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CIVIC FEDERATION NEWS

OFFICIAL PUBLICATION OF THE MONTGOMERY COUNTY CIVIC FEDERATION, INC.

JANUARY • 2026

**New Year In-Person Event!** | A fun social and networking event has been planned for ***Sunday, January 11, from 2:00–4:00 p.m.*** Join us to collaborate, socialize, and discuss ideas and plans for the next six months. Details on the service component of the meeting below. Venue to be announced. | P. 3

**January Program: Office of the People's Counsel** | There also will be an update on UBCP and other policy issues. As usual, this meeting will be virtual. | P. 3

**Bylaws Amendment** | The ExCom proposes an addition to Annual Awards to include a "Legacy of Leadership Award," which will be voted on at the January meeting | P. 3

**MCCF Shoebox Gift Drive** | Attendees of the in-person social event on Jan. 11 are asked to bring a shoebox full of personal items for people in need this winter | P. 4

**Forever Chemicals in Synthetic Turf** | How these chemicals went everywhere and threatened our health | P. 6

**Synthetic Turf According to Artificial Intelligence** | A.I., does synturf contain PFAS? | P. 8

**Committee for Montgomery** | CfM kicks off its 2026 legislative session at Strathmore | P. 10

**TO PRINT, USE PRINT VERSION**

## of note

**Next MCCF Meeting #970**

Monday, January 12, 2026, 7:00 p.m. *online via Zoom*. Topic: "Office of the People's Counsel."

Join the Zoom Meeting Here

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

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**December Meeting Minutes**

General Meeting #969 P. 14
Executive Committee Meeting P. 15

**Membership Application**

JOIN ONLINE | MAIL-IN FORM

## Federation Meeting #970

*Monday, January 12, 2026*
7:00 p.m.
Online Zoom Meeting

**AGENDA**

1. Call to Order/Introductions
2. Approval of Agenda
3. Approval of Minutes: December General Meeting #969 P.14
4. Treasurer's Report
5. Announcements
6. January Program: Office of the People's Counsel 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 July.

**The January 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, January 12, 2026, 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 **845 0760 7212**. 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 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 16

## President's Letter: Dear Delegates and Members,

Please mark your calendar for two events in January!

First, a **New Year in-person social and celebration, in-person on January 11 from 2:00-4:00 p.m.**, location TBA. We will have a chance to collaborate, socialize, discuss ideas and plans for the next 6 months. This will not be a regular business meeting, but it will be a fun networking and social event. This is a big year, with local elections that will be critical on our issues, on-going challenges with the economy, housing, environmental and other civic issues. And of course, in June, we will have our own MCCF elections. We will send an email to everyone shortly with full details and location. *We will also have a service component to the in-person social. See the announcement on page 4 of this newsletter.*

**Our regular membership meeting will be on January 12 at 7:00 p.m. by Zoom.** Our primary topic will be the Office of the People's Counsel, and we are working on securing speakers with expertise and information that will be useful in a lobbying push for funding for this position this year. We will also have an update on the University Boulevard Corridor Plan and other legislative or policy issues that we might address.

As always, thank you for all you do in your community and for the MCCF. On behalf of the Board, we hope for a happy and healthy New Year for everyone.

*—Cheryl Gannon* ▮

## Bylaws Amendment

In accordance with Article XVII of the MCCF Bylaws, Section 1, Amendment of Bylaws, the Executive Committee proposes the following change to Article XV, Annual Awards. The amendment will be debated and voted on at the January 12 regular membership meeting:

**ARTICLE XV, ANNUAL AWARDS, NEW SECTION (D)**

*Legacy of Leadership Award—to be given to a leader whose vision, integrity, and devotion to service have left an enduring mark on the county and its people through a career of service and steadfast commitment to the public good, justice, and inclusive government. The award may be given annually or periodically as deemed appropriate by the Awards Committee and Executive Committee.* ▮

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# MCCF Shoebox Gift Drive MCCF Shoebox Gift Drive

Join us in spreading joy and hope! Pack a shoebox filled with gifts for individuals and families in need in our community. Every box makes a difference! ***Choose a recipient group below, pack a box, and bring it to our Sunday, January 11, in-person social event!***

