

# GTCC

# The Greater Timonium Community Council

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**There will be no general meeting in March due to the pandemic. We will notify you in an upcoming newsletter when we plan to resume meetings in compliance with government regulations.**

*President's Message:*

## **Where's the Vaccine?**

I wish I had an insightful answer to this question, but I do not. Yet most people will be uttering this question for many weeks, if not months, into the future. It is now the middle of February while I write this newsletter, and many seniors, above age 75, have still not received a vaccination or even an appointment for one. I have attended two virtual town halls on the vaccination problem, and have I heard frustrations vented by many seniors.

It remains unclear if the problem is a lack of supply or if the problem is a distribution issue. In terms of the supply pipeline, officials in many states are complaining that they are not getting adequate doses from the manufacturers/federal government. As of the end of January, the New York Times reports that slightly more than 36 million doses have been manufactured. The Times also reports that the two manufacturers are producing between 12-18 million doses per week. With the stated goal of getting 200 million total doses out by the end of March, which equates to 100 million people being fully vaccinated with two doses per person. If manufacturers fail to hit the high end of their weekly production schedule, they will never meet the stated goal of 200 million doses without exceeding the weekly production in the coming weeks. Thus far, it does not appear that manufacturers are meeting the upper end of their weekly goal.

In the state of Maryland, the Democratic members of the congressional delegation are urging Governor Hogan to improve the distribution process. They are calling on the state to create a one-stop state website where all Marylanders could register for an appointment and for better coordination between the Maryland Department of Health and the local health departments. Registering with the local health department and several local hospitals and

pharmacies does not ease anxiety for residents still waiting for an appointment, and many citizens are registering with neighboring counties as a further way of increasing their odds of getting an appointment. But I am not sure that one centralized state website is the answer either. After all, did not the State experience all sort of website problems when too many people tried to register for unemployment benefits at the start of the pandemic in March and April of last year? Or have we forgotten the website problems at the outset of the Affordable Care Act?

But it is certain that counties are seeing less vaccines now than they did just a few weeks ago. The Howard County Executive, Calvin Ball, reported his county saw a thirty percent drop of vaccines over a three-week period in January and early February. The Sun reported that Bob Atlas, the CEO of the Maryland Hospital Association, wrote that second doses expected in the last week of January were about “one-third lower than corresponding dose allocation from 3-4 weeks ago would call for.” It is unclear if these problems are caused by a malfunction at the state level or if they are caused at the manufacturer/federal level. Further, the New York Times reports that Maryland has only administered 69% of the vaccine doses that it has received as of February 23<sup>rd</sup>. That figure is one of the lowest rates in the nation. President Biden’s calls for a greater sense of urgency are not being carried out to date.

Clearly, some additional information from the State Department of Health would make this picture clearer. The State should share its information on weekly vaccine allocations from the federal government and share information on how much the counties are receiving, along with companion information on hospitals’ and pharmacies’ allocations.

All I can offer is a suggestion for patience. This is such a multi-faceted, complex situation. I am not sure that any one strategy or any one person can correct the vaccine shortage any time soon.

Eric Rockel

### **County to Hold Virtual Town Halls on Budget**

County Executive John Olszewski, Jr. announced plans to hold a series of town hall meetings to hear from constituents about their ideas and priorities, just as he has done in the past two years. These seven virtual meetings, one for each council district, will ensure that community members have a chance to voice their feelings as the budget planning process takes place. The County Executive stated that “while this pandemic has upended our way of life, we remain committed to keeping Baltimore County government open, accessible and transparent ... to build a better Baltimore County.”

All Budget Town Hall Meetings will be livestreamed on Baltimore County’s You Tube page and Facebook page, and residents may also join in by phone. The call-in number is 1-415-655-0001, access code 180 202 5808.

The meeting for the Third Council District is scheduled for Thursday, March 18<sup>th</sup>, at 6:30 pm. Should you wish to listen by phone, rather than virtually, the call-in number is 1-415-655-0001, with an access code of 180 202 5808. You can also submit ideas in advance by emailing [townhall@baltimorecountymd.gov](mailto:townhall@baltimorecountymd.gov).

