

2012 Legislative Address
Council President Billy Boniface
February 21, 2012

Due to the long agenda ahead of us this evening I'm not going to dwell on the accomplishments of the year we leave behind but instead concentrate on what 2012 has in store for the Council. Currently we have before us the Master Plan, an accumulation of a year long process that has produced a road map to guide the County for the foreseeable future. This is probably one of the most critical pieces of legislation that this Council will be asked to approve during its term in office and as we consider amendments tonight, I can assure you that each of us don't take this responsibility lightly. Mr. Gutwald and his department should be commended for their due diligence along with all those in the community who contributed to the proposal at hand.

In the coming months the Council will be considering recommendations from the Charter Review Board, a group of citizens appointed by us and the Executive who have spent the better part of the last seven months in developing a final report. It is our hope that the Charter amendment process will address many of the issues that our sister charter ruled counties around the state have dealt with previously. We thank the Board for their efforts and will be taking their findings under consideration in the coming weeks.

The uncertainty of the actions of the General Assembly during this year's legislative session will have a profound effect on our budget process. It will require a cooperative effort among all of the various agencies that provide services to those that choose Harford County as a place to live and work. The Council looks forward to working with everyone on a County-Wide Facilities Master Plan that will allow us during these times of limited resources to develop a Capital Improvement Program based on real needs and hopefully not politics.

The growth seen over the last ten years has placed a significant strain on the County's ability to keep pace with our public safety needs. The County Executive will be requesting our support of several initiatives dealing with the issue. A plan must be implemented that ensures our Fire and EMS personnel have the tools necessary to provide the level of service the citizens of Harford deserve but it's important that the volunteers who have always answered the call to action when the alarm has sounded be partners in the process. The Sheriff's Office must have the ability to keep up with what the County's population increase requires to keep our neighborhoods and streets safe. The Judicial System and State's Attorney's office aren't immune to the problems growth brings with it and require our support also.

Our Teachers need to be compensated at a level that allows us to retain our best and brightest but not at the expense of all those who serve the citizens of the county. Regardless if you're a teacher, deputy, librarian, or anyone else who is employed by a county agency, all contribute to making Harford a success and each should be treated equally.

“Our children are our future”. A statement used often in many an elected official’s speech. If this is true than I say our future is at jeopardy. Drug and alcohol abuse among our teenagers and young adults is increasing at an alarming rate. Addiction is a topic most tend to avoid but I’m sure there is not a person in this room who hasn’t been touched by its negative effects in one way or another. Now is not the time to place blame but now is the time to come together both government and the community to address the issue. No one chooses to be an addict. It’s a disease and should be dealt with accordingly.

These are a few of the concerns we face in the year ahead. I’m sure there will be others. This Council is prepared to take on whatever challenges come our way. I’ll finish up and move on with one of my favorite quotes; “Where you are going to be tomorrow depends on what you do today”.
God bless.