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2-18-2023 4:53pm

Gum Springs to Fairfax County: "Earn our trust."

 [Mary Paden](#)





Editorial Update: In a Feb. 22 email to Gum Springs residents and other community stakeholders, Queenie Cox alleged that New Gum Springs Civic Association bylaws were violated in the Feb. 15 electing of new officers.

About 70 Gum Springs residents, including the newly elected officers of the [New Gum Springs Civic Association](#), lambasted Fairfax County officials for what they termed years of neglect and disrespect at a Feb. 16 meeting at the Gum Springs Community Center.

The meeting was organized by Mount Vernon District Supervisor Dan Storck and the county's Chief Equity Officer Karla Bruce, along with Neighborhood and Community Services, to discuss issues raised over the past few years by the community. Two topics were on the agenda: How can the county and Gum Springs build a better relationship? And what are the priorities of the Gum Springs community?

Gum Springs, founded in 1833 by West Ford — who was freed from slavery and given land by the family of George Washington — is the oldest African American community in Fairfax County.

The meeting was triggered by the proposed development of 65 townhouses called [West Ford Manor](#) on the corner of Richmond Highway and Sherwood Hall Lane, which had split the New Gum Springs Civic Association. Anti-townhouse officer candidates won an election the night before the community meeting with Vincent Carter replacing Queenie Cox as president, and local activist Mattie Palmore becoming vice president. Cox had previously offered civic association support for the townhouse development to get into the planning process.



Supervisor Dan Storck (l.) and New Gum Springs Civic Association President Vincent Carter (r.) set up a follow-up meeting date following the contentious Feb. 16 community meeting.

At the meeting Storck promised to keep the townhouse development on hold until the Gum Springs community supported it. Opponents said the project was too dense and not in keeping with a conservation land use plan the community had adopted eight years ago but which the county allegedly had ignored. The conservation plan envisioned a low-density, residential community “with a sense of place where Black people could own property and have a place to live,” according to Ron Chase, president of the Gum Springs Historical Society and member of the civic association. “We don’t want to be Mosaic or McLean,” he said.

Gum Springs is under development pressure because it encompasses two planned Richmond Highway Bus Rapid Transit stations as part of a \$1 billion redevelopment plan for the highway promoting mixed-use high density near transit stations.

Bruce and Storck, as well as top county officials at the meeting, including Director of Housing and Community Development Tom Fleetwood, acknowledged the existence of the conservation plan, but all said it had been derailed before their tenure, and they could not explain what had happened to it. Although they had the plan, Bruce said, they did not have the authority to

move forward with it.

County documents show that neighborhood conservation plans were developed in the late 1970s through the Fairfax County Redevelopment and Housing Authority to preserve affordable housing and neighborhood stability and prevent commercial encroachment. Gum Springs' conservation plan was adopted by the Board of Supervisors in 1979, amended in 1990 and expired in 2004. A new conservation plan was developed in 2015.

Conservation plans often covered the same areas as the neighborhood improvement plans, which were developed in the 1990s by 26 county neighborhoods for a now-defunct Housing and Urban Development grant program to improve street infrastructure in blighted neighborhoods.

In 2015, the Fairfax County Board of Supervisors accepted a staff recommendation to delete references to both types of neighborhood plans in the county's Comprehensive Land Use Plan, saying that many of the objectives had been accomplished and that remaining guidance was incorporated into the overall Comprehensive Plan.

Bruce suggested the community start a new process of envisioning how they want the neighborhood to develop.



Residents listen intently to speakers at the Gum Springs community meeting.

Several community members at the meeting balked, stating they had put a lot of effort into the 2015 conservation plan and wanted feedback from the county before starting over.

“You never responded to that plan and now you want us to start over? How can we trust you to respond this time?” asked one resident.

Frustrations with the county ran deep. A quick poll showed that 63 percent of the attendees had lived in the area for more than 20 years. Linda Brown, a community activist participating in a small group session, said the county would have to earn the trust of the community, given the history.

Chase has repeatedly accused the county of honoring the community with rhetoric but dishonoring it by pushing density, including very low-income rental housing developments rather than opportunities for Black homeownership.

Addressing the crowd, Bruce said, “There had to be a point at which the county came to stand flat-footed before the community. You have every reason not to trust Fairfax County. I ask you to allow this opportunity for the county to express an apology and a desire to move forward.”

She noted that the meeting would be just the beginning of a conversation to repair the relationship and work out a new community plan.

Palmore, newly elected vice president of the civic association, took the microphone to say, “We are moving forward whether or not you want to come.” She cited major community issues as lack of jobs and the need for job training, affordable housing and eviction protection.



