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## Local

Officials, critics decry lack of oversight of Park and Planning Commission

Dena Levitz, The Examiner

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Current rank: *Not ranked*

### Montgomery County -

The Maryland-National Capital Park and Planning Commission, by its own description and allegations of its critics, answers to nobody in state and county government.

The problem that frustrates some elected officials is that the county appoints the board that runs the commission and pays the commission's salaries but it cannot compel Montgomery County Park and Planning to investigate citizen complaints about the application process.

Park and Planning spokeswoman Nancy Lineman told The Examiner state law established the commission in 1927. Montgomery County Park and Planning, within the larger commission, is not considered a county agency, nor does it answer to the state.

"If you're talking about one all-powerful agency having oversight, that's not the way the agency works," she said.

Lineman described the relationship between the County Council and Park and Planning as collaborative. The council selects Planning Board members and determines how much of the county's budget will go to Park and Planning. Council members also can direct broad action, as they did in asking Park and Planning to recommend a new growth policy by a particular date.

"We are their main resource and research arm into land use and park management issues," she said. "But for a member of the council to tell [Park and Planning] to do something about a specific case, that's not appropriate."

The role of the county's inspector general is similar, Lineman said, in that he can perform an audit, "but that doesn't mean if he makes suggestions, we have to do it."

Del. Karen Montgomery, D-Montgomery County, said she has written to Park and Planning officials for more than a year seeking answers about the inspection process and calling for reform.

However, so far her requests have gone unanswered, she said, and she has no authority to make any demands.

"When I make an inquiry, usually it's settled," Montgomery said. "Frankly I'm shocked that this is still up in the air."

Council Member Marc Elrich has also written a handful of letters asking Park and Planning to provide information and further review of land-clearing cases involving constituents.

The requests have not been honored, however, and Elrich is asking Attorney General Doug Gansler to step in.

"The County Council is not an investigatory agency and given the gravity of the allegations ... I respectfully request the assistance of your office," he wrote.

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*Examiner*