



# Planning Communicator

July 6, 1938 *70th Anniversary Special Issue* July 6, 2008

## Commissioner Spotlight

The special anniversary issue spotlights Suzanne F. Harsel, Braddock District Commission, who has served on the Planning Commission for 26 years, the longest continuous tenure in Commission history. She has been elected Commission Secretary since 1989 (also a Commission record) and previously served as Vice Chair from 1984-1986.



Harsel first became interested in local land use while growing up in Valparaiso, Indiana where her parents were real estate agents. She moved to Fairfax County in 1976 and served as president of the Glen Cove Homeowners Association in 1979 and as treasurer from 1980-1982. During her tenure on this association, she represented the community at local land use citizen meetings. Harsel also served on the Annandale Plan Review Task Force in 1979, 1981 and 1982, Annandale Plan Review Task Force

in 1979, 1981 and 1982 and made presentations before the Planning Commission and the Board of Supervisors.

Following Paul Keast's resignation from the Planning Commission in early 1982, then Supervisor Audrey Moore asked Harsel to serve as the Annandale District Commissioner (renamed Braddock District in 1992). Harsel asked why Moore chose her and

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## Proclamation Issued for 70th Anniversary

On Monday, June 30th, the Fairfax County Board of Supervisors recognized the 70th anniversary of the Planning Commission by proclaiming the week of July 6-13 as *Fairfax County Planning Commission Week*. On behalf of the Planning Commission, Chairman Peter Murphy accepted a Resolution of Appreciation from the Board. Current and former Commission members and staff attended the presentation. Following remarks by Board Chairman Gerry Connolly and Providence Supervisor Linda Q. Smyth the following Proclamation was unanimously approved by the Board of Supervisors:

**WHEREAS**, on July 6, 1938, the Board of Supervisors established the Fairfax County Planning Commission to oversee the land-use process in the county and in the ensuing 70 years 121 citizens have served terms totaling more than 780 years of dedicated service to the county; and

**WHEREAS**, during the 70 years, the Planning Commission has held thousands of public hearings and hundreds of committee meetings; and

**WHEREAS**, after long and thorough consideration, the commission and its staff have forwarded thousands of recommendations to the Board of Supervisors on land-use applications, amendments to the Comprehensive Plan, Zoning Ordinance, Zone Map, Public Facilities Manual and Subdivision Ordinance, as well as the Capital Improvement Program; and

**WHEREAS**, the Fairfax County Planning Commission promotes orderly, balanced and equitable county growth; **NOW THEREFORE**

**BE IT RESOLVED**, that the Fairfax County Board of Supervisors, on behalf of all residents of Fairfax County, does hereby proclaim the week of July 6-13, 2008, as **Planning Commission Week** in Fairfax County and urges all residents to join in recognition of the 70th anniversary of this dedicated group of Fairfax County citizens.



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# Commissioner Harsel Spotlight

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she responded, "I've watched you at these community meetings and you're not afraid of the developers and you don't back down when you ask a question and that's what I want on the Commission." Harsel was appointed on April 5, 1982 to complete the remainder of Keast's term, and was reappointed to her first four-year term in January 1984.

Harsel describes the Braddock District as primarily residential and predicts that it will likely remain so as residents tend to stay for a long time. This also affects how land-use applications are handled. Harsel explains that in the Braddock District, "If someone wants to develop something, we have a meeting so that the Supervisor, the Commissioner, and the neighborhood affected will hear about it for the first time. If there is anything that Supervisor Bulova feels is going to be the least bit controversial, she tells the applicant, "I want to test the waters... Let's get the people together and hear what they have to say and then if it's okay and they're happy, then go ahead and file." She notes that this is probably why Braddock District has few controversial cases. However, Harsel recalls "the ugliest case in the Braddock District" concerned an undeveloped 15-acre site zoned C-6. An amendment was made to the Comprehensive Plan to allow eight to 10 townhouses on the site since it was surrounded by townhomes. Hazel Peterson had bought the property and sold it to the Target Corporation, which planned to build a store on the property. Supervisors Bulova held a citizens' meeting to explain the proposal but many citizens were strongly opposed. Harsel said that the Target representatives were good about trying to accommodate community requests and concerns.

Harsel considers the 1982 Occoquan downzoning to help protect water quality in the County as memorable. She considers a case in the Dranesville District concerning Rolling Holly Drive, north of Route 7, as also memorable. Citizens were upset that traffic from Loudoun County was cutting through the subdivisions along Rolling Knoll Drive to reach Tysons Corner to avoid congestion on Route 7. Since the County



*(l to r) Daughters Kari Gray, Karla Fink, with daughters Lauryn and Kayla, Harsel and Honorable John T. Frey at 2008 Courthouse swearing-in ceremony*

had been unsuccessful in obtaining State funds for transportation improvements in the area, the Planning Commission decided to close off the cut-through road to help address this issue.

Harsel recalls one case in the Mason District concerning the mosque located off Route 7. The County had approved parking for the mosque based on the maximum number of seats allowed in the building. A representative of the mosque returned to the Commission with an application to expand the number of parking spaces because of a significant parking overflow problem. However, the applicant was not asking for more seats because the mosque did not use seats and the County had not realized this at the time of the initial application.

Harsel considers one of her first cases as her biggest accomplishment on the Commission although the site is no longer in her district. A developer had proposed to rezone property, which was once part of the Ratcliff, then Sager family farm known as Aspen Grove located along Roberts Road in Fairfax County at the time, to replace a house, built circa 1803, with 26 single-family homes and remove gorgeous, mature English boxwoods and shagbark hickory trees. Both Harsel and then Supervisor Moore were uncomfortable with the proposal. So, she denied the rezoning for 26 single-family homes and then made a motion to rezone the property to PDH-3, which allowed townhouses and saved the historic house, the shagbark hickory trees and the English boxwoods. "It was Keith Martin's [the

attorney for the applicant] first case before the Commission and he's never forgiven me," Harsel noted. Later, the residents of Aspen Grove petitioned to leave Fairfax County and become part of Fairfax City. "We overlook some local things because we have Mount Vernon and Sully Plantation, but local history and places belonging to Fairfax County...we've lost a lot of historic places because of development," Harsel explained.

