

Wednesday, April 21, 2010

## **CASA protests cuts to tenant organizing**

### **But county denies the cuts were proposed**

County News | Erin Cunningham

CASA de Maryland and other community groups rallied Tuesday in protest of cuts to the Montgomery County budget that county spokesman Patrick K. Lacefield says have not been proposed.

CASA's Advocacy Director Kim Propeack said Montgomery County Executive Isiah Leggett's fiscal 2011 budget proposal eliminates funding for tenant organizing and representation in the Long Branch community.

Lacefield called the assertion "absolutely false."

"And they know it is false," he added.

More than 100 people attended the rally Tuesday in front of the county office building on Maryland Avenue in Rockville.

Propeack said the Tenant Advocacy Project is supported through \$350,000 in county funds that were included in Leggett's (D) fiscal 2010 budget.

There is no funding for the project in Leggett's proposal for fiscal 2011.

However, Lacefield said the Tenant Advocacy Project is funded through March 2011.

He said the county has suggested that the tenant advocacy efforts could continue through June 30 — the end of fiscal 2011 — if the money was spread out.

Propeack said that if that happened, services would suffer. It would cost the county \$102,000 to continue the Tenant Advocacy Project from March 2011 to June 30, 2011.

Propeack said CASA is asking that all of the funds be restored to continue services through at least fiscal 2011.

She said it was essential that tenants have the resources of the Tenant Advocacy Project in most neighborhoods — but especially in Long Branch, which she said is the poorest county community with the highest minority density.

The Tenant Advocacy Project is focused largely on improved public safety and eradicating unsafe apartment conditions, according to a CASA news release. The Tenant Advocacy Project is part of the Public Justice Center — a nonprofit legal advocacy organization founded in Maryland in 1985.

Council honors environmentalists

The Montgomery County Council honored 40 of the county's top environmentalists at the start of its Tuesday meeting.

The recognition was in honor of the 40th anniversary of Earth Day.

"We've benefited from tremendous talent in Montgomery County," Council President Nancy M. Floreen (D-At large) of Garrett Park said.

Floreen asked residents and organizations countywide for nominations. Awardees were selected based on significant impacts they have made on climate policies, energy efficiency, renewable energy or other environmental goals, according to a news release.

Award recipients included Ginny Barnes, who has led grass-roots water quality and stormwater management efforts for 20 years; Rachel Carson, who is considered by some

to be the "mother of the modern environmental movement;" and David Hauck, the current chairman of the Montgomery County Sierra Club.

Berliner proposes restructuring of county government

Montgomery County Councilman Roger Berliner (D-Dist. 1) of Potomac plans to introduce a resolution next week establishing a commission that would restructure county government.

A restructuring effort would be aimed at making government more efficient and saving money.

The proposed 14-member panel would be jointly appointed by County Executive Isiah Leggett (D) and the council. Leggett endorses the panel, according to a news release.

The commission would submit its recommendations in January 2011, the release states.

If approved, the commission members would be appointed by June 30.

"This proposal and resolution is not intended to suggest that we, as a government, should not take immediate action — in this budget — wherever we can to restructure our services to minimize duplication and increase efficiencies," Berliner wrote in a letter Monday to council members. "We can and we should move forward on discrete reforms that are ripe and compelling."

Navarro seeks clarification

on 'mother-in-law' apartments

Residents pursuing a special exception to build an accessory apartment onto their home — commonly called a "mother-in-law" apartment — now will see a warning on their applications that their Homeowners Association might prohibit the structures.

Montgomery County Councilwoman Nancy Navarro (D-Dist. 4) of Silver Spring requested that the language be added to address a situation that has been costly for HOAs to address, according to a news release.

In a March 26 letter to the county's Board of Appeals, Navarro wrote, "I believe that a simple disclaimer on the special exception application for accessory apartments, stating that a resident's HOA covenant may prohibit accessory apartments even if a special exception is granted, would prevent many of the difficulties and expense HOAs and residents have encountered due to the confusion surrounding this issue."

The Board of Appeals approved the following language for the disclaimer: "Please note: Approval of a special exception is separate from Homeowner Association (HOA) and Condominium agreements and covenants, which may prohibit accessory apartments. Homeowners should consult their Condominium or HOA documents. The Board of Appeals cannot enforce HOA or Condominium covenants, which are private contractual agreements."