

**Legislative Address
Council President Boniface
February 2, 2010**

When this Council's time began over three years ago, the handicappers had mixed feelings on where to place our odds of success. There were just too many unknown variables to take into consideration. Four first-time starters, seven very different pedigrees, that couldn't possibly ever agree, and probably the most concerning of all, Dion is still here.

But now with three seasons behind us and a record of accomplishments to show for it, we're on track to complete our first terms, not as long shots but arguably the most productive Council to serve together since the County established a Charter form of government.

This year's agenda could easily be summed up in three areas of priority-- the economy, budget process, and property tax relief.

The Economy

As legislators working with the Administration, we have implemented tax credit programs, reduced fees, funded the efforts of the County's Office of Economic Development, and cooperated with our partners at the state and federal level to bring new businesses to Harford County.

We developed an entirely new Zoning Code that laid the groundwork for an historically successful comprehensive rezoning process that was supported by all members of the Council and County Executive without opposition of the community. This one accomplishment on its own will have us in a much better position to be prepared for BRAC as the economic climate improves.

But none of this means anything if you have lost your job and are struggling to make ends meet. It is now time to take advantage of the many tools we have placed in the box that will allow Harford County businesses to grow but most importantly, put people back to work.

The Budget Process

As revenues continue to decline, the decisions get harder. To insure that we achieve a successful outcome for the upcoming budget process this Council and Executive have agreed that communication and cooperation are paramount.

On the operating side it's maintaining basic services without any bells and whistles.

The Capital Program for this year-- if the mortar isn't being mixed or the dirt isn't being moved, it's most likely going to have to wait until things improve.

While still very strong in our ability to borrow and much more conservative than other counties throughout the state, we must continually look for other ways to fund projects.

This country was built upon the principal of living within your means and saving for the future. Borrowing and investing on speculation is at the heart of the current financial crisis.

As a nation, haven't we passed enough burdens on to those that will come after us?

Property Tax Relief

Balancing the needs of our citizens and the amount we ask of them in taxes is always difficult but even more so when many are just trying to get by. The cost of the services we provide and improvements we make should not entirely be on the shoulders of our property owners.

This Council and Executive have demonstrated time and again that we believe actions speak louder than words when it comes to providing tax relief for those that choose to live in Harford County. We lowered the homestead tax cap from a maximum allowed rate of 10% to 5% for this year forward, something no other Council since 1991 has had the fortitude to execute. We recently removed the service charge placed on those that choose to take advantage of paying their property tax bill in two payments. These measures alone will provide significant savings for property owners.

The Council strongly supports the efforts of our State Senators and Delegates to improve Maryland's property assessment process in order to create a more reliable and fair indicator of property values.

Mr. Guthrie, I'm sure, will continue throughout this year to be wherever and whenever he needs to be as an advocate for the citizens of District A.

The Council suffered a great loss in 2009 with the passing of Mrs. Chenowith. While she can never be replaced, Mr. Woods has already in a short amount of time established himself as a strong supporter of those he serves in District B.

What about Jim McMahan and the yellow van you may ask? The Capt'n doesn't wait on District C to come to him; he believes that to be a true representative of the people, one must be out and about among them. He led us on several of the property tax issues we as a Council have dealt with and I thank him for that.

Mr. Shrodes has joined the ranks of fatherhood, and I believe although she is only less than two months of age, young Madeline has her father right where she wants him. He continues to work throughout District D to find common ground on the many issues that are unique to the area. His desire to maintain Northern Harford County as a rural community is one I share.

Coach Slutzky has been invaluable to me in my role as Council President. I often use him as a sounding board on difficult issues. His "think before you leap" approach to a problem has helped me grow as a leader. District E has many challenges ahead as BRAC approaches but is well up to the task with Mr. Slutzky as its Councilman.

Ms. Lisanti has taken on the call of the Council to lead the effort of finding new solutions to an ongoing problem-- how to fund our school construction and renovation needs. She continues to use her connections at the state and federal level to secure funding for projects throughout District F and Harford County.

I know I speak for my colleagues in thanking the following people who have helped us along the way: our staff for their diligence, the Administration for their assistance, and the many members of the community who have spent an immeasurable amount of time providing the Council with input and advice.

I firmly believe this Council has hit its best stride and is united in the goal of keeping Harford County moving forward.

God bless.