

# BLADENSBURG TOWN COUNCIL MEETING

MONDAY, MARCH 13, 2023



Mayor Takisha D. James

Monthly Report on Meetings and Activities

# Monthly Meetings & Activities

## For the Month of February

**Happy Black History Month!** February is the month set aside for special recognition of the accomplishments and legacy of African Americans. As we examine the history of African Americans we must continue to honor our rich legacy and the progress we have made in the United States of America.

**February 1: Meeting with Prince George's County State's Attorney Aisha Braveboy** | This meeting served as a follow-up to the Municipal Retreat organized by State's Attorney Braveboy in January of this year. Chief Collington and I attended this virtual meeting with a small group of elected officials and the State's Attorney's staff to discuss specific community programs to help Senator Augustine shape legislation to provide funding to support local efforts to provide youth programming that ultimately reduces crime in local communities.

**February 6, 13, 21 & 27: PGCMA Legislative Committee Meetings** | The meetings were held on a weekly basis as we worked with the PGCMA legislative consultants to track important legislation moving through the Maryland General Assembly.

The PGCMA body approved sending a letter to MML to reconsider their position on House Bill 459.

- Legislation Summary: FOR the purpose of authorizing a certain county or municipality to acquire certain street lighting equipment by purchase or condemnation, convert its street lighting service to a customer-owned street lighting tariff, enter into an agreement to purchase electricity, and contract with an electric company for the maintenance of the street lighting equipment; authorizing certain disputes to be submitted to the Public Service Commission for resolution; and generally relating to the purchase of street lighting equipment by a county or municipality from an electric company and tariffs for street lighting.

There was discussion and agreement to send a letter in support of SB 409 - Police Accountability Boards and Administrative Charging Committees – Municipal Corporations.

**Legislative Summary: FOR the purpose of authorizing a municipal corporation in the State to have a certain police accountability board; authorizing a municipal corporation in the State to establish**

an administrative charging committee to serve certain law enforcement agencies; and generally relating to police accountability boards and administrative charging committees in municipal corporations.

Additionally, a letter of support was provided by the Town of Bladensburg in support of this bill as this is one of our legislative priorities.

The Committee discussed supporting HB 0892 (Environment - Comprehensive Flood Management Grant Program - Funding for Overburdened Communities) sponsored by Delegate Julian Ivey and the same bill cross-filed in the Senate as SB 0813 sponsored by Senator Washington.

- Legislation Summary: Requiring at least 40% of funding provided under the comprehensive flood management grant program to be used for projects located in or directly benefiting census tracts with an EJ Score of .76 or greater; and requiring the Governor to include in the annual State budget an appropriation of \$20,000,000 for the comprehensive flood management grant program in fiscal year 2025 and each fiscal year thereafter.

**February 6, 17, & 24: Black History Month Planning Meetings** | I enjoyed the opportunity to work with Mr. Ray Jeffries and Council Member Brown to plan the 2023 Annual Black History Month celebration. We worked to incorporate the distinct honor of giving the Distinguished African American Award to Dr. Barbara Bottoms, an outstanding educator who worked for over 30 years in Prince George's County Public School System. She served as principal at Rogers Heights Elementary School for many of those years where she made a significant impact on the lives of students and families from the Port Towns communities. Dr. Bottoms worked tirelessly to address and eradicate the use of textbooks that contained disparaging and discriminatory language regarding minority students. She also worked to address and eradicate gang activity at Rogers Heights with the Town and a broad spectrum of community stakeholders. Her impact on Rogers Heights Elementary School and the Town of Bladensburg will be felt for many years to come.

**February 9: Emergency Special Meeting & Closed Session** | The Town Council voted to enter into an Emergency Closed Session pursuant to the State of Maryland General Provisions Article 3-305 - #7 to consult with counsel to obtain legal advice.

**February 10: Emergency Special Meeting Notice & Closed Session** | The Town Council held an Emergency Special Meeting and then voted to enter into a Closed Session pursuant to Section 3-305, #4 to consider a matter that concerns the proposal for a business or industrial organization to locate, expand, or remain in the State.

