

Ex-chairman tapped to lead Planning Board

By Jon Ward
THE WASHINGTON TIMES

A unanimous Montgomery County Council yesterday named a Planning Board chairman from the 1970s to run the agency again, this time in the aftermath of a building scandal in Clarksburg.

The nine-member council appointed Royce Hanson, 74, who led the Planning Board from 1972 to 1981. He did not attend the council meeting yesterday.

"This is the most important appointment that the council can make," said council member Tom Perez, a Takoma Park Democrat who is running for attorney general.

Mr. Hanson directs the George Washington University's Center for Washington Area Studies and has worked for a research group focused on national urban policy. He also has taught at the University of Minnesota, the University of Texas at Dallas and the University of Maryland, Baltimore County.

"He's a good short-term choice. He's not long-term. They're making a safe choice with a view toward an election year," said David Brown, a private attorney who represented the residents in Clarksburg before the Planning Board. Mr. Brown



Royce Hanson

CONTINUED

The Washington Times

Metropolitan

Metropolitan Section

7/26/2006

BOARD

attended yesterday's council meeting.

Last year, Clarksburg residents uncovered hundreds of building violations in a 1,300-home development and accused planning officials of exercising lax supervision over developers.

A county planner was discovered to have falsified a site plan to cover up the violations, and many other violations have been found since in developments across the county.

"This is a Planning Board that I believe has lost the confidence of the Montgomery County public," said council member Steven Silverman, an at-large Democrat who is running for county executive.

Mr. Silverman was instrumental four years ago in appointing the departing chairman — former council member De-

rick P. Berlage — but withdrew his support for Mr. Berlage in the wake of the Clarksburg scandal.

Mr. Berlage decided not to seek a second term after the majority of the council withdrew its support. He said Mr. Hanson's "knowledge of the issues and commitment to the agency's success are obvious to everyone."

Mr. Silverman said the agency needs a "wartime chairman" to make sweeping changes in the Planning Board, which oversees the Department of Park and Planning.

Under Mr. Berlage, "developers ran the show" at the department, Mr. Brown said, adding that Mr. Hanson "will be a strong leader."

"He's going to stick with what he thinks is right," the attorney said.

Each council member spoke for several minutes about the appointment, expressing respect for Mr. Hanson's experience and noting the board's need for new

leadership and wide-ranging reforms.

Phil Andrews, Rockville Democrat, took the opportunity to criticize the council's majority — led by Mr. Silverman and outgoing County Executive Douglas M. Duncan, a Democrat — for being beholden to developer interests.

"If voters are sick of traffic, they should thank this council majority," Mr. Andrews said, referring to Mr. Silverman's campaign signs, which ask voters if they are sick of traffic.

Mr. Andrews takes no campaign money from developers in the county, in comparison to Mr. Duncan and his "End Gridlock" slate of candidates in 2002, who receive significant contributions from developer interests.

The End Gridlock slate included Mr. Silverman; council President George Leventhal, at-large Democrat; Nancy Floreen, at-large Democrat; Michael Knapp, Clarksburg Democrat; and Michael L. Subin, at-large Democrat.