

The 2009 State of the County Address
As Delivered By
Harford County Executive David R. Craig
to the
Harford County Council

Tuesday, February 10, 2009

As we look back over the important issues which confronted us in 2008 we can be collectively proud of the way we addressed them. It is clear to me, to the people of Harford County, and, I hope to each of you, that our greatest successes came when we worked together. Those successes came when council- members worked with each other and with the council president. The challenges were overcome when the council, both collectively and individually, worked with the administration and the administration worked with the council.

Thank you Council President Boniface, Vice President Slutzky and each councilmember for all of your help and cooperation. But, most importantly, those achievements came about because of the hard work and dedication of those people we sometimes call employees and who we often know as neighbors; the highway workers who clear our roads on wintery mornings, the deputies who patrol our communities, the community service people who help our senior citizens, the emergency operations dispatchers who answer our 911 calls, those who have just begun their careers and those who are preparing for a well-deserved retirement.

Some of these accomplishments have only been reached after controversy and compromise, but as Thomas Moore once wrote "The things, Good Lord, that we pray for, give us the grace, to labor for".

This is the fourth time that it has been my honor to convey to you the State of Harford County. We have kept at the forefront the issues that are most important to the function of local government, public education, public safety, a strong business community and a high quality of life. We have worked smarter, we have worked better, and we have worked leaner. We have striven to be more efficient. We have operated within our means. We have made our bottom line smaller.

In the past it has been traditional that this address is a litany of projects - a laundry list of programs. Tonight I intend to deviate from that model somewhat.

I believe that we would all agree that one of our major accomplishments was the rewriting of our 26 year old zoning code. Along with the Sign Code and subdivision regulations, the groundwork for this action began two years ago when Council President Boniface and I worked out a time-line. With direction from Pete Gutwald the administration and council stuck to the guide lines. Working in-house we set the course for future development in Harford County. There were two unsung heroes in this effort; Suzanne Wenzel of the Law Department, and Theresa Raymond of Planning and Zoning. They typed that 800 page document, took all the notes and monitored the 150 amendments. Thank you, Suzanne and Theresa, for your hard work and dedication.

An issue of special interest to Councilman Shrodes is the operation of our landfill. This operation had been troubled for several years. While the admission of the problem and bringing in an outside, independent agent to suggest changes were the first two steps in making much needed improvements, the key to success was also found in-house. Tom Hilton has not only taken leadership, but ownership of this issue. In six short months 42 of the 56 recommendations have been implemented. Tom has also made suggestions which will save us \$250,000 without any loss of service. Thank you, Tom.

Fifteen months ago, when confronted with a structural deficit, the State laid an extra tax burden on its citizens. We instead created an Efficiency in Government Commission comprised of citizens throughout the county. The Commission has made many recommendations. Some have been adopted, others are in progress. More importantly, however, has been the fact that our employees have used this opportunity to examine their own operations. Joan Turbutt is one of them. Joan works in Facilities and Operations. She is in charge of cleaning our buildings. By examining contracts and reviewing products used she has made cuts of over \$127,000. Thank you, Joan.

The past year saw the first concrete proof of the process we call BRAC. It started in March with the groundbreaking of the C4ISR Facility; a \$500 million project and the heart of BRAC for APG; soon after that over \$48 million in changes at the gate were started.

In June we hosted a job fair attended by 1500 people. Just last week, a second job fair was attended by 4200 people from 13 different states. There have been ribbon cuttings and ground breakings for R4, CACI, Mitre, Lear/Siegler, and COPT just to name a few. Over 300 people have made the move from Fort Monmouth, and this year 900 more will follow.

Every day, Harford County employees do their numerous and varied duties. This year one of those days was particularly trying for Tim Smith and Richard Robinson. These men were carrying out their duties for the Department of Public Works when they were robbed at gunpoint in one of our communities. But their dedication and commitment to duty has not faltered. We appreciate all they do for the people of Harford County.

When people call or write to complain or express their concerns about something, one person is responsible for taking their calls, their emails, their letters, and works to resolve their problem. That person is Jane Walker, of the Office of Governmental and Community Relations. Jane does an outstanding job handling constituent issues and we appreciate everything she does on a daily basis to help people with their concerns.

Denise Carnaggio is the face of BRAC, as is Eileen Frado and many others. Thank you, Denise and Eileen for your work.

The State of Harford County in 2008 was solid. We have had many successes of special interest to each of you: Councilman Guthrie – the Southern Resource Center; Councilwoman Chenoweth - The Fallston Recreation Center; Councilman McMahan - Bel Air High School; Councilman Shrodes - North Harford High's turf field; Councilman Slutzky - the addition to Aberdeen High School; Councilwoman Lisanti - the third segment of the Ma and Pa Trail; Council President Boniface - 3400 acres of Ag Preservation.

There are other achievements of general interest: on-line job applications, a Buy Local campaign, the expansion of the Abingdon Water Plant, negotiations of the redevelopment of Washington Court, Saturday transit service, relocation of the food bank, new gang suppression initiatives, a Youth Commission.

No action was as important, however, as our quick response to the fiscal problem presented to us in October - a drop in revenues of over \$13 million. We reduced overtime. We froze vacant positions. We cut travel. We limited training. We eliminated take-home vehicles. We changed hours of operations. And we ultimately reduced costs by 4% virtually across the board. These cuts will be made permanent in the FY10 budget; cuts which reduce the base.

This year will bring us an equal set of challenges and an equal set of opportunities. We cannot, however, appear to be bold without taking risks. Those opportunities are as numerous as those we confronted this year. We will be making decisions concerning Comprehensive Rezoning, the FY10 Budget, an innovative Waste to Energy Facility, wind power, an infrastructure authority, road improvements, school construction to eliminate elementary overcrowding, improvements to our technology services.

Looking to Washington for bail-outs or to Annapolis for solutions will not resolve all these issues. We must continue to look to local solutions for local problems. We cannot, and will not turn to the taxpayers for new sources of revenue.

The state of Harford County will continue to be solid and positive as long as we continue to put aside personal agendas; as long as we continue to work together. The citizens and tax payers expect and deserve no less.

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