Harsel commented that she enjoys serving on the Redevelopment and Housing Committee, established in 1989 to serve as a liaison between the Commission and the Redevelopment and Housing Authority. Harsel currently chairs the Schools Committee, which serves as a liaison between the Commission and the Fairfax County School Board. She says what she is "most proud of is getting other official County commissions like TAC [Transportation Advisory Commission], the Housing Authority and the School Board to interact with the Planning Commission to have a meeting of the minds and an education as to what these bodies do... Land use is a functional thing for all of them." Harsel also believes the relationship between the Commission and other County bodies should continue as "a two-way street."

Harsel met her husband Leonard in 1959 in Frankfurt, Germany. They have been married for 46 years and have three children and eight grandchildren. Eldest Kari resides with her husband James Gray, son Sean (age 12) and daughter Fiona (age 7), in San Francisco, California. Son Joe, his wife Carol, and their four boys: Ben (age 17), Luke (age 14), Henry (age 11) and Sam (age 9), live in Baltimore, Maryland. Youngest daughter Karla lives with husband Tim and their two daughters, Kayla (age 8) and Lauryn (age 2 1/2), in Spring Hill, Florida. Harsel graduated from Indiana University in 1957 with a Bachelor of Science degree in Elementary Education. Harsel said she loved teaching where she primarily taught first and third grades. She had taught at Pittman Square School in Gary, Indiana from 1957-1959, and in Frankfurt, Germany at American Dependents School from 1959-1961. Harsel also taught in Baltimore, Maryland public schools in 1962 and in Austin, Texas as a substitute teacher from 1974-1976. When Harsel moved to Fairfax

*(Continued on page 3)*

# Commissioner Harsel Spotlight



Back row (l to r): Tim Fink; Leonard & Harsel; & Joe, Carol & Ben Harsel. Front row (l to r): Kayla, Karla & Lauryn Fink; James, Sean, Kari & Fiona Gray; & Sam, Luke & Henry Harsel

(Continued from page 2)

County, she decided to take a break from teaching and from 1980-1983 worked part-time as a trade practice specialist at the Better Business Bureau in Washington, DC and later managed its Falls Church office.

Harsel decided to return to teaching in 1987 and worked for a year as a part-time instructional assistant at the Bailey's Elementary School library. She later worked as a full-time instructional assistant in the Learning Disabilities program at Little Run Elementary School. She retired from the Fairfax County Public Schools system in 2000. Harsel reflected on her teaching career and said, "I loved every bit of it." One highlight was how she connected with a fifth-grade Vietnamese boy and helped him learn how to read. In 2004, attending the Stafford University gourmet cooking school

in Tysons Corner, Harsel was approached by that same young man, who was now about to graduate from the school. He excitedly told all his fellow chefs that she had taught him to read. Harsel said, "I think education is my field, not land use."

Currently, Harsel volunteers with the Volunteer Learning Program, a tutorial program to help students pass General Educational Development (GED) tests. Harsel has also worked with the residents of the Juvenile Detention Center at the on-grounds school. She noted, "I'm still in the teaching field. I love it. I love working with these kids."

Harsel and her husband are both avid travelers. They had wonderful experiences riding camels in Egypt, celebrating Easter in the Holy Land, spending Thanksgiving in Prague and Vienna and visiting Paris while teaching at the American Dependent School in Germany. After she and Leonard had been married for three years, they went back to Germany where they were able to continue to travel. They also have visited Scotland several times.

Traveling to Australia twice, Harsel comments that, "Australia was a different culture in more ways than one....As my brother-in-law says, 'If England doesn't approve it, Heaven forbid that we should ever do it here in Australia.'" She describes Sydney as "a young, fresh city" and Melbourne as "an English city, very similar to London." Harsel noted that land use was involved in her last trip to Australia when she traveled to the upper isle of New Zealand and spent time looking at a new

development in a resort seaside town of about 1,000 people. When this development had been proposed, the developers threw a party each week for a month to bring together the whole town and discuss the project. Huge tanks to hold water lined the outside of the development and people purchased lots on a golf course that they could choose to build or not build on, so many people started off using a trailer.

When the Harsels visit their daughter Kari and her family in San Francisco, she always asks about the different land use. She describes San Francisco's public transportation system as "the most efficient thing I've ever seen in my life." Harsel explains that an electric trolley, which runs on electricity from overhead cables, can convert to a railcar by lowering its wire contactors flat on its roof and moving up its wheels.

The Harsels have a vacation home in Venice, Florida which they try to visit every year and Harsel attends the Planning Commission meetings in the area while she is there.

*Harsel asked why Moore chose her and she said: "I've watched you at these community meetings and you're not afraid of the developers ...and that's what I want on the Commission."*

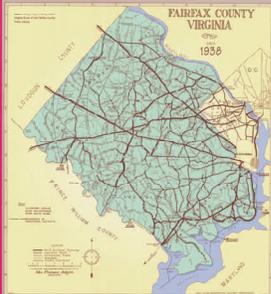
## Planning Commission 70<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Display

To celebrate *Fairfax County Planning Commission Week*, proclaimed by as well as a map depicting the current supervisor districts. Then and

the Board of Supervisors to honor the 70<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the establishment of the Planning Commission, there will be a display in the lobby of the Government Center during the week of July 6-13th.

The Planning Commission was first created on July 6, 1938. The display features a 1938 map of the County