## Who You Can Pack For

### MEN OR WOMEN

- ✔ Sturdy water bottle or small flashlight
- ✔ Ball cap, warm hat, or gloves
- ✔ Socks (new)
- ✔ Comb or brush
- ✔ Toothbrush (in package) and washcloth
- ✔ Solid, nonmedicated deodorant
- ✔ Nonmedicated lip balm
- ✔ Nail clippers and nail file
- ✔ Adhesive bandages
- ✔ Underwear (new)
- ✔ Pens, pencils, small notebook or pad
- ✔ Simple wallet or coin pouch
- ✔ Reusable tote bag

### CHILDREN (AGES 5–9 AND 10–14)

Try to include one "wow" toy plus school supplies and personal care items. Label your box with:

- Boy 5–9,
- Girl 5–9,
- Boy 10–14, or
- Girl 10–14.

**Great "Wow" Items:**

- Small soccer ball (with manual pump)
- Medium plush animal or doll
- Sturdy toy truck or car
- Small backpack or drawstring bag

**Toys and Fun:**

- Jump rope, yo-yo, small ball
- Plastic figurines, small dolls, toy cars
- Card games, simple puzzles, fidget toys
- Stickers, coloring or activity book
- Craft kit (beads, lacing cards, simple sewing cards)

**School Supplies:**

- Pencils and sharpener
- Crayons or colored pencils
- Erasers, pens (for older children)
- Small ruler
- Notebook, journal, or drawing pad

MORE

## Shoebox Gift Drive, cont.

**Personal Care and Accessories:**

- Toothbrush (in package)
- Comb or brush
- Washcloth
- Nonmedicated lip balm
- Fun adhesive bandages
- Socks (new)
- Hat
- Hair accessories or simple jewelry (for older girls)

**PLEASE DO NOT INCLUDE**

To keep everyone safe and simplify distribution, please do not pack:

- ✘ Any food, candy, chocolate, or gum
- ✘ Drinks or drink mixes
- ✘ Toothpaste, liquids, gels, or lotions
- ✘ Medications, vitamins, or medicated products
- ✘ Used, worn, or damaged items
- ✘ Weapons, toy guns, knives, or anything violent or frightening
- ✘ Items with horror or scary themes
- ✘ Seeds, candles, matches, or aerosol cans
- ✘ Breakable glass items (such as snow globes or glass containers)

**HOW TO PARTICIPATE**

1. **Choose your recipient:** Select men, women, or a child (ages 5–9 or 10–14).

2. **Gather items:** Select new items from the lists above that match your chosen recipient.

3. **Fill your shoebox:** Pack the box creatively with your chosen gifts.

4. **Wrap the top and bottom of the box separately**, so it can still be opened (i.e., not wrapped shut).

5. **Label the box:** Write the recipient category clearly on the outside of the box. ❚

## How These Chemicals Went Everywhere and Threatened our Health

*[This letter was sent to all members of the County Council and Maryland General Assembly on December 9, 2025.]*

Members of County Council, Maryland General Assembly, and Others,

What confounds me with every passing year is that the Montgomery County Council and Montgomery County Public Schools have been informed of the scientific findings surrounding the toxic components of synthetic turf for nearly 20 years and yet the county keeps doubling-down on the use of toxic plastics grass. Recently we learned that MCPS wants to expose thousands more children in the county's public schools to these toxic compounds and spend >$70 MILLION it doesn't have to install more of these unrecyclable heat islands. Since it's so difficult to believe your own constituents bearing science before you, maybe you can believe *The Washington Post* and Artificial Intelligence [see A.I. excerpts on page 8].

Additionally maddening is that the Planning Board seems to be fast-tracking a data center in the MoCo Agricultural Reserve, along the banks of the Potomac River, upstream of the intakes for the Dalecarlia Water Treatment plant, our region's drinking water source. PFAS [Per- and Polyfluoroalkyl Substances] are used in data centers. It's highly likely that phthalates also are used heavily in data centers as the miles of cable connecting the servers are surrounded by plastics jacketing that makes the cables pliable.

In the presence of sunlight and heat, toxic plastics grass releases numerous compounds into the breathing space of users. These compounds infiltrate their lungs. The compounds also enter their blood when the field surface creates abrasions on their arms and legs, field debris lodging in their open wounds. Thousands of young people in the developmental stages of their lives are exposed routinely to phthalates/PFAS/lead/methane/ethylene gas and other noxious compounds at high temperature from using synthetic turf (ST). During torrential rains, the microplastic components of the ST fields pollute watersheds across the region, affecting aquatic life and the food chain.

