First county Hackathon to be held this coming weekend
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The Montgomery County Civic Federation, the Sunlight Foundation, the Montgomery County Taxpayers League and the Parents' Coalition of Montgomery County, Maryland invite the public to attend and participate in The Great Montgomery Hackathon, to be held this weekend, February 8 and 9, in the Bethesda-Chevy Chase Regional Services Center (across the street at the rear of the Bethesda Metro Station).

Drop-in is fine; you don't have to stay for the whole time!

Bring your laptop! Don't have one? Come anyway, there will be plenty to do!

Registration and other information on the event is available online on Twitter, at http://twitter.com/@hackMontgomery, or use the hashtag: #hackMontgomery

What is a Hackathon? According to Wikipedia, "The word 'hackathon' is a portmanteau of the words 'hack' and 'marathon', where 'hack' is used in the sense of playful, exploratory programming, not its alternate meaning as a reference to computer crime."

A *civic* hackathon is an event where civic activists come together with computer programmers to develop new web applications that can use government provided data in order to make life in our county easier for the average citizen.

The hackathon will focus on four projects, although suggestion from citizens for other projects would be more than welcome.

1) Transit - Help us build a multilingual mobile web app that will help people find Ride On bus stops as quickly and easily as possible

2) Demographics - Create a tool to help people location important areas and locations on a map and find out the demographic makeup of the area using data from the US Census Bureau.

3) Public Information - Start a service that will help people submit Maryland Public Information Act (MPIA) requests and track the responses, opening up them up to the public.

4) Follow the Money - Help create a usable, easily searchable database from State of Maryland pdf files on lobbying activities.

Don't feel like you will be limited to just these projects. If you have a burning passion to work on something else, come and hack with us anyway!

Don't know how to write code or design? That's okay. There will be a number of tasks that even the most nontechnical people can help out with.

We will provide a light breakfast and coffee each morning. We will also provide lunch, with vegetarian options available. Beverages and snacks will be available throughout the day and we will wrap up Saturday evening with a happy hour at a local pub.

The schedule for the two-day event is as follows:

Saturday, February 8--
- 9:30 am - 10am: light breakfast and coffee
- 10am - 11am: welcome and project introductions
- 11am - 3pm: working!
- 3pm - 4pm: afternoon checkup and project statuses
- 5pm: wrap-up for the day

Sunday, February 9--
- 9:30 am - 10am: light breakfast and coffee
- 10am - 10:30am: welcome and recap of Saturday
- 10:30am - 2pm: working!
- 2pm - 3pm: project review, next steps, and wrap-up

Please join us this weekend for the first Great Montgomery Hackathon.

The views expressed in this column do not necessarily reflect formal positions adopted by the Federation. To submit an 800-1000 word column for consideration, send as an email attachment to the montgomerycivic@yahoo.com