### Fairfax County Planning Commission

 <p style="text-align: center; font-weight: bold; color: yellow;">July 6, 1938</p>	<p style="font-size: small;">Mission: To provide the Board of Supervisors and/or the Board of Zoning Appeals with recommendations on land-use policies and plans that will result in orderly, balanced and equitable County growth.</p> <table border="1" style="width: 100%; font-size: x-small;"> <thead> <tr> <th>FAIRFAX COUNTY</th> <th>THEN</th> <th>NOW</th> </tr> </thead> <tbody> <tr> <td>Land area</td> <td>416 square miles<sup>1</sup></td> <td>395 square miles</td> </tr> <tr> <td>County population</td> <td>48,870 (in 1940)</td> <td>1,042,507 (in 2007)</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Percent urban<sup>2</sup></td> <td>8% (in 1940)</td> <td>88.6% (in 2000)</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Dwelling units</td> <td>9,860 (in 1940)</td> <td>265,240 (in 2007)</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Number of farms</td> <td>1,724 (in 1940)</td> <td>191 (in 2002)</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Farm acreage<sup>3</sup></td> <td>123,000 acres (in 1940)</td> <td>8,540 acres (in 2002)</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Real establishments</td> <td>287 (in 1940)</td> <td>2,947 (in 2002)</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Number of public schools &amp; students</td> <td>28 schools &amp; 5,885 students (1938)</td> <td>107 schools &amp; 164,845 students (2006)</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Number of public libraries</td> <td>0 (in 1938)<sup>4</sup></td> <td>25 (in 2006)</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Planning Commission members</td> <td>5 (in 1938)</td> <td>12 (in 2006)</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Number of PC meetings</td> <td>32 (in 1942)<sup>5</sup></td> <td>68 (50 regular &amp; 22 committee meetings in 2007)</td> </tr> </tbody> </table> <p style="font-size: x-small;"> <sup>1</sup> Fairfax County was created by the merger of Loudoun, Stafford, and Westmoreland counties in 1743.  <sup>2</sup> Urban population is defined as the population of the County's 10 largest cities and towns.  <sup>3</sup> Includes land used for agriculture, but excludes land used for residential, commercial, and industrial purposes.  <sup>4</sup> The first public library in Fairfax County was established in 1942.  <sup>5</sup> The first meeting of the Planning Commission was held on July 6, 1938.                 </p> <p style="text-align: center; font-weight: bold; color: yellow;">Serving Fairfax County and our Citizens for 70 years</p>	FAIRFAX COUNTY	THEN	NOW	Land area	416 square miles <sup>1</sup>	395 square miles	County population	48,870 (in 1940)	1,042,507 (in 2007)	Percent urban <sup>2</sup>	8% (in 1940)	88.6% (in 2000)	Dwelling units	9,860 (in 1940)	265,240 (in 2007)	Number of farms	1,724 (in 1940)	191 (in 2002)	Farm acreage <sup>3</sup>	123,000 acres (in 1940)	8,540 acres (in 2002)	Real establishments	287 (in 1940)	2,947 (in 2002)	Number of public schools & students	28 schools & 5,885 students (1938)	107 schools & 164,845 students (2006)	Number of public libraries	0 (in 1938) <sup>4</sup>	25 (in 2006)	Planning Commission members	5 (in 1938)	12 (in 2006)	Number of PC meetings	32 (in 1942) <sup>5</sup>	68 (50 regular & 22 committee meetings in 2007)	 <p style="text-align: center; font-weight: bold; color: yellow;">July 6, 2008</p>
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Now statistics are also included to illustrate how the County has changed in the last 70 years.

The display table will also feature two handouts: a *Reference Guide to the Planning Commission* and a *Planning Commission bookmark*.

# Planning Commission Memories

(Presented in alphabetical order by last name, with Commission memories first followed by those of staff)

## Planning Commissioners

**Rosemarie Annunziata:** My most memorable moments on the Planning Commission include: (1) Providence District, itself...the District I represented. Located at center County, it presented unique opportunities for interesting and, even innovative, development that addressed the County's economic, social, environmental and aesthetic needs. The complexities posed by large tracts of land, infill pieces, two metro stations, and contiguous districts with development patterns of their own, made for many challenging cases. (2) My colleagues on the Commission. Diverse in interests and vision, highly talented and energetic, they were, to a person, committed to bringing high level development to the County that addressed the reasonable interests of all parties involved and recognized the importance of open space and parkland, affordable housing, schools, and public transportation. They were friends then and remain so now. (3) The staff—both the Commission and the Planning staff. Unparalleled in their abilities and professionalism, the County staff provided excellent technical and managerial guidance to the Commission as well as to the Board of Supervisors. They remained graceful under pressure, accommodating in the face of multiple demands, comprehensive in their presentations, dogged in their research and analyses. They made a hard job look easy! (4) The site visits in the middle of the day and the meetings that lasted well past midnight. Need anything else be said? (5) The citizens who committed time and energy to the planning and rezoning process; the land owners and developers who brought new ideas to the fore, the architects and engineers who translated them, the attorneys who assured a high level of dialogue among the competing interests. (6) The Board of Supervisors who considered what we had to say, and ultimately decided the hard questions of the day!



**David Bobzien:** Many a night, County applications were deferred, and (staff) was sent home licking wounds and realizing that a little more work still needed to be done. Over the years, things improved, and the County came to realize that not only did it have to produce as much as any other applicant, in reality, it also had to do more and set an example. It was simply the right thing to do.



**John Byers:** Over 40 years ago I was involved in drafting the original Fairfax County Comprehensive Plan. The section for Mount Vernon, all of 33 pages and dated March 1967, was based on an earlier draft prepared by the Mount Vernon Council in November 1966, and I still have them. This effort was particularly important because it was the first time the people came together to decide how they wanted their County to grow. As I have often reminded speakers at public hearings, the Comprehensive Plan is the people's plan; it's their expression of the direction the people want to see their neighborhood change in developing our County. And those directions are written by the residents in each community; they are not imposed by the County staff or the Planning Commission or the Board of Supervisors. The Planning Commission is only the caretaker of the Plan. It's important that every resident understands this and understands the need to keep the Plan current with changing aspirations. What was appropriate ten, fifteen years ago may no longer be what the community now desires, but it's the people who must change the Plan. (And it's obvious that other commissioners, e.g., Murphy, Alcorn, Hall and Hart, agree

