

Chance to make nice leads to spat over homes on park property

The Montgomery County Council and the county Planning Board sat down for an informal lunch meeting Tuesday billed as a chance to improve relations, but instead led to a disagreement on the use of homes on park property.

County Council members want the homes used as part of an effort to make more homes available for affordable housing.

County park and planning officials say that they don't want to get into the housing industry.

When homes are on land acquired for parks, the homes are often offered to nonprofit groups to make into group homes or rented to county employees as part of a workforce affordability program.

But Councilman George Leventhal (D-At Large) of Takoma Park said the County Council had always intended for the homes to be used for a broader affordable housing effort.

Council members said they were displeased to hear of a plan to tear

down several homes to improve a park's vista.

Planning Board Chairman Royce Hanson said many homes would require substantial plumbing and electrical work to make them habitable.

County parks director Mary Bradford said the county "really ought to take a hard look at how we acquire property if we're not going to use it for parks."

Hanson said it creates substantial problems for the parks and that most homes on the acquired land should not be

seen as permanent features.

"I understand but we don't see eye to eye on it," Leventhal said.

Bradford said each home had to be considered on its own.

But Councilwoman Marilyn J. Praisner (D-Dist. 4) of Calverton said that is the wrong approach.

"I want a policy approach that we can apply," she said. "I fear if we do it on a case by case basis, we won't do it on a consistent basis."

— C. BENJAMIN FORD