

MONTHLY REPORT | December 12, 2022
BLADENSBURG TOWN COUNCIL MEETING



Mayor Takisha D. James
Monthly Report on Meetings and Activities

Monthly Meetings & Activities

for November 2022

November 5: District 47 Quarterly Leaders Breakfast | Council Members McBryde, Brown and I attended this breakfast organized by Senator Malcolm Augustine. We heard updates regarding upcoming events being organized by the 47th delegation including a reminder about the Peace Cross Rededication planned for Friday, November 11.

In speaking about funding priorities Senator Augustine mentioned providing resources for transit-oriented development, creation of a hub and spoke for behavioral health services, and a privacy bill to protect the privacy of citizens. The senator noted California and Virginia have citizen and industry-friendly laws. Delegate Holmes is pushing for a Commission for Common Ownership at the state level. Given mounting issues with communities such as Parkway Condominiums, this is needed to protect members of condo and homeowner associations. For any capital projects we need, he encouraged us to ask the governor's office first and then come to him as it's easiest to have the money placed in the Governor's capital budget. In asking about how to address concerns for legislation around rent stabilization, he mentioned this would come before Delegate Fennell's Committee. I will follow up to request a meeting to understand the best process for advocating for legislation in a manner that will garner bi-partisan support.

The meeting was held on the heels of the County Executive's press conference regarding the FBI building and the urgency for sticking to the original plan to have the facility placed in Prince George's County.

November 5: Ms. Julia Spencer's celebrates her 90th Birthday | I had the opportunity to surprise Ms. Spencer with a proclamation and greetings on behalf of the Town of Bladensburg in recognition of her special birthday. Ms. Spencer has been a resident of Bladensburg for over 20 years, so it was an honor to thank her for being a good citizen and recognize her during the beautiful birthday celebration planned by her family.

November 5: Laurel Housing Coalition Meeting | Council Member McBryde and I were invited to attend this meeting by At Large Laurel Council Member Martin Mitchell. This provided an opportunity to learn of the steps being taken by Laurel residents and CASA to address challenges with Schweb Management in their community. This was important and timely because Schweb recently acquired property in Bladensburg and since the time of the acquisition, residents have had a myriad of challenges with maintenance and steep rental increases. Staff and members of the Town Council have continued to work with residents, property management and CASA to address these concerns and obtain middle ground on the rental increases as well as work to address the ongoing maintenance concerns.

November 7: PGCMA Legislative Committee Meeting | We discussed and worked to finalize the legislative plan for 2023 to present to our state and county officials during the annual Legislative Event. The format was determined to be a meet and greet as we did in 2021 to allow people to flow in and out of the event.

November 11: Peace Cross Rededication | The Maryland National Capital Park & Planning Commission organized the rededication of the Peace Cross. The timing of the rededication coincided with the annual Bladensburg Veterans Day Ceremony, so we forewent the annual event in order to

participate in the rededication. Media outlets from across the region attended and reported on the event. Special recognition was also given to Ms. Renee Green of the Bladensburg Patriotic Committee. As many may recall, Ms. Green developed a grassroots campaign to help save the Peace Cross. She developed a documentary about the memorial and those who it was built to honor. Her efforts were recognized with an award from MNCPPC during the event. I especially want to thank MNCPPC for their hard work with *truly* saving the Peace Cross. The leadership and guidance from their legal team was incredible and enabled them to prepare to have the case heard by the United States Supreme Court in 2018. The day of the rededication was emotional and held special meaning as heavy rains marked much of the ceremony. We learned this was also the case on the date of the original dedication in 1925.

November 11: Parkview Senior Apartments Veterans Day Program | The First Gentleman, Walter James, Jr. and I had the pleasure of joining residents of Parkview for their annual program. It was a privilege to spend time with the residents of Parkview and giving thanks for their service.

November 15: Hamlet Woods Annual Meeting | Chief Collington and I were invited to attend the annual meeting to provide residents with updates regarding the Town and public safety. We also made residents aware of upcoming community events and encouraged their participation and more engagement with the town volunteer opportunities.