### **BCPS to Begin Hybrid School Reopening**

Baltimore County Public Schools announced a phased-in reopening schedule for those families who want their children to participate in hybrid learning. Hybrid learning will include two in-person learning days per week and three virtual learning days per week.

“We have heard loud and clear that some families are ready for in-person learning,” stated School Superintendent Dr. Darryl Williams. He also acknowledged that school operations will look different, caused by the CDC’s health and safety protocols, but he commended the staff for rising to these challenges.

The Phased-In Timeline will look roughly like the following:

Week of March 1- Students in separate days schools, i.e., Battle Monument, Ridge Ruxton, Maiden Choice and White Oak Schools will return; as well as students in Preschool to Grade 2 and Grade 3 students in a Grade 2/3 class in a special education regional program.

Week of March 15- Students in grades 3-12 whose individualized program includes a least restrictive environment that is primarily outside of the general education classroom setting, such as Communication and Learning Support, Functional Academic Learning Support and three other support programs. In addition to the aforementioned groups, students in select Career and Technical Education programs will return the week of March 15.

Week of March 22- Remaining students in Grades 6 and 9.

Week of April 6- Remaining students in Grades 3-5, 7-8, and 10-12.

Under the hybrid learning situation offered by BCPS, students will be placed in one of two cohort groupings, with one group attending school on Mondays and Tuesdays, while the other cohort group will attend school on Thursday and Friday. On the other three days of each week, students will continue virtual learning.

Families also have the option to continue a fully virtual instruction schedule amid the phased-in hybrid reopening.

## **Reopening Draws Criticism in Some Quarters**

Despite Baltimore County Public Schools specific plan to launch a hybrid reopening, as well as Governor Hogan's general exhortation that all schools need to reopen, a group of special interest leaders, led by Cheryl Bost of the Maryland State Education Association, Willie King of the NAACP state conference and Gustavo Torres of Casa de Maryland took exception to school re-openings in a Commentary article published in the Baltimore Sun on February 1. The writers pointed out that research is far from settled on the safety of school re-openings. Further the writers called out those who would state that educators should not be worried about being vaccinated before returning to school. They went on to proclaim that it is encouraging to see the Biden administration approach these challenges with "real plans, realistic expectations and recognition of the complexities," and they stated that this was not happening from state leaders.

How these writers reconciled this criticism with the recent pronouncement from the Biden Administration's Director of the CDC, Dr. Rochelle Walensky, when she said on national television that vaccinations of teachers are not a prerequisite for the safe re-opening of schools, has not yet been addressed.

The Commentary article went on to outline the baseline expectations for what should be done to safely re-open schools. Those recommendations included accelerated vaccination availability for educators; reasonable safety standards in school buildings and addressing educator workload, including additional staffing support. All those expectations appear reasonable topics for discussion, but I am sure that Ms. Bost's and her cohort's ideas of what is adequate may be far greater than what certain government leaders deem necessary.

The article concluded by urging that "we must do less blaming of each other and more building up of one another." Yet in the paragraph prior to that conclusion, the writers blamed Governor Hogan for vetoing the Blueprint for Maryland's Future (the Kirwan Education bill) and suggested that the state needs this legislation to overcome inequities caused by virtual learning during the pandemic.

## **Is Baltimore County Ready for Term Limits?**

Baltimore County already has term limits with respect to the county executive, who by County Charter may only serve two terms, but up till now, the County Council faced no term limitations. Councilmen Tom Quirk and Todd Crandell hope to change that with introduction of Bill 11-21. Under this bill the Council members would be limited to three, four-year terms. Because this change would necessitate a revision of the County Charter, five of the seven

Council members will need to vote in favor of this bill, and if it passes, the measure would then be voted on in referendum in the 2022 election.

This bill will be discussed at the work session of February 23<sup>rd</sup> and voted on at the legislative session of March 1<sup>st</sup>.

