

GTCC

The Greater Timonium Community Council

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9b West Ridgely Road, Box 276, Timonium Maryland 21093
[http:// www. gtccinc.org](http://www.gtccinc.org)

President: Eric Rockel, 410 252-8439; Vice President: Kathleen Beadell, 410 977-7581; Secretary: Laura Renshaw, 410 583-1908; Directors: Ashley Richardson, Cathy Norton, Joan Mahan, Larry Lidard and Ed Hale, Jr.

Due to the pandemic, there will be no in-person GTCC meeting on the second Wednesday in May. If the pandemic continues to subside, we will attempt to hold a meeting in June. See page 9 for details.

President's Message

I have loved basketball my entire life. I still remember the first time I watched the NCAA Championship game, and it left an indelible impression on me that caused me to want to play the game for many years afterwards. That is why a recent commentary in the Baltimore Sun caught my eye. The headline for the commentary read “Baltimore County Homeowners’ Association Orders Kids’ Basketball Hoops Removed; Parents Suspect Discrimination.”

As the article went on, it described that eleven-year-old and thirteen-year-old boys who live in the subdivision known as Rockland Ridge, off Falls Road and inside the Beltway, have enjoyed shooting balls on portable hoops set up in their parents’ driveways. But the Homeowners Association instructed the families of the boys to remove the portable hoops because the hoops violated the declaration of the covenants for the subdivision. The author of this commentary, Andrea K. McDaniels, who is the deputy editorial page editor for the Sun, reported that the boys were crushed at the possibility of losing one of their favorite pastimes, and their parents suspected that their sons were being discriminated against because the two young men are African American and Korean American.

Somehow, unexplained in the article, the Speaker of the House of Delegates, Adrienne Jones, became aware of the situation, and she was concerned enough to call for legislation to address it. House Bill 1347 was submitted by Delegate Barve of Montgomery County, and it would “prohibit unreasonable limitations on the location and use of a portable basketball apparatus on property in which an individual owns or has exclusive right to use.” The bill was passed in the House of Delegates and the Senate, and presumably it will be signed by the governor. I found it intriguing that the bill was sponsored by a Montgomery County delegate when the problem arose in Baltimore County, but the reason for that may never be answered.

It is also impossible to know whether racial bias played any part in the events as the parents suspect. The president of the homeowners' association strongly denied that racial bias played any part in the matter. He went on to say that in 2017 the HOA's architectural review committee denied a request to install a portable hoop, and another hoop was removed in 2020 after a complaint by a neighbor. Neither prior case involved people of color, according to the president.

What struck me as noticeably absent from this commentary was the failure of the parents to appreciate the impact of the covenants before this whole situation played out. I live in a subdivision that does not have a declaration of covenants, and therefore I only must be mindful of zoning regulations and possibly building permits before I undertake any outdoors improvements on my property. But in this subdivision, the original developer determined that in order to preserve the property values and amenities of the development, as well as to maintain the common areas, that it would be wise to set up a declaration of covenants. The covenants for some communities are very exacting and stringent, while in others the rules are loose and minimal. But all potential buyers in a subdivision governed by covenants should be made aware of the declaration by either their realtor, the title company at closing on the property or both.

Had the parents of these young men read the declaration of covenants, they would have seen that no landscape feature can be removed from any lot without the approval of the HOA. Similarly, television and radio antenna are not allowed per the covenants. So, forget about subscribing to the DISH Network or DirecTV. As it relates to this situation, part of the covenant reads "no structure of a temporary character... recreational structures, or other similar structures shall be erected, used or maintained on any Lot at any time." That seems truly clear, and you wonder why the parents did not try to get the covenants amended before the portable hoops went up or why they even bought in a subdivision with an exacting set of covenants.

I wish Ms. McDaniels had been more balanced in her commentary. There are many social justice stories worth exploring, but I do not think that this qualifies as one.

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I have mixed feelings about one of the items in the County Executive's proposed budget. Specifically, he states that he is funding 122 teaching positions that had been eliminated in the Board of Education's suggested budget because of declining enrollment projections for next year. One part of me feels sorry for these persons who could have lost their jobs, but another part of me says this is how the system is supposed to work, yet the Executive wants to override it. Just maybe he should have left the system alone. Let me explain.

Normally in the private economy if a product does not sell, at some point the company producing that product will eliminate production of that good and more than likely lay off the employees who produced it. The same sort of principle applies to education funding in Maryland. The State provides education funding, in part, based upon the number of students in a county's school system. More students translate to more funding, and conversely, less students equates to less money. That is why the school system eliminated those teachers in its' budget.

It is equally clear that a certain segment of the parents in Baltimore County are dissatisfied with the education being provided by Baltimore County Public Schools. Those parents are turning to private schools, parochial schools, and home schooling as their preferred alternatives, and as a result we are seeing a decline in enrollment.