NLC Meetings Attended:

- Met with Sarah Beth Stewart, Vice President of Business Development, Retail Strategies to discuss the master plan for the Town of Bladensburg and better understand resources they can help as we move forward on economic development.
- Met with Alex from Mayors Against Illegal Guns to better understand the organization and discuss opportunities to engage mayors in Maryland in their efforts.
- Attended various National Black Caucus of Local Elected Officials policy, luncheon and business meeting.
- Met with representatives from the United States Fire Safety Administration
- American Ramp Company representatives shared information with me regarding the potential expansion of parks in town which could include a bike or skate park.

Closing the Affordable Housing Gap Session | This session shared ideas and best practices for the leveraging existing buildings for adaptive reuse options such as senior housing or affordable workforce housing. Presenters also shared ideas for advocacy for affordable housing legislation and leveraging federal programs to support the project development. They encouraged us to think about strategies for moving people from an affordable housing program to home ownership. We were encouraged to establish a rental registry in order to have some teeth to actions that we take, as non-compliance could forfeit good standing on this registry. We should also have a method to track foreclosures in the community.

City Strategies for Reimagining Public Safety | Speakers shared best practices for creating safe, healthy and hope-filled communities with the development of plans to directly address high crime with public safety officials, grassroots organizations and local communities. Communities were encouraged to establish a strategy for gun violence prevention and to reduce the rising gun violence rates. For example, The Philadelphia Roadmap to Safer Communities was established in Philadelphia, PA. This plan takes a public health approach to violence that uses science and data to better understand the problem. This approach also allows for development of strategies to address the underlying factors that contribute to the

violence in our communities, not the least of which is pervasive poverty. In Charlotte, NC they extend services to include offering resume writing support along with other employment services for those who are most likely to engage in violent activity. They also have established a violence interrupter program. *Using the information providing, I will pursue the possibility of establishing a homeless taskforce to serve and ultimately reduce the number of homeless individuals in the town. I will further research this concept before formally presenting it to the Council and staff for consideration.

November 19: Annual Thanksgiving Giveaway in Partnership with Victory Grace Center and No Opportunity Wasted Foundation | This annual event was a huge success. Victory Grace Center led the way with negotiating the rates for the food purchases, picking up and storing the items until the day of the giveaway. NOW Foundation did a masterful job of helping us secure a large number of volunteers, primarily from Bladensburg and Bowie High School athletic coaches and students. In addition, I was able to work with the principal of Bladensburg High School, Thanks to engagement from Mrs. Faulker-Jones and the NOW Foundation we secured over 100 students for the first time. Many of the students were present and working by 7:00 am with unloading the food truck and assisting with the organization of the food items in the BHS cafeteria. They also carried hundreds of boxes of food from the cafeteria to the car service lands in the parking lot to facilitate the smooth distribution of the food boxes and turkeys to the community. In some cases the young men from the school helped older residents carry their food items back to their apartments at Gateway Gardens.

November 29: Meeting with Seton and BHS Leadership | I had the pleasure of meeting with Dr. Grillo, President of the Elizabeth Seton High School, Ms. Erica Borsicot, Director of Engagement, and Mrs. Faulker-Jones, Principal of Bladensburg High School. We focused our conversation on opportunities to work together and get students engaged in more community opportunities in the Town. We are particularly excited to have engagement from students with the Green Team efforts and a capstone project where students work to develop an engineering solution to a community challenge.

November 30: Bladensburg Community Center Renames the Gymnasium after Dr. Clifford L. Thomas, Sr. | After much advocacy from We Lead By Example, Inc. in Mr. Adrian H. Seemangal and Ms. Susan McKutchen we were notified that our request was granted by Maryland National Capital Park & Planning Commission. A brief rededication ceremony was held inside the gymnasium and while there was short notice in preparing for the ceremony, it was still moving and befitting of the legacy of Dr. Thomas.