Choices made by adults for children should carry minimal risk. The Maryland General Assembly leader-

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## Synthetic Turf, cont.

ship has also thumbed their collective nose at the cumulative risk that plastics grass poses for users. The Md. General Assembly passed on creating a binding "chain of custody" for used plastics grass fields, and now waste piles leach their toxins into our watersheds across the region and nation.

The Consumer Product Safety Commission refused to regulate synthetic turf as a children's product. The industry is completely unregulated at the federal level. Drafts of laws have been written to hold politicians, county and state agencies, and others criminally negligent for refusing to accept the scientific evidence on these well-documented risks. Little traction has been gained.

The synthetic turf industry uses the same playbook as "Big Tobacco"

once did. Their "science" is nothing of the kind; it all withers under third-party independent review. Their fraudulent claims of recycling are ludicrous. The mantra of big tech is, "move fast and break things." Do we really want to "break" our water supply? Do we think that everyone in the region has the means to install reverse osmosis water filtration systems in their homes to remove these toxic compounds from a resource they pay to be CLEAN?

I did not wake up this morning expecting to write about the evidence-based choices we collectively need to make. We're soon to enter the 26th year of the 21st century. Money and children do not grow on trees. Healthy ecosystems and people don't just happen, especially when we keep choosing products that sicken our entire biome. Maryland and Montgomery County are lucky to have large populations of scientists and highly educated people, but science and knowledge are repeatedly treated as inconvenient in local and state decision-making. The climate crisis is deepening and it doesn't give a damn about us, but we should certainly give a damn about one another, and public policy decisions made every day that affect us all. County activists have called for a moratorium on the installation

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## Synthetic Turf, cont.

of new plastics grass fields on more than one occasion; they presently are asking state legislators to override Governor Wes Moore's veto of a study to examine the downside risks of data centers on water and energy consumption and environmental impacts.

Fifty-two years ago, The O'Jays delivered a smashing soul/funk hit "For the Love of Money." Half-a-century later, it still rings true, but our challenges have grown more complicated, and throwing endless amounts of revenue at bad options requires greater scientific scrutiny and course corrections. The tech and plastics industries may be offering large cash promises, but what is gained when our food and water become unfit for consumption?
*—Bailey Condrey, Kensington, Md.*

## Synthetic Turf According to Artificial Intelligence

"Yes, artificial turf contains PFAS (Per- and Polyfluoroalkyl Substances), known as "forever chemicals," in its plastic blades, backing, and infill, leading to environmental contamination of soil and water, microplastic pollution, and potential health risks for athletes and children through direct contact, ingestion, or leaching from high heat, prompting bans in some areas and calls for safer alternatives like natural grass.

**DEGRADING SYNTHETIC TURF FIELD AT THE COUNTY'S WALTER JOHNSON HIGH SCHOOL**

### HOW PFAS GETS INTO TURF

- **Manufacturing Aid.** PFAS are used as extrusion aids to help form the durable plastic fibers (polyethylene, polypropylene, nylon) used in turf blades, preventing sticking to machinery.
- **Components.** They are present in the plastic backing that holds the fibers and can also be found in infill materials, including crumb rubber (recycled tires) and other polymeric infills.

MORE

## Synthetic Turf A.I., cont.

### HEALTH AND ENVIRONMENTAL CONCERNS

❙ **Leaching.** PFAS can leach from turf into local water supplies, exceeding safe limits in some areas, like Rhode Island.

❙ **Exposure.** People can be exposed by swallowing contaminated soil/dust, touching turf, or drinking water near fields.

❙ **Health Risks.** Linked to high cholesterol, liver disease, cancer, and impaired fetal development.

❙ **Microplastics.** Turf breaks down into microplastics, which are carried into the environment.

❙ **Heat.** High temperatures (over 100°F) increase chemical release from turf, making it hotter than asphalt and potentially increasing exposure.

### REGULATIONS AND AWARENESS

❙ **Bans.** States like Colorado and municipalities in Massachusetts, California, and Connecticut have banned PFAS in turf or allowed local bans.

❙ **Disclosure.** Manufacturers often don't disclose full chemical content, but independent testing confirms PFAS presence.

❙ **Recommendations.** Health centers, like Mount Sinai's Children's Environmental Health Center, advise against installing artificial turf due to cancer risks.