Now if this dissatisfaction does not have any resulting consequence, such as the loss of jobs, what will motivate a change in behavior to improve the environment in Baltimore County Public Schools? That is what bothers me about this line item in the County Executive's budget.

Eric Rockel

Maryland General Assembly Wrap Up

As the General Assembly session ended on April 12th, the Governor, Speaker of the House, and Senate President all expressed general satisfaction with the work the legislature completed during the session.

The lawmakers passed a final budget in the amount of \$52.4 billion, significantly expanded from Governor Hogan's initial proposal of \$49.35 billion. That expansion reflected the rebounding state economy and federal stimulus funds, which alone amounted to \$1.5 billion of the increase. Included in the budget are \$300 million to expand broadband access, \$100 million to go to the subdivisions for workforce training, nearly \$600 million for school re-openings, of which \$80 million will be used for improved HVAC systems. The budget also covers the cost those programs enacted to provide relief measures from the state for such programs as payments to struggling businesses and direct relief payments for low-income earners.

Ignoring vetoes from the governor, the legislature overrode those vetoes to pass a set of police reform laws that supporters proclaimed would transform policing in the state. By contrast, critics claimed that these reforms would hasten early retirement by many officers and would harm future recruitment of replacements. Termed the Maryland Police Accountability Act, this series of laws will start taking effect later this year. Among the facets of this act, it changes the disciplinary process for officers accused of misconduct, allows public inspection of complaints against police officers and internal affairs files, and creates new requirements that police use only "necessary" and "proportional" force in dealing with suspects. The new law also restricts the use of "no-knock" warrants to only daylight hours and increases the criminal penalties for the use of excessive force. One of the most controversial parts of the reform bill was the repeal of the Maryland Law Enforcement Officers' Bill of Rights. We became the first state in the nation to repeal this type of legislation.

In a related matter, the legislature also overrode Governor Hogan's veto of the Juvenile Restoration Act. That law, sponsored in part by Senator Chris West, allows people convicted as children in adult courts to seek reductions in their sentences after serving twenty years in prison, and it waives mandatory minimum sentences for juveniles convicted in adult courts. Senator

West said he believes society should be willing to give people a second chance, and he argued that this change is not a “get out of jail free card.”

On the last day of the legislative session, a bill allowing sports betting also passed both the House and the Senate with bipartisan support. According to the legislation there will be 60 licenses for online betting and 30 licenses for in-person sportsbooks. The 60 online licenses are nearly double the amounts allowed in other states, such as New Jersey and Colorado. The legislation would allow existing casinos, such as the Horseshoe Casino in Baltimore and the MGM Casino at National Harbor to have both online and in-person licenses, and the professional sports stadiums in Baltimore and Landover would be treated similarly, as would the racetracks at Laurel, Pimlico, and Timonium. Maryland will become only the second jurisdiction in the nation to allow independent, non-gaming entities to open sportsbooks, and this featured may have been included to promote minority and women’s participation in sports betting. The Maryland Gaming Commission will now oversee the process of selecting all the licensees, and experts are projecting the sports betting will start at the beginning of the NFL season in September 2021. It is anticipated that nearly 80% of the betting will occur online.

As reported previously, the legislature also overrode the governor’s veto of the Kirwan education bill at the start of the session. The legislature did not, however, fully fund the estimated \$4 billion per year that will be needed when the Kirwan mandates are completely implemented. In addition, the legislature also passed further refinements to the Kirwan bill in this session, House Bill 1372, which will require another \$1 billion at the end of the ten year implementation time line.

New Housing Subdivision Proposed for Brooklandville

A 61-single family home development, Greenspring Manor, is being proposed for the property at 2310 West Joppa Road. The property is south of the Meadows of Green Spring development on West Seminary Avenue and adjacent to existing homes on Tally Ho Road. The property is zoned DR-1, which allows one dwelling per acre, and DR-2, which allows two per acre. The lot sizes for the proposed dwellings vary, with some lots only 40-foot wide, while others are 50 and 54 feet wide. The entity proposing the development is ATAPCO Properties, who bought the land for \$8 million according to the land records.

County agencies suggested several red flags that may complicate or even alter the development. The sewer lines that will serve the property do not have adequate capacity, and until the sewer is upgraded the County will not issue building permits for this site according to the office of Development Plans Review. Additionally, this site is within a traffic deficient area, graded level of service “F”, and it remains to be seen if the County will allow any building while the level of service is failing.

The Department of Planning was critical about the subdivision proposal, as well. They stated that the site is considered “overdeveloped” by this proposal, and they also stated that many of the lot sizes, which they considered too small, are not compatible with the surrounding

neighborhood. Ultimately, Planning recommended that the developer reconsider what is being proposed.

