

Hanson is pick to lead Planning Board

■ Unanimous County Council vote returns a well-known expert familiar with the county's history to the land-use panel

BY MARGIE HYSLOP
STAFF WRITER

Nationally renowned planning expert Royce Hanson was named Tuesday to lead the Montgomery County Planning Board, where he served as chairman from 1972 to 1981.

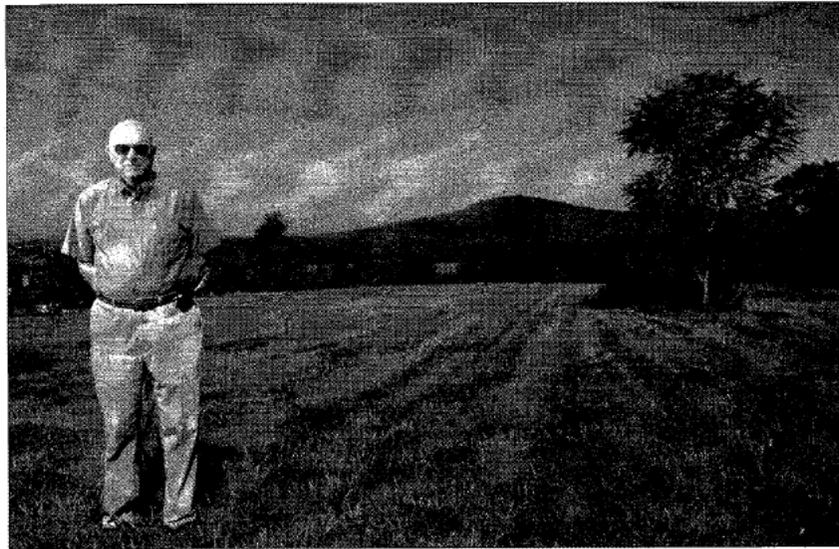
In a unanimous vote, County Council members said Hanson was best qualified to set right the planning agency and restore public confidence after residents uncovered hundreds of building height and setback violations last year in Clarksburg.

Those findings led to the discovery of systemic failures at the county's planning agency. It was those troubles that brought Hanson back into the council's view; the council asked him to examine the problems at the troubled agency, figure out what happened and why, and suggest solutions.

When Council President George L. Leventhal nominated Hanson on Tuesday, he said it was not an easy choice because the pool of candidates was strong and well-qualified.

"Royce Hanson is the class of the field," said Leventhal (D-At large) of Takoma Park, noting Hanson's national and local experience and "stance."

Hanson, who lives in Montgomery Village, led a field that included current Planning Board member John Robinson, Wendell Holloway of the Board of Appeals, planners, civic activists and land-use lawyers, including David C. Gardner, the only applicant other than Hanson to receive a vote Tuesday. Councilman Michael L. Subin nominated and



CHARLIE SKIDMORER/THE GAZETTE

The county's new Planning Board chairman, Royce Hanson, said he is proud of having helped create the open space of the Agricultural Preserve (pictured here with Sugarloaf Mountain in the background) when he was chairman a quarter-century ago.

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HANSON

voted for Gardner, touting his experience as both a civic activist and land-use lawyer. Gardner would be able to look at the agency without "pre-conceived notions" and make big changes if needed, said Subin (D-At large) of Gaithersburg. After Gardner drew no other votes, Subin voted for Hanson, making his appointment unanimous.

Although he is regarded as the architect of the county's Agricultural Reserve, Hanson calls himself an "urbanist" and notes that he was responsible for much of the planning of Germantown, where he says it's time for more jobs to join the residences and retail that have replaced much crop and pasture land over the past 15 years.

As for the dozens of reforms that the Planning Board has undertaken recently, "we're probably going to have to road test... and see if some adjustments are necessary," Hanson said.

Hanson has shown his independence and willingness to challenge the agency he once led as well as the council, said Amy Presley, co-founder of the Clarksburg Town Center Advisory Committee, whose research and doggedness uncovered the problems that led to the planning scandal.

In his report to the council, Hanson criticized the agency for a sustained lack of leader-

ROYCE HANSON

- **74, Montgomery Village**
- **Family:** Wife, Mary; three children; grandchildren
- **Education:** Law degree, doctorate and master's in government and public administration from the American University; bachelor's in economics from University of Central Oklahoma
- **Recent jobs:** Research professor and director, Center for Washington Area Studies, George Washington University; professor and interim director, Center for Urban Environmental Research and Education, University of Maryland, Baltimore County (1998-2002); dean, School of Social Sciences, University of Texas at Dallas (1987-1998)

ship and of internal quality controls, and he said it suffered for not being held more accountable. He also urged the council to update the county's zoning laws, which he called a mess.

"We think he's a strong leader with integrity and we don't believe he's going to be controlled by any interest group," Presley said.

Hanson's appointment will be approved by County Executive Douglas M. Duncan (D) as soon as he receives the paperwork.

"He's right person given the challenges they have faced internally and externally," said Councilwoman Marilyn J. Praisner (D-Dist. 4) of Calverton.

Until the council tapped him to advise them on how to reform the planning agency last year, Hanson was more history than a presence to many of the agency's employees.

Hanson, who will be paid \$150,000 a year during his four-year term, is expected to begin work in about two weeks. He will be working at the Department of Park and Planning's Silver Spring headquarters, next to an urban park that was named for him.

"I think Royce has always been fair," said land-use lawyer Stephen Z. Kaufman, who represented Clarksburg Town Center developer Newland Communities.

"What we are looking for is some leadership," Kaufman said, adding that Hanson provided leadership before and that he hopes he will now.

Since the agency acknowledged problems at Clarksburg last summer, many of its top managers have left or announced that they will soon, including Planning Director Charles Luehr, Executive Director Trudy Morgan-Johnson and Chairman Derick P. Berlage, who withdrew his bid for reappointment in May and pledged Tuesday to work with Hanson to smooth the transition.

The council has made Hanson's job tougher by its actions to add jobs faster than housing and shift many costs from developers to taxpayers — against the advice of the Planning Board, said Councilman Philip M. Andrews (D-Dist. 3) of Gaithersburg.

Councilman Michael J. Knapp said he disagreed with Andrews on the causes for the county's growth problems, but is confident that Hanson "will force the county to have the conversations that are difficult."

No one should think that problems at the agency are fixed because the council has named a new chairman, said Councilman Thomas E. Perez (D-Dist. 5) of Takoma Park.

Perez urged Hanson to "reach out" to some farmers who opposed his appointment because of concerns that he would not support some provisions that they have counted on that increase their value of their land.

Perez also urged his colleagues to change the date when they appoint the Planning Board chairman so that it does not fall before an election.

"It's difficult to begin with, but with the political overlay of an election year makes it harder to do what is in the public interest," he said.

Praisner said she also wants Hanson to go "back to the future" by taking a look at ways the 1980 plan for the east side of the county overlooked the needs of older neighborhoods.