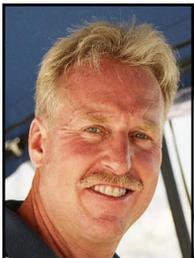


because they occasionally quote me!) Like most other commissions, boards, and task forces, the Planning Commission, during my 20 plus years on it, has habitually been comprised of remarkably intelligent, dedicated and conscientious members. I was particularly fortunate to have such people as my mentors: Rosemarie Annunziata who taught me the importance of writing down the details, Carl Sell who would not bring a case to the Commission until all the kinks had been worked out, Tybelle Fasteau who told me, "Sometimes trees are more important than bricks," Jim Hart who impressed me with his analytical reasoning and piercing questions, Janet Hall who taught us all the need for empathy and compassion, and Pete Murphy whose ubiquitous humor and great timing frequently served to defuse a tense situation. Outstanding people, every one of them! And hard working. I learned a lot from them all, right up to the day I retired. The job of Planning Commissioner is not a light one - going to and participating in public hearings, meeting with citizens' groups, conferences with developers and staff, visiting sites, and meeting with the Supervisor approaches 25-30 hours each week. Yet these folks do it willingly and scrupulously. The citizens of Fairfax County are unusually well-served by this Commission and its outstanding staff, and we owe them and their supporting families a great deal of credit. For some time there has been a vicious rumor going the rounds of gossip within the Planning Commission staff, an otherwise unusually capable and dedicated group ably led by Barbara Lippa, that John Byers inhales a god-awful concoction of coffee and who-knows-what-else, and that his test for the purity of this vile stuff is whether a spoon will stand erect in the cup unsupported. This rumor is patently false. Everybody knows that one eats coffee with a fork, not a spoon! This scuttlebutt is simply a bald attempt to denigrate my singular reputation for creating a valuable and exotic brew. The Commission staff is kind enough to make some insipid potion each night of public hearings to help enable those who can stomach the weak stuff to stay awake past midnight. Ms Lippa was sympathetic with my request for a more substantial grog and purchased a container of instant coffee. By experimenting, I found that if one were to put four or five heaping spoonfuls of instant coffee in a cup and then fill it with the freshly brewed dosage provided by our staff, the resulting draft approached a properly made cup of Army-type coffee, guaranteed to straighten your back, curl your hair, and fix your face in a permanent grimace. And that's before you swallow it! There is, however, one true episode concerning my coffee. At a public hearing on a particularly contentious Mount Vernon case, the applicant's attorney, who in modesty must remain nameless (actually it was Keith Martin), said that Commissioner Byers was tired of the quibbling going on between staff and the applicant and that he threatened to put the attorney and the staff coordinator (Peter Braham) in a locked room and force them to drink his atrocious brand of coffee until they came to an agreement! Whereupon they immediately agreed! And the attorney said all this on public television! There were 27 emails the next day

# Planning Commission Memories

requesting my recipe! Before I was appointed Planning Commissioner in 1986, I was a vice president of the Southeast Fairfax Development Corporation and responsible for trying to improve the northern third of Richmond Highway. The SFDC struggled along, made some much needed plantings, but had a hard time making any significant changes to the corridor. However, after I became a commissioner, Carl Sell, the Lee District commissioner, and I got together during a Comprehensive Plan review and drew up a major, innovative change. We both wanted to break up the 6 1/2 mile commercial strip that ran from Alexandria to Fort Belvoir, but we didn't want to put anybody out of business. So we conceived a plan of five commercial nodes that would be interspersed by urban residential areas. Businesses that wanted to expand would be encouraged to move into new sites within the nodes, vacating land that could then be developed with residences, and existing vacant lots would be put on a fast track for new residential communities. We broached the idea at several Plan review meetings and at both the Lee and Mount Vernon council meetings, and met with strong approval. The Plan was revised accordingly and new applications for special exceptions were measured against the new concept. Of course, there was some reluctance at first on the part of developers, but with strong community and staff support, the concept began to take shape. Now, more than a decade later, the improvement of Richmond Highway is remarkable, especially to those who have lived in the area for a long time. There is still much to be done, but Richmond Highway is no longer pictured in urban design textbooks as a glaring example of urban blight. There are trees and flowers, upgraded shopping malls, new townhouse developments, fewer overhead wires, more office space - a burgeoning transformation, still in the making but well on its way.

**Pat Hanlon:** I remember the mark-up on the comprehensive plan revisions of the early 1990s. I was the protagonist for the transportation section of the plan, and it was a long night. Among other things, I repeatedly clashed with Sue Harsel over proposed roads in the Annandale District. Some of our exchanges must have been heated, since they were so described in the Journal the following day as a battle between the "beige-haired commissioner from the Providence District" and, well, Mrs. Harsel. That weekend Sue and I met for lunch at Brion's, which was much frequented by commissioners then, to cool off and chat about next steps. One of the citizens of my district, who happened to be in the restaurant, was so delighted to see us reconciled that she had the waiter bring us each an ice cream sundae to celebrate. The whole incident symbolized how the commission operated. The commissioners worked together for the public interest as best we could, even though we often fussed at each other; when we got mad, we got over it; and the citizens relied on our teamwork to make sure that their voices would be heard in the planning process. I also remember this well because it was a really good ice cream sundae.



**Rob Hartwell:** My most memorable meeting was my last PC meeting that went until 3:30 a.m. As an At-Large PC, I took on the local commissioner and lost 5-3. But today, at the entrance to Mason Neck, the townhomes you were not supposed to see from Route One stick out like a sore thumb at the entrance to Virginia's most historic and environmentally sensitive peninsula. The developer swore we would never see them from the road.

