

GTCC

The Greater Timonium Community Council

**Volume XII , Issue 3
May, 2020**

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+++++++ NEWSLETTER ++++++

THERE WILL BE NO GTCC MEETING ON MAY 13, 2020. WE WILL ATTEMPT TO HOLD A MEETING OVER THE SUMMER, BUT A DATE AND TIME HAS NOT BEEN ARRANGED.

President's Message:

I'm sure all our members join me in thanking the medical professionals, police officers, firefighters, EMS personnel, postal workers and grocery store workers who have served this county, state and nation in these unprecedented times. The lockdown has been hard on everyone, to varying degrees, but it would be impossible to understate the important work carried out daily by the medical professionals and these other groups. We may be near the peak of the crisis for Maryland, but even if the restrictions are eased in the coming weeks, remember that social distancing, washing your hands frequently and other strategies are still the most basic means of self defense until scientists come up with a vaccine.

Elsewhere in this newsletter you will see an article about the newly released fiscal year 2021 budget for Baltimore County. I'm hoping that the County Council will exercise fiscal prudence and not just rubber stamp the budget's approval because I don't think this budget fully appreciates the economic downturn that has already started. County Executive Olszewski acknowledged economic conditions in his budget address when he quoted a UC Berkley labor expert who stated we are "definitely headed into something much deeper than the Great Recession, and comparable to the Great Depression." I hope that labor expert is wrong, but I fear he is not, and yet the County Executive increased some sectors of the county budget, such as education spending, by as much as a four percent increase. In terms of the education budget, he proposes to spend \$20 million more than the State-mandated "maintenance of effort." If approved, this \$20 million more will have to be spent again next year, the year after and on an on. When an individual's budget takes on an unexpected expense, such as unanticipated medical

expenses for an operation or a costly automobile accident, you cut back in other areas to make up the unanticipated expense. Why wouldn't the County do likewise?

Comptroller Peter Franchot estimates that State income taxes alone through June of this year will drop by 22%. He cautioned that this sharp downturn will not jump back immediately. "You can't just turn the economy back on like a light bulb," he warned. Yet the County Executive wants to spend more on guidance counselors for schools and he has set aside \$24 million more for the "Blueprint for the Future," also known as the Kirwan recommendations. Another example of the dramatic increase is in the bond indebtedness to pay for increased school construction. As of June 30, 2017, the County owed \$519.5 million in debt to pay for school construction, and by June 30, 2020 we will owe \$779.5 million, an approximate fifty percent increase in three years. I personally have no issue with spending more on school construction, although the fifty percent increase over a short time span does give me some pause, but I can't understand increasing the operating budget at a time when things look gloomy. Postpone the hiring of more guidance counselors and forget about the Kirwan recommendations, which have not even been signed into law by the Governor to date. Let's start living within our means.

Eric Rockel

What's the New Normal?

In the midst of this global pandemic, it's impossible to say exactly how social norms and personal behavior will change after the pandemic ceases. But changes will occur. People's behavior changed after the great depression of the 1930s. Institutional changes happened after World War II ended, with the birth of organizations like NATO and the United Nations. Even the great recession of 2008 ushered in changes to personal spending habits and homeownership, although those changes were more short-lived.

Listed below are a series of questions about possible changes in the future. You be the judge as to which ones will take place. It is too early to say with any certainty, but it never hurts to speculate.

Will shaking hands go the way of the dinosaur? Or will it return as a popular greeting after a vaccine becomes available for Covid-19?

Will people continue to stockpile food, paper goods, antibacterial cleaners and the like after the virus subsides this summer or fall? Will this behavior change the way grocery stores manage their inventory?

Will sporting events, concerts and movie going have the same level of attendance as they did before the outbreak of Covid-19 ?

Will small businesses be able to survive the shutdowns that have resulted? Or will an even greater percentage of our commerce be concentrated in large retailers, like Amazon, Walmart, Costco and the like?

Will school systems place a greater reliance in online learning with full curriculums being developed for many schools?

