

GTCC The Greater Timonium Community Council

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***Our Next General Meeting is May 10, 7 PM
At the Vista Room at the State Fair***

Draft Master Plan Brings Heartburn

When the Department of Planning released the draft Master Plan in April, some three months later than originally anticipated, I immediately wanted to see what it recommended for the Lutherville/Timonium/Cockeysville area. If you live on the east side of York Road, there is no direct impact suggested by the plan to your neighborhoods. There may be plenty of indirect impacts, such as added traffic congestion or changes in school boundaries, but the plan does not recommend any impactful changes to the land use patterns on the east side of York Road.

The west side of York Road, however, is a different story. In the area from I-695 to Padonia Road, the plan suggests three different “redevelopment areas,” called “nodes” that are roughly 800 to 1,000 acres each in size. The plan recommends high density residential development to be introduced in these areas as a way to encourage transit use and to expand the County’s tax base with new development.

I have heard that refrain from the Department of Planning for at least twenty years- “ the County’s ROI (return on investment) in the Central Light Rail line has been low and we need to promote redevelopment in that area.” Give me a break ! The County’s initial investment in the Central Light Rail line was a whopping \$10 million, a significant but hardly a major investment. When you look at the current FY 24 budget proposal, \$4.9 billion, the expenditure of \$10 million is more like a rounding error than a major outlay.

When the County held focus groups to offer comments about the state of the County more than fifteen months ago, I heard many citizens state that they did not want to see increased urbanization of this Lutherville/Timonium/Cockeysville area. In fairness to all points of view, there is a contingent of residents who think that urbanization is just fine if done in a thoughtful manner. Yet I think the evidence in the past shows that added traffic congestion, school overcrowding and the loss in quality of life is a more plausible outcome.

Transit use is declining in this country, not increasing, as the County's planners hope. For example, nationwide in 1960, 12% of the population used transit to get to work. That figure has dropped to 5% by 2020.

I encourage anyone who is interested to review the Master Plan 2030 by entering the keywords Master Plan 2030 in the search box on the Baltimore County website's homepage. Please read over the summary of the plan and see the core retrofit areas, also called nodes, that are recommended for our area. If you are as alarmed as I am, write the Planning Board at masterplan@baltimorecountymd.gov on or before May 17 and tell the Planning Board that you do not support the proposals for the Lutherville/Timonium/Cockeysville area. If this plan is adopted by the County Council over the summer, our area will see significant changes in the future that may prove to be irreversible!

Eric Rockel

Legislative Wrap Up

The Maryland General Assembly ended its' session on April 10, and the taxpayers can breathe a sigh of relief in that no new taxes were initiated by the legislature. A vote to repeal last session's law that tied the annual gas increase to the rise in inflation was also taken, but that vote failed. So, for at least another year motorists will see an automatic increase caused by inflation.

The legislature also reacted to some of the events on the national level, and they passed a referendum measure for the 2024 general election that deals with reproductive choice. If it passes, this measure would be incorporated as an amendment in the State constitution.

The important wording for this referendum measure reads as follows: "Every person, as a central component of an individual's right to liberty and equality, has the fundamental right to reproductive freedom, including but not limited to the ability to make and effectuate decisions to prevent, continue, or end one's own pregnancy. The State may not, directly or indirectly, deny, burden, or abridge the right unless justified by a compelling State interest achieved by the least restrictive means." Thus, the voters will decide on this weighty question in the next election.

The General Assembly also passed two bills that regulate the ability to carry a firearm. Opponents of these measures argue that the laws will certainly be challenged in federal court, and considering prior high court decisions, these laws may ultimately be ruled unconstitutional. HB 824 regulates possession and the ability to carry a handgun. It prohibits the possession of a firearm by anyone under age 21, by anyone suffering from a mental disorder or who has a history of violent behavior. This legislation also modifies the requirements of the firearms training course that is approved by the Secretary of the State Police. SB1 prohibits persons, even those who hold a valid carry permit, from carry a handgun in an area where children congregate, a government building or institution of higher learning and from bringing a gun into a sports

facility, museum, or live entertainment venue. It also prohibits a person from carrying a firearm into another person's dwelling without expressed permission.

The legislature also passed the "Clean Trucks Act of 2023," which will require the Maryland Department of the Environment (MDE) to adopt the Advanced Clean Truck rule by the end of 2023 as a way of ushering in the electric truck era in Maryland. It will require an increasing annual percentage of zero-emission trucks, school buses and delivery vans beginning with model year 2027. MDE may delay implementation if it determines that the electric grid does not have sufficient capacity to support this rule.

The General Assembly also ushered in rule that will allow cannabis dispensaries to start selling the product to the general population, and it expanded on an existing law that exempts certain amounts of military retirement income to be taxed on the State level. The new exemption level is \$25,000 for 2023, and it rises to \$40,000 starting in 2024.