Mattie Palmore, recently elected vice president of the New Gum Springs Civic Association speaks at the meeting.

Asked for his reaction after the meeting, Carter said, “I think they were checking off a box. We will find out later. We want that townhouse development taken off the books permanently.”

The townhouse development is one of many proposed developments coming before the Fairfax County Planning Commission March 2 as part of a countywide Site Specific Plan Amendment process. Although Storck promised to withhold his support for the project if the community opposed it, he said he would not ask for it to be taken off the list of projects going before the Planning Commission.

Following the meeting, Carter made arrangements with Storck for a follow-up meeting to discuss matters further.



Gum Spring residents listen intently to speakers at the meeting.

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[More community gathering spaces, trees and artwork are some of the recommendations for the area between Lockheed Boulevard and Jeff Todd Way.](#)

[Erika Christ](#) Editor



[Mount Vernon](#) Fri. Feb 2 2024

[Mount Vernon High School honors Marine Corps JROTC program founders](#)

[Alumni came from near and far to attend the dedication of a wing at the high school to their former JROTC program instructors.](#)

[Erika Christ](#) Editor



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Mount Vernon Weather: Tuesday February 6



High: 44°

Low: 32°

Wind: 11 MPH NE

Chance of rain: 0%

Sunny, with a high of 44 and low of 32 degrees. Sunny in the morning, clear for the afternoon and evening,

[Huntington](#) Thu. Feb 1 2024

[FCPD seeks suspects in recent carjacking at Montebello](#)

[The incident in Huntington took place Jan. 25, and the two adult victims were uninjured.](#)

[Erika Christ](#) Editor



[Lorton](#) Wed. Jan 31 2024

[Lorton-based theater production racks up award nominations](#)

[The Workhouse Arts Center's 2023 production of "Urinetown" garnered five Helen Hayes Award nominations.](#)

[Erika Christ](#) Editor

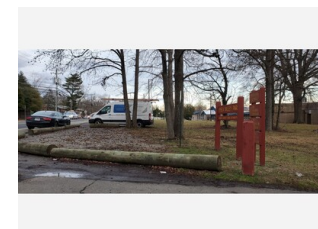


[Hybla Valley](#) Wed. Jan 31 2024

[Pedestrian safety improvements coming to several Route 1 area schools](#)

[Several Fairfax County Active Transportation projects near schools in the Franconia and Mount Vernon Districts have received funding.](#)

[Erika Christ](#) Editor



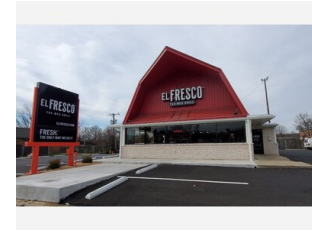


[Hybla Valley](#) Mon. Jan 29 2024

[El Fresco opens in Hybla Valley](#)

[This is the Tex-Mex restaurant's fourth location, with another on the way in Fairfax.](#)

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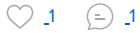


[Mount Vernon](#) Mon. Jan 29 2024

[South GW Memorial Parkway, Mount Vernon Trail to undergo improvements, pending funding](#)

[The National Park Service issued a Finding of No Significant Impact for its Environmental Assessment of improvements to the Parkway and Mount Vernon Trail.](#)

[Erika Christ](#) Editor



Replies



[Greg Crider](#)
Neighbor

1-29-2024 1:15pm

Erika, thanks for keeping the community informed.



[Woodlawn](#) Thu. Jan 25 2024

[Sacramento Center lands new restaurant tenant](#)

[Chipotle Mexican Grill recently signed a lease with Renaud Consulting for a nearly 3,200 square-foot pad building.](#)

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[Mount Vernon](#) Wed. Jan 24 2024

[Bike share program may expand to Mount Vernon District](#)

[FCDOT is proposing installing Capital Bikeshare docking stations at a dozen locations around the district.](#)

[Erika Christ](#) Editor



[Lorton](#) Mon. Jan 22 2024

[Taco Rock to hold grand opening at new Lorton location](#)

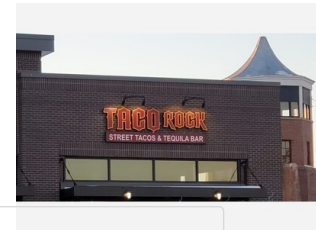
[The Tex-Mex restaurant will open Jan. 24 at Liberty Market.](#)

[Erika Christ](#) Editor



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[Alexandria](#) Fri. Jan 19 2024

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[Occupancy rises at Richmond Highway Corridor's newer apartment complexes](#)

[Some multifamily housing developments are filling up, with a few newly constructed buildings starting move-ins in February.](#)

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