

LEGISLATIVE ADDRESS

Delivered By

Council President Billy Boniface

February 20, 2007

This Council will face Challenges over the next four years like no other Council has in the past. We must find a balance between dealing with Growth and ensuring a quality of life for all those who choose to call Harford County home. We must properly plan but equally importantly we must take action. The Master Plan of 2004 has provided direction for the foreseeable future. It is imperative that we strive to carry out these directives but also as a community evaluate our progress along the way to ensure that the goals and objectives are being achieved.

What are the priorities?

First and foremost a rewrite of the Zoning code. This was a critical element of the Master Plan. Its completion will help ensure that the comprehensive zoning process that follows will be consistent with the policies of the Plan. The Council has presented the Executive with an acceptable timeline to accomplish both. Together we are moving forward to assure that this process will be an open one. There will be an outside facilitator to guide the public input phase that allows for every voice to be heard. There will be a workgroup established consisting of representation from all corners of the county to review the recommendations of the Department of Planning and Zoning and incorporate the suggestions of the Community. This workgroup will be hard pressed to accomplish this task in the timeline that has been presented but nothing worth doing comes easy. It will be my job to ensure that the Council is kept involved throughout the process and the concerns of each Member are brought to the table for discussion. Once completed we can begin Comprehensive Zoning with the proper tools to do the job right. It

is through the Legislative process of Comprehensive Zoning and not the appeals procedure that we can achieve the most.

Growth and time have taken their toll on Harford's road system. To commute through this county during any part of the day has become a true test of patience. The County must partner with the state delegation to secure additional funding for a multitude of projects. If the funding does not come we need to be creative in developing solutions to the problems on our own. We must ask ourselves, are there short term fixes we can initiate until more money becomes available? How can we improve our public transportation system? We must think outside the box.

Schools

During the last 20 years of tremendous population increases in Harford County, we have allowed school construction projects to fall behind and not keep pace with growth. Some projects that we did do involved several problems and setbacks. Hopefully we have learned by our mistakes of the past. The Council joins with the Executive in making building and renovating schools a top priority but as with any capital projects it is imperative that we protect our bond rating. There must be a cohesive effort by all to secure additional state funding. Private industry must be a partner. If financing does not come quick enough then we must be willing to move forward ourselves, but to weaken our ability to borrow at a reasonable rate during times of dire need would be irresponsible, bad business, and put a greater tax burden on our citizens.

Water is a resource that is often over looked. Contrary to belief the glass is not bottomless. Currently there is research being done to determine the effects continued sprawl will have on our underground reservoirs and the many tributaries to the bay. When is it enough? We must concentrate our growth in areas that are accessible to Water and Sewer systems. Hopefully an updated zoning code, an aggressive land preservation effort, and a possible new transfer of development rights program will help us accomplish this goal. Upgrading our facilities to provide Water and Sewer services is critical. The three municipalities and the county are working together to find solutions. This is a task that requires attention equally important as any other.

Public Safety

Law enforcement and the Fire/EMS system are stretched to their limit. Sheriff Bane needs the support of the Council to move forward with an agenda he laid out during the campaign to make our neighborhoods safe. Our correctional officers can not go forgotten. This is a thankless job that is critical to the efficiency of the detention center. The state's attorney's office and court system are equal partners in crime prevention and have serious growing pains. The fire service must have the County's continued funding and support of the Foundation that allows supplementing paid providers in addition to volunteers to deal with response issues throughout the County. Collectively these groups have been meeting to recognize the greatest areas of concern. Hopefully this will develop into a comprehensive plan to address the needs of the county now and in the future.

Profitable Agriculture will play a major role in the landscape of Harford County's future. This involves both land preservation and economic development. One does not work without the other. We must promote Agriculture as a career opportunity for future generations. We must protect the land values of farmers which for many is their only asset. As a member of land preservation and active agriculture, I intend to work with my fellow council members in making sure my industry remains a priority but doesn't overshadow the many obligations the Council and Executive must meet. This County is comprised of several different communities with unique concerns and challenges but we are one Harford. Edgewood's problems are Whiteford's. Jarrettsville's issues are Havre De Grace's. Success comes from our ability to recognize this and work together in finding solutions.