### ALTERNATIVES AND SOLUTIONS

❙ **Natural Grass.** Considered a safer, better environmental option by organizations like Clean Water Action.

❙ **Testing.** Various test methods are used to detect PFAS in turf, focusing on total fluorine and precursors."

**TEMPERATURES OF SYNTHETIC TURF CAN BE 25° HIGHER THAN OTHER SURFACES AND MORE THAN 60° ABOVE THE AMBIENT AIR TEMPERATURE.**

*[This entire quotation is what resulted when Artificial Intelligence—A.I.—was asked if synthetic turf contains PFAS.]* ❙

# Unified Front: Cmte. for Montgomery Kicks Off 2026 Legislative Session at Strathmore

The Committee for Montgomery (CfM) held its 37th Annual Legislative Breakfast on December 5, 2025, at the Music Center at Strathmore, drawing hundreds of leaders from across the county. This premier event served as the critical kick-off for uniting the county's business, labor, and civic community around a forceful legislative agenda for the upcoming 2026 Maryland General Assembly session in Annapolis. The Montgomery County Civic Federation, Inc., is a founding member of the Committee for Montgomery, Inc.

The CfM Chair—Silver Spring attorney and Montgomery County Civic Federation official Alan Bowser—opened the breakfast by welcoming the diverse and engaged crowd, which included the newly elected County Council leadership, President Natali Fani-González and Vice President Marilyn Balcombe. Bowser emphasized the CfM's vital role as the county's "shared conscience," highlighting its unique ability to bring together business, labor, nonprofits, and civic groups to advocate with a unified voice for the general welfare of all residents.

BOWSER, BABE-THOMAS

## CFM'S FOUR CRITICAL LEGISLATIVE PILLARS

Bowser's address clearly outlined four critical legislative pillars the CfM coalition will fight for during the 2026 session:

- **Education.** A central focus remains securing increased State funding for school construction to address the County's extensive facility needs and enrollment growth. Equally important is ensuring the Blueprint for Maryland's Future is implemented successfully and transparently to truly serve students and educators.
- **Transportation.** A reliable network is vital for a thriving econo-

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## CfM Leg. Session, cont.

my. The CfM will be fighting for necessary, sustainable WMATA funding to keep the Metro and transit systems safe and reliable. The coalition also continues to prioritize Vision Zero initiatives to make streets safer for pedestrians and cyclists.

❙ **Economic Development and Housing.** The CfM is committed to policies that foster economic growth and job creation, which must go hand-in-hand with housing stability. This includes supporting efforts to aggressively address the crippling housing shortage and protect vulnerable residents to prevent the further exodus of young families.

❙ **Social Safety Net.** The final pillar focuses on continuing to advocate for the health and human services that support the well-being

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ATTENDEES AT THE CFM LEGISLATIVE SESSION

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## CfM Leg. Session, cont.

of every resident, ensuring that the county remains a place where everyone can thrive, regardless of income or background.

### FEDERAL AND LOCAL LEADERSHIP ADDRESS CRISES AND CALL FOR ACCOUNTABILITY

The event featured remarks from federal and local leaders. U.S. Senators Chris Van Hollen and Angela Alsobrooks, along with U.S. Representative April McLain Delaney [all seen at right], addressed the crowd, focusing their concerns on the local impact of federal government firings and cutbacks in social programs, stressing the need for strong federal-state collaboration to protect critical services.

A highly anticipated panel of County Executive candidates—Councilmembers Andrew Friedson, Evan Glass, and Will Jawando, and challenger Mithun Banerjee [all shown on next page]—concurred that the county is at a "crisis moment" requiring bold action. Key areas of agreement included the urgency of the housing crisis and the need for greater transparency and accountability in Montgomery County Public Schools (MCPS) funding and facility management. While all agreed on the problems, their solutions varied, with candidates offering different approaches ranging from aggres-

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## CfM Leg. Session, cont.

sive regulatory reform to structural government spending cuts.

In her closing remarks, new Council President Natali Fani-González championed her Trust Act to protect immigrant communities and reiterated the council's commitment to tackling both public safety and housing affordability. The consensus of the day was a unified demand for decisive action and accountability from all levels of government to address the county's pressing challenges in the 2026 legislative session.