**February 15: Maryland Board of Public Works Approved a Request to Support the Peace Cross** | The Board considered and approved the request to enter into a grant agreement for a \$160,000 grant for the Maryland-National Capital Park and Planning Commission. The funding will allow for the acquisition, planning, design, construction, repair, renovation, reconstruction, site improvement, and capital equipping of the Bladensburg World War I Memorial Peace Cross. There is no matching fund requirement for this grant and this request stemmed from concerns with traffic accidents at the Peace Cross before and after the reconstruction and rededication of the memorial. I'm so grateful for Treasurer Davis, Comptroller Lierman and Governor Moore for their support of this grant!

**February 16 & 17: MMA Winter Conference** | It was a pleasure to attend this conference to gather useful information to help better advocate and work for the Town of Bladensburg. While there were many lessons learned and takeaways, so I summarized some of them below for brevity.

The conference began with a Leadership Panel featuring Senate Minority Leader Stephen Hershey (R-36), House Majority Leader Delegate Marc Korman (D-16) and House Minority Leader Jason Buckle (R-1B). These legislators participated in a bi-partisan discussion and shared issues that are priorities for each of them. It was interesting to learn the state is severely understaffed and how Delegate Korman is prioritizing filling the gaps to reduce the double digit vacancies. He spoke about the negative impact this deficit is having on the state's ability to deliver customer service to residents and in some cases it's impacting public safety. Probation officers are understaffed so they aren't checking in with people as often as they need to. This is a state wide issue and tied to increases in crime. They are keenly aware of this and working to support addressing this issue in the legislature.

They are working on legislation to crack down on repeat violent offenders. This is not directed at those who commit a minor mistake, but those who show no sign of rehabilitation and continue to commit violent crimes. In addition to the public safety concerns, this also hurts the ability of business and entertainment districts to thrive so they understand the urgency to act.

When asked about the legislation that is occupying their time:

Delegate Korman stated his work on the House Appropriations Committee is around the major funding savings and financial support from the federal government. Because of the large amount of assistance related to COVID-19, the budget is in a good place today, however when planning for the outer years when this funding doesn't align with expenses he's concerned about how the state will meet its financial obligations. The Blueprint for Maryland's Future will prove to be a major cost, so the ability to pay for that in the long term is also a concern. He's also focused on ensuring a balanced budget is passed.

Delegate Buckle agreed and noted the importance of prioritization. Delegate Buckle noted praised Delegate Korman's work on a bill which, will raise salaries for special needs teachers. He also noted the republican viewpoint is to prioritize where you can spend the money to get the most bang for your buck in order to get funding to the most deserving.

Senator Hershey noted a priority is working through the legislation on marijuana uses. They are working through whether it is regulated as cigarettes or alcohol when it comes to use, public consumption, etc. They're also considering whether there is an opt-out clause for counties, whether municipalities can designate areas that are off limits for use such as school zones, near senior facilities, etc.

**Police Accountability Boards Update:** The legislators noted they are working to advance the priority of municipalities. Delegate Buckley stated he understands municipal concerns with the current legislation regarding handling police accountability boards and administrative charging commissions. He stated the final legislation was a function of the short legislative session last year and not having sufficient time to fully vet the legislation before approval. He also stated the perspective of House Speaker Jones is largely due to the fact that her district does not include municipalities, therefore she's not fully informed on the importance of why the option to handle the Police Accountability Boards and Administrative Charging Commissions at the local level is so vital. We also asked for consideration for smaller municipalities that want to partner with a few municipalities to make the establishment of these entities more affordable and easier to manage at the local level.

Cannabis legislation: This is creating additional work for the legislators as well. They noted we should keep in mind that for every \$1,000,000 in marijuana sales, it only generates \$900 in tax revenue for municipalities. When you consider the cost to municipalities such as enforcement, costs to create and post signage, establishing no smoking zones and other implementation costs, it's simply not worth the effort financially for municipalities. The argument for pushing the legalization of marijuana was the significant tax revenue. Legislators also wanted to diminish the illicit market but this legislation is proving to be troublesome and it's not certain that it's worth the trouble.

