

Monthly Report for Mayor Takisha D. James Town of Bladensburg, Maryland



Celebrating Independence Day in the Town of Bladensburg

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July Meetings & Monthly Activities



July 3: Annual Town of Bladensburg Fireworks Event | The Town of Bladensburg celebrated Independence Day with another successful Annual Fireworks event. This event brought thousands of residents and community stakeholders together from Bladensburg and the Port Towns, providing a safe and fun event for all. While we appreciate the Independence Day events in other cities and towns, it's important to provide these opportunities for residents to enjoy themselves right here in their own community.

I'm grateful to every staff member who supported this event with the planning and implementation of it. The public safety departments did an excellent job keeping many people safe throughout the event—special thanks to the Bladensburg Police Department, Bladensburg Volunteer Fire Department, and MNCPPC Park Police. Additionally, I am incredibly grateful to the Bladensburg Waterfront staff for partnering with us and hosting our event. I must also thank Mr. Ray Jeffries, who spearheaded the overall event planning.



July 3: Appointment as Chair of the Maryland Municipal League Engagement & Outreach Committee | I received a phone call from MML Board President John Carroll (Mayor of Galena) informing me that I was appointed to serve as Chair of the 2023-2024 Engagement and Outreach Committee. The E&O Committee keeps its finger on the pulse of the League and its resources. The committee also works to ensure that the full body understands how to make the most of their League membership.

Key initiatives of the committee for the coming year are to organize the "If I Were Mayor Contest" to help educate fourth graders about local government, encourage more cities and towns to earn their Banner City designation and promote Municipal Government Works Month across the state. I'm also pleased to say we will also undertake a new initiative to support the efforts of President Carroll by building on the MML Town Hall Series with a new Hometown Series. This initiative will require committee members to serve as ambassadors delegated with

the duty of visiting member municipalities to spread goodwill and connecting them to services, programs, and resources provided by MML.

July 6: Update Received Regarding the Bladensburg High School Track and Field |

I reached out to the newly appointed Superintendent of Prince George’s County Public Schools (PGCPS), Millard House, II, to request an update on the status of this project for the July Town Council Work session. The Project Status was as follows:

- Phase 2 construction of the Bladensburg High School stadium renovation project commenced on May 25, 2023. The contractor has completed all demolition of existing track events and drainage piping, subgrade & perimeter drainage excavation, and installation of a new perimeter drain system and outlet replacement.
- The contractor is installing new perimeter track concrete curbs, spectator fencing, and a stone base for turf fields, drainage, and track areas. In addition, they are also installing all concrete curbing for in-field track events (discus, long jump, triple long jump, and pole vault area).

In the next two weeks, the following work is to be completed:

- Continue working to establish track sub-grade
- Begin installation of asphalt track base
- Installation of Goal Post, Discus, and Pole Vault foundations
- Continue installing stone base to establish field envelope grade

Following is a rendering of the new track & field:



July 12: Bladenwoods Condominiums Board of Directors Meeting | I want to thank the Board President, Mr. King, for inviting me to attend the meeting and give updates on Town projects and initiatives to the residents. This was a valuable opportunity to share information

about the Proposed Flood Barrier Project, given the devastation that Bladenwoods residents experienced from the September 12, 2020, flash flood. Residents shared their ongoing concerns with flooding and appreciated the Town and County's efforts to address this issue, threatening some of the condos along Quincy Run. I had the opportunity to meet the new property manager to enable us to facilitate better communication through the management company with the residents of the Town of Bladensburg.

July 15: Parkway Condominium Community Clean Up |

The Board of Directors contacted me for assistance with organizing a cleanup effort for their property. Residents turned up in great numbers and took pride in improving their condo building by picking up trash and recycling materials, weeding, planting flowers, putting out mulch, and power washing parts of the property. We agreed to come back together with another effort in the coming months to continue the progress. I want to thank Mr. Purnell Hall, Public Works Supervisor, for sharing his expertise with the Board in assisting them with guidance on other efforts they are taking to improve the property.



July 17: Redevelopment Meeting | I joined the staff in meeting with local experts in redevelopment to discuss the Town's Master Plan and brainstorm options for moving the plan forward. We will follow this meeting up with a site visit to view the proposed sites in person as a next step.

