair, Conservation Montgomery 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 October meeting will be held online via Zoom (see page 3 for program) at 7:00 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, October 13, 2025, 7:00 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 **892 5205 1222**. No password is required.

We hope you will join us! ▮

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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
civicfednews AT montgomerycivic.org

TO SUBMIT AN ARTICLE, SEE PAGE X

October Program

Amanda Farber, Co-Chair and Advocacy Committee Member for Conservation Montgomery, will be our guest speaker for October. Conservation Montgomery is a coalition of civic and environmental organizations and individual residents who work to address a broad spectrum of environmental and quality of life challenges facing Mont. County.

Amanda first caught the attention of the Montgomery County Planning Commission by using a scale Lego model to illustrate the potential impact of a local urban development project. She has quickly become one of the most respected advocates in the county on both land use and environmental issues. She's passionate about data and fact-checking as she monitors issues affecting the quality of life in Montgomery County.

She represents Conservation Montgomery in the MoCo Forest Coalition and was involved in the 2023 amendments to the county Forest Conservation Law, as well as efforts to update the tree replacement fees associated with the Tree Canopy and Roadside Tree Protection Laws. She is current President of the East Bethesda Citizens Association and Co-Chair of the Bethesda Implementation Committee and served as an appointed member of the Development Review Process Workgroup.

She will explain the various laws regarding tree protection and the rules that vary by location (private home, street trees, larger developments) and size of the development. Come and learn what you need to know to be an effective advocate for your neighborhoods as we face growing development pressures. ▮

Important Notice: County Executive Candidates Forum

Please join us for a forum with candidates for the County Executive race. The forum is sponsored by MCCF and will be moderated by Lou Peck, Contributing editor of *Bethesda Magazine*.

Saturday, November 15
3:00 to 5:00 p.m.
Newport Mill Middle School
11311 Newport Mill Road
Silver Spring, MD 20902

Doors open at 2:30 p.m. Please come early for a good seat as the event will be open to the public.

MCCF Hosted Transparency Expert Miranda Spivack About 'Backroom Deals'

By Elizabeth Joyce, MCCF Second Vice President

MCCF kicked off its 2025–2026 season by hosting award-winning investigative reporter Miranda Spivack at a packed September 4 gathering at the Somerset Town Hall in Chevy Chase. Ms. Spivack, a former *Washington Post* reporter and expert on transparency, showcased her newly released *Backroom Deals in Our Backyards*, the product of years of research on how local governments deny crucial information to their constituents seeking relief from problems.

Spivack's book features the stories of "accidental activists," ordinary people from across the nation who questioned why their governments weren't protecting them from damaging policies. The secret deals, lies, and corruption they discovered (including in Maryland) moved them to action. Many of these people, not trained in advocacy, struggled for years against impossible odds to solve life-threatening problems their communities failed (or actively resisted) trying to correct.

Most relevant for Montgomery County residents is the story of Richard Boltuck, an attorney who tried for years to convince the State Highway Administration to place a traffic light at a particularly dangerous intersection on River Road near Walt Whitman High School. The Maryland Highway Administration repeatedly claimed that their studies showed the intersection was not as perilous as everyone knew it was. Boltuck's efforts to access these studies hit a dead wall because government contractors often have the power to deny access to such studies to the public who pay for them. The reason: a federal law that allows contractors to withhold such information because of intellectual property rights. In this case, no traffic light was installed until a horrendous accident that killed three members of a four-member family in 2016.

SPIVACK

Another example of serious injustice is the widespread use of a software that in one outstanding

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Spivack, cont.

case, provided the basis for denying a deserving prisoner a well-earned release from prison only six months before his sentence was over. The reason: proprietary software used by the justice system to analyze worthiness for such releases, even though, in this and many other cases, the software system omitted crucial information that prisoners need to press their claims.

Secrecy, Spivack stressed, allows officials to hide their actions and elude responsibility for them. Audience questions ranged freely over a number of local issues, such as:

1. Why does the Maryland-National Capital Park and Planning Commission exercise such power without accountability to the public? Why does this 100-year-old charter remain unchallenged when residents need responsible oversight of County Council land use decisions?

2. Why were so many crucial Montgomery County land use issues promoted during COVID, when public attention focused on survival issues rather than long-term general zoning plans that could have waited until the public could be actively involved?

3. Why are Maryland's Open Meetings Act provisions so often ignored, leading to politicians making decisions in private and then presenting them before the public has a legally allowed chance to weigh in?

4. How has the "news desert" problem of the disappearance of local newspapers affected public awareness of crucial issues that will affect constituents for years?

5. How can local *Washington Post* subscribers impress on this formerly great newspaper how disappointed their increasingly fewer subscribers are about their failure to cover local news? Changes happening in Montgomery County are powerful and likely permanent, but so few residents know what is going on.

Spivack's response is that the determined "accidental activists" she features provide a model to combat these distressing deficiencies. Only by persistence, joining forces, filing public information requests, and never giving up can Americans knock down the barriers governments and corporations are placing in our paths.

The Montgomery County Civic Federation thanks the Somerset Town Hall officers and staff and Miranda Spivack for enabling us to present this successful community event. ▮

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Purple Line Update

By Jerry Garson, Transportation Committee Chairman

The Purple Line Construction started in 2018 and is now scheduled to be completed by the end of 2027. The project is 16 miles long The Project director says that 70% of the track work for the light rail vehicles has been installed. The project has resulted in numerous streets being closed and it has impacted businesses along the right-of-way. Starting September 22, 2025, the stretch of Sligo Creek Parkway between Piney Branch Road and Wayne Avenue will be closed for the next two months.

