***Clarksburg Master Plan to Change for Creek***

By Kristen Milton

In a hotly-debated move, the Montgomery County Council has decided to have the planning board once more open up plans for the Upcounty’s oft-halted Clarksburg community and prepare a Limited Master Plan Amendment to better protect Ten Mile Creek.

There were groans all around October 9 when Councilman Hans Riemer (D-At large) of Silver Spring noted that the decision “may be a watershed moment” for the community that has already endured years of wrangling over building violations and a repealed development district among other challenges that have slowed construction; however, other council members agreed with the sentiment, if not the pun. “This is a priority; it is time to get to a decision point,” said Council President Roger Berliner (D-District 1) of Bethesda, saying Clarksburg residents have been in limbo for too long.

Calls to establish new protections for the creek’s watershed area date back to 2009 when the County Council created the ad hoc Water Quality Working Group to examine the issue. The group gave a two-part recommendation in 2010, split in large part between the economic interests of landowners and the environmental concerns of activists. Thus “where we are today is somewhat where we were in 2009,” said acting planning director Rose Krasnow as she presented the planning board’s recommendation for the master plan amendment to the council.

The current Clarksburg Master Plan, approved in 1994, lays out a four-stage development process requiring specific criteria be met at each stage. Triggers allowing development to advance to Stage 4 were met in 2008, but work was delayed by the water quality concerns resulting from development already underway.

Some residents have worried that reopening the master plan will delay amenities already overdue, and three developers have already filed applications to have public water and sewer extended into their properties near the headwaters of the creek, raising the possibility of protecting Ten Mile Creek through conditions targeted at such properties rather than the broader amendment process eventually recommended.

In the end, Councilman Craig Rice (D-District 2) of Germantown, who represents Clarksburg, said October 9 he believed common ground could be found in the amendment that would protect both citizen rights and water quality. “I don’t think that there’s going to be winners and losers in this case,” Rice said. “We need to put this to bed once and for all for Clarksburg.”

Councilman George Leventhal (D-At large) of Takoma Park said that in spite of hundreds of passionate communications from the public, he felt the council had not received enough disinterested information to make a balanced decision. Planning Board Chair Françoise Carrier responded that reports from outside consultants would be part of the amendment process.

County environmental activities greeted news of the council decision to go forward with the amendment, which was reached by consensus rather than direct vote, with enthusiasm.

"Ten Mile Creek is Montgomery County's last, best stream, and part of our drinking water supply," Diane Cameron, Conservation Director for Audubon Naturalist Society, said in an October 11 press release. "We are thrilled that the council listened to the voices of the people who spoke out in favor of protecting this gem of a natural resource."

"The pace and intensity of development in Clarksburg's Stage 4 will now be driven by community needs, current science, and environmental stewardship of regionally important resources—not developer schedules," Caroline Taylor, executive director of the Montgomery Countryside Alliance, said in the same release. "We are all winners in this scenario."

Krasnow said that with “a coordinated effort” and by postponing work on other master plans including the scheduled review covering Montgomery Village in Gaithersburg, the master plan amendment for Ten Mile Creek could make its way through the planning board and return for council review in about twelve months.