

# Planning issues top February agenda for Gaithersburg mayor, council

## City Notes

DANIELLE GAINES

### ■ Officials to consider Crown Farm annexations and fairgrounds rezoning

It's going to be a busy February for the city of Gaithersburg's planning department.

Three major planning projects are on the agenda for Monday's mayor and council meeting: an annexation request from Habitat for Humanity, an amendment to the annexation agreement for the Crown Farm development and continued debate on a sign ordinance that could render more than 50 city business signs illegal this month.

The council and planning commission will meet together Feb. 22 to discuss the Montgomery County Agricultural Center's application to rezone the county fairgrounds land as a mixed-use, allowing more dense development at the 63-acre site.

### Once upon an extended deadline ...

The Gaithersburg Book Festival has extended the deadline for entries to its short story contest for high school students to 5:00 p.m. Thursday.

"We already have 45 entries, which is an amazing response for the contest's first year," Councilman Jud Ashman said in a statement. "However, some teachers reached out to us this week to ask if we could extend the deadline in light of the recent weather-related school closures."

The goal is to allow as many students as possible enter the contest, Ashman said.

The new deadline will allow the judging of the contest to proceed as planned.

Area high schoolers are invited to submit short stories using one of these three opening lines written by author Sarah Pekkanen:

"In my entire life, I've fibbed dozens of times — usually to be polite or to get out of attending some mind-numbing social event — but I've only told one really big lie."

"Don't open the box, my father always told me."

"When I left my parents' house for good, I took five things with me."

To participate, individuals must be in high school and live in Maryland, Virginia or Washington, D.C.

Complete rules for the contest are online at [www.gaithersburgbookfestival.org/writing-contest.htm](http://www.gaithersburgbookfestival.org/writing-contest.htm).

The 2011 Gaithersburg Book Festival will be held May 21 on the grounds of Gaithersburg City Hall. Admission is free.

### MARC letter sent by mayor

Gaithersburg Mayor Sidney A. Katz has mailed a letter to John Hovatter, director of MARC Train and Commuter Bus Services, asking for increased safety measures at the Gaithersburg MARC station at South Summit Avenue, where an elderly resident was hit and killed on Jan. 14 as he tried to board an eastbound train.

Katz thanked CSX and MARC for improvements including a better notification system for inbound trains and new scheduling plans for passenger boarding that are expected to be in place by early spring.

He also asked that the system consider installing a shelter beside the eastbound tracks,

where the waiting area is uncovered, and relocating the westbound platforms so trains will not block South Summit Avenue as passengers board, Katz wrote.

"We believe these suggestions will make MARC commuting safer and more comfortable and will also make it safer for people traveling through the Summit and Diamond intersection," Katz wrote.

### Free financial literacy workshops offered

Bank On Gaithersburg, Maryland CASH (Creating Assets, Savings and Hope) and Family Services, Inc. are hosting free financial education workshops.

The two-hour sessions will be held in English and Spanish at the Activity Center at Bohrer Park, 506 S. Frederick Ave. All run from 6 p.m. to 8 p.m.

Admission is free, but registration is required. Call Ruth Rivas at 301-840-3218, e-mail [rivasr@fs-inc.org](mailto:rivasr@fs-inc.org), or register at the beginning of each class.

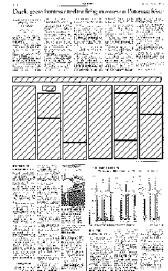
Upcoming sessions are:

Money Is Not a Four-Letter Word, today: The session will focus on budgeting, financial goals, managing bank accounts and saving money.

Credit Reports and Scores, Feb. 16: Participants will learn how and why to get their credit report and how to understand them.

Smart Consumer, Feb. 23: The focus will be on smart shopping and how to avoid common consumer scams.

Choosing and Using Credit Wisely, March 2: Participants will learn the different types of loan products and how to use credit wisely.



For information, call the Gaithersburg Community Services Division at 301-258-6395 x2 or go to [www.gaithersburgmd.gov/bankon](http://www.gaithersburgmd.gov/bankon).

### **Free tax preparation available**

Tax season is here again and for some residents in Gaithersburg, there's help.

For the second year, the city is hosting a Volunteer Income Tax Assistance program with the Montgomery County Community Action Agency, and Family Services, Inc.

The program offers free tax preparation assistance to individuals who earn less than \$49,000 per year and who are filing a standard 1040 form. Services are offered in both English and Spanish.

The site, at 630 E. Diamond Ave., will be open through April 18 from 1 to 8 p.m.

Appointments are required. Call 301-258-6395, select option 6, and leave a name and phone number on the message line. Someone will call back to schedule an appointment.

In 2010, the four VITA sites in Montgomery County helped 1,975 people receive more than \$7 million in refunds.

### **Nominees sought to fill commission vacancy**

The city is looking for someone to fill a vacancy on the Gaithersburg Planning Commission left by the resignation of Leonard Levy. Levy will remain in the position until a new member is appointed.

The planning commission,

with five members and one alternate, reviews all annexation requests, zoning applications, subdivision plats, site development applications and plans for municipal improvements. The commission generally meets twice monthly, on the first and third Wednesdays at 7:30 p.m.

Resumes and letters of interest should be submitted by 5 p.m. Feb. 28 to Mayor and City Council, 31 S. Summit Ave., Gaithersburg, MD 20877, or [cityhall@gaithersburgmd.gov](mailto:cityhall@gaithersburgmd.gov).

For more information, go to [www.gaithersburgmd.gov/planningcommission](http://www.gaithersburgmd.gov/planningcommission) or call Community Planning Director Trudy Schwarz at 301-258-6330.

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