

Montgomery In Focus

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Letter To County Executive Re Economic Development

In response to the recent departure of Department of Economic Development Director Pradeep Ganguly, I, along with Councilmembers Valerie Ervin, Mike Knapp and George Leventhal, sent a letter to County Executive Ike Leggett urging him to appoint a new director with a comprehensive vision for the County's future and who would provide realistic strategies to enable the County to navigate current economic challenges. We said in the letter that the County must reclaim its competitive advantage.

We went on to say, "Memoranda of understanding with China are intriguing; however at this time, we are focused closer to home and believe the County should be directing resources to bioscience, technology, green jobs and business innovation. We also need to support and promote minority and local small business."

Employment in the County has stalled and is now declining. The County's unemployment rate has

increased to 4.6 percent, the highest level since 1990. Home sales, which were down 20.5 percent in 2006 and 23.4 percent in 2007, fell another 17.8 percent in 2008. Home sales prices and residential assessments also have dropped. The letter said that these indicators suggest continued weakness in County tax revenue, and that the trend is evidence of the need for strong leadership.

The letter went on to say: "...We are looking to you to appoint an economic development leader who will undertake aggressive strategies for enlarging the County's economic tax base by attracting new, forward thinking companies and enhancing the competitiveness of businesses located in the County."

I believe if we are to continue to satisfy our community's high expectations for quality of life, we should take this opportunity to focus on economic development. With more jobs and a stronger support system for them, we can spread the tax burden across a larger base, enhance our work-life balance, promote entrepreneurship, encourage diversity and ultimately make the County a more affordable place to live.

Green Tip of the Month

Ready to give back to Mother Earth? The County's Volunteer Center can help you create an Earth Day project, access resources, or join an existing project. You can participate in one of many projects throughout the county for Potomac River Day on April 4 or hook up with Montgomery County Parks throughout the month to remove invasive plants. The Anacostia River Watershed Society will sponsor a clean-up on April 18, and the Montgomery County Recycling Volunteer Program will hold its Earth Day Celebration on April 25. There's something for everyone.



We need a leader with a comprehensive vision.

Fast Fact

The Montgomery County Department of Economic Development has a new Microenterprise Loan Program, a financial and technical assistance program to assist existing microenterprises located throughout the county. The program works with entrepreneurs that traditional lending institutions consider too small or risky with the expectation that the program will increase the number of residents able to start and maintain businesses in the county. To learn more, call the Department of Economic Development at **240-777-2035**.

Entering a Tough Budget Season

As you may have heard by now, this promises to be the toughest budget in County history. Unemployment in the County has nearly doubled, property assessments are down, and new construction is basically at a standstill. As a result, County tax revenue is currently predicted to be \$2.96 billion (compared with \$3.02 billion last year). Coupled with this are significant decreases in State revenue. As of this moment, we anticipate receiving at least \$50 million less from the State than last year. The federal stimulus aid is helping a tad but not enough.

What this means is that the County Executive's March 15 budget is under-funded to the tune of at least \$50 million and probably more. Solving this problem will not be pretty, and the devil will be in the details. I believe the Council is united in its determination not to look at property tax increases as a solution, which means we will have to cut programs and services. So tighten your seatbelts and stay tuned.

Better yet, share your thoughts with me. I encourage you to testify at one of the Operating Budget public hearings on **April 13, 14, 15 or 16**. Call **240-777-7931** to register. Or e-mail me anytime. We'll work through the issues over the next several weeks and pass our final budget at the end of May.

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www.montgomerycountymd.gov/esubscription/

Property Tax Forum

Last month I, along with our experts in finance, conducted a personal property tax forum for a packed house at Leisure World. Residents learned about property tax credits that may be available to them based on income, age, disability or other factors. Treasury employees brought informational brochures and application forms with detailed instructions. Best of all, they walked residents through the sometimes complicated processes. If your community association could benefit from one of these forums, let me know. We'll be happy to help.



Many tax credits are available to property owners.

Apply Now to Planning Board

We're now taking applications for the Planning Board. This is an important position as the Planning Board serves as the Council's principal adviser on land use planning and community planning. This means the board is responsible for preparation and amendment of the County General Plan; preparation and amendment of Master Plans and functional plans; implementation of the subdivision process and a whole lot more.

On average, a Planning Board member can expect to spend at least two full days a week in scheduled and informational meetings. We need some good talent for this position, so remember to get your application in by **April 22**.