**John Kershenstein:** It was 1978. The PC met in the Massey Building in the BOS board room. Ed Gurski was Chairman and Ed ran a tight ship. I was in my final year as Commissioner from Springfield. For whatever reasons, the Southern Railroad had decided that, since it no longer stopped at Fairfax Station for passenger service, the old station itself was going to be torn down from its life long residence along the main line of the Southern. That didn't sit well with Lena Wyckoff (who was Jimmy Wyckoff's mom, Jimmy being the PC's executive director and who had been in place almost as long as the station had been in Fairfax). Lena was pretty much the unofficial mayor of Fairfax Station and decided that something had to be done to preserve the station. She apparently convinced Jack Herrity (BOS Chairman) of the wisdom of her logic because a movement was mounted to preserve the old station. Southern Railroad was convinced not to destroy the station if it could be relocated to another location. Lena founded the Friends of Fairfax Station and the Friends somehow managed to convince Mark Fried (a Fairfax land use attorney) who happened to own a 5 acre parcel at the entrance to Smoke Rise on Fairfax Station Road that he should donate the parcel to the cause. Now Mark was no fool. He was well known to the BOS & PC and was an all round good guy. However, a 5 acre parcel in that location represented a pretty substantial gift. Mark agreed to donate the property but didn't want to take a big loss. Enter the Park Authority. If Mark donated the property to the Authority it could be considered a tax deductible gift. However, the authority would need to get the parcel designated as a public use or facility and that was the Planning Commission's job. Therefore a "456" hearing as it was then called was scheduled. Whenever a case fell in a magisterial district, it was the job of the district's commissioner to recommend a course of action for the PC to follow. I had had a fair amount of practice in this department since Springfield had had the heaviest caseload during the past several years with rezonings that had resulted from the adoption of the county's first comprehensive plan that came out of the PLUS program. I had had several successes and some failures at convincing the PC of the wisdom of my recommendations. Now this case seemed to me to be a no-brainer but I didn't want to take any chances. Since I was a child and my uncle took me into the Altoona Roundhouse, I was always a train buff and was quite familiar with the Fairfax Station and would often go there just to watch a train or two go by. I had also assembled a fair collection of steam engine recordings, one of which I transferred to a small tape recorder that I smuggled into the hearing. At the conclusion of the public hearing, Gurski as he always did announced that he was 'turning to the commissioner from the district' for his recommendation. Each commissioner had before him two microphones, one that was fairly obvious and a lapel mic that could be clipped to his person or held. Whatever was said was piped throughout the Massey building. I began my summation by saying that it was not my normal practice to 'railroad' cases through the Commission but in this case I was making an exception. At this point I switched to my lapel mike which was next to the speaker of my tape recorder and Southern Railroad Steam Engine 4501 roared through the board room and the rest of the building. The "456" was approved and the Fairfax Station now resides a few blocks away from its original location at the intersection of Fairfax Station Road and Smoke Rise Lane. It was later joined by a caboose which Lee District Commissioner Carl Sell was able to sequester by which means I was afraid to ask.

# Planning Commission Memories

**Ron Koch:** After the first few speakers, everything that needs to be said has been, except everyone else hasn't had a chance to say it also.



**George Lilly:** All of the time I spent at the PC was memorable and I formed relationships that have lasted all of my life.



**Bill Lockwood:** At a 1968 meeting the Fairfax County Board of Supervisors agenda included the selection of term vacancy on the F. C. Democratic Board's nominee proposed by member. Bill Lockwood,



County Citizens Associations, was approved as a Northern Virginia Sun reported on this selection Bill Lockwood? I never even met the man!" The meeting. Fred Babson, Board Chairman, joint meeting since he wanted the dubious, ironic A year later Lockwood was nominated by later, he was nominated by Jim Scott, a Democrat, for a 4 year term. Lockwood was subsequently nominated for a 4 year term as at-large Planning Commissioner by Jack Herry, a Republican, then Board Chairman. Lockwood is an Independent.

County Board of Supervisors agenda included the selection of term vacancy on the F. C. Democratic Board's nominee proposed by member. Bill Lockwood, a replacement to fill an unexpired Planning Commission. The majority nominee was not approved. Neither was the Tom Wright, a Republican, the Providence District Board whose selection for the job was recommended by the Fairfax compromise Planning Commissioner. The next day's and quoted Tom Wright as remarking, "Why should I vote for following week the Board and Commission held a joint requested that Lockwood not meet with Wright prior to the pleasure of introducing Wright and Lockwood at the meeting. Wright, the Republican, for a full 4 year term. Four years

**Hank Strickland:** My most memorable, although sad, response to the Planning Commission's request for "my most memorable moment as a PC member" was the death of two of our daughters, within 11 weeks, early in 1991. I was summoned from a Commission Hearing on January 9 and told that Kathleen, the youngest of our six children, who was then a senior at George Mason University, had collapsed while running at the George Mason Field House. I went immediately to the Emergency Room of Fairfax Hospital, where Kathleen, was pronounced dead. She died of an undetected heart defect, just one week after our family had celebrated her 21st birthday. Eleven weeks later, on the morning of March 25, Teresa, our next youngest, was killed in her parked car on the shoulder of Rt. 95 on her way to work. A careless motorist swerved off the highway and slammed into Teresa's car. Teresa was 28 years old then, a Virginia Tech graduate, with a master's degree in electrical engineering from The John Hopkins University. She graduated from Hopkins with highest honors. The loss of our two youngest daughters, both in their twenties, with great futures ahead of them was by far the greatest test of our faith and our lives for me and my wife Muriel. Only our prayers and the devotion of our four remaining children saw us through this terrible ordeal.

**John Thillmann:** A few of my favorite stories are: (1) Pete Murphy and I shared a district line along Rt. 50 when I was the Centreville Planning Commissioner (it is now the Hunter Mill District) and he was/is the Springfield Commissioner when a proposal came to the Planning Commission for the Police and Sheriff training academy, firing range and short term jail. It was proposed for the area just below Dulles Airport in my district but all of the people opposed were in Pete's Springfield District (they all lived south of Route 50). The night of the hearing 100 or so protesters came to the hearing in buses and car pools and all were dressed in Jail Striped shirts. The vote was in the affirmative but with out a jail! (2) When The Reston Town Center was proposed in I believe 1986/7 Martha Pennino (Centreville Supervisor and Vice Chairman of the Board) put me in charge of a Task Force to work with the County Staff and the Developer (Mobil Reston) to review the plans and hammer out something acceptable to all. We met almost every other week for 18 months and when the hearing came up for determining where to put millions of square feet of office, retail, hotel and a Hospital including thousands of residential units all of which would generate huge amounts of traffic trips only 12 speakers came and they all spoke in favor! (3) One of the sub plots in the Reston Town Center story is that I was adamant that in the Town Center there be a community gathering space like a formal town green and space dedicated to history or the arts by the Hotel and near the fountain. The developer fought it as an expensive proposition in otherwise very valuable ground that in addition would be difficult to maintain. They felt that no one would use it. Well, I was able to convince them to go along and the space became the Reston pavilion and it is used extensively in summer for concerts and out door events and winter as a great community skating rink. The Developer has on numerous occasions told me that it was the best thing that they were ever forced to do. The art space is now the Greater Reston Art Center (GRACE)--and a group (Initiative for Public Art-Reston) is now developing a Reston Public Art Master Plan of which I am a Board Member. Small world. The Northern Virginia Art show is annually sponsored by GRACE, held in the Town Center (partly on the Pavilion) and it has become the largest juried art show/festival on the East Coast of the United States! (4) One of what I consider a real accomplishment is that when EDS which owned a large tract of land along Route 28 and McClaren Road wanted to allow hotel uses and additional FAR on their site we were in favor of the use but we convinced them that they needed to construct 1/2 section of a four lane road one mile long McClaren Road between Centreville Road and West Ox Road. This was done 30 years ago and has for all of these years handled two-way traffic and neither the State nor Fairfax County ever built the other half of the road--but at least the connection was made.