### **Legislators Override Hogan's Vetoes**

In votes cast along party lines, the Maryland House of Delegates and the Maryland Senate have overturned the governor's vetoes on the Blueprint for Maryland (Kirwan Education Bill) and the tax increases that will pay for *part* of the new funding for education. Proponents of Kirwan used the same arguments that have been heard for the last two years about the state of education in Maryland, while opponents voiced many of the complaints that most legislators chose to ignore. For example, proponents state that "Maryland schools are underfunded," but in truth on a per pupil basis, Maryland spends 22% more than the national average. Opponents also point out that on a per pupil basis, Maryland's teachers are paid 28% more than the national average, contradicting that teachers in the state are underpaid. Kirwan supporters have also claimed that these reforms will not impose financial burdens on the local jurisdictions, but approximately one-third of the costs for Kirwan will be shouldered by localities. Last year, Governor Hogan estimated that the cost of Kirwan would result in an additional \$6,200 in taxes for every Maryland family when fully implemented.

One of the tax bills that was overridden places new taxes on video streaming services. Termed the "21<sup>st</sup> Century Tax Fairness Act," this new tax will add a 6% tax to online providers. Consider some of the following: currently Netflix cost \$13.99 per month, but after this tax it will be \$14.82 monthly; a Verizon/Xfinity bill will rise from \$89.99 per month to \$95.39 and Disney+ will increase from \$6.99 to \$7.41 per month. In addition to these and other direct sales taxes on cable and streaming services, the new digital ad tax, which Gov. Hogan also vetoed but was overridden, will result in additional costs to consumers, but it is much more difficult to give concrete examples from that category because of the fluctuation in frequencies of digital ads across internet services, but the estimate revenue from this tax is projected to be \$250 million annually.

A consortium of big tech companies, the U.S. Chamber of Commerce and others have already filed a lawsuit in federal court challenging this tax. Maryland is the first state in the nation with this levy, and the lawsuit alleges the law violates federal laws.

### **Local Legislators Offer Many Bills in Maryland General Assembly**

The greater Timonium area includes parts of both legislative district 42 B and district 11. The following is a sample of the legislation sponsored or co-sponsored by the senators and

delegates from those two districts. The total number of bills sponsored and co-sponsored by each member is indicated in parenthesis.

#### District 11

- A.** Senator Shelly Hettleman (38 bills): SB 012- Provides that the Office of the Inspector General for Health is an independent office in state government, rather than a unit of the Health Department. It also requires an annual report of the office, particularly concerning fraud, waste and abuse of certain health funds, as well as the office's referrals of Medicaid fraud; SB 023- Home Detention Monitoring, this bill would exempt certain indigent defendants from paying certain home detention fees to the state; SB 075- Requires in-person renewal of driver's licenses for individuals age 85 and over; SB 138- allows employees of Baltimore County Public Libraries to form and join a union, as well as collectively bargain; SB 154- This bill establishes a right to legal representation for tenants in an eviction proceeding, as well as establishes a coordinator position in the Office of Attorney General to monitor and supervise the implementation of legal representation around the state.
- B.** Delegate Jon Cardin (10 bills ): HB 136- Should sports & event wagering be passed, this bill would prevent business entities associated with sports & event wagering, as well as certain individuals employed by those entities, from directly or indirectly contributing to campaign finance organizations; HB 249- Would prohibit the Dept. of Agriculture from issuing a license to grow hemp on land that is located within 25 feet of a property or properties with three or more individual residences, unless the grower agrees to grow hemp indoors with an approved filtration system to limit fumes from the plants; HB 274- Requires each local board of elections to send a vote-by-mail ballot to each registered voter in the state.
- C.** Delegate Lisa Belcastro (9 bills ): HB 209- Establishes a Maryland Suicide Fatality Review Committee to identify and address the factors contributing to suicide deaths and work on changes to prevent suicides; HB 416- Requires the Maryland Dept. of Health to adopt specific standards governing memory care and Alzheimer's units in assisted living programs, including training requirements and staffing requirements; HB 053, as a co-sponsor- This bill repeals the State law that bars individuals convicted of a felony and currently serving a sentence for that conviction from being qualified to be a registered voter.
- D.** Delegate Dana Stein (21 bills): HB 022- Requires any officer, employee or contractor for the state or a subdivision to deny to any federal agent or any federal agency any personal information related to civil immigration enforcement unless provided with a valid warrant for same; HB 094- Expands the authorized use of financing guarantee authority under the Maryland Water Quality Revolving Loan Fund. Currently the fund only provides guarantees related to wastewater facilities; HB 164- Requires the Office of Recycling in the Dept. of the Environment to promote the development of markets for recycled materials.