Our local legislators saw many accomplishments on bills that they sponsored or co-sponsored. Delegate Dana Stein's HB 503 will provide direct funding to land trusts, local governments, and non-profit organizations to acquire, or place under easement, or improve greenspaces in underserved communities. He also saw both houses pass a bill to enable the University of Maryland Extension Service to hire a native plant specialist, who will provide education and outreach to teach the public and landscapers about the benefits and availability of native species of plants. Delegate Stein and Senator Shelly Hettleman, among other sponsored, enacted into law requiring the Maryland Department of Agriculture to study the use of PFAS chemicals in pesticides. PFAS chemicals are often called "forever chemicals" because they can stay in the environment, or in your body, for years.

Delegate Michele Guyton sponsored HB 456, which will require that blind individuals and persons who are visually impaired have access to prescription labels and medical guides that those persons can read. Her persistence also paid off in the passage of HB 525, the Outdoor Preschool Pilot Program, where licenses for outdoor, nature-based early learning and child-care programs will go through a trial period to offer early learning in the state. Finally, her sponsorship of HB 870 will require the Division of rehabilitation Services in the Dept. of Education and the Developmental Disabilities Administration in the Dept. of Health to enter into a memorandum of understanding for data sharing on medical and psychological records of mutual clients.

Being in the minority, Senator Chris West found the legislative landscape more challenging. He sponsored SB 744, the "Violent Firearms Offenders Act of 2023," which would have made the use of firearms in the commission of a crime of violence a felony. But that bill was never brought to the floor for a vote. His legislation, SB 036, did gain passage, and it will repeal the provisions of a "limited divorce" and authorizes the granting of an absolute divorce based on a six-month separation or irreconcilable differences. SB 209 also passed, and it establishes a task force to study crime classifications in the state and to make recommendations regarding the classifications of crimes and civil offenses. He also co-sponsored SB 90, which will limit spam phone calls and prevent solicitors from using a "fake" local number when they place the call from outside the local calling area.

Senator Shelly Hettleman sponsored SB 786, which will ensure data privacy to patients and providers involving reproductive care in Maryland. She also sponsored SB 328/HB 498 that requires the Board of Public Works to establish a system to virtually accept the public's written comments on agenda items to be heard by the Board. She has been steadfast in advocating for victims of rape, and SB 789 mandates that all jurisdictions have a rape kit tracking system, and it requires that all rape kits be saved for 75 years. Finally, SB 797 establishes a task force to ensure the State is protecting seniors from abuse and exploitation, and the results of this task force will be studied by the legislature in the future to determine if existing laws should be refined.

The legislature learned to work with new personnel in the governor's office in 2023. Governor Moore strongly supported an increase to the minimum wage for this session, and starting in January 2024 the minimum wage will rise to \$15 per hour. The governor also advocated for the establishment of a Department of Service and Civic Innovation. Under this agency there will be two paths for a year of service after graduating from high school and for young adults. Both of these measures were part of Governor Moore's agenda for his first year in office.

County Council Crafts Accessory Dwelling Unit Law

In the last newsletter, we told readers that the County Council had not concluded working on accessory dwelling unit legislation, but since that time the Council has passed a much different bill than the one originally submitted to it. Accessory units can be situated either inside, or attached to, an existing home or an accessory unit can be detached from the home and located in the rear yard. Since the County already had an accessory law on the books, the original submittal only sought to clarify that occupants of an accessory unit must be related to the owners by blood, marriage, or adoption, and that the owner may receive rent (compensation) for use of the accessory unit. The original submittal also established that a use permit, administered by the Department of Permits, Approvals & Inspections, was necessary before occupancy of the accessory unit, and if the accessory unit was detached, the owner would need to undertake a special hearing before the Administrative Law Judge before the permit was issued.

The Council added several conditional requirements in passing the accessory dwelling law. First, they acknowledged that they did not know the impact this law would have on neighborhoods throughout the County, and for that reason they wanted to test and monitor the outcomes for three years before final implementation. The Council added many annual reporting requirements for the Department of Permits, Approvals & Inspections in order to assess the impacts. For example, each year the department must prepare a list of the number and location of all applications, as well as those applications that receive the permit. The number of special hearings each year needs to be reported, as well as the category of the family relation that lives in each unit, and each year there must be a tally of the number of application renewals, since each application is only valid for two years. The Council also placed limitations on the size of accessory units. On lots that are one acre, or larger, the unit can be up to 1,200 sq. ft., while smaller lots can hold accessory units no more than 800 sq.ft.

County Executive Presents FY 2024 Budget

John Olszewski, Jr. presented his FY 24 budget to the public and the County Council in April. All totaled, the operating budget is almost \$4.9 billion dollars. That represents a 1.8% increase over the FY 23 budget. Based upon the anticipated growth rate of household income in the coming year, the County Executive could have increased the budget by 4.79% , according to the County's Spending Affordability Committee. Yet he chose to be more measured in his spending.