Each Councilmember will be hard at work over the next year representing their districts;

Mr. Guthrie will be ensuring that many projects in his area are moving forward. The \$2.5 million dollar project to build an addition to the PAL Center in Edgewood that will also serve as a gymnasium will begin this spring and should be completed sometime in early 2008. The planning and beginning of the construction of a brand new Edgewood High School and rebuilding Edgewood Elementary School. The new \$3.5 million dollar gymnasium to be constructed at Joppatowne High School. These are just a few of the events taking place. I've enjoyed my time on the Council with Mr. Guthrie so far. He works hard at responding to his constituent's needs. While I wouldn't recommend using his barber, Edgewood and Joppatowne can rest assure that he is looking out for their best interest.

After a 3 year search Ms. Chenoweth in working with the County has secured a 42 acre site for a new Fallston Recreational and Senior Center. She will be making sure during the construction stage that it meets the needs of the Fallston Community. I've admire her tireless efforts in working to ensure that the County has one of the finest Library Systems in the state. Several new ones have been built or renovated during her time representing the Council on the Library Board with more in the works. Her experience on the Council is truly an asset to me as a new Council President.

I find Mr. McMahon's enthusiasm and can do attitude very refreshing. He takes time to go out in the Community to learn the issues affecting his district and involves the citizens in building consensus. I'm also considering a resolution declaring him the official Council Historian. The man is a walking encyclopedia on the history of the County.

Mr. Shrodes shares my same love of the land and the rural character of northern Harford County. He realizes the importance of proper planning to keep it that way. His experience as a former planner for the County will be very helpful to the Council in dealing with the Zoning Code rewrite. He is passionate about the need of tax relief for the constituents of his district and will be working hard to get this accomplished.

Mr. Slutzky's district E will be under tremendous stress dealing with the pressures of future growth. Transportation issues, school overcrowding, quality residential development, and commercial build up are all major concerns. Traffic problems from Aberdeen to Churchville are getting worse

each day. Much of the school overcrowding that will remain after the opening of Patterson Mill will occur in Councilmember Slutzky's area. Effective leadership comes from recognizing the Strengths of those around you. Coach Slutzky's extensive knowledge of the Educational system will be invaluable to the Council in future legislation and budget considerations. I appreciate his no nonsense work ethic. I have to admit that I still find myself on occasion jumping to my feet prepared to hit the ground for push ups when he enters the room.

Ms. Lisanti's experience as former town administrator for the city of HDG has been extremely helpfully to me in assuming the responsibilities of Council President. She goes to great strides to research all possibilities of proposed changes and legislation before making any decision. She may not be with us tonight but will be back to work in March representing her constituents.

In the very near future this Council will be presented with a proposed budget from the Executive that will most likely be the largest in the history of the County. Much of this Budget will be mandated to fund. Prioritizing our needs and ensuring efficiency will require time and patience. We have been elected to make sure our tax dollars are spent wisely. While Harford County has experienced significant growth, we are still very much a bedroom community which relies primarily on property taxes to provide public services. Hopefully a new code and comprehensive zoning process along with economic development especially along the route 40 and I-95 corridor, will allow us to find more balance between commercial and residential

development that helps lessen the tax burden on the homeowners of the County.

I've laid out several priorities for the future. I've purposely exclude the subject of BRAC because regardless of whether BRAC exists or not we still need to deal with the issues I've presented this evening. BRAC merely requires us to quicken the pace. Yes it is true BRAC brings with it many opportunities but it also presents many challenges. The State and Federal Government need to recognize those challenges and assist with significant funding or none of us will reap the benefits. The citizens of Harford County can not be expected to go this alone.

I leave you with this thought "Success is nothing more than a good idea coupled with hard work." This Community is blessed with many bright minds willing to make a difference. Being elected doesn't mean you have all the right answers. It is only by working side by side, the People and their Government that we can find solutions that lead to success. Together we can put Harford on the Right Track.