## District 42 B

- A. Senator Chris West (45 bills): SB 024- If Maryland hands out licenses for sports betting sites, it must issue one to the Maryland State Fair; SB 038- Requires all commissioners of the Liquor Board of Baltimore County to be residents and voters of the county; SB 148- Requires electric generating plants in the State to transition from the use of fossil fuels and to establish a transition fund to support displaced workers and impacted communities (although this bill specifically speaks of fossil fuels generally, this legislation's aim is to reduce the impacts of ending coal-fired electricity generating plants); SB 210- Provides civil immunity from liability in matters related to Covid-19 for persons who act in compliance with statutes, rules, governmental orders and other edicts, so long as the person's actions are not negligent; SB 237- Law Enforcement Reform, Requires all police forces that employ more than 20 officers to use body cameras by October 2023. Make Baltimore City Police Dept. an agency of the city, not the state, alters the application process for no knock warrants and other reforms.
- B. Delegate Nino Mangione (9 bills): HB 438- Prohibits persons from willfully destroying, damaging, or desecrating a "historically significant" monument, and carries mandatory sentences and fines; HB 459- Exempts residences owned by a disabled active or veteran service member, or a surviving spouse, from state and local property taxes; HB 895- requires local boards of elections to establish polling precincts in continuing care communities of 200 or more persons if so requested.
- C. Delegate Michele Guyton (19 bills): HB 192- Requires each county board of education, beginning in school year 2021-22, to install at least one video recording device in each special education classroom; HB 193- Requires the State Board of Victim Services to develop a poster to notify victims of their right to request a private room when reporting a crime. The law enforcement agencies will be required to display the poster and to have the room available; HB 474- Extends the existing tax credit on the income tax for certain expenses for wineries and vineyards until 2026.

### **Quality Inn on Beaver Dam Road Sold**

The Quality Inn & Suites located on Beaver Dam Road, across from Cockeysville Road, has been purchased by local real estate company Blue Ocean. This property will undergo extensive renovations as part of Blue Ocean's plans for the property.

Founded in 2004, Blue Ocean is a real estate investment and management company that holds 23 properties, including the Middle River Depot on Eastern Boulevard.

## **Compost Bin & Rain Barrel Sale in Progress**

Baltimore County announced an online sale of compost bins and rain barrels, effective February 3 until March 31. The compost bins are available for \$45 each and rain barrels will cost \$55 each. These prices include sales tax, and the pre-orders can be made at [www.baltimore.enviroworlds.us](http://www.baltimore.enviroworlds.us). All products will be delivered directly to the purchaser's homes between March 15 and April 30. Composting converts yard waste into soil amendments, and rain barrels help reduce stormwater runoff. Residents can visit the Bureau of Solid Waste Management website for more information.

## **Final Report from APFO Task Force**

The eight-member Adequate Public Facilities Ordinance (APFO) task Force on public school facilities issued its final report at the end of December. The task Force was composed of representatives from the PTA Council, the Board of Education, the League of Women Voters, the Building Industry Association, the Teachers Association of Baltimore County, and local government representatives. The primary purpose of the APFO is to make sure that development growth does not outpace existing school facilities and planned future school construction.

