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Our Next General Meeting is Jan. 8th at the Vista Room

President’s Message

Public Safety and Other News Entering a New Year

For the first time in many years, the City of Baltimore will see less than 200 murders in the year just ended. Kudos to Mayor Brandon Scott and the police department for their strategies to reduce violence in the city. Mayor Scott’s non-traditional gun violence reduction strategies are working and the police efforts to have more officers pounding the pavement on daily patrols appear to be big reasons for reductions in the murder rate. The city still has its problems with violence, such as the fact that assaults are three times higher than the national average, and the drug trade is still a major reason behind crime in charm city, but there is some reason for hope in light of the decline in the murder rate.

Despite the recent wave of violence along Loch Raven Blvd. in the County, we can also point to a decrease in homicides over the first half of the year. (statistics have not yet been released for the entire year) There were only 11 homicides in the County over the first half of the year. That is a drop of 31% compared to the same time frame in 2023, and it is a drop of 66% compared to 2021. Similarly, non-fatal shootings were down by 30% compared to 2023.

One element that is not on the decrease is juvenile crime. Every week we read or hear about some teenager, or group of teenagers, or even younger ones, being involved in a car-jacking or assault. In far too many instances the juvenile justice system does not take these youngsters off the streets. It simply releases these young offenders to their parents’ or guardian’s custody pending a court date.

If you want to learn more about the state of the juvenile justice system, join us at the next GTCC general meeting on **January 8th when our guest speaker will be Baltimore County State’s Attorney, Scott Shellenberger**. We could not be hearing from a better authority than Mr. Schellenberger.

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Approximately 200 citizens turned out to let the County Council know what qualities the Council should be looking for in selecting a County Executive to fill out the remaining two years, more or less, of the Olszewski term. The Council was looking for traits of the next executive, and they did not want to hear endorsements for any specific candidate, although several speakers made obvious references to a candidate just the same.

Former County Executive Don Hutchinson told the Council that they needed to choose a candidate who could make direct connections with the County employees. Although Olszewski will be leaving, Hutchinson was right to suggest that the executive and department heads need to be on the same page given that these department heads were appointed by Olszewski.

Retired Essex attorney, Robert Romadka, now in his nineties, offered his recommendations on the traits of the next County Executive, and Baltimore County State's Attorney Scott Shellenberger made a spirited speech endorsing candidate Jim Brochin, without ever stating his name.

There were also a number of supporters for candidate Yara Cheik at the hearing, and they recognized Cheik's longtime advocacy for educational issues.

I told the County Council that the next County Executive will need to practice fiscal restraint. With the State facing a \$2.7 billion-dollar structural deficit in the coming year, the County should not look for much money from Annapolis, and I also anticipate that the Trump administration will reduce spending as well, cutting off another source of funding. Further, the next County Executive should have a strong platform for economic development in our jurisdiction. Fields such as manufacturing, life sciences and tech are just a few of the employers that Baltimore County should be attracting.

As of this writing the County Council has reduced the list of candidates to five: Jim Brochin, Yara Cheik, State Senator Kathy Klausmeier, Barry Williams and George Perdikakis. In a separate Council session, they interviewed each of these candidates. For a further look at these interviews, look for a separate article in this newsletter.

Eric Rockel

State Issues Report Card on All Local Schools

The Maryland Department of Education released its school accountability ratings, known as the Maryland report card. In order to determine each school's performance, state educators looked at the following indicators: achievement and growth on State tests in English Language arts and mathematics; student achievement on state tests in science (elementary & middle); student readiness for postsecondary (high school) success and other factors.

The summary scores for each school fell into three different measurement ratings. Each school received a “star rating” with one star being the lowest score and five stars being the highest. Another category viewed the total number of earned points as a percentage of the total possible points. The final measurement looked at a percentile ranking of how an individual school compared with other schools.

