

Dear Editor,

At the North College Park Citizens Association meeting on January 14, members considered an amendment to place a limit of two votes per address. As NCPCA President, I did not participate in the discussion, vote, or give my opinion. I would like to do so now, since this is such a sensitive issue with NCPCA members.

I oppose the amendment for three reasons. First, the amendment is technically flawed. It replaced the term “family” with “address” in one section, but did not change it elsewhere, which would have created inconsistent and confusing By-Laws.

Second, as written it would not have accomplished its stated purpose, which was to limit each address to two votes. This was not stated explicitly; one must infer it, which could be countered by an alternate interpretation.

Third, it did not speak to the underlying issue: Many members feel disenfranchised from the organization. There is a perception that a large number of members who do not regularly attend meetings vote as a majority bloc, and would be able to defeat anything put forward by any other member.

Limiting the votes per address speaks to this perception, but may not have the intended effect. According to NCPCA member records, 35 households have one adult, 45 have two adults, 7 have three adults, and only 4 have four or more adults. There is a total of 167 votes. If the amendment had passed, the total votes would be 147, but the largest bloc of members would still have a majority.

What needs to be addressed is the perception that an overwhelming voting bloc, many of whom rarely attend meetings, is poised to turn out to a meeting at a moment’s notice to quash the wishes of longtime residents who are vested, through years of participation, in the activities of the organization. Perception can outweigh reality.

If the bloc acts in this manner, the minority could become disillusioned and leave, believing there is no longer a place for them. This would damage NCPCA’s credibility as a civic association that embraces all residents in its area, and would ultimately work against the purposes to which we all, including those in the bloc, aspire.

Some may say this is democracy in practice. It is certainly a democratic process, using all the mechanisms of democracy, and is certainly legal, ethical, and not against NCPCA’s By-Laws. As last week’s article quoted me as saying, however, this does not mean it is wise. We have seen Congress see-saw back and forth between the parties as one, then the other, comes to power and denies the minority a leadership role. Surely, we in College Park can do better than this.

Larry Bleau

President, North College Park Citizens Association