Legislative Overview by MML Staff:

Senate Bill 409: They followed up on issues with the current legislation and how it mandates Administrative Charging Committees and Police Accountability Boards through counties. This design doesn't consider there are 89 municipal police agencies in the state and 25 in Prince George's County. Additionally, there is no other area where the county has direct oversight of municipal employees so there is no precedent here. MACO is also providing a letter of support for this bill, as counties have no interest in adjudicating officers they don't employ.

**Other highlights were provided:**

Climate issues are still of high priority during the legislative session.

Cannabis: It looks like municipalities will get some tax revenue, but it's minor. They are working to get more flexibility from a local and land-use perspective. While we cannot prohibit dispensaries and retail shops, they are working on an amendment to give us the ability to keep them out of our communities. Note the Maryland sales tax is 6%, so municipalities will get 1.5% of what the state collects. For every million dollars of sales the Town will collect \$900.

**Advocacy Training & Tips were held with Justin Fiore to prepare us for meetings with our delegations.**

- Know Your Audience - Know them by name and title, especially if they are in leadership
- Know your elevator pitch and personalize it.
- Know your bills as part of this and be able to communicate the concerns with it.
- At the end be sure to make the ask for support.
- Have a leave behind when it's appropriate even if it's something from your town.

Following the training, we were escorted to the State House and able to observe the House of Delegates and Senate in session. Afterwards we had time to visit our delegations to share our concerns and areas where we need their assistance with our municipalities.

*Reception at the Governor's House:* MMA was grateful to Governor and First Lady Moore for hosting us for this annual reception. This event offers an opportunity for mayors to connect directly with the Governor, Lt. Governor, First Lady and their staff. Having this interaction is vital in building collaborative and positive relationships with each administration. I was able to connect with Governor Moore regarding our Master Plan Redevelopment efforts and the Bladensburg Trade School to request support with these efforts from the state. Governor is committed to providing workforce development opportunities to Marylanders. During his prepared remarks, he highlighted his efforts to work with and on behalf of all Marylanders. Just one month after taking office he has submitted ten bills, seven of which are sponsored by Republicans. He is demonstrating his commitment to working across the aisle.

Comptroller Brooke E. Lierman shared updates on her priorities as Comptroller. She is seeking ways to work with local government and share tax incentives and credits for residents. Comptroller Lierman is also looking for ways to better educate the community about what her office does.

She is working to build transparency and accountability into the Board of Public Works as well as upgrade the tools of the staff so they can better serve resident needs. .



When speaking with Comptroller Lierman I shared that her predecessor did a great job with providing updates and webinars for businesses. She was open to doing the same thing so I'll follow up to schedule this opportunity.

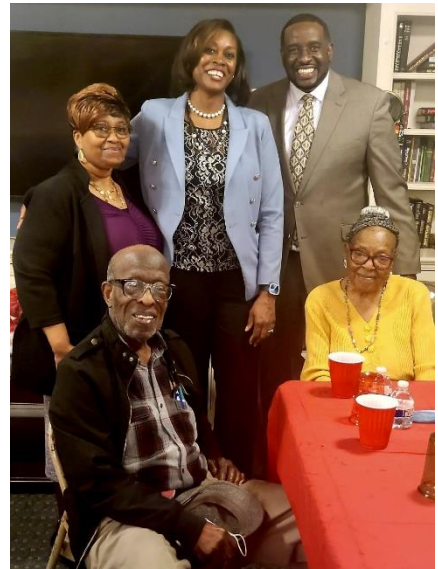
**February 17: District 47 Quarterly Meeting Hosted by Senator Malcolm Augustine |** During the meeting Senator Augustine, Delegate Fennell and Delegate Ivey shared updates from the current legislative session. Senator Augustine encouraged residents to apply for Board and Commission appointments. Please visit <https://govappointments.maryland.gov> to view opportunities to participate in opportunities to serve the state.

