

Wednesday, March 2, 2011

Council learns what growth in Montgomery minorities means

Housing, economy, schools affected by changing population

by Erin Cunningham | Staff Writer

Montgomery County is expected to be home to 1 million people by 2013, according to the director of the county's planning department — and the largest growth will be in its minority population.

In presenting an analysis of county population data to the County Council on Tuesday, Planning Director Rollin Stanley pointed to recent U.S. Census statistics showing that minorities now make up more than half — 50.7 percent — of the county's population. Thirty years ago, 82.5 percent of the county was white.

"I think we're dealing with some very tough issues," said council President Valerie Ervin (D-Dist. 5) of Silver Spring. "There are people in our community who are a little bit nervous hearing about some of the changes that are under way."

Of the county's 971,777 residents, about 17 percent — 165,398 — are Hispanic, a 64.4 percent increase from 2000.

Montgomery's total population has grown by 11.3 percent since 2000. In that time, the white population has declined by 40,486, and the number of minority residents has increased by 139,151.

About 31 percent of the county was born in another country, Stanley noted.

The number of black residents in the county also grew by 26.5 percent in the past decade. The only race to decline was non-Hispanic whites, whose total dropped by 1.3 percent.

Stanley said the new residents will affect the county's housing, economy, schools, transportation and other issues. More transit options will be needed to accommodate the growing population, and especially minority residents who are more frequent transit users, he said.

Also, an increasing number of minorities own their own businesses, he said.

Councilman Philip M. Andrews (D-Dist. 3) of Gaithersburg said there is increasing demand for rental housing in the county, and officials should take steps to protect existing affordable housing.

"Growth is going to come whether we build or not," Stanley said.

Councilman George L. Leventhal (D-At large) of Takoma Park said he would like to avoid using the word "minority" to describe Montgomery's population. "Caucasians are the minority," he said. "There is no majority population in Montgomery County."

Councilwoman Nancy Navarro (D-Dist. 4) of Silver Spring said she has known for years that the county was becoming more diverse. Now that the numbers are known, she said, it is important to act to ensure that the county's new residents are well represented.

She said the council often does not hear from or see many of the county's newest residents.

"There's this sense of urgency and responsibility that goes with a lot of these figures," she said.

However, Councilman Marc B. Elrich (D-At large) of Takoma Park disagreed, saying that the county has a responsibility to meet the needs of all residents of all ethnicities — not only the ones who are experiencing a population boom.

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