July 21: Meeting with Decatur Heights Baptist Church |

Officer Rinehart, Deputy Chief Dickerson, Lt. Frishkorn, Town Administrator Bailey-Hedgepeth, and I met with leadership from the church to learn about their concerns. After hearing the challenges they are experiencing with trespassing and safety concerns, we were able to brainstorm solutions and start collaborating on addressing them. One of the solutions is to enter a MOU allowing the Bladensburg Police Department to act as an agent and enforce trespassing on the property.



July 22: International Day | The Town held its first International Day to celebrate the many unique cultures represented by our residents. This event offered education through presentations, martial arts, cultural dance, and music. As we continue to boost community engagement and celebrate our cultural diversity, this was an important step to connect those who don't always feel connected to the community or local government.

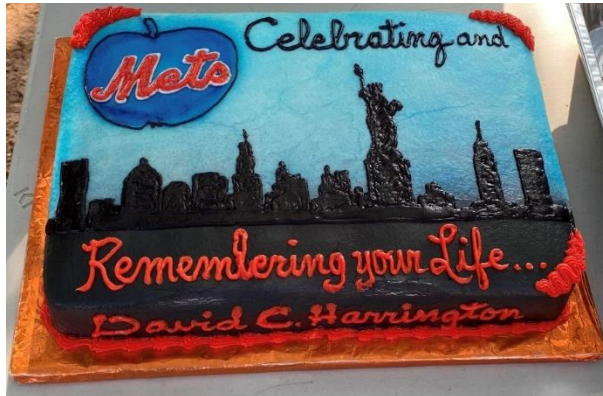
I appreciate all of the residents, vendors, and performers who supported the event. I want to also thank Ms. Josephine Selvakumar (Planner III, Master Plans and Studies Section, Community Planning Division, The Maryland-National Capital Park and Planning Commission) and her team for joining us. They leveraged this event to conduct informal interviews of residents and provide information about the Port Towns Sector Plan Project.

July 24: MML Board Orientation | As a newly elected Maryland Municipal League Board of Directors member, I attended the mandatory training session. This was important in understanding the rules, expectations, annual schedule, and role of Board members.

July 24: Nuisance Flood Steering Committee | The committee met and discussed the methods for mapping nuisance flooding across the county. The discussion was necessary so as to determine the most clear and appropriate manner for showing areas of concern with a history of flooding using GIS mapping.

July 24: Ward 1 Rock the Block | The Bladensburg Community Action Team hosted this event to connect with the residents at Bladenwoods Condominiums. This event was timely, given it came after concerns were recently raised related to public safety and other resident concerns.

This community event provided a great opportunity for Town staff and elected officials to speak with residents about concerns on various issues. Following the event, the Board President, Mr. King, expressed his gratitude and conveyed how beneficial it was for the residents.



July 31: Commemoration of Former Mayor David Harrington's Birthday | In partnership with the Harrington Family, the Town of Bladensburg participated in celebrating the life and legacy of Former Mayor David C. Harrington. This event brought together individuals from all walks of life who were touched by the great work of Mr. Harrington. It was well attended and included guests such as Delegate Diana Fennell, Senator Malcolm Augustine, Delegate Julian Ivey, Council

Member Jolene Ivey, Paul Pinsky (Maryland Energy Administration Director), and Peter Shapiro (Chairman, Prince George's County Planning Board, MNCPPC).

August Meetings & Monthly Activities

August 1: National Night Out | The Bladensburg Police Department did an outstanding job, as usual, with this annual event. The purpose of National Night Out is to provide a positive opportunity for residents to engage with and get to know their local law enforcement officers as well as their neighbors. This effort is important for establishing a sense of community and unity within the Town of Bladensburg.



August 2: Flood Project Update Meeting | Building upon the presentations provided during the Town Council Meetings earlier this year, we followed up with a community presentation about the Flood Barrier Project. Ms. Joanna M. Smith (Associate Director, Office of Storm Drain Maintenance, Prince George's County Department of Public Works and Transportation) presented an overview of the project to residents and also facilitated a question-and-answer session. This meeting was helpful because it allowed County representatives to hear directly from residents regarding their concerns and experiences with flooding in the proposed project area.

August 4: Bladensburg Development Site Tour | As a follow-up to the redevelopment meeting held in July, members of the Bladensburg Team toured areas identified in the Town's Master Plan to resume brainstorming and discussions.