## Planning Commission Staff

**Robin Hardy:** To have been a member of the Planning Commission staff for over thirty years – you not only have to love land use, you have to genuinely appreciate your colleagues. It has been my honor to have known and worked with County staff and Planning Commissioners, past and present, with particular thanks to...former County Executive Jay Lambert and current County Executive Tony

# Planning Commission Memories



Griffin for always being so approachable...to former Commissioner Tybelle Fasteau for insisting on beauty in development...to former Commissioner Patrick Hanlon for broadening my vocabulary....to David Marshall of the Planning Division for always making me laugh...to former PC Executive Director Jim Wyckoff for the lunch-time tours of the County and for not freaking out when I went into labor in his office....to former Commission Chairman Ed Gurski for insisting on holding a PC meeting in the midst of an electrical outage...to former Commissioner Peter Brinitzer for being effective, efficient and caring beneath his tough-guy exterior....to former Commissioner Pappy Price for the best darn resignation letter ever written ("If everybody thinks they're a planner then you don't need me" - discovered in the Commission archives) and to former Commissioner Paul Keast for the second best resignation letter ("I quit")...to Bob Hood of the County Print Shop for being able to figure out 20+ years ago how to implement my idea for the PC packets and for printing me a copy of the Fairfax County Courthouse Civil War photo....to the members of the 1980s County Employees bowling league for many Sundays of fun....to land use

attorneys Marc Bettius, Russ Rosenberger, and Til Hazel for being willing to star in the 1979 satire (*A Day in the Life of the Planning Commission*) written by PC staff....to current Commissioner Suzanne Harsel for never forgetting the staff and for her many malapropisms (of which I am convinced many are deliberate)....to current Commissioner Pete Murphy for his levity and dedication...to current Commissioner Ken Lawrence for his thoughtful and erudite summations...to former Commissioner Carl Sell for always speaking his mind... to former Commission staff member Gloria Watkins for "getting" me and my need for color-coding and organization....to former and current PC staff members Mary Pascoe, Helen Darby, Laura Espiritu, Norma Duncan, Kara DeArrastia, Chris Remer, Toni Denson, Jeanette Phillips and Linda Rodeffer for their thorough and excellent work...to former ZED Chief Phil Yates for always working hand-in-hand with the Commission staff....to former Planning Division staffer Alison Kriviskey for working with me on developing the first APR guide for citizens and for being so team-oriented...to current DPZ staff member Harry Rado for his willingness to lend a "graphics" hand...to former PC staff member Betty Tiches for coining the unique interpretation of the word "skillet" which is still in use today....to former Commissioner Ron Koch for always bringing staff a momento from his exotic vacations....to Michael Long of the County Attorney's office who didn't laugh when I wanted to create a Planning Commission seal....to former Commissioner John Byers for daring me once to drink his style of coffee and for getting me water after I gagged....to Karen Harwood of the County Attorney's Office who managed the near-impossible feat of making Ed Gurski and Pete Brinitzer smile when she wore her sweater with strategically placed cows...to former Commissioner Al Thomas for his spiritual comments at special PC occasions....to current PC Executive Director Barbara Lipka for being willing to implement many of my suggestions over the years...to former Commissioners Rosemarie Annunziata, David Bobzien, Linda Smyth and Joan Dubois for never becoming too important to remember the PC and its staff...to former PC staff member and current BZA employee Suzie Frazier for taking my hand and heart in friendship 32 years ago and never letting go....and to former DPZ employee John Hardy for being the love of my life.

**Barbara Lipka:** Never did I imagine when I joined the Commission Office as a planning aide in 1978 that I would remain for 30 years and rise to become Executive Director! With little initial interest in planning, I quickly came to see how "citizen-planners" could work with adjoining neighbors and through those efforts result in mutual benefits, often to the entire Fairfax community. Over the years I have been witness to transformations in the County that have been nothing less than phenomenal-- including its changing residential face through such developments as Kingstowne, Franklin Farm, and Little Rocky Run, and, of course, ever-changing and expanding Reston; the Metro developments at Dunn Loring and Vienna, the closing of Lorton Prison and metamorphosis into Laurel Hill; the well-utilized mixed-use developments at Fair Lakes and Fairfax Corner and of course, the Government Center complex itself, to name but a few stand-outs. None of the change would have been possible without the intense dedication of each individual who has served on the Planning Commission over these years and, of course, County staff. It has been, and continues to be, my sincere pleasure to work with such highly-committed individuals, especially each member of the Commission staff, who always does their utmost to fulfill the needs of Commissioners and ultimately, the Board of Supervisors! Happy Anniversary to all!



**Mary Pascoe:** Many funny and/or interesting things happened while I was Clerk, but I can't remember them off hand. One thing I do remember vividly was that the shooter at the CIA several years back was a courier who brought documents to our office from various law offices and companies. I recognized him from his photograph in the newspaper.

**Gloria Watkins:** The only thing I can think of is that play we put on back in 1980 -- "A Day in the Life of the Planning Commission." It was hilarious.

## County Attorney Staff

**Karen Harwood:** Once upon a time there was a Fairfax County Planning Commission that did not include Peter Murphy or Suzanne Harsel. There was no cable company; no Channel 16; Planning Commission meetings were not televised. Affidavits were typically no longer than two or three pages. Land use attorneys from the Fairfax County Attorney's Office took turns attending each Commission meeting, sitting with staff from the agency formerly known as the Office of Comprehensive Planning. In 1978, those attorneys were Ed Finnegan, Bob Flinn, Kathe Anderson, and Karen Harwood. Speaking only for myself from personal experience during those days, if the official Planning Commission meeting ended at a reasonable time (i.e., before midnight) what at times approached a quorum would reconvene at what was then known as "Charlie's" (now known as "Brion's Grille") for a night cap. For then-Commissioner John Kershenstein, the "night cap" consisted of a bowl of chocolate ice cream. Then-Commission Chairman Ed Gurski, Executive Director Jim Wyckoff, others and I had the traditional fare. I have many fond memories of my work with the Planning Commission, work that literally has spanned decades. To the Fairfax County Planning Commission - Happy 70th Anniversary!!!!

