

Council considering switch to full-time status

■ Council weighs change to the county charter that could mean higher pay

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County Council members discussed Tuesday whether they should redefine their jobs as full time by revising the county's charter.

Voters must approve any change to the charter, and that raises the stakes in this year's election, where the seven incumbents standing for re-election face opponents.

Although the amendment, recommended by the county's Charter Review Commission, would not prohibit council members from being compensated for other work, it brings to the forefront the issue of whether a candidate's outside employment interferes with or detracts from his or her council work.

Defining council posts as full time also raises pressure to increase salaries (now \$79,721 a year, with a \$7,973 supplement for the president), which council President George L. Leventhal said are at the "low end" of what is usually paid for professional work in the county.

"Should the council place this on the ballot, the voters will give us guidance. ... I would find that guidance useful," said Leventhal (D-At large) of Takoma Park.

"I have not found it functional to have outside employment," he said, explaining that he works at least 40 hours weekly and frequently on Wednesdays, Fridays and weekends when no council business is scheduled.

Michael L. Subin (D-At large) of Gaithersburg agreed that council members work at least 40 hours a week, but said he sees no reason to make council jobs full time.

Subin, who has a busy law practice and has been criticized for missing some discussions and votes, said that outside employment enables council members to see some issues they might otherwise miss. He suggested it goes against the tradition of having a citizen council.

Nancy M. Floreen concurred.

"I'm privileged enough to be able to treat this as a full-time job, but I do

not think it should be a requirement," said Floreen (D-At large) of Garrett Park.

Leventhal, who often has commented that council salaries are low, noted that the county is larger than five states and the District of Columbia, whose 13 council members each are paid more than \$92,000 a year.

The council is scheduled to decide July 25 whether to put the proposal on the Nov. 7 ballot.

In other business

•**Clean energy credits:** The council unanimously approved a measure that would provide a rebate to residents and businesses for buying energy from sources cleaner than fossil fuels. Under the Clean Energy Rewards program, the county would credit to energy bills or pay back about one-half cent of the roughly 2.5 cents more per kilowatt-hour that customers pay for "clean energy."

About 6,000 residents could be eligible for rebates of up to \$60 annually, according to council projections.

The council also agreed to increase the county government's purchase of "clean energy" from the current 10 percent to 20 percent of its use by 2011.

•**Track tear-downs:** Councilman Howard A. Denis called again Tuesday for the council's Office of Legislative Oversight to examine the laws and regulations and audit the practices that govern neighborhood redevelopment.

Concerns about the effect on communities and the environment from scores of older, smaller houses being torn down to build much larger ones led Denis (R-Dist. 1) of Chevy Chase to sponsor a bill passed last year to lower the height of replacement homes.

ICC hearing Thursday

The Planning Board will hold a public hearing on the Intercounty Connector at 1:30 p.m. Thursday at its offices at 8787 Georgia Ave. in Silver Spring. The hearing is part of a mandatory referral process by state and federal agencies that have the controversial highway, planned for more than five decades to link Interstates 270 and 95 from Gaithersburg to Laurel.