The income that generates this budget is varied. Property taxes make up 26%; while income taxes represent 23%. State aid contributes 25% of the budget, and Federal Aid accounts for 9%. The remaining 17% comes from a variety of sources.

As far as expenditures, 57.5% of the operating budget goes to schools, colleges, and libraries. The next largest expenditure is for Public Safety at 11.4%, followed by non-departmental sources at 15.5%. Health, recreation, and community services consume 8.1% of the budget, and both public works and general government each account for a little over 3% of the monies spent.

In addition to the operating budget, the Executive's capital budget, for things like roads, bridges, storm drains, public buildings, and a variety of other categories, is projected to be \$1.4 billion in FY 2024.

The average property tax bill to pay for these operating and capital budget costs is expected to be \$3,048 per household for the upcoming year, or \$115 more than in FY 2023.

As has been the case for all his tenure, the County Executive places more emphasis on educational spending than any other category. Money is allocated for pre-construction, preparatory efforts for new Towson and Dulaney High Schools. Starting teacher salaries will be raised to at least \$59,000 per annum. The upcoming budget also provides for 41 new positions for Pre-K para-educators and 22 Pre-K educators. Finally, the budget includes free community college tuition for county residents making less than \$150,000 per year.

The final steps in this annual budget process include the County Council holding a series of hearings with a variety of County agencies to examine how the monies will be spent, followed by the approval of the budget. The Council can remove monies from the proposed budget, but it cannot add to what the County Executive has proposed.

New Book Release

For those of you interested in local history with a national twist, a new biography of the late U.S. Senator Daniel Brewster has been published. Entitled *Self-Destruction. The rise, fall and redemption of U.S. Senator Daniel B. Brewster*, it chronicles Brewster's life, from his youth through his heroism during World War II, to his time as the shining star of Maryland politics and his career as a U.S. Senator, to his fall from grace, to his resurrection and contentment during the latter years of life. The author of the book, John W. Frece, spent many years as a reporter for the Baltimore *Sun* and the *United Press International*, in addition to time in the Glendening administration and working for the EPA.

The biography is available on Amazon and in many bookstores.

West Ridgely Road Transit-Oriented Development

Representatives from the Lutherville Community Association, GTCC, the property's owner and developer, supporters of the project and other opponents met for a second time to discuss the possible redevelopment of the property known as Lutherville Station, all under the auspices of Councilman Wade Kach. The various factions offered feedback on a set of development covenants that an attorney for the developer had authored at least a year earlier.

To date the most contentious of subjects, the proposed uses for this 12+ acre parcel, has not been discussed among the group.

Future meetings are planned for further discussions about the site, its uses, and the guardrails that need to be in place when the property is re-developed.

Dulaney Athlete Garners Award

Dulaney High School has always had outstanding track and field teams, going back to the 1960s when Bob Dean served as coach and Bob Wheeler was the outstanding athlete. This year, senior Tyler Dailey was named the Baltimore *Sun* Athlete of the Year in boys track and field. He earned the class 4A state cross country championship, outdoors, as well as going undefeated indoors, running the 800 and 1,600 distances. Tyler will continue his running career at the next level, electing to attend Eastern Michigan University. We congratulate Tyler for his achievements this year and wish him success in the future.

Tentative Agenda for GTCC General Meeting of May 10

- 1.) Report on Public Safety from Cockeysville Precinct.

- 2.) Wrap Up Report on General Assembly Session-Senator Chris West
- 3.) Presentation from Constellation Home on HVAC offers.
- 4.) Report on Transit Oriented Development & Light Rail Extension
5. Old & New Business

Calendar of Events

Remember starting June 7th, and every Wednesday thereafter, the State Fairgrounds will host a Farmers' Market, where the public can get fresh, local produce. The Market is open from 10:00 AM until 1 PM on Wednesdays.

- 1.) May 6-7, Camp Lindner, swine competition, 8 AM-5 PM; Swine Barn, Maryland State Fair (MSF)
- 2.) May 6, Steam Engine Show- free admission, Maryland Fire Museum, 10 AM-2 PM
- 3.) May 13-14, Reptile & Exotic Animal Show, 10 AM- 4 PM; Exhibition Hall MSF
- 4.) May 19, Dulaney High Grad Gals
- 5.) May 20, Latino Concert, 7 PM ; Cow Palace MSF
- 6.) June 3, Driving Competition- Motor Truck Association, 8 AM-10 PM, Exhibition Hall MSF
- 7.) June 10, Maryland Toy Expo, 8 AM-3 PM ; Exhibition Hall, MSF
- 8.) June 18, 5K Run- Jewish Caring Network, 9 AM
- 9.) June 23-25, Gem & Jewelry Show, 10 AM-5 PM ; Exhibition Hall , MSF