Will our country become more self-reliant in the manufacture of products, including medicines, personal protective equipment and the like?

Will more people elect to go into the medical field, be it as doctors, technicians, nurses or clinicians?

The use of video conferencing could make the idea of central offices a less necessary gathering space. How much more prevalent will working at home and video conferencing become in the future?

What trends will emerge when the pandemic ends and we grapple with what is the new normal? At this point no one knows for sure, but change is constant and there will be changes as we evolve after this tragedy.

What's in Your Wallet?

This advertising slogan adopted by one of the credit card companies may soon be a popular refrain asked by thousands of Marylanders as they confront the new taxes adopted by the Maryland General Assembly during the truncated 2020 session. Governor Hogan threatened to veto these new taxes, but as of this writing he has been attending to the Covid 19 crisis and it's unclear whether he will carry out his threat. Regardless, there are enough votes of Democrats in the General Assembly to override the governor's veto if necessary.

Both houses of the legislature passed the Kirwan Commission reforms without providing any direct way to pay for it, a cost to the state of approximately \$2.6 billion per year when fully implemented. But the legislation that will be enumerated below produces an estimated \$500 million a year, only a portion of that total cost.

House Bill 732 places a tax on digital advertising in the state, a first throughout the entire nation. Estimates on how much revenue this will produce have varied widely, from \$50 million per year to over \$200 million annually. There is good reason why Maryland may be the first in the nation with this tax- its opponents claim that it violates existing federal law. Even Attorney General Brian Frosh's office warned the General Assembly that this tax could be stricken down by federal courts. The "Internet Tax Freedom Act", enacted in 2016 by the Obama Administration may strike the tax down if challenged. House Bill 932 created a new tax on digital goods and services, such as e-books, streamed movies and music downloads. Tobacco & nicotine, as part of HB 732 will face higher taxes, with cigarettes taxes being increased by \$1.75 per pack and vaping products being taxed for the first time.

Sports Betting

Both chambers of the General Assembly passed a bill allowing sports betting. The matter will now go to a referendum of all voters this November. If this measure succeeds in November, sports betting will become legal, but there was an interesting twist in the version of the bill passed by the legislature. The bill initially approved by the Senate, and sponsored by Senator Chris West, specifically named the Timonium Fairgrounds racetrack as a venue for sports betting. However, the bill that was adopted left out all specific references as to where sports betting would be allowed, and the specific sites will be determined by the legislature in the future if voters approve the referendum measure.

Code Enforcement Panel Concludes

Tasked by the County Council and the County Executive to review the operations of the Code Enforcement office, a panel of citizens from around the county, along with professionals from that office, came up with recommendations for future changes. Among the ten recommendations that the panel put forth was the creation of a revolving fund that would provide Code Enforcement more money to proactively correct problems when a property owner fails to act. Currently all of the money assessed in fines as a result of code enforcement violations goes directly to the general fund, and the County Executive and County Council must set aside a pool of money yearly to allow for correction actions. If adopted, the new policy would have all fines go directly into a revolving fund to pay for corrections. The panel also endorsed the practice of inspectors working flexible hours other than nine to five. Violations such as operating a rooming house are often hard to verify during the nine to five-time frame, and flexible hours could correct that deficiency. Currently, there is only one Administrative Law Judge hearing enforcement cases, and the panel recommended adding a second judge to speed up due process. In a companion move, the panel also recommended adding to the staffing of inspectors. There are currently 18 inspectors according to Michael Mallinoff, Director of Permits Approval and Inspections, whereas ten to twelve years ago there were 34 inspectors. The recommendation did not include a specific number of new hires. Soon there will be new technology deployed for inspectors to report on their inspections, and the current violations log will be reformatted. Several citizens on the panel remarked that the on-line violations log contained too little information for the public to find it useful. Hopefully, that feature will change as part of these changes. Finally, the panel also urged the creation of a vacant property registry, in which landlords would need to notify the County when their properties are no longer occupied. All of the above-mentioned changes must now be enacted by the County Executive for administrative changes, and in some cases by the County Council. For example, there was talk of increasing the fines for the dumping of trash on vacant properties, and that change would require Council action.

