

Fairfax County Federation of Citizens Associations  
Membership Meeting of December 13, 2007  
MINUTES  
Approved by the membership February 21, 2008

The meeting of FCFCA was held at the Packard Center at 7:30 p.m. (Attendance list is attached to file copy.)

In the absence of President Jeff Parnes, First Vice President Charles Dane presided. He noted that he had not previously had the privilege of introducing Supervisor Sharon Bulova, who represents Braddock District, where he resides, and he wanted to thank her for her combination of communication and action on community issues, often through task forces. He thanked her for "listening and acting." He noted that Supervisor Bulova would introduce the speakers and then would have to depart to another meeting.

Program —

Supervisor Bulova introduced the speakers. She explained the Braddock District initiative regarding safer and more attractive neighborhoods is a response to increased complaints about zoning and code violations, often in older neighborhoods. In recent years, Supervisor Dana Kauffman of the Lee District has also tackled the issue of single-family homes run as illegal boarding houses or businesses, an effort that led to the county strike force.

Since concerns like these may involve different aspects of local government, including zoning, police, the health department, and fire and rescue, neighborhoods have often been uncertain how to proceed. Supervisor Bulova assembled a council of representatives from older communities in Braddock District, which met with senior county staff to discuss a template for communities facing destabilization. The resulting plan emphasizes beefed-up enforcement, on the one hand, and enhancing the ability of communities to help themselves, on the other. The Kings Park neighborhood volunteered to become the pilot community, and is now midway through a year-long effort. The initiative was kicked off at the June 20 Braddock District town meeting, which was heavily attended. Supervisor Bulova explained that this evening's speakers represented both the countywide strike force and the Braddock initiative.

Art Wells, who organized the evening's program and speakers, noted that the June 20 Braddock District meeting was standing-room-only, with a very interested audience, and had helped to inspire this program.

The first speaker was Deputy County Executive Rob Stalzer, who spoke about the county strike force on illegal boarding houses and overcrowded single-family residences. The strike force began on June 1, 2007. It addresses concerns about the health and safety of residents and quality of life. Overcrowding refers to more than four unrelated people living in a single-family residence. He shared several recent images taken in overcrowded residences in Fairfax County that included locked, barred, or blocked exit doors and windows, dangerous wiring, excessive outdoor storage or trash, and a single room shared by numerous adult sleepers. The strike force includes two five-person strike teams with environmental, health, fire, zoning, and law enforcement expertise. About 50 percent of the strike force's cases have been in Lee and Mason Districts and about 10 percent in Braddock; 26 cases are being pursued in civil court and 22 in criminal court. Typically, a case involves about 10 different notices of violation and corrective work orders, reflecting multiple violations. The most efficient way to contact the strike force is to go to the county website; citizens can also call the Strike Team Command Center at 703-246-2503.

The second speaker, Dave Ellis of the County Executive's office, talked about the modern challenges of community building. People are busier and more work-oriented than in the past; residents of the same neighborhood, who might once have worked for the federal government downtown, now have diverse jobs and lifestyles. Neighborhoods where most families were once at the same stage of life now include residents of different ages and family circumstances. Neighbors are also more diverse and may speak

different languages. He encouraged getting to know neighbors informally. In terms of neighborhood organizations, he suggested that the old model of monthly meetings may no longer be best. It may be better to find more electronic methods of communicating and to emphasize more specific volunteer programs (for example, tutoring) rather than a general monthly meeting. He also encouraged holding events that would bring people in to talk and socialize and mentioned holiday lighting contests, spring clean-up days, and block parties. He also mentioned several county programs, including neighborhood colleges, citizen police academies, Neighborhood Watch, Citizens Corps, the volunteer boards, authorities, and commissions listed on the county website, and the local boards of local community, senior, youth, and recreational centers. He answered a question about the county's role in maintaining and updating contact information for homeowner and civic associations. Charles Dane noted that associations can go online to the county site and update this information individually as well. Dave Ellis also reported that the Statewide Conference on Neighborhoods—a conference in its 10th year, which is usually held in other parts of the state—will be held in Fairfax County in September 2008.

The next speaker was Elizabeth Teare, Assistant County Attorney. She reported that seven attorneys in the county attorney's office do zoning enforcement work. Neighbors who have made a complaint are sometimes uncertain about what has happened to address it and she encouraged them to call the office at 703-324-2421 and find out the status of cases that have been filed. The process may include mailing and receipt of the notice of violation, reasonable time to comply, owner appeals, which take about three months, and, pursuit of the matter as a civil case. The standard of proof is a "preponderance" of the evidence and the county almost always wins the civil cases it takes to court in zoning enforcement matters. After a civil case, it may still be necessary to pursue contempt proceedings, fines, and jail time. Criminal cases may be filed in fire and building code cases. Property maintenance injunctions run with the land, not the owner, so a change in ownership does not end the case. She explained, however, that homeowner association covenants are private legal arrangements and are not enforced by the county.

The next speaker was Mike Congleton, Senior Deputy Zoning Administrator. He stated that there were about 3500 complaints last year and have been 6000 this year, with no increase in the staff last year; the staff is now increasing as of this week. The county has 22 inspectors in all. If residents need help, they can call the department at 703-324-1300. He asked for patience; 80 percent of complaints are resolved in 60 days, but others take more time. The zoning enforcement staff coordinates with the public works department, the health department, the sheriff, housing, fire and rescue, and other staffs; they are moving toward a central call center in the future. The staff uses an outside language-translation service, LLE, which can provide a translator on the phone for any of 132 languages within two minutes. When a complaint is received, the staff investigates. About 25 percent of the time there is no violation. If there is a violation, a notice of violation is issued; if the matter is not resolved, the county goes to court.