August 4: Ice Cream with a Cop | I want to thank the Community Action Team for organizing another engaging and fun way for residents to get to know the local law enforcement officers. This Ice Cream with a Cop event was our highest-attended event of this nature. It's clear that residents are taking advantage of the opportunities provided by the Town to connect in a positive manner with our police department.

August 5: District 47 Leaders Breakfast

| Senator Malcolm Augustine hosted his quarterly meeting in Colmar Manor. The special guest speakers were the newly appointed Superintendent of Prince George's County Public Schools (PGCPS), Millard House, II, and Sheriff John Carr. Senator Augustine encouraged the municipalities to submit their funding requests as soon as possible. The committees are already meeting and discussing priorities for the next legislative session, which is very important.



August 5: Bladensburg Car Show | The Community Action Team did a great job organizing the annual car show to raise funds for the youth programs that the CAT Unit spearheads. The event was held at the Three Brothers Shopping Center for the first time. I'm grateful for the support of Three Brothers with hosting the event. I also appreciate all of the participants and Mr. Rob Lucian, who played an integral role in registering and implementing the awards and program.

August 11: VGC / Thanksgiving Giveaway Initial Planning | In preparation for this Thanksgiving Giveaway in partnership with Victory Grace Center, TA Bailey-Hedgepeth and I met with Deacon Pat Jones and Deacon Antoinette Alleyne to have an initial call to review lessons learned from 2022 and areas of success. We agreed with the overall framework of last year's event and will be working on ideas to improve the efficiency of the distribution and volunteer onsite training and organization. We agreed to take our notes to our respective teams for further refinement before we connect to hold a follow-up meeting. I will also reach out to the Bladensburg High School leadership to request the use of the facility, as it was the perfect location for this major program.

August 14: Bladefest Meeting | The Bladensburg Team has started meeting to plan and prepare for the return of Bladensburg Day. Bladensburg staff is already marketing this event and working to secure the participation of vendors and participants in the overall program and parade.

August 24: Meeting with the property owner to address concerns | Town staff and I met with the owner of a vacant lot, which is becoming a place with unhoused individuals gathering in the community. By talking through the challenges the Town is experiencing, we were able to begin brainstorming on solutions to this issue, public safety concerns, as well as development needs and concerns in the area. The property owner agreed to take the notes from our discussion to his partners to determine which efforts we identified would be best/most appropriate. We will follow up in a few weeks to continue progressing on the identified concerns.

August 24: Completion of the 57th Avenue Repaving Project! |

I'm so grateful to the Public Works Supervisor, Mr. Purnell Hall, for working with our new Town Administrator to move this project forward. The project is finally completed just in time for the new school year! This project was long overdue, and given the high volume of traffic to four local schools, four major apartment complexes, the community center, and usage by Metro buses daily, it was in desperate need of completion this summer.



August 26: Back 2 School Jam | The Community Action Team held an impactful event to help send students back to school with the resources needed to begin a successful school year. The event provided free backpacks, shoes, and coats to students. Port Towns Community Church provided free games for the children. The event also featured a bouncy house for students, free food and beverages, and a 360-photo booth.

Additionally, organizations such as Decatur Heights Baptist Church, New York Life, DARE, and RRR Auto had resource tables providing information to residents. I want to thank Lt. Frishkorn for assisting me on the grill with hot dog duty and Chief Collington for grilling those delicious burgers! And finally, the Bladensburg Police Explorers were awesome in supporting this event.



August 30: Meeting with Municipal and County Officials regarding Grocery Store Thefts |

Town Administrator Bailey-Hedgpath and I attended a meeting coordinated by Prince George's County Council Member Ivey to address this topic. We heard directly from two local grocers regarding retail theft. The meeting was intended to start the dialogue so we can collaborate on solutions across levels of government and with the private sector. Recent news reports have confirmed the regional impact of this issue; with concerns growing regarding a recession, we will work with our local grocers to tackle this issue. As a next step, we scheduled a more detailed follow-up meeting with the owner of the Bladensburg Save-A-Lot store to address specific concerns for that location.

Legislative Updates from the 2023 Session Maryland General Assembly

Below are updates from the 2023 legislative session as well as their outcomes (whether they became laws or received an unfavorable report in committee).