Most of the areas around the 21 stations have light amounts of dense housing compared to the light rail systems in Europe that often have 10,000 or more residents living within 500 feet of the stations. In Europe the system refers to its vehicles as Trams.

The County Council in a report dated September 22 has stated: "Of the original fleet of 26 light rail vehicles (LRVs), eight (8) have been shipped and delivered to the Glenridge Operations & Maintenance Facility (OMF) as of the end of March 2025, and the remaining 18 are ready to ship. Two additional LRVs were ordered and both are ready to ship."

The vehicles that have been delivered are not in use since they will not open any portion of the system until the entire project is completed.

Since the execution of the new design-build contract on April 15, 2022, through May 31, 2025, $1.822 billion has been expended on the design-build contract. Reported expenditures are based on the latest monthly construction progress report prepared by the Concessionaire. The cost per mile as of now has been over $113,000,000 per mile of system.

There will be 10 Stations in

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Purple Line

Montgomery County and 6 in Prince George's County. The first stop will be in Bethesda, then: Connecticut Avenue, Lyttonsville, 16th Street-Woodside, Silver Spring Transit Center, Silver Spring Library, Dale Drive, Manchester Place, Long Branch, Piney Branch Road, Takoma/Langley, Briggs Road, Adelphi Road-UMGC-University of Maryland, Campus Drive-UMD, Baltimore Avenue-UMD, College Park-UMD, Riverdale Park North-UMD, Riverdale Park-Kenilworth, Beacon Heights-East Pines, Glenridge, and the final stop will be at new Carrolton. Most of these stops have limited number of residents living within 1,000 feet of the station.

You can view the County Council's 94-page report on the Purple Line here. ▮

MCCF General Meeting Minutes, September 8, via Zoom

By Alan Bowser, Secretary

1. Call to Order. The meeting was called to order at 7:05 pm by President Cheryl Gannon.

2. Approval of the Agenda. The agenda was approved.

3. Approval of Minutes. The minutes of the July 2025 General Meeting were approved.

4. Treasurer's Report. The Treasurer's report was received.

5. September Program.

1st Vice President Joyce Gwadz introduced former Maryland State Delegate Al Carr to discuss transparency, accountability, and advocacy in Montgomery County and the State of Maryland. Carr cited many issues of concern to Montgomery County residents, focusing on complaints about the responsiveness of elected and appointed officials to important community issues.

In his discussion of possible solutions to increase accountability, he emphasized: making use of sunshine laws, e.g., Open Meetings Act and Maryland Public Information Act; testifying at State and County meetings; joining advocacy groups such as the Sierra Club and Nature Forward; and maintaining contacts with local media. He also discussed the use of charter petitions, community coalitions, appealing land use decisions, when necessary, and advocating for live streaming of all County Board and Commis-

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September Minutes, cont.

sion meetings. Among possible and useful legislative "fixes," he called for stronger ethics laws, funding of the Office of the People's Counsel, a prohibition on Planning Board members as political candidates, ban on developer contributions, establishing a County Executive veto over ZTAs, easier access to planning board member financial disclosures, and County Charter changes.

6. Questions. Members asked a range of questions, including: how to engage the State Delegation, how to improve communications with elected officials at the County and State level, improving enforcement of election laws, publishing elected and appointed official's calendars, the appointment of State Delegates by the County Central Committee, and public financing of State elections for Delegates and Senators.

7. Upcoming Public Hearing. Cheryl Gannon highlighted upcoming County Council public hearings of concern to members.

8. New Business. Cheryl Gannon discussed plans to develop a Federation legislative agenda highlighting accountability and transparency issues as well as a MCCF forum with County Executive candidates.

9. Adjournment. The meeting was adjourned at 9 p.m. ▮

MCCF Executive Committee Meeting Minutes September 18, 2025

By Alan Bowser, Secretary

1. Call to Order. The meeting was called to order at 7:05 p.m. by Cheryl Gannon.

2. Members present. Cheryl Gannon, Alan Bowser, Jerry Garson, Joe Harkins, Joyce Gwadz, Elizabeth Joyce. Special guests: Linda Nemic and Pam Stanzione (Forest Grove Citizens Association), Carlotta Amaduzzi (Rosemary Hills Neighborhood Association).

3. Treasurer's Report. The Treasurer's report was received. A bank balance of $5,955.00 was reported.

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Sept. ExCom Minutes, cont.

4. October General Meeting. Amanda Farber of Conservation Montgomery and the East Bethesda Citizens Association will be the featured speaker of the October 2025 meeting. We will also discuss MCCF's legislative agenda for the year focusing on transparency and accountability in State and local government.

Suggested topic for the November General Meeting: Office of the People's Counsel in other jurisdictions. Possible in-person meeting with members of the State Delegation.

5. New Members. Representatives of the Forest Grove Citizens Association and the Rosemary Hills Neighborhood Association were present and discussed issues of concern in their neighborhoods.

6. Adjournment. The meeting was adjourned at 8:00 p.m. ▮

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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*.

Send all address corrections to *membership AT montgomerycivic.org*.

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