Senator Augustine also shared his 28 pieces of legislation before the general assembly, three of which were at the request of the State Treasurer. He also talked about his legislation for \$12,000,000 for the 988 trust fund, establishing the Commission on Behavioral Health Care Treatment and Access to make recommendations to provide appropriate, accessible, and comprehensive behavioral health services to individuals in the State, and establishment of a

**Mental** Health Workforce Development Fund. He also discussed SB 0050 to prohibit appropriations of state funds for the Magnetic Levitation Transportation System.

**February 20: Parkview Tenant Council Officer Installation & Appreciation for Mrs. Footman and Ms. Benjamin |** Council Member Blount, Council Member McBryde, the First Gentleman and I attended this event. I

installed the newly elected Council and we honored two long time volunteers in Mrs. Footman and Ms. Benjamin. Mrs. Footman has served as financial secretary for approximately 10 years, while Ms. Benjamin has served in many of the Tenant Council roles over the last 15 years. The residents came together to celebrate the service of these beautiful women who have improved the quality of life for Parkview residents over more than a decade.



**February 22: Vice President Kamala Harris Visits Bowie State University with an Announcement to Save Homebuyers and Homeowners \$800 Per Year** | Vice President Harris announced the Biden-Harris Administration has taken action that will save homebuyers and homeowners with new FHA-insured mortgages an average of \$800 per year, lowering housing costs for an estimated 850,000 homebuyers and homeowners in 2023. This action will help 850,000 new homeowners.

HUD, through the Federal Housing Administration (FHA), will reduce its annual mortgage insurance premium by 0.30 percentage points, from 0.85% to 0.55% for most new borrowers. The mortgage insurance premium is the monthly fee that homeowners with FHA-insured mortgages pay to insure their mortgages, which they pay on top of their monthly principal and interest payments. Homeownership is a building block to wealth, so this action will help move many Americans into the middle class and transition them into the path of wealth.



**February 25: The 42<sup>nd</sup> Annual Black History Month Celebration “Black Resistance: In the Past, Present, and Future” was held at Martin’s Crosswind** | This annual event was organized by The Black History Promotion & Education Committee, The Maryland 4<sup>th</sup> & 5<sup>th</sup> Congressional Districts, and the Black History Month Planning Committee. Special guest speakers were Congressman Steny Hoyer, Congressman Glen Ivey and Governor Wes Moore. This program offered an inspirational and beautiful celebration of African American History and Culture.



**The Annual Senior Graduation & Prom |** Congratulations to Elizabeth Seton High School and Seniors Against Stalking and Domestic Violence for organizing a beautiful graduation and prom for seniors who successfully completed the GED program. There are various reasons that our seniors may have had to drop out of school, but this unique program enables them to achieve a lifelong dream through Deacon Barbara Givens' program. This annual program also recognizes the achievements of veterans, domestic abuse survivors, community advocates and health crisis survivors from our community. It was an incredible experience to celebrate Bladensburg residents who were a part of this year's program. Congratulations to:

- Ms. Pope
- Mr. Thacker
- Ms. Sampson
- Mr. Lundy

I was also honored to receive an award of recognition for my support of this program over many years.



**Town of Bladensburg Black History Program |** This year's Black History Month program provided an opportunity to educate attendees about the role of African Americans in Bladensburg's history as well as highlight some of the historical sites in our community. A highlight of the program was honoring Dr. Barbara Bottoms with the Distinguished African American Award celebrating over 30 years of service to educating and empowering our youth as part of the Prince George's County Public School System. Dr. Bottoms was also presented with a citation from State Senator Malcolm Augustine, Delegate Diana Fennell and Delegate Julian Ivey as well as recognitions from Cottage City and Edmonston.

I appreciate all of the hard work of the planning committee with Council Member Trina Brown and Mr. Ray Jeffries, as this year's program was our first time returning to an in-person format since the COVID-19 pandemic began. Thank you to all of the residents, community stakeholders, and elected officials who took time to join us!