In reviewing the 163 Baltimore County public schools, a total of 20 schools earned a 5-star rating. There were 44 schools that garnered a 4-star rating, and 66 schools with a 3-star rating. Finally, 32 schools earned a 2-star rating and only one school received a 1-star rating. pe

Information about local schools can be found in the table below:

Towson High	4 of 5 Stars	78 percentile rank
Dulaney High	3 of 5 Stars	63 percentile rank
Cockeysville Middle	3 of 5 Stars	61 percentile rank
Ridgely Middle	4 of 5 Stars	80 percentile rank
Hampton Elementary	4 of 5 Stars	79 percentile rank
Lutherville Laboratory	4 of 5 Stars	84 percentile rank
Timonium Elementary	5 of 5 Stars	97 percentile rank
Pinewood Elementary	5 of 5 Stars	98 percentile rank
Pot Spring Elementary	4 of 5 Stars	71 percentile rank
Warren Elementary	3 of 5 Stars	47 percentile rank
Mays Chapel Elem.	4 of 5 Stars	86 percentile rank

Board of Education Elects Officers

The Board of Education has selected Jane Lichter as Chair of the Board and Robin Harvey as its Vice Chair. Both ladies held these positions in the previous year. Ms. Lichter is a retired educator and administrator, who served 37 years with Baltimore County Public Schools. Ms. Harvey is currently the executive director of the Maryland Department of Human Services, the Office of Licensing and Monitoring.

Delta Hotel on Shawan Road to be Redeveloped

Baltimore County’s Department of Permits, Approvals and Inspections has received an application to convert the former hotel into a residential subdivision. To be developed by a subsidiary of Keelty Homes, the site will feature 126 single townhomes and 164 two-over two townhomes on 18.5 acres. The site will also include a 30,000 square foot gathering area of green space.

The developer has already completed its concept plan conference and community input meeting. At the concept plan conference county departments present their initial reactions to the plan and tell the developer what needs to be presented before these departments can support the

plan. The developer now has up to one year to respond to the County's comments and then submit the development plan for a hearing officer's hearing.

Then on December 23rd the public learned that the developer, Shawan KB 245, through Steve Keelty of Keelty Homes, was hedging its bets in case the County would not approve the initial plan described above. They have submitted a "Plan B" that will only be presented to the hearing officer if the hearing officer does not approve the initial plan. "Plan B will never see the light of day," reported Gary Berman, a consultant on the project. Plan B, if it does move forward, would replace the townhomes with 14 separate buildings, twelve of which would contain 360 units of multifamily housing and two other buildings containing nearly 20,000 square feet of commercial space. The developer says the commercial space would be tailored to include stores not found at the nearby Hunt Valley Towne Center. This notion of a concurrent second development plan is a unique approach under the County's development regulations and leaves many questions why the hearing officer would reject Plan A given the past history of development in Baltimore County.

A copy of Plan A for this site will be available at the next GTCC general meeting.

Division of Solid Waste Management Proposes Rule Changes

The Division of Solid Waste Management held a public hearing on December 18 to allow comments from the public on certain rule changes. According to Steve Lippy, a retired solid waste engineer, the most significant rule changes include reducing the weight of a filled trash container to 30 lbs. from 45 lbs. , reducing the weight of bundled tree limbs from 45 lbs. to 30 lbs., your collector will no longer pick up plastic bags set out at curbside if the change is adopted, and yard waste cannot be included in your trash pick-up in the three months of the winter when there is no dedicated yard waste pick up. One of the most controversial new regulations would be to limit each household's visits to the landfills to ten visits per year. The County has not enforced the current limit of six visits per year but appears poised to enforce the ten-visit limit, which would include visits for recyclables.

Who's Next?

With John Olszewski, Jr. resigning his position as county executive in order to serve in Congress, the County Charter stipulates that the person replacing him as county executive will be appointed by the County Council. The Charter also stipulates that this person shall be of the same political party as the outgoing executive. Other counties charters provide for elections in these cases, such as is the situation in Prince George's County, but that is not the case in Baltimore County.

What started out as a list of twelve candidates for the position has been reduced by the County Council to a group of five candidates under consideration. On December 16, those candidates underwent a public interview before the Council and the public. The list of the candidates who interviewed were Barry Williams, George Perdikakis, Sr., Katherine Klausmeier,

Yara Cheik and Jim Brochin. Below is a brief summary of the remarks made by each of the candidates.