# Remembrances from Chairman Pete Murphy

Peter F. Murphy, Jr., Springfield District member, has served on the Planning Commission since 1983. He has been the longest-serving Chairman in the history of the Commission at 19 consecutive years. In this special anniversary issue, Murphy offers his reflections on his service:

As we celebrate and commemorate the 70<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Fairfax County Planning Commission – founded on July 6, 1938 -- and its dedicated service to the citizens of Fairfax County, we also recognize and honor our Planning Commissioners – of yesterday and today -- who have given unstintingly of their time and talents to make our county a better place to live, work, worship, recreate, educate our children and retire.

During the past seven decades, 121 county citizens – including those on the current commission – have served as Planning Commissioners, overseeing the land-use process and ensuring that our citizens enjoy a safe and secure quality of life as our county evolved from an agricultural crossroads – focusing on milk and poultry products – to a dynamic suburban/urban 395-square mile jurisdiction with an all-important goal of preserving and enhancing our environment.

Since its first meeting on July 18, 1938, in the Old Court House in Fairfax City with its five charter members, to the Board Room in the Massey Building, to the Board Auditorium in the new Government Center, Planning Commissioners have convened thousands of public hearings and countless citizen, committee and task force meetings.

And, from that first meeting to the last convened, each commissioner has had the undaunting task of finding a balance between the rights of the landowner and the desires of the citizens.

As Fairfax County grew – due primarily to its proximity to Washington, D.C. – we began to transform from a dependent bedroom community for the nation's capital to a thriving, independent, diversified jurisdiction with a strong and vibrant residential and business-oriented base.

The Planning Commission, as the custodian of the Comprehensive Plan – the county's primary land-use guide for development and growth -- has been and continues to be in the forefront developing policies and plans to logically and realistically address the growth issues and the infrastructure needed to keep pace with the county's increasing population and changing demographics.

Planning commissioners, with professional guidance from the dedicated county staff, – and with maximum citizen participation, input and recommendations -- developed for the approval of the Board of Supervisors, the PLUS (Planned Land Use System) Plan in the early 1970s, Planning Horizons in the early 1990s and frequent, if not yearly, reviews of the Comprehensive Plan to the present day.

This timely and relevant process ensures the Comprehensive Plan – the “Citizens Plan” – addresses, in a significant and meaningful way,

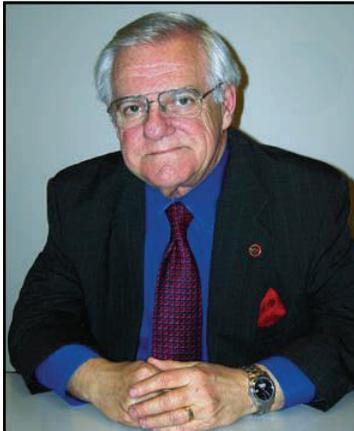


Photo by Brian Trompeter, with *Sun Gazette*

the applicability of its guidance to the overall quality-of-life goals that afford our citizens a true “sense of community.”

Even today, as Planning Commissioners prepare for the Area Plan Review process for North County, a special citizen task force – the Fort Belvoir Base Realignment and Closure APR Task Force -- from the Lee, Mount Vernon and Springfield Districts and at-large members -- is examining land-use nominations in specific areas around the Army post that will experience a very significant increase in military, civilian and contractor personnel by 2011 due to the BRAC legislation.

It is a team effort.

Since its founding, the Planning Commission owes a debt of gratitude to the members of the Fairfax County staff for their expertise, counsel and tenacity as we commissioners determine our courses of action in land-use and related matters.

We also thank the Board of Supervisors and the County Executive, his deputies and staff, and our Board of Supervisors' staffs for their support.

The Planning Commission also appreciates Channel 16, our superb TV crew, with us at each public hearing from before the gavel goes down to well after we adjourn – and to all those who produce, direct, film and edit the Planning Commission Roundtable.

The past and present Planning Commission staff cannot receive enough praise for all they have done and do today for the commission, the various Fairfax County staffs, the Board of Supervisors and, most importantly, the citizens of our county.

We could not do it without you.

Thank you: Barbara Lipa, executive director; Robin Hardy, assistant director; Christopher Remer, chief, Administrative/Notification Branch; Linda Rodeffer, clerk to the commission; Kara DeArrastia, deputy clerk to the commission; Jeanette Phillips, associate clerk to the commission; Toni Denson, planning technician; and Norma Duncan, associate clerk and receptionist.

It has been an honor for me to serve on the Planning Commission for 26 eventful and challenging years, and to have the distinct privilege of chairing a magnificent group of truly dedicated men and women public servants for 19 years.

We may not always agree, but we are united in our goal of making, to the best of our ability, sound, realistic and well-thought out land-use recommendations and decisions.

Personally, none of this could be possible for me without the love, understanding and patience of my wife, Charlene, and our daughter, Cherilyn.

Thank you for all your support.

Happy 70<sup>th</sup> to all – and many, many more.

# Fairfax County: Then and Now

## **Then**

In the weeks preceding the establishment of the Fairfax County Planning Commission in 1938, the Board of Supervisors discussed whether to implement the provisions of the recently-adopted Chapter 415 of the Acts of the Assembly of Virginia (which allowed for the appointment of the Planning Commission). The following is an excerpt from the Minutes of the June 29, 1938 meeting of the Board of Supervisors:

*“Honorable Francis Pickens Miller, member of the House of Delegates from this County, who is also the President of the Fairfax County Chamber of Commerce, then addressed the board regarding this matter, citing numerous instances where undesirable places of business have sprung up, due to a lack of zoning regulations, and calling the attention of the Board to the legislation passed at the 1938 session of the General Assembly of Virginia, authorizing the appointment of a Zoning Commission, and asked for the immediate appointment of a Planning Commission to prepare the Master Plan for this County, which must precede any zoning regulations stating that it will take some time to prepare this map or master plan, and discussed with the Board the question of financing the cost of the preparation thereof, advising the Board that the State Planning Board has a photographic map of the entire County of Fairfax, made from aerial photographs, which may be used by the local Planning Commission when one is appointed, further stating that one county in Virginia is already beginning its planning and zoning work, at a cost of four thousand dollars per annum, some of which may be obtained in the form of a F.W.A. grant.”*

After agreeing that a planning commission was needed to prepare a zoning ordinance and map for the County, the Board debated whether to appoint commissioners geographically (to represent the six supervisor districts) or instead to represent specific land use interests (such as farmers, town people, commercial and industrial interests).

