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President's Message

The Education Debate in the Upcoming Legislative Session

The battle that was brewing in Annapolis about how to spend additional tax dollars on education has been put on hold for a year. In one corner is Governor Larry Hogan, who has a new proposal for accelerating the construction of school buildings in the state. In the other corner are the proponents for the Commission on Innovation and Excellence in Education, aka the Kirwan Commission, which seeks to spend that money inside the classroom, not on the classroom.

Both sides have their eyes on the additional tax dollars for education that will be generated thru the "lockbox" amendment approved by voters in November that forces the State to use casino-generated tax dollars for educational purposes, be it for operating costs or capital costs. Prior to this amendment, the State was not limited to use casino-generated taxes for educational purposes. It is projected that this increase in funding will total an estimated \$4.4 billion over the next ten years.

Governor Hogan proposes to add \$1.9 billion in new construction projects for schools, in addition to the \$1.6 billion that is currently allocated in the five-year capital improvement budget. In order to accelerate this construction of new schools, the Maryland Stadium Authority would issue bonds backed by the casino-generated tax revenues in order to provide the funds on an expedited basis. According to the governor, ninety percent of the construction projects that are requested by local school systems could be built using this approach, but the governor has not provided a specific list of those projects.

In contrast to the governor's proposal, the efforts of the Kirwan Commission aim at improving the educational policy prescriptions in the state. Among the recommendations are offering full day education for 3-year-olds from low income households, universal pre-kindergarten for 4-year-olds, raises for teachers, steps to upgrade the standards for teachers and other policies aimed at improving education in impoverished communities. If all of these and other policy positions were implemented, it is estimated to cost an additional \$4.4 billion *per year*. Governor Hogan warns that the state cannot afford these

expenditures without a tax increase, which he is not inclined to support. Just recently both the Senate President and the Speaker of the House of Delegates acknowledged that the commission had not finalized the funding formula for these policy prescriptions, making it impossible to address the issue during the upcoming legislative session. Key to this funding formula is a determination of how much will be picked up by the State and how much will be picked up by localities.

State Senator-elect Chris West cautions that this debate should not devolve into an “either/or” discussion. He believes that we can implement the governor’s school construction program and implement reforms as urged by the Kirwan Commission. West argues that “we can’t afford to institute all of the Kirwan reforms immediately, but we need to get them underway...”. I agree with State Senator-elect West that we need further explanation about the cost of these reforms, but if the \$4.4 billion per year is an accurate number, that is a hefty increase that will certainly cause a tax increase at either the state level or the county level, or both. Further, if we expand education for 3 and 4-year-olds, won’t that require physically larger schools, and are those costs factored in the additional cost for the Kirwan initiatives? We should have learned from the Thornton recommendations in the early 2000s that the cost of these mandates needs to be thoroughly vetted. Let’s hope we will learn from our mistake back then and fully explore the fiscal implications of these sweeping educational recommendations. Spending money does not always result in better performance. For example, we are just now learning that the push to provide all students with a laptop has not resulted in improved test scores in Baltimore County. Accountability in educational funding can be an illusory goal. Keep an eye on the funding recommendations coming from the Kirwan Commission. Some will suggest that the State legalize sports betting with all of the associated taxes going to educational funding. In my mind there are enough other pressing needs in the state, such as infrastructure needs, that require additional sources of revenue. A balanced approach is probably a wiser rationale.

Eric Rockel

New Grocer Comes to Area

Choices for grocery shopping in Timonium grew a little larger with the December 14th opening of Green Valley Marketplace in the Padonia Village Shopping Center. This store, operated by B. Green & Company, is the third store in Maryland for the locally-owned company and the first store in Baltimore County.

A visit to the store revealed that many improvements have been made to the exterior and interior appearance, and layout, from the former Mars Supermarket days. The staff at the store proved helpful and friendly. Many of the baked goods were prepared in the store, and the meat department featured a wide variety of certified angus beef. Prices appeared competitive with the larger chain stores. Stop by and check out the in-store café, the organic produce section or the seafood department, which features local Maryland steamed crabs, crabmeat and local oysters.

Maryland Dept. of Education Releases School Ratings

Education professionals have long argued that it takes more than test scores to evaluate the learning environment for students. So, the Department of Education recently released a “star rating system” for every public school in the state. Schools are graded not just on the test scores of its students but on such items as a well-rounded curriculum, whether students are perpetually absent and the ability to integrate students of differing nationalities into the learning environment.

Most schools in the state graded out to be two, three or four- star schools. Very few schools received either the lowest rating, one-star, or the highest, five-star.

See the ratings below to determine the ranking of the school in your neighborhood:

Cockeysville Middle- 4-star
Ridgely Middle- 4-star

Dulaney H.S.- 4-star
Towson H.S- 4-star
Carver Center, Arts & Tech- 5-star

Hampton Elem.- 5-star
Lutherville Elem.- 5-star
Mays Chapel Elem.- 5-star
Padonia Int’l. Elem.- 4-star
Pinewood Elem.- 5-star
Riderwood Elem.- 5-star
Pot Spring Elem.- 4-star
Timonium Elem.- 5-star
Warren Elem.- 4-star

Pinewood Elementary Garners Recognition

Pinewood Elementary School was named one of Maryland’s six newest Blue Ribbon Schools at a recent ceremony in Annapolis. The Blue Ribbon Schools Program is both a state and national program that honors high performance, as well as significant progress by individual schools, based upon standards developed by the Maryland State Department of Education and the U.S. Department of Education.