Questions & Answers on Covid-19 Related Topics

Delegate Michele Guyton has been putting out some very useful newsletters covering a variety of timely topics. Below is her April 10 newsletter, and if you want to see other newsletters, go to www.micheleguyton.com

I have lost my job due to Covid 19 and I am having trouble reaching the Department of Labor to apply for unemployment!

The Maryland Department of Labor is well aware that it has been difficult for folks to reach them, particularly by phone. They are actively working to move employees from other departments to help cover the increased demand. Additional servers have been added to handle the increase in on-line applications and they are encouraging people to file their claims on-line as much as possible. In the past, Federal employees and people that had worked out of state were unable to file a claim on-line and had to file in person or over the phone. Those requirements are being relaxed during this time. All of this information and more (including form to file for unemployment insurance) can be found here: [MD Dept. of Labor](#) Many people are filing for unemployment for the first time in their lives and understandably have questions. You can e-mail questions to [unemployment questions](#) . Staff is being added to field the increase in e-mail inquiries as well. If you absolutely must call, hours have been extended to 7:00am - 6:00pm Monday through Friday and starting next week Saturday hours will be available. Please click on the following link: [MD Dept. of Labor](#) and look at the schedule of when to call. They are asking that people file on days based on the first letter of their last name to avoid everyone calling at once. Please be assured that Maryland does not have a waiting week like many other states do. No matter when or how they file, Marylanders become eligible for benefits starting the day after they separated from employment. If you are eligible, you will be paid for all benefits due.

It is great that BCPS is supplying meals to children, but what about food insecure adults?

The Baltimore County Department of Recreation and Parks, with support from the Maryland Army National Guard, Maryland Food Bank and Healthy Food Access St. Vincent de Paul of Baltimore, is offering limited take-away meals for families. Meals are available from 4 to 6 p.m. on Mondays, Wednesdays and Fridays on a first come, first served basis. Food is available on Saturdays starting at 11 a.m. also on a first come, first served basis. In addition, you can call 410-887-2594 or e-mail food@baltimorecountymd.gov if you have food needs or questions. If you are a senior, or know of a senior with food access needs, call 410-887-2594 or aginginfo@baltimorecountymd.gov. All of this information and more can be found at [BC Food Resources](#) Make sure that you scroll down to the bottom of the page to see the different food distribution sites. Links to BCPS meal sites as well as a map of restaurants that are still offering take-out can also be found at the BC Food Resources link.

Other Resources are available through the Maryland Department of Health and Human Services. To apply for help over the phone, you can call the Maryland Hunger Solutions hotline at (866) 821-5552. They will assist anyone who calls with a SNAP application or is in need of food resources. Call between Monday - Friday 10:00am - 6:00pm and leave your name and a phone number. An

advocate will get back to you within 24 hours. You can also apply online at <https://mydhrbenefits.dhr.state.md.us>

The Baltimore County Together campaign is offering the option to order weekly produce kits that can be picked up at “pop-up markets” in each of the seven county council districts. The produce kits will be made available for a significantly reduced cost of just \$20 for more than 15 pounds of fresh produce. Reservations for the kits can be made online. These prepared produce kits will provide options for fruits, vegetables, and combination packages to support families for up to two weeks at a time. The campaign is also accepting donations so that additional kits can be purchased and provided to those in need for free. For more information and to place an order, please visit: [Baltimore County Together](#)

I am retired / not currently working but I have skills that would be of value during this crisis!

You should look into the Maryland Responds program. The State of Maryland has organized a registration system for medical and public health officials to volunteer during this pandemic. You can find more information here: [Maryland Responds](#)

Do I need to be concerned about my Social Security or SSI checks?

