

**Legislative Address
Council President Boniface
February 10, 2009**

I'm happy to report that the Council has survived another year without strangling each other or requiring security intervention. Many things have been accomplished and much more lies ahead as we pass the halfway point of our terms in office.

Without a doubt the most significant task of 2008 was the completion of Harford County's new zoning code. This was part of a process that began soon after we were elected, and it was a major goal of the Council. After the introduction of the legislation, we worked diligently together to compromise on passage of over 145 amendments to the County Executive's proposal. This could not have happened without the assistance of our own Council Attorney Mary Kate Herbig, County Attorney Nancy Giorno, and Director of Planning and Zoning Pete Gutwald. Each member of the Council managed to champion a priority they felt needed to be included. This well overdue new zoning code will enhance the County's ability to reach the goals and objectives of the 2004 Master Plan for years to come.

What is on the horizon? The immediate future involves what is on everyone's mind, the economy and how it will affect the upcoming budget proposal for FY2010. It is no secret that this country is in a recession that is far worse than any could have predicted a mere six months ago. County revenues are significantly less than projected. To solve its own budget shortfalls, the likelihood of the Counties having to pick up additional costs from the State is very real. What that will be, changes every day. One of the responsibilities of the Council is to review the recommended tax rate of the County Executive for the next fiscal year and establish one that we determine allows him to provide the citizens of Harford County with accentual services. While we have been able to maintain the same property tax rate for some time, due to the increase in the State's assessment of our properties, even as their market values fall, the reality is the tax burden placed on our citizens grows each year. What that amount should be is the challenge. We have a responsibility to ensure a quality of life for all who choose to live here but can only ask so much of our property owners in this County who are struggling to live within their means during these difficult times.

The County Council must also determine how much the Executive can borrow to finance projects for the future. As most of us do in our businesses and personal lives, we determine what we can borrow today by our ability to meet the obligation we create for tomorrow. Revenues change, the acceptable liability may need to change also. The County is no different. The Council must work with the Executive to consistently reevaluate what burden we create for the future taxpayers of Harford County. Whether or not the opportunity exists to recoup that investment must and will play a major role in that determination.

In the end, everyone has needs and wants. We will strive to do our best to fulfill the needs of the County but many of the wants will have to wait for another day.

On the heels of the budget season will be the approval of the County Executive's proposed comprehensive re-zoning. While his administration works to develop a plan to introduce to the Council in June, our involvement is very limited. Upon introduction to the Council, we plan to work just as diligently as we did during the code rewrite process with the many citizen land advocacy groups in the County and each other to determine if any changes should be made. More than likely there will be few. I say this because I know that both the County Executive and the Council will not accept any request not in compliance with the current Master Plan. Both branches of government take the responsibility of following the guidelines of this document very seriously. Our schedule for the public hearings to be held has been established well in advance to allow for any citizen wishing to be involved in the process significant time to plan accordingly. The time line for completing re-zoning and the several other state mandated plans that are required before the end of our terms in office is a busy one I will admit. But as I often say, we were elected to serve every day, not just the months of the year we pick and chose.

Mr. Guthrie continues to give me a stomach ulcer on a regular basis but has been extremely helpful in serving the needs of his constituents in the Edgewood and Joppatowne area. While there are days my colleagues and I have had to endure hearing it a multitude of times, not an issue of the community he represents goes by without him lobbying the Council on their behalf. He has also been a strong proponent of Public Safety.

Public Safety consisting of the Sheriff's Office, Local Health Department, and Our Volunteer Fire/EMS system is a "need" of the citizens of Harford County and should remain a funding priority of the County Executive as it has been in the past.

Mrs. Chenowith has truly been an inspiration to all of us. She continues to deal with her health issues and never misses a beat taking care of the Fallston communities' concerns. Let me be clear -- Mrs. Chenowith remains an active and productive member of this Council, and having gotten to know her better over the last two years, we plan on her being so for her full term in office.

Mr. McMahan has accomplished a great deal over the last year. Notably as the representative of the Council on emergency operations issues, he managed to insure that all parties affected by an important hazardous materials piece of legislation were involved in the process and concerns dealt with through amendments, especially the AG community, and I thank him for that. Because of my farm commitments, I often delegate tasks on to him knowing that they will be taken care of thoughtfully and effectively. He has been a pleasure to work with. He currently is working with the Administration on important legislation dealing with wind energy that will be coming before the Council shortly. His yellow van, or mobile office as he calls it, is so well known throughout the district he serves that I'm considering asking him to mount a bell and sell ice cream in the summer to supplement the County's budget problems.

Mr. Shrodes and I share a common goal -- the preservation of northern Harford County's farmland and scenic landscape for future generations. I firmly believe because of dwindling water supplies in the Midwest, advancements in this nation's energy independence policies, and increased awareness of the benefits of buying local, the focus of production agriculture will be shifting to the East Coast over the next several decades. Thanks to Mr. Shrodes' efforts and the emphasis County Executive Craig has placed on preserving land, we are well on our way to meeting our goal of 55,000 acres before 2012.

Mr. Shrodes lobbied hard to expand the County's Priority Preservation Area that played an important role in Harford County's re-certification for participating in the State's Preservation Program. While the funding source for the County's program is significantly down due to the economy, those State dollars will become even more critical. Together with the support of the Council we finally put into law a viable Transfer of Development Rights program. This additional preservation tool comes without a price tag. No good TDR program works without reviewing its effectiveness on a regular basis. Mr. Shrodes and the Council plan to work with the Administration this fall to see if any changes in the program are needed to insure its success.

I've gotten so used to working with Chad that I jokingly suggested last year when he and Amber were choosing a wedding date that he pick mine so I that I could be helpful and remind him each year when his anniversary was coming up. I had no idea he would take my advice.

It's no secret Vice-President Slutzky's knowledge of the County's education system has been truly an asset to this Council. He has been our go-to-guy on school issues but there are two other traits of his that I've learned to admire over the last two years. When given a task, no stone goes unturned. His attention to detail is unmatched in comparison to anyone I've worked with. I like to contribute this to the discipline all Wrestlers must learn to be successful. But even more important is something that he always practices, which just so happens to be the same advice given to me by my father long ago, "Choose your words wisely for once spoken, they can never be taken back".

Ms. Lisanti, your experience in local government has benefited each of your colleagues in review of any legislation that has come before this Council. You have represented us in Annapolis since our terms began. The relationships you have developed in both the State House and DC will continue to play a major role in this County's preparedness for BRAC. I would have to say though, I'm often glad of my experience gained from 23 years of marriage to an Italian, to how should I put it, better understand your fiery passion at times.

There you have it -- Your Council, Individually, each but a voice. Together, a force. A group of very different people but each with something to add that makes the team successful. We take very seriously our responsibility to provide direction and oversight for this County. I'm honored to have been given the privilege to serve alongside my colleagues and look forward to the years to come. Thank you.