The task force acknowledged that their assessment of the past and current situations was made more difficult because Baltimore County Public Schools failed to provide it with historical records of the accuracy of projected school enrollment attributable to proposed and approved development. Yet despite this absence of historical records, the task Force used alternate approaches to reach reasonable conclusions and recommendations in its' opinion.

Those recommendations believed to be most significant in altering the current APFO law included:

A change in the timing of the impact on school capacity of a development from early in the development approval process, what is known as Phase I, until after development plan approval, but prior to building permit issuance. The developer would have some flexibility as to when that assessment would be undertaken.

Elimination of exception opportunities, such as being allowed to consider an adjacent school district's capacity, if the school district housing a proposed development is deemed overcrowded.

Basing the overcrowding determination on a 3-year projection of school enrollment that includes all vested and unvested developments in a district.

An eventual tightening of the overcrowding standard to 100% of State-rated capacity, rather than the current standard of 115%.



A queueing process for developments awaiting APFO enrollment approvals, with a five-year limit on wait times; and

A 3-year window to build after APFO approval, after which a development in an overcrowded district would need to re-enter the queue for re-approval and face additional waiting time after receiving a second approval.

Other important, but less significant, recommendations that the Task Force offered included:

Add to the County Code a set of conservatively determined, data-driven enrollment yield factors tied to square footage of living spaces that would be applicable for all developments throughout the County, with no exceptions.

Require that the school system provide annual, or more frequent, reports on enrollments and specialized instructional programs as they impact enrollment projections.

Providing transparent opportunities for a developer to mitigate overcrowding by constructing additional capacity or requesting the redistricting of school boundaries along with nearby schools that have adequate capacity.

This report must now be considered by the County Council, who will be ultimately responsible for amending the adequate facilities law. Hopefully, the Council will hold a public hearing so that stakeholders can react to the content of this report, and that public hearing should be followed by some robust debate by Councilmembers about the recommendations in this report. When you consider the significant costs associated with school construction, and the impact of inadequate facilities on the learning environment for our students, it is obvious that this topic is important.

### **County Executive Announces Efficiency Audit**

County Executive John Olszewski, Jr. announced that a consultant has been selected to conduct a comprehensive assessment of all government departments and the public school system to identify savings through efficiency and better service delivery.

The firm selected to conduct the audit, Public Works, LLC, has vast experience working with state and local governments, in addition to public school systems, according to Olszewski. Teams of consultants with knowledge of the agencies that they audit will evaluate the operations over a six-month period before releasing their findings. The project will be overseen by the Office of Government Reform and Strategic initiatives, a new office created by the county executive to improve accountability and innovation.

In addition to this initiative, Olszewski also created an Office of Inspector General. In less than two years, that office has examined inefficiencies and mis-billings in the jointly operated, city/county water system, uncovered improper employment of retired county workers and improper spending associated with the Agricultural Center on Shawan Road.

### **BCPS Offers Stakeholder Survey**

If you want to offer feedback on the budget, staffing and school programs, Baltimore County Public Schools is offering a short stakeholder survey until March 26.

You can access the survey by logging on to the BCPS home page. School Superintendent Dr. Darryl Williams announced that he hopes all parents, students, staff and the community members at large will participate in the brief survey, and he indicated that the survey will be used to modify future programs that the system initiates.

### **Solid Waste Work Group Asks for Your Comments**

Baltimore County created a Solid Waste Work Group to address all facets of solid waste collection and disposal in the county. As the group's efforts come to a close, it will be holding a public meeting to solicit comments on March 4, from 5:00 PM until 7:00 PM.

If you wish to provide comments during the meeting, a registration form must be completed by going to <https://bcwebservices.wufoo.com/forms/rvjc84n1iusf83/>

That registration form can also be accessed on the Solid Waste Work Group webpage, as found on [www.baltimorecountymd.gov/boards-commissions/executive/solid-waste-work-group](http://www.baltimorecountymd.gov/boards-commissions/executive/solid-waste-work-group)

You can also listen to the meeting over your phone by calling 1-415-655-0001, access code 172 052 6335.