Purchase and possession of adult-use cannabis becomes legal in Maryland on Saturday, July 1st. Key facts regarding the new law:

- Smoking cannabis is permitted **only** in private residences. Public smoking is prohibited both indoors and outdoors, on public transit, in moving vehicles, and on all federal property.
- Driving under the influence of cannabis is illegal.
- Purchase and possession limits for the adult-use market include 1.5 ounces of dried cannabis flower, 12 grams of concentrate (i.e., vapes), or 750 milligrams of THC (i.e., edible products). Products can be shared with other adults.
- A nine percent sales tax will be applied to adult-use sales.
- The medical cannabis program will remain unchanged. Dispensaries are required to have patient-only hours or lines, medical products will not be subject to the sales tax, and certain highly concentrated products will only be available for certified patients.
- Employers and landlords/property managers are permitted to retain stronger policies on cannabis use.

HB0055 | Local Government – Condominium and Homeowners Association – Repair and Rehabilitation Funds | Delegate Marvin Holmes proposed the legislation below, which, unfortunately was introduced but didn't make it out of committee. It will be essential to support this in the next session and encourage residents to do so as well. A critical need, should this move forward, will be funding from the County or State to provide resources for this fund.
Bill synopsis: Authorizing a county or a municipality to establish a certain fund to support infrastructure repair in a community subject to a condominium association or a homeowners association and requiring that certain property tax revenues be assigned to a fund created under the Act.

HB 0190 | Housing and Community Development - Homeowner's Extreme Weather Mitigation and Preparation Grant Program | Delegate Julian Ivey proposed this legislation, which did not make it out of committee. I recommend support for this bill, given the increased and more significant impacts of flooding in urban and coastal communities across the state.
Bill Synopsis: Establishing the Homeowner's Extreme Weather Mitigation and Preparation Grant Program in the Department of Housing and Community Development to assist homeowners, local governments, and nonprofit organizations in preparing and repairing residential properties to mitigate water damage caused by extreme weather, limiting a grant awarded to a homeowner to \$5,000 or less; and requiring the Governor to include in the annual budget bill an appropriation of \$5,000,000 for the program beginning in fiscal year 2025.

HB0308 | Police Retention Workgroup | Delegate Chris Tomlinson (District 5) sponsored this bill. I believe we should consider getting Chief Tyrone Collington placed in this workgroup, given his visionary leadership in building strong, accountable, and community-oriented police agencies.

Bill Synopsis: Establishing the Police Retention Workgroup to study issues and factors potentially contributing to the decline in police officer retention statewide and requiring the Workgroup to report its findings and recommendations to the Governor and the General Assembly by December 30, 2024.

HB0239 Accessory Dwelling Unit Policy Task Force | The following bill was a PGCMA priority and passed into law.

Bill Synopsis: Establishing the Accessory Dwelling Unit Policy Task Force to survey and document a representative sampling of the variety of ordinances, laws, codes, and policies regarding the development and operation of accessory dwelling units in areas zoned for single-family residential use and requiring the Task Force to report to the Governor and General Assembly on its activities on or before November 1, 2023, and its findings and recommendations on or before June 1, 2024.

HB 0706 | Community Development – Sustainable Community – Business Façade Improvement Program | Delegate Adrienne A. Jones introduced this legislation, which passed into law. This is important for helping businesses improve their facades, which enhances overall beautification for sustainable communities. I strongly encourage our local businesses to apply for this resource.

Bill Synopsis: Establishing the Business Façade Improvement Program in the Department of Housing and Community Development to assist qualified businesses located in sustainable communities with improving the outside appearance of the qualified businesses' buildings or facilities; requiring the Department to develop an application process for political subdivisions seeking to participate in the Program; and requiring the Governor, beginning in fiscal year 2025, to include \$5,000,000 in the annual budget bill for the Program.

HB 0827 | Prince George's County Gateway Development Authority – Established | Delegate Julian Ivey proposed this legislation to support the Port Towns and the Gateway to coordinate on pursuing grant funding to support our community development.

Bill Synopsis: Establishing the Prince George's Gateway Development Authority in Prince George's County to support and develop a certain neighborhood revitalization plan in coordination with certain residents and requiring the Authority to report its comprehensive neighborhood revitalization strategy to the Governor and certain committees of the General Assembly on or before October 31, 2025.

HB 0830 | Residential Construction – Electric Vehicle Charger | Delegate Jen Terrasa proposed this bill, passed into law to establish a requirement for new housing units to include electric vehicle chargers.

Bill Synopsis: Establishing