Barry Williams: He is a life-long resident of Baltimore County who has worked as a teacher and then a principal and area superintendent in Baltimore County Public Schools, as well as in County government as head of Workforce Development and later as director of the Department of Recreation and Parks. He stated that he felt the county had adequate financial resources for fiscal year 2026, but he sees strains on the resources for the fiscal year 2027 budget. He wants to address the 270, more or less, vacancies within the police department, and he sees a further strain on personnel in the police department with retirements in future years. He spoke about the positive performance in the public schools, and he urged for future workforce training programs to follow the trends in business as a way to promote new jobs in the County. He supports more mixed-use development in the County and suggests that he would support more regional cooperation between the jurisdictions in the Baltimore area.

Jim Brochin: Residents of the greater Timonium area will recognize that Jim Brochin served this area as its state senator in the General Assembly for sixteen years, and he had a reputation as a maverick who did not always tow the line with Democratic Party doctrine. He wasted little time in this interview by proclaiming that he would not raise any taxes or increase any fees, and that he would not make any cuts to Public Safety or Code Enforcement. In anticipation of budget deficits at the state level and cuts in federal aid, he stated that all county department heads would be asked to see if they could reduce their budgets by between 10-20%.

He stated that he will cooperate with ICE regarding criminal undocumented immigrants, and by the end of his two-year term he hoped to have more police officers in each precinct around the County. He also said he would urge for tougher consequences on juvenile crime, particularly on any child found to have committed a crime while in possession of a gun.

He also said he wanted to create a task force that has a broad array of viewpoints, including the homebuilders and community groups, to examine how the permitting process can be shortened. He also made clear that the executive office would refrain from forcing housing into any district because he feels that is in the purview of the County Council, not the Executive, and he promised to have a bi-partisan County Executive's office.

George Perdikakis, Sr.: Mr. Perdikakis spent the early part of this interview describing his inspirational success story. He came to the United States in 1966 with little money and speaking only two words of English from his native Greece. His first job in America was as a dishwasher, but he went on to graduate from the University of Rhode Island and eventually he migrated to Baltimore where he worked in city government and formed a friendship with then-mayor William Donald Schaefer. In addition to his time in city government, Perdikakis served as the head of a quasi-public agency, the Maryland Environmental Services, as well as the director of Baltimore County's Department of Environmental Protection and Resource Management. He stressed that his top two priorities would be public safety and education. He talked about finding solutions in these two areas, but never really identified the problems in each. He did raise the vacancies in the Police Department as an area of concern and one problem that he would fix.

He also stressed it was especially important to keep the County's AAA bond rating, but he did not identify a strategy to keep the rating. Without offering any specific projects, he wants to address the infrastructure needs of the County, and he said protecting the current Urban-Rural Demarcation Line was the most important policy that the County has ever developed.

Katherine Klausmeier: Ms. Klausmeier has served for twenty-nine years as a delegate and is now state senator in the General Assembly. The fact that she is so well known may explain why she did not use all of her allotted time in addressing the Council. She stated now is not the time for Baltimore County to coast. She, too, wants to protect the County's AAA bond rating. She wants to place an emphasis on hiring more police officers, and she will work to reduce juvenile crime. She felt that the County's efforts to revitalize the West Side of the County should be accelerated, and she hopes to expedite the permit application process, though she did not offer any specifics on how that would be accomplished. She was the only candidate who mentioned the importance of rebuilding the Francis Scott Key Bridge, and she wants to address the housing needs in the County, but again she did not offer any strategies on housing. She is widely considered as one of the front runners for the position of interim County Executive.

Yara Cheik: A resident of Hampton, Ms. Cheik has a high profile in this area as an advocate for a new Dulaney High School and other issues in education. She currently owns a real estate development company, and she is president of the Board of Library Trustees of Baltimore County. She hopes to invigorate the County because of its immense potential, and she would do this in a collaborative manner with the County Council. She wants to continue the practice of pay as you go financing on capital projects, such as building roads, public buildings and other infrastructure needs. She not only wants to fill the police vacancies but does so to create a more diverse workforce. She hopes to implement mortgage incentives for police to live in our county, and she would allow the police to take their cars home. She emphasized her strong and long-standing advocacy for education, and she said she supports the Blueprint for Maryland's Future. She also wants to highlight the efforts in economic development happening at Trade Point Atlantic. The Trade Point site is projected to create 1,100 jobs in the midterm future, and she wants the community colleges to collaboratively design workforce development initiatives to match those needed jobs. She also stated that the Red Line transit system is an important economic development initiative. Finally, she said that affordable housing is a priority, but she did not define how she would implement more affordable housing.