To learn more about the Committee for Montgomery's mission and legislative agenda, visit their official website here. ▮

CANDIDATES FOR COUNTY EXECUTIVE

## MCCF General Meeting #969 Minutes for December 8, 2025, via Zoom

*By Alan Bowser, Secretary*

**1. Call to Order.** In the absence of the President and 1st Vice President, the meeting was called to order by Secretary Alan Bowser at 7:05 p.m. A video of the meeting is online here.

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

**3. Approval of the Minutes.** The minutes of the November 10, 2025, General Meeting were approved.

**4. Treasurer's Report.** Treasurer Jerry Garson reported on Federation revenues and expenditures, noting significant growth in membership dues. He reported a bank balance of $5,987.00.

**5. Announcements.** The Civic Federation will host an in-person social gathering on January 11, 2026, at a venue to be determined.

**6. December Program: Transportation and Pedestrian Safety.** Transportation and Pedestrian Safety Committee Chair Jerry Garson introduced the evening's guests: Chris Conklin, Director, Montgomery County Department of Transportation, and Wade Holland, Vision Zero Coordinator in the Office of the County Executive.

**7. Department of Transportation Director Chris Conklin** summarized the broad range of responsibilities of the County's Department of Transportation, discussing transit services, parking facilities, highway and capital projects, the role of the traffic division, and coordination with WMATA and the Maryland State Transit Administration and the State Highway Administration. He said that there was considerable and continuing resident interest in the projects and policies of the Department.

He talked at length about the implementation of bus rapid transit projects along Rt. 29, Viers Mill Road, and Rt. 355. One point of emphasis was that construction and maintenance costs were steadily increasing in the current inflationary environment. He said there was progress in focusing Federal attention on the replacement of the American Legion Bridge.

MORE

## December Minutes, cont.

**8. Wade Holland, Vision Zero Coordinator** in the Office of the County Executive, provided an update of the County's Vision Zero program and policies, using a PowerPoint presentation that highlighted walkability studies, the attention to corridors considered as high injury risks, school engagement and education, expansion of automated traffic enforcement, and the ongoing holiday alcohol task force. The PowerPoint presentation is included in the program video and also posted to the MCCF Facebook page.

**9. Delegate and Member Questions.** Delegates and Members asked a wide range of questions about the transportation and pedestrian safety issues raised by the speakers. Questions and issues discussed included: street sweeping, cut-through traffic, safe routes to school, traffic and parking issues in the Lyttonsville community, difficulties in communicating with DOT staff, bus rapid transit, automatic traffic enforcement, bus line connections between Friendship Heights and Glenmont, bike lanes on University Boulevard, and traffic calming in Forest Glen. Members also inquired about creating a BRT stop on Colesville Road at Sligo Creek Parkway, restoration of tree canopy, flooding concerns, and ways to improve traffic in Downtown Silver Spring. The speakers noted that there were written questions that had not been answered and said that they would respond.

**10. Adjournment.** The meeting was adjourned at 9:00 p.m. ▮

## MCCF Executive Committee Meeting Minutes for December 17, 2025, 7 p.m. via Zoom

*By Alan Bowser, Secretary*

**1. Call to Order.** The meeting was called to order by President Cheryl Gannon at 7:05 p.m. Members present: Cheryl Gannon, Alan Bowser, Joyce Gwatz, Joe Harkins, Jacquie Bokow, and Elizabeth Joyce.

**2. Treasurer's Report.** In the absence of the Treasurer, there was no Treasurer's Report.

**3. Review of the December General Meeting.** Members discussed the December program on transportation and pedestrian safety which was well attended by Delegates and Members.

MORE

## Dec. ExCom Minutes, cont.

**4. Upcoming Programming.** Members discussed programming suggestions for upcoming meetings. Programs on the Office of the People's Counsel and the FY26 Operating Budget were suggested. Members also expressed interest in convening a program with candidates for the office of Montgomery County Councilmember-at-large. Dates and possible venues were discussed.

**5. January In-Person Social Meeting.** Several venues were suggested for the mid-January meeting.

**6. Bylaws Amendment.** President Gannon proposed an amendment to the Federation's bylaws which would codify the new Legacy of Leadership Award as one of the Federation's regular annual Awards.

**7. Nominations and Awards Committees.** Members discussed the possible membership of this year's Nominations & Awards Committee.

**8. Newsletter Deadline.** The newsletter deadline is December 28. Members suggested possible articles for the January 2026 newsletter. ▮

**Montgomery County Civic Federation**
*www.montgomerycivic.org*
*info AT montgomerycivic.org*
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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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