No, Andrew Saul, Commissioner of Social Security, reminds the public that Social Security and Supplemental Security Income (SSI) benefit payments will continue to be paid on time during the COVID-19 pandemic. Unfortunately there are known scams - do not fall prey! The Inspector General of Social Security, Gail S. Ennis, is warning the public about fraudulent letters threatening suspension of Social Security benefits due to COVID-19-related office closures. The Social Security Administration will not suspend or discontinue benefits because their offices are closed to the public for in-person service. For more information regarding Social Security and SSI payments during this time, please visit: [SSA during Corona](#)

I would like to see a healthcare / mental health professional but I am afraid to leave the house!

Good News! Did you know that the state of Maryland requires coverage of telehealth? This is true if your health plan is regulated by the state. If you participate in a self-funded employee benefit plan, your plan may fall under ERISA which pre-empts state law. The Maryland Insurance Administration is still open for business and their employees have been very responsive to constituent concerns. First check with your individual health plan provider (many have expanded telehealth services during this time) but if you feel that you are not receiving the proper coverage, you can find many resources here: [MD Insurance Administration](#)

I have an E-ZPass Commuter plan. I am not going to use it since I am staying at home and I am upset that I will lose that money....

Expiration dates for E-ZPass® Discount Plans that customers use at the Bay Bridge, the Nice/Middleton Bridge and throughout the Baltimore region – including the Fort McHenry and Baltimore Harbor tunnels, Francis Scott Key and Hatem bridges, and John F. Kennedy Memorial Highway – have been extended from 45 to 90 days to give commuters time to use their plans’ remaining trips. The Bay Bridge Shoppers Plan expiration is extended from 90 to 150 days. Discount Plan holders who anticipate a long-term or permanent change to their commute due to COVID-19 may change or cancel their plan by ezpassmd.com calling 1-888-321-6824 (711 for MD Relay). The automated phone system is available 24/7. To speak with a customer-service representative, call the toll-free line between 7 a.m. and 6 p.m. Monday through Friday.

I have Diabetes and I am afraid of how I will be affected by coronavirus / I am concerned about being able to afford my insulin...

The American Diabetes Association is providing support and guidance to constituents impacted by diabetes, who are at higher risk of getting very sick from COVID-19. You can access helpful resources, understand your risk, know your legal rights, and connect with community at diabetes.org/coronavirus. Make sure you know how to reduce your risk of contracting COVID-19 and what to do if you or a loved one develops symptoms. In addition, many people are now facing unexpected financial hardships. If you are struggling to pay for insulin, the ADA has resources to help - visit InsulinHelp.org. Questions? The American Diabetes Association is here to help during this challenging time: [click here](#) or call their Center for Information at 1-800-DIABETES (800-342-2383).

In addition to the resources available through the American Diabetes Association, Pharmaceutical company Eli Lilly is introducing the Lilly Insulin Value Program, allowing anyone with commercial insurance and those without insurance to fill their monthly prescription of Lilly insulin for \$35. The program is effective as of April 7th, 2020 and covers most Lilly insulins. Details and more information can be found in the press release here: <https://e.lilly/2wjEr7J>.

How do we protect vulnerable families from domestic violence when people are trapped in their houses?

One of the unfortunate side effects of being confined to your home is that it may make abusive relationships worse or make it difficult to report abuse. We are fortunate in Baltimore County that our Police Chief, Melissa R. Hyatt, is aware of these issues and our police force is prepared to help. There are several ways to contact the police if calling 911 is not an option, you can have a family member or friend call the non-emergency number at 410-887-2222, you can email iwatch@baltimorecountymd.gov, call the Special Victims Unit at 410-887-2223, or call GBMC's Sexual Assault Forensic Examination (SAFE) and Domestic Violence (DV) Program at 443-849-3323. (GBMC HealthCare)

I have lost my job and I am concerned about Health Insurance!

I included this link in a previous newsletter but with more Marylanders finding themselves in positions that they had never previously imagined, I think it is important for people to know that the deadline to enroll in the Maryland Health Connection health insurance program has been expanded until June 15th, 2020. You can find more information here: [MD Health Connection](#)

I have nothing but time on my hands, I might as well file my taxes by the original deadline!