Olszewski Announces Affordable Housing Project on Loch Raven Blvd.

In what may be his last chance to tout his affordable housing efforts while in Towson, County Executive John Olszewski, Jr. announced a new multi-family housing development, known as Loch Raven Overlook. The project will be situated on the current site of a Days Inn on Loch Raven Boulevard, and that property has had a checkered law enforcement history in recent years, as well as demonstrated much deferred maintenance. The project will include construction

of two buildings once the Days Inn is demolished, and in total those buildings will house 122 units, of which 115 units will be affordable housing.

The project is being undertaken by as a joint venture by Osprey Property Company, who is also responsible for the 26 townhomes constructed behind the car dealership on Padonia Road, Pax Development and the Community Assistance Network, a local non-profit that provides services to many in need in Baltimore County and City.

Councilman Mike Ertel, in whose district the property is located, reacted by saying, “It will be an attractive, high-quality building that will provide affordable rents to hardworking people who already work and live on Loch Raven Boulevard....”

In support of this effort, Baltimore County will grant the Community Assistance Network the sum of \$8 million, which will be used to purchase the Days Inn property. Those funds come from the federal program, the American Rescue Plan (ARPA), a cornerstone of the Biden Administration’s assistance to state and local governments. The president of Osprey Property Company remarked that “projects like this are only possible through strong partnerships with state, local, and federal programs and partners.”

The only disappointing note to an otherwise positive development is that Mr. Olszewski, Jr. did not disclose that his director of Housing and Community Development is on the Board of Directors of the Community Assistance Network, the company that is receiving the grant from the county, according to information contained on their website.

Tentative Agenda for the GTCC General Meeting, January 8th @ 7:00 PM

- 1.) Introductions
- 2.) Report on Public Safety from Precinct 7: Officer Bull
- 3.) Featured Guest: Baltimore County State’s Attorney, Scott Schellenberger
- 4.) Review of Development Proposal for the former Delta Hotel Site, Shawan Road
- 5.) Reactions to Candidates for Interim County Executive
- 6.) Old Business
- 7.) New Business
- 8.) Adjourn

Calendar of Events

- 1.) Maryland Wedding Expo: Jan. 4: 11AM to 4PM, Exhibition Hall
- 2.) Chesapeake Bay Boat Show: Jan. 10, 10AM to 6 PM; Jan. 11, 9AM to 8PM.
Jan. 12, 9 AM to 5 PM all at Cow Palace
- 3.) Appalachian Gun Show: Jan. 11, 9 AM to 4 PM; Jan. 12, 9AM to 3 PM
At the Exhibition Hall

- 4.) Tot Swap, Children's Consignment Sale: Jan. 17, 9AM to 7 PM; Jan 18, 9 AM to 5 PM; Jan. 19, 10 AM to 4 PM; Jan. 20, 9 AM to 10 AM at 4H/Home Arts Bldg.
- 5.) Jurassic Quest: Jan. 17, 1 PM to 6 PM; Jan. 18 & 19, 9 AM to 6 PM; Jan. 20, 9 AM to 4 PM At Cow Palace
- 6.) Reptiles & Exotic Animal Show: Jan. 18, 9AM to 4 PM; Jan. 19, 10 AM to 4 PM At Exhibition Hall
- 7.) World of Pets Expo: Jan. 24, 2 PM to 8 PM; Jan. 25, 10 AM to 7 PM; Jan. 26, 10 AM to 5 PM at Cow Palace
- 8.) GB Charities Bull Roast: Jan. 25, 5 PM to 10 PM, at Exhibition Hall
- 9.) Motorcycle Show: Feb. 8, 10AM to 8 PM at Cow Palace
- 10.) Spring Home, Garden & Craft Show: March 1 & 2, 10 AM to 6 PM; March 7 & 8, 10 AM to 6 PM; March 9, 10 AM to 6 PM at Cow Palace