The final speaker of the evening was John Cook, president of the Kings Park Civic Association, the pilot neighborhood for the Braddock District initiative. He sees this pilot project as part of a new paradigm of local government in which the government, instead of identifying a problem and devising a top-down solution, instead acts as a facilitator to bring people together to identify issues, come up with solutions, and implement them. The county has been a critical partner in the Kings Park effort (which is at about the midpoint of its initial year) but through knowledge and assistance rather than money.

He said that he sees overcrowding as a symptom of eroding communities. Top-down enforcement alone will not work in addressing the underlying problem; one also needs to strengthen the community and tap its energy. Kings Park has about 1160 homes. It distributed a draft plan (which he shared at the meeting) to all 1160 for comment. The goal was to be all-inclusive and avoid any sense of "apartheid" between older and newer residents. Following finalization of the plan, the project started with a neighborhood college organized by the county for Kings Park that he said was phenomenal. A total of 38 residents attended. It included six 3 1/2 -hour Monday night sessions and a Saturday morning. There were sessions on zoning, law enforcement, budget, demographics (with the county demographer), community building, cultural competency, and conflict resolution. Participants each did a practicum and reported back to the

group on their chosen topic. They got to know each other and began taking action; for example, two people interested in the entrance signs organized a work day and 12 people attended. All participants were energized and committed to doing something for the neighborhood. The next effort was to expand this energy to the community. For example, beautification and neighborhood infrastructure came up as issues in the sessions, and a 10-person committee formed to tackle them.

He also went over the document that he had distributed. He noted that by educating block captains about zoning issues, the community can reduce the number of groundless zoning complaints, and can also resolve many issues informally among neighbors without involving zoning enforcement. He also emphasized the "new neighbor welcome" sessions that are part of the plan.

#### Business Meeting —

- a. The minutes for the November 15 membership meeting were unanimously approved.
- b. The Treasurer's Report was deferred to the next meeting in the Treasurer's absence.
- c. Charles Dane noted that the Federation is seeking volunteers for the Recording Secretary and Corresponding Secretary positions; interested parties should contact President Jeff Parnes. In addition, representatives are still needed for the Gifted and Talented Advisory Committee to the School Board (contact Charles Dane) and for the Airports Advisory Committee (ideally from Lee or Mount Vernon Districts) and the Criminal Justice Advisory Board (contact Esther Ferington). All contact information is at [www.fairfaxfederation.org](http://www.fairfaxfederation.org).
- d. Jim Colby, Chair of the Land Use Committee, reported on the recommendations of the ad hoc committee on the proposed Reston township referendum, which was established at the November membership meeting. The committee met twice and reviewed background documents that included the 1979 document from the General Assembly, materials from the Fairfax County Division of Management and Budget, the earlier Reston township referendum, and county correspondence with the chairs of legislative committees. It found that there are several reservations related to unknown or uncertain specifics of the plan. The committee therefore unanimously recommended that the Federation encourage the convening of a task force on the issue that would include all key affected interests, as outlined in the membership meeting agenda, to complete its work during the upcoming two-year legislative term. Furthermore, it was recommended that the task force be co-chaired by a representative from the Reston Citizens Association, Fairfax County, and the state legislature. The motion was moved and seconded and was approved 22 to 4.
- e. Art Wells reported on developments regarding BRAC (base realignment and closing). The Government Accountability Office (GAO) has recently issued a report that comes down hard on the current nationwide BRAC round, stating that costs will be much more than had been estimated, savings will be much less, and the transition cannot be completed by 2011. He also noted that the Continuing Resolution (CR) for 2008 included \$5.6 billion for BRAC.
- f. Carol Hawn stated that the next newsletter deadline is December 23.
- g. Sally Ormsby stated that she may have found a new site for the Citizen of the Year banquet and will inform the Board of details.
- h. Charles Dane, as Chair of the Education and Youth Committee, noted Jeff Nolan's comments included in the meeting agenda, which mention that the Advisory Committee on Students with Disabilities, on which Jeff Nolan is the Federation's representatives, will be covering reading improvement and developing state regulations for IDEA 2004.

He noted that the next meeting of the Education and Youth Committee, scheduled for January 8, may change because that the school budget draft will not be available until January 10. Those who plan to attend should check with him beforehand to confirm the date. He also reported that the local composite index has now reduced the expected state funding to the county by \$20 million.

i. Flint Webb, Chair of the Environment Committee, reported that the Metropolitan Washington Air Quality Committee's Technical Advisory Committee (MWAQC/TAC), on which he serves, has recommended a state implementation plan (SIP) for PM 2.5 (small particles). One contentious issue had to do with unmonitored emissions from the Mirant coal plant. He will testify on the plan in January and will prepare his testimony for the Board to review at its December meeting. He also noted the State Corporation Commission's hearing on the Dominion Power lines is on January 8.

j. Carol Hawn reported that the draft of the plan to end homelessness in the county in 10 years has been presented to the Board of Supervisors committee; the Beeman Commission report has some time to go. Both drafts are available online.

k. Sally Ormsby, Chair of the Legislative Committee, noted that Jeff Parnes, as Federation President, will testify on the Federation's legislative program on January 8 before the members of the Fairfax County delegation to the General Assembly.

l. Charles Dane, as First Vice President (membership), noted that he is continuing to contact district council representatives and he asked that each of those in attendance confirm that his or her own civic or homeowners association has joined the Federation.

m. Art Wells noted the December 6 Taste of Braddock was well attended. Sally Ormsby noted that the Providence District party on December 11 honored Fran Wallingford for community service.

Next Membership Meeting: January 17 – FCPS Proposed 2009 Budget Presentation with Public School System Leaders

Next Board Meeting: December 20 at the Marco Polo Restaurant in Vienna

Meeting adjourned at 10:30 p.m.