On July 6, 1938, the Board voted unanimously to appoint a Planning Commission composed of five members to each represent a specific land use interest. The Board, however, did not approve staff or operating expenses for the Commission at that time. According to Board minutes, the first appropriation made by the Board to the Planning Commission occurred in August of 1938:

*“Mr. E. Russell White, Chairman of the Fairfax County Planning Commission, reported that the Planning Commission had found itself somewhat embarrassed at having no place to do its work, especially large tables on which to place the large maps, and asked the permission of the Board to use the board room in the evenings, and that the board provide the Commission with a file, equipped with a lock, in which to keep the records of the Commission, and a regular map file, with a lock, in which to keep map.”*

On August 3, 1938, the Board authorized the purchase of a “four-drawer legal size file cabinet built of board or lumber of sufficient size as to hold approximately 50 large maps” for use by the Planning Commission.

The first official commendation of the Planning Commission by the Board of Supervisors occurred on August 2, 1939 and read, in part:

*“RESOLVED, that the thanks and appreciation of the members of this Board as individuals, and through them, as the governing body of the county, the thanks and appreciation of the citizens of this county, be, and now hereby are, extended to the members of the County Planning Commission for their untiring efforts during the past year in assembling data, making investigations, hold a public hearing, and preparing, after long and thorough consideration and study, the comprehensive proposed Zoning Ordinance for the County this day submitted to this Board, together with the said map for use in connection therewith.”*

All of the early meetings of the Planning Commission were considered executive sessions and attendance by the public was by invitation only. A record of individual votes was not kept and actions were accomplished by the "commission as a whole". Planning Commission Minutes were not prepared until 1941.

## **Now**

In 2008, the Planning Commission consists of twelve members – nine who represent the supervisor districts and the remaining three members who serve At-Large – appointed by the Board of Supervisors. The Planning Commission Office has eight staff members and is located in Suite 330 of the Government Center.

The Commission meets twice a week (depending on workload) in regular session. In addition, there are two standing committees (Personnel & Budget and Policy & Procedures) as well as eight special committees that meet in joint session with members of other boards, authorities and commissions. Commissioner members receive an annual stipend of \$15,000.

All Planning Commission regular and Committee meetings are open to the public (with the exception of the Personnel & Budget Committee). Meetings are broadcast live on Channel 16, advertised in a newspaper of general circulation, listed in the County's Weekly Agenda publication, and posted on the County's Public Meeting Calendar. Planning Commission Minutes are prepared for each regular and Committee meeting and are posted online. The Commission maintains an up-to-date presence on the web at <http://www.fairfaxcounty.gov/planning/>



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**2008  
Planning Commission**

- Peter F. Murphy, Jr., Chairman  
*Springfield District*
- Walter L. Alcorn, Vice-Chairman  
*At-Large*
- Suzanne F. Harsel, Secretary  
*Braddock District*
- Frank A. de la Fe. Parliamentarian  
*Hunter Mill District*
- Earl L. Flanagan  
*Mount Vernon*
- Janet R. Hall  
*Mason District*
- James R. Hart  
*At-Large*
- Jay P. Donahue  
*Dranesville District*
- John L. Litzengerger, Jr.  
*Sully District*
- Kenneth A. Lawrence  
*Providence District*
- Rodney L. Lusk  
*Lee District*
- Timothy J. Sargeant  
*At-Large*

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This publication will be made available in alternative formats upon request. Please call 703-324-2865 (V), 703-324-7951 (TTY). Please allow seven days for the preparation of material.

# Fairfax County: Then and Now

The following facts highlight some of the changes that have occurred in Fairfax County over the last 70 years.

	THEN	NOW
Land area	416 square miles <sup>1</sup>	395 square miles
County population	40,929 (in 1940)	1,041,507 (in 2007)
Percent urban <sup>2</sup>	6% (in 1940)	98.6 % (in 2000)
Dwelling units	9,602 (in 1940)	391,138 (in 2007)
Number of farms	1,724 (in 1940)	151 (in 2002)
Farm acreage <sup>3</sup>	123,909 acres (in 1940)	9,946 acres (in 2002)
Retail establishments	297 (in 1940)	2,941 (in 2005)
Number of public schools	26 (in 1938)	197 (in 2008)
Number of students	5,865 (in 1938)	164,843 (in 2008)
Number of public libraries	0 (in 1938) <sup>4</sup>	23 (in 2008)
Planning Commission Members	5 (in 1938)	12 (in 2008)
Number of PC meetings	32 (in 1942) <sup>5</sup>	88 (50 regular & 33 committees in 2007)

<sup>1</sup> The City of Fairfax and the City of Falls Church were not incorporated until 1961 and 1948, respectively, and therefore were included in the Fairfax County land area in 1938. This figure from the 1940 Census also includes land that was later subject to minor boundary adjustments with other neighboring jurisdictions.  
<sup>2</sup> Based on the U.S. Department of Agriculture Census definition of "farm"  
<sup>3</sup> Based on the U.S. Census Bureau definition of "urban" population density  
<sup>4</sup> The Fairfax County Public Library System was established in 1939  
<sup>5</sup> 1942 is the first full year of available Planning Commission meeting minutes

**Sources:**  
 2002 Fairfax County Economic Census  
 Fairfax County Department of Systems Management for Human Services  
 Fairfax County Public Library, Administrative Services  
 Fairfax County Public School System, Facilities Planning Division  
 Department of Planning & Zoning, Planning Division  
 University of Virginia Historical Census Library (1940 Census)  
 U.S. Census Bureau (2000 Census & 2005 County Business Patterns)  
 U.S Department of Agriculture, National Agricultural Statistics Services