

A Wakeup Call for Fallston

This past year, the Maryland Department of Planning warned that Harford County's new Transfer of Development Rights (TDR) program is inherently flawed because it allows other rural areas (*Fallston, Joppa, Jarrettsville and Forest Hill*) to be the receiving areas for more building rights rather than the development envelope. The Greater Fallston Association (GFA) publicized this problem but there was no citizen ground swell to revise the program. The impact of this new zoning legislation became all the more apparent in the first round of comprehensive zoning when the Department of Planning and Zoning (P&Z) approved virtually all of the requests to convert agricultural land to residential development in these rural receiving areas. Again, few citizens took notice. The GFA raised the alarm when it noted that Fallston received 10 times more requests to convert agricultural land to development than either Jarrettsville or Forest Hill (*there were no requests in Joppa*) and petitioned P&Z to consider the disparity. Our request went unheard. Again, few citizens reacted.

Similarly, at the adequate public facilities hearings before the County Council several weeks ago, the GFA cautioned the Council not to raise the allowable school capacity to 110% considering both the already overcrowded Youth Benefit Elementary School and the additional development that will occur in the Fallston area as a result of the TDR program. Most of the Council gave a deaf ear and few citizens testified to support our plea.

While plans for additional development in the rural Fallston area seemed to go unnoticed, the more recent recommendation by the executive committee of the Harford County Public Library to close the Fallston branch has raised the eyebrows and the ire of the Fallston community and awakened the residents to what has been happening all along under this County Council's watch, i.e., the gradual conversion of Fallston into an expanded suburbia.

The arguments that the library executive committee provided to justify closing the Fallston facility (*aging facility, lack of pedestrian access, poor and dangerous vehicle access*) are the same arguments that could be used to justify its expansion and renovation and improve utilization in a community that has long been starved of adequate public facilities. While the library executive committee noted low walk-ins and low computer usage, it failed to mention that Fallston surpassed Edgewood, Jarrettsville, Joppa, Norrisville, Darlington, Whiteford and Havre de Grace in circulation (*FY07*.) Furthermore, Fallston is the fourth highest revenue producer from taxes in Harford County, almost as much as Aberdeen and Havre de Grace combined (*2004 Master Plan data*)-communities served not by one, but two library branches. The hard working taxpayers of Fallston deserve better!

Why then are we targeted to lose our library? In these difficult economic times, it is clear that we must all tighten our belts and make sacrifices, but sacrifices should be spread across the board without targeting a specific community.

Thank you Fallston, finally, for your support in ensuring the betterment of our community.

Dr. Roman Ratych
(President, Greater Fallston Association, Inc.)

Beth Scheir
(Vice-President, Greater Fallston Association, Inc.)