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Dear Mr. Hull:

We are writing to take the strongest possible exception to the statements of Rollin Stanley, the Montgomery County planning director, that appear in the article “The Future Is Looking UP” in your March/April 2012 issue.

The article describes the commercial building boom planned for the North Bethesda, White Flint and other areas of the County, as well as the concerns of local residents about the impacts this high-density development may have on their neighboring communities. In describing Mr. Stanley’s views on citizen participation in this critically important planning effort, the article states:

He has little patience with dissenters. Stanley goes so far as to accuse them of being ‘rich, white women . . . spreading fear.’ He says they stalk his appearances before community groups, sowing discord. He claims they refer to themselves as ‘the coven.’”

As four of the “dissenters” in question, we are appalled that Mr. Stanley, the County’s senior planner, would intentionally engage in a smear campaign against us because we have exercised our rights as County residents to question current efforts to change the face of suburban Montgomery County. Most of us have been involved in Montgomery County land use issues for over 30 years. In recognition of our expertise in these issues,

- Two of us are past members of the Montgomery County Planning Board who were appointed by the Montgomery County Council to those positions;
- Two of us are current members of the Planning Board’s Zoning Advisory Panel, appointed as community representatives by none other than Royce Hanson, the former Planning Board chairman who hired Mr. Stanley to serve as the County planning director;
- One of us is a member of the Board of Trustees of the Montgomery County Parks Foundation, recently appointed by a unanimous vote of the Planning Board; and
- All four of us were honored last year by the Montgomery County Civic Federation for our efforts to educate its member civic associations on planning and zoning issues of concern to their communities.

In addition, several of us are attorneys, past and current elected officials of local municipalities, and hold or have held leadership positions in major County non-profit and philanthropy organizations.

For example, one of us is a member of the advisory board of the Community Foundation of Montgomery County, whose Sharing Montgomery and Neighbors in Need Funds were celebrated in your November/December 2011 issue for their financial support of County non-profits that serve low-income families and seniors throughout the County.

Another of us is the former president of Mobile Medical Care, Inc., a County non-profit that provides a wide variety of healthcare services to underserved County residents, particularly in the immigrant community. And all of us have appeared before the County Council and Planning Board as affordable housing advocates.

As the planning director of the Planning Board, Mr. Stanley's role is not to pursue a personal agenda for land use planning in Montgomery County. Yet, the article shows clearly that is precisely what Mr. Stanley is doing. In denigrating our efforts to educate our neighbors about the County's "vertical future," Mr. Stanley not only attacks our motives and belittles our credentials, he also demonstrates a stunning disregard of his responsibilities as the senior County planner to seek out the views of all stakeholders in the County's planning and zoning processes, including those who respectfully disagree with him.

By asserting that we "stalk" his appearances before community groups around the County, Mr. Stanley ignores the fact that we are routinely invited by these community groups to share our expertise with them, and where he and/or his staff members have been present, to discuss in open forums the planning and zoning issues that are at the heart of the future urbanization of the County.

By dismissing us as "rich white women" (a blatantly racial and sexist slur) who "spread fear" and "sow discord," and by claiming that we describe ourselves as members of a "coven" and thus by implication are not to be taken seriously by local elected and appointed planning officials, Mr. Stanley has impugned our integrity, attacked our credibility, and damaged our personal and professional reputations.

Worst yet, we believe such statements by the County's highest-ranking professional planner as reported in your broadly distributed and highly regarded magazine breach the public's trust in the integrity of Montgomery County's land use planning processes.

Yours very truly,

/s/ Pat Baptiste

/s/ Meredith Wellington

/s/ Julie Davis

/s/ Jenny Sue Dunner