Comptroller Peter Franchot urges Maryland taxpayers seeking refunds to file electronically as soon as possible and reminds those who file paper income tax returns to make sure those returns are postmarked by April 10th to ensure processing. The agency will temporarily stop processing paper tax returns on April 15 in an effort to keep essential employees safe amid the spread of COVID-19. For more information, including the new tax deadlines for those of us that do not want to think about taxes right now, click marylandtaxes.gov

I hope that you find some or all of this to be helpful! I know this is a Holiday weekend for many of us and that it is tempting to visit with families and friends. I ask that you all embrace the current normal and do so virtually to keep all of those that you love safe! As a psychologist, I feel the need to end with some mental health tips. Remember that your mental health is just as important as your physical health! The following are reminders from our friends from the National Alliance on Mental Illness:

Senator Chris West Reviews His Environmental Votes

The League of Conservation Voters, the State's leading environmental organization, identified eight key pieces of legislation which came to the floor of the State Senate and on which I cast a vote. I VOTED IN FAVOR OF ALL EIGHT BILLS. Let me briefly summarize them: 1) I voted in favor of a bill to provide for management plans governing our State's oyster resources (this bill passed and is now on the Governor's desk for his signature); 2) I voted to ban the use of chlorpyrifos in Maryland as it is an extremely dangerous chemical and there are safer alternatives to protect crops and flowering trees (this bill also passed and is on the Governor's desk for his signature); 3) I voted in favor of Senate Bill 172, enabling funds in the Bay Restoration Fund to be used for stormwater management and flood control (again, this bill passed); 4) I voted for SB 457, giving local governments the authority to establish Resilience Authorities (once again, this bill passed); 5) I voted for SB 656, requiring the Public Service Commission to take climate into consideration in its regulation of utilities (this bill passed in the Senate but died in the House of Delegates); 6) I voted for SB 460, creating an environmental and natural resources ombudsman (this bill also passed in the Senate but died in the House of Delegates); 7) I voted for SB 721, which would have created a State Chief Resilience Officer (yet another bill that passed in the Senate but died in the House); and 8) I voted for SB 254, which would have licensed sewage disposal inspectors (again it passed in the Senate but died in the House).

There were a number of other environmental bills that never reached the Senate floor for a vote but which I probably would have supported: a ban on plastic bags, an effort to move to zero emission buses, the "Greenhouse Gas Emissions Reduction Act" and a bill dealing with food purchasing. Finally, there was a bill that I co-sponsored that would have changed the State's renewable energy standard to exclude trash incineration as a "clean energy" source and to exclude "black liquor" produced as a byproduct of paper-making as a "clean energy" source; this bill never reached the floor in either house of the General Assembly.

One of the disadvantages of the shortened session was that three bills that I introduced and fought hard to pass ended up on the cutting room floor. First, working with the Sierra Club, I sponsored a bill to phase out the burning of coal in Maryland to generate electricity. There are only six remaining coal-fired electrical generating plants in Maryland. Coal is by far the dirtiest way to generate electricity and is a major cause of global warming. Second, as we passed legislation providing for spending \$2.2 Billion on new school construction, I introduced a bill to require that all new buildings constructed in Maryland using public funds be equipped with solar panels on their roofs. Solar panels should be installed on roofs, not on productive agricultural land. Finally, I introduced a bill to enable the counties to issue bonds and use the bond money to assist their residents in installing upgraded septic systems.

I hope you are pleased with my environmental record in the 2020 Session.

In every legislative session, there are both winners and losers. Due to the shortened session this year, there seemed to be more environmental losers than winners, but the good news is that we will return next January and will have another chance to revive and pass the bills that failed this year. In the meantime, please accept my very best wishes for a healthy and safe Spring, Summer and Fall.

