

## **MCCF support of the SCGC**

The Montgomery County Civic Federation (MCCF or Civic Federation) is a large umbrella group and does not usually 'join' other organizations. The Stop Costco Gas Coalition (SCGC) is an Associate Group member of Civic Federation and asked for its support of our efforts. The December 2012 MCCF newsletter contained a brief article we prepared to describe SCGC positions on the Costco mega gas station issue. It is available on the MCCF website (at <http://montgomerycivic.org/files/201212.pdf>); the article (on page 3) is appended at the end of this document.

At the December 3, 2012 meeting of Civic Federation delegates several members of the SCGC Coordinating Committee made a brief presentation of our position (based on the newsletter article) and answered questions from the delegates. The delegates then voted in strong support of our positions. Our article had been submitted before word was received of the controversial timing of the upcoming Special Exception Hearings; thus the motion we proposed made no mention of the hearings. However, Civic Federation delegates, upon learning of the hearing dates, expanded our draft motion, adding explicit support for our position that the hearing dates be changed. The full text of the Civic Federation resolution is available on their website (at [http://www.montgomerycivic.org/files/Costco\\_gas\\_station\\_Spec\\_Excep\\_Resolution\\_MCCF\\_12-3-12.pdf](http://www.montgomerycivic.org/files/Costco_gas_station_Spec_Excep_Resolution_MCCF_12-3-12.pdf)) and is reproduced here:

"approved by Delegates at 12/3/12 meeting

### **MCCF Resolution on Wheaton Costco Gas Station Special Exception Application**

The Montgomery County Civic Federation supports the objectives of the Stop Costco Gas Coalition and urges Costco to withdraw Special Exception application S-2863. The Civic Federation urges the County Executive, the County Council, Westfield Corporation and Costco to work together to find a site for the proposed gas station that is at least 1000 feet from homes, schools and outdoor public recreation facilities.

Further, the Montgomery County Civic Federation supports the recently filed request to postpone the hearing dates for Special Exception application S-2863. We agree with the Stop Costco Gas Coalition that the currently scheduled dates, which begin in mid-March 2013, provide too little time for adequate review of the application by Planning Department staff, our member groups and individuals, and other interested parties."

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### **MCCF Newsletter Article:**

#### **Bad Place for a Mega Gas Station**

**Mark R. Adelman, SCGC**

The Stop Costco Gas Coalition (SCGC) was formed recently to strengthen and expand the long (soon to

enter its fourth year) battle to prevent Costco from building a “mega gas station” in Westfield's Wheaton Plaza, immediately adjacent to homes, a community swim club and a public school for medically fragile special needs children. Our website ([www.stopcostcogas.org](http://www.stopcostcogas.org)) has background material, including links to public domain information and a synopsis that, while brief, has much more information than we can include in this newsletter article.

The battle has been going on since early 2010 when citizens of the Kensington Heights community (KHCA) learned of an agreement, involving the County Executive, Westfield Corporation, and Costco, to facilitate the construction, in the southwest quadrant of Wheaton Plaza, of a Costco Warehouse Store and a VERY large Costco gas station (mega gas station). From the outset, this has been a case of corporate decisions, supported by government entities, to force an unjustifiable project down the throats of a neighborhood. And of the neighborhood fighting back, against apparently overwhelming odds. The citizens never opposed the Costco store, nor did they object to the gas station. The objection was, and remains, that the mega station is planned to be built in a location that is inappropriately close to homes, a swim club, and a public school; the proposed citing will expose citizens to unacceptable risks to health from air-borne pollutants, increased traffic, and various other factors that diminish quality of life.

An initial attempt (supported by the County Executive) to have the County Council pass a site specific ZTA (10-04), to allow the construction, was blocked by vehement citizen protest. Costco then began the normal process (which it had sought to avoid) of filing for a Special Exception for the gas station. Citizen activists then pressured the County to pass a countywide zoning text amendment - ZTA 12-07 - that requires a buffer zone separating any such facility from sensitive land uses. The protective buffer zone was originally proposed to be 1000 feet, but intense lobbying lead to a compromise of 300 feet.

Even though the compromise 300 foot buffer allowed Costco to meet the new requirement by moving the proposed site very slightly and, in fact, placing it even closer to the school and homes, it has caused Costco too have to file a new application for a Special Exception. After a long delay, that application has been filed (S-2863) and hearings are expected to take place in spring, 2013. Citizen resources are again required to fight yet another stage of the battle.

The SCGC was formed by a group that recognized this as not simply a neighborhood issue, but one of widespread potential impact. “Mega gas stations” are roughly 10 times the size of a standard gas station. They bring large numbers of cars to one location and many sit idling in long queues, making the problems associated with exhaust pollutants much worse than with smaller stations. SCGC is reaching out across the County and State. We are expanding the battle. We

need the continued support of those who argued in favor of ZTA 12-07 (like MCCF, via the testimony of Jim Humphrey). In our presentation to MCCF we will review the details of the citing, citizen concerns, and the reasons why the Stop Costco Gas Coalition has been formed.

We have two objectives:

1. To prevent the immediate threat of Costco placing a mega gas station at Wheaton Plaza in close proximity to homes and other sensitive land uses; and
2. To advocate for statewide legislation that will establish a safe buffer around any potential mega gas station site so as to "protect everyone's backyard".

We ask that you pass the following motion at the meeting on December 3:

*The Montgomery County Civic Federation supports the objectives of the Stop Costco Gas Coalition and urges Costco to withdraw Special Exception application S-2863. The Civic Federation urges the County Executive, the County Council, Westfield Corporation and Costco to work together to find a site for the proposed gas station that is at least 1000 feet from homes, schools and outdoor public recreation facilities.*