A community input meeting took place on April 27. Over sixty residents signed on to participate in the virtual meeting. The developer's attorney tried to cast this proposal in the best possible light. He indicated that 42% of the property will remain open, while 58% will support the homes, roads, and other public facilities necessary for the development. The attorney also took exception to the Department of Planning's comments about the lot sizes not being compatible with the surrounding neighborhoods, and he noted that the lot sizes were in the middle of the pack as far as size was concerned. The developer plans to enlarge some 300 linear feet of sewer line to accommodate their plan, and along with other sewer improvements being undertaken because of recent development at Greenspring Station, the attorney represented that the development would not be delayed by a sewer capacity problem. This statement has not been independently verified with Baltimore County officials. The attorney also stated that his client is not applying for any variances in order to construct this project.

One statement made by the attorney was challenged for its' veracity by the public. The attorney stated that Ridgely Middle School, which will serve this development, is below capacity. A resident correctly observed that Ridgely's enrollment is at 102% of the State-rated capacity. The attorney countered this fact by saying that Baltimore County policy allows development to proceed if a school is not over 115% of State-rated capacity, which is true, but it does not detract from the absolute fact that Ridgely M.S. is over capacity.

The residents attending the meeting had many written comments related to this plan. A large number echoed the sentiment that the developer should reduce the number of lots proposed below 61. There was also a great deal of concern about existing traffic conditions, and the possibility that this development will exacerbate the situation. A portion of the neighbors do not want to see Mays Chapel Road extended thru this development, and that is the desire of the developer, but another segment of the neighbors, including many who live on Tally Ho Road, want to see Mays Chapel Road extended to take some pressure off of Tally Ho Road.

The developer now has up to one year from April 27, to submit a development plan to the County. After County agencies have issued comments related to that second submission, and administrative law judge will decide whether to approve the plan. Typically, construction of the project commences anywhere from six month to a year after the approval of a plan. So, it is possible that this project may not commence for another two years, if approved.

Olszewski Announces FY 2022 Budget

County Executive John Olszewski, Jr., announced a government-wide operating budget of over \$4.268 billion dollars, as well as a capital budget of over \$1.024 billion dollars. Funded from property taxes (25.1% of budget), income taxes (20.4% of budget), other taxes and revenues (22% of budget), state aid (22.2% of budget) and federal aid (9.8% of budget), the

County Executive's spending reflects his commitment to education spending, relief measures aimed at reducing the impacts from the pandemic, and an increase in expenditures for land preservation and local parks.

He recounted that the County distributed \$7.5 million in eviction prevention funding in the past year using federal funds from the CARES Act, passed in 2020, and for FY 2022 the County has allocated \$52 million in state and federal funds. To maintain business stability, the County awarded \$25 million in grants to business with funds provided from the federal CARES Act.

For the education budget, the County will be spending 4.7% more than is required under the maintenance of efforts requirements by the State that insist that jurisdictions spend no less than the previous year unless given a waiver. In total, education spending increases by more than 10%, with \$192 million coming in new funds. The school system will receive \$72 million in federal funds that have not been allocated to date.

As far as capital expenditures to fund school buildings, this budget continues and will complete the "Schools for our Future" program initiated under the Kamenetz Administration and allocates over \$67 million towards a replacement of Lansdowne High School. The County Executive also spoke of developing a long-term plan for the County's high schools, but specific mention of Dulaney or Towson Highs were absent in his remarks. That may be because the school system undertook a consultant's study last year that did not support new schools for Dulaney or Towson. This budget does allocate money to initiate a feasibility study, or studies, to identify the best approaches for the County's high schools, be it to remodel existing schools or build replacements.

Federal funding help will be used for a variety of initiatives in the school system, including extending the school day by fifteen minutes, funding 35 new positions for school counselors and pupil personnel workers and restoring 122 teaching positions that may have been lost. The County would also increase the free breakfast and lunch programs that are available in many communities.

Mr. Olszewski also proposes to create a new Department of Housing and Community Development. There was little detail in the budget message about how this new agency would function, but the message made clear that five new positions would be created for this new department, and it is assumed that workers in existing agencies who deal with housing issues would be transferred to the new office. What the public does not know yet is whether this new agency will have new objectives. For example, many jurisdictions nationally have government-owned housing projects to support the demand for workforce housing. Will Baltimore County follow suit under this new department?

In terms of parks and land preservation, there are many new initiatives and/or added support for existing ones. The County proposes to increase local funding for land preservation programs to a total of \$5.3 million in FY 2022. Seven million dollars in state and local funds will go to developing a 7-acre park in Randallstown, and \$14.5 million will be spent on a new park in

Sparrows Point. The County will also build lighted turf fields next to the elementary school on Belfast Road, and over \$6 million will be spent on enhancements to Oregon Ridge Park.

Finally, the budget proposes the first installment on a North County senior center, \$3 million in this budget year, and \$2.5 million will be used for parking lot expansion at the Cockeysville Senior Center.