Chris

State Senator Chris West, 42nd District

County Executive Unveils Budget

Acknowledging that “this is not the budget I hoped to present to you this year, but it is the budget that meets the moment,” County Executive John Olszewski, Jr. held a virtual budget presentation to the County Council and the public. Olszewski made it clear that his immediate concern was responding to the pandemic brought on by the coronavirus that has resulted in less revenue than anticipated even a month ago.

In all, the operating budget proposal calls for \$3.9 billion in fiscal year 2021, which is \$40 million less than the original revenue estimates, but it is more than the \$3.77 billion of last fiscal year. Included in the budget are new spending proposals for what Olszewski termed “eye toward the future” initiatives, including more capital dollars for parkland acquisitions, funding to match federal grants for the planning of the Towson Circulator bus, a data-driven performance management program called BC Stat and better job training for county employees. The budget also provides \$1 million more for volunteer fire companies around the county, and a 1% pay increase for all education employees. Negotiated before the start of the coronavirus, general county employees would receive a 2% increase in July 2020 and another 2% increase on January 1, 2021. He also requested funds to build two new PAL centers- at McCormick and Glenmar Elementary Schools.

The largest expenditures in the budget go to education spending. The total proposed education budget, which includes K-12 grades, as well as community colleges, comes to more than \$2 billion, over half of the total budget. That sum represents nearly \$36 million more than the fiscal year 2020 education budget and is \$20 million more than the State-mandated maintenance of effort. Although earlier the County Executive had imposed a hiring freeze for county employees, his budget provides \$1 million to hire additional school counselors and support staff. Completion of the Schools for the Future school construction initiative started by a prior administration is on hold pending when State monies will be available. However, Olszewski will be requesting that the County Council approve a bond bill, which would be voted on in a referendum in November 2020, for \$200,000,000 as part of additional school construction funds.

In terms of enumerated projects for the greater Timonium area there was little detail in the budget message. Added spending is planned for the recovery center at the Texas Landfill and a storm drain project in Lutherville was mentioned. Projects outside of Timonium, but in adjacent communities, included a storm drain project at Joppa Road and Goucher Boulevard and a stream restoration project at Little Gunpowder Falls. There will be additional miles of road resurfacing, as well, but typically the budget address does not enumerate which roads will be resurfaced.

Maryland State Fairgrounds Responds to the Corona Crisis

In the midst of the uncharted waters that we all experience with the coronavirus crisis, the State Fair is doing its part to help the Baltimore County community. Part of the fairgrounds is being used by the Maryland National Guard as it assists Baltimore County to distribute food to over thirty school sites and other distribution centers, and on the day before Easter the fairgrounds, itself, also became a food distribution site to be accessed by needy families. The Cow Palace has been recently converted into a drive-through coronavirus testing center, and it became operational on April 16..

None of the above can become possible without a lot of behind the scenes efforts from the stalwart men and women who work at the fairgrounds, and those who volunteer their time for its betterment. We would like to thank the leadership team of Gerry Brewster, Donna Myers and Andrew Cashman, as well as those many others who are dedicated to its upkeep.

Planning Board to Discuss CZMP Issues

The Planning Board will discuss the CZMP issues for the 3rd Council district on April 23, starting at 5:30 PM. This will be a virtual meeting, and you can catch the livestream of the session by accessing it on the Planning Department homepage of the Baltimore County website.

Support Those Who Assist Others

There are many organizations that have been assisting others in light of shortages that exist due to the pandemic. On May 5, the nation will be donating to many organizations as part of a GivingTuesdayNow effort to contribute to groups that are on the front line of providing aid to our most needy and vulnerable citizens among us. Listed below are four organizations that would appreciate your support, and a donation for their efforts. There are many more that are equally as worthy, but please consider helping the following:

Assistance Center of Towson Churches
Baltimore CountyCovid-19 Relief Fund

Meals on Wheels of Baltimore County
Community Assistance Network

Stay Safe and Follow the Guidelines!

Again, There will be No Meeting in May

**If and When we hold a meeting over the summer,
We will provide ample notice of the date**

Don't forget 2020census.gov