As a result of this award, Pinewood will receive a Maryland Blue Ribbon flag, a monetary prize, \$1,000 in office supplies, technology equipment and a school celebration. Our congratulations go out to the principal and staff of the school, as well as the entire student body.

Join Us for Our Next GTCC Meeting

Our next GTCC general meeting is scheduled for January 9, at 7: 00 PM at the Cockeysville Library. Our featured speaker will be Scott Shellenberger, State's Attorney for Baltimore County. He will speak about the newly enacted "Red Flag Protective Orders," as well as other areas of interest.

We had also planned to have representatives from Kaiser Permanente speak about the planned medical facility to be built on Greenspring Drive, but they are unable to attend, and we plan to have them come in the future.

Roland Run Stream Restoration Project

EQR, a contractor working for Baltimore County, is more than fifty percent finished the stream restoration project for part of the Roland Run. Starting at Business Park Drive, which runs between Aylesbury and Greenspring, the restoration work proceeds southerly to approximately one-third mile north of Seminary Avenue. Much of the work involves armoring the stream bank to prevent erosion thru the use of stone and boulders, along with replanting the stream banks in the coming spring with native plants. In addition to the stream bank protection, the design of the project also strives to slow the stream waters by causing the stream to meander more and to deepen the stream bottom where possible. More than fifteen years ago, Baltimore County undertook a similar restoration project along Spring Branch, north of East Timonium Road.

Area Trivia Test

1. Many people know that the water from Loch Raven supplies some of Baltimore's drinking water. Do you know when the original tunnel from Loch Raven to Baltimore was completed?
2. Can you name the very first Baltimore County Executive?
3. In what year was Sherwood Episcopal Church built, and who was the largest donor towards its construction?

Answers follow on the next page

Zoning News and Notes

No major zoning or development news has taken place since our last newsletter. However, some minor zoning requests have occurred in that time span. The property at 1701 York Road, the former “Bagel Works” building will be converted to a urologist office. The building will remain but receive a new exterior appearance. Several residents from the adjacent York Manor neighborhood attended the zoning hearing, and one adjacent neighbor requested that an eight-foot tall privacy fence be constructed at the rear of the property’s parking area. In the end, the Administrative Law Judge approved a variance for the required number of parking spaces and other variances, but required the property to have the eight-foot tall privacy fence.

Smyth’s Jeweler’s has requested to install a new video display screen on its existing sign along York Road. The top end of the sign will remain the same, but the new message portion will replace the existing message board, which is fifteen years old. The zoning hearing for this will be on January 7, 2019 at 11:00.

Legal representatives for 7-Eleven and Graul’s have appealed the zoning approval for the Sheetz convenience store to be located at Padonia and Beaver Dam Roads. The appeal hearing is scheduled for March 5 and 7 before the Board of Appeals of Baltimore County.

Answers to Trivia Questions

1. The original tunnel to carry Loch Raven’s water was completed in 1881.
2. Michael Birmingham was the first County Executive.
3. The original section of Sherwood Church was built in 1835 and consecrated on August 1, 1836. Mrs. Francis Taylor donated the land for the church, as well as a large portion of the building costs.

Safety Tip from the Cockeysville Precinct:

Are you going out of town? Don't leave your home looking unoccupied. Complete a [Vacant House Form](#) and email it to the precinct at pdpc07patrolfax@baltimorecountymd.gov. Officers will then check on your location for any unusual activity while you are away.

If something suspicious does happen at your home, law enforcement will be able to quickly reach you or a local emergency contact from the information provided on the form.

Calendar of Events

1. Woodworking Show: January 4-6 at the Cow Palace at the Timonium Fairgrounds; Friday, 12:00 to 6:00 PM; Saturday, 10:00 AM to 6:00 PM; Sunday, 10:00 AM to 3:00 PM
2. World of Pets Expo: January 25-27 at the Cow Palace at Timonium Fairgrounds; All days 2:00 PM to 6:00 PM
3. Motorcycle Show: February 8-10 at the Cow Palace at Timonium Fairgrounds; All days 10:00 AM to 6:00 PM
4. Baltimore County Restaurant Week: January 18-February 2
For sites, menus and prices go to BaltimoreCountyRestaurantWeek.com
5. Learn about Indians who inhabited Maryland during colonial times, as presented by the Maryland Historical Trust; Cockeysville Library, January 16 at 7:00 PM
6. Public Open House with State Highway Admin.- Reducing Congestion on I-695- January 14, 5:30 to 7:30 PM, Ridgely Middle School, 121 E. Ridgely Road

GTCC Meetings for 2019

January 9

September 11

March 13

November 13

May 8

We wish all a Happy and Healthy New Year