The County's Spending Affordability Committee is tasked, in part, to project income growth and identify if the General Fund Operating Budget will exceed the growth in personal income. For this coming fiscal year, FY 22, the Spending Affordability Committee projected growth of 3.86%, but this year's proposed budget grows by 5.67%, nearly 2% more. Whether the County Council pares this increase remains to be seen at the time of writing this article.

Councilmanic Redistricting Commission

As required by the County Charter, every ten years the County Council must appoint a commission to oversee the configuration of the County Council districts. The Commission is responsible with assessing the population information generated by the 2020 census, holding public hearings, and recommending a plan for redistricting, all of which must be completed by October 15, 2021.

The five members of the Commission, appointed by the Council, are: James Almon, Esq., an Assistant County Attorney for Carroll County; Robert Latshaw, Jr., chair of the Greater Baltimore Economic Forum; Sophia Montgomery, president of the Chesapeake Gateway Chamber of Commerce; Samuel Neuberger, Esq., a director of Klein Enterprises; and Aaron Plymouth, a retired educator and community association officer.

Volunteer Opportunities with Gunpowder Valley Conservancy

Want to get some exercise and enjoy the great outdoors as a way of ending the malaise brought on by the pandemic? You may want to consider volunteering with the Gunpowder Valley Conservancy, a non-profit group that is dedicated to improving the land and waterways in the watershed serving the Gunpowder River. There are tree planting events planned for May 15 and May 22 on Glen Arm Road and Pine Ridge Golf Course, respectively, as well as tree maintenance events on May 10, 12, 16 and 17th. There will be other events as we move farther along in the spring and summer, as well. To learn more about the locations, time and what to wear if you participate, go to gunpowdervalleyconservancy.org, and click on the calendar of events. You will need to register on the website to participate in any of these events.

County to Initiate Master Plan 2030

Baltimore County's Department of Planning will be kicking off efforts to develop the Master Plan for 2030 in the month of May. The invitation for this event states that "your input will guide the vision and strategies for the County over the next 10 years as we build a sustainable future." So, is that just an empty promise that we have heard many times before, or is there a kernel of truth in that grandiose pledge? Well, consider the following: back in the 1960s & 1970s some visionary county residents urged that Baltimore County commit to preserving large portions of the northern county from residential, subdivision development. Those residents were largely successful, which in turn put more pressure on the existing suburbs to support greater urbanization. Maybe the next ten years will be the time when we mitigate many of the impacts of this greater urbanization so that our neighborhoods are more green, livable, and not suffering from congestion.

The kickoff meeting for the 2nd and 3rd Council Districts will take place virtually on May 18 at 6:30 PM. To join in that meeting, go to baltimorecountymd.gov/masterplan2030.

Late Fire Chief Elwood Banister Remembered

Friends and family of Elwood "Woody" Banister, a retired chief of the Baltimore County Fire Department, held a memorial service in his honor on April 17. Chief Banister and his wife both passed away from complication from Covid-19 near the end of last year. This memorial started with services at Towson United Methodist Church, followed by a luncheon at the Cockeysville Volunteer Fire Company. The event ended with a private ceremony at Sherwood Episcopal Church in Cockeysville.

To honor the late chief, his grandson has established the Chief Elwood Banister Memorial Foundation, which will assist fire companies in their fundraising efforts and provide scholarships. A concert at the Upperco Fire Company is planned for July 31 to fundraise for the foundation. To learn more about the foundation and the concert, visit www.joshchristinamusic.com.

Quick Bits

Below are some brief remarks about new development that is taking place in the greater Timonium area:

Curio Wellness, at 5 West Aylesbury Road, is expanding its medical cannabis facility by greatly increasing its growing facility with an addition at the rear of this property.

That construction taking place on West Padonia Road, at Broad Avenue, is for a Royal Farm Store, including gas pumps and a car wash.

The Timonium Business Park, south of Timonium Road, along Greenspring Drive, plans to add a three-story, 90,000 square foot office building to the office park.

BGE intends to construct several storage structures at its service center located at 10500 York Road. In addition, they will also build an electric vehicle charging station.

Baltimore County government elected to settle a lawsuit filed by Hunt Valley Baptist Church, which claimed that the County violated federal laws protecting religious groups from discrimination. The County Board of Appeals had ruled against the church, who wanted to build on Shawan Road. The agreed upon settlement amounted to \$1.1 million.

Return of GTCC Meetings

The pandemic has put a stop on in-person GTCC meetings, but we hope to resume our meetings this summer. As of this writing, all meeting rooms at Baltimore County Public Libraries are still not being offered up for public use. So, our first meeting may be located at a different venue. We will send out a notice toward the end of May to identify when and where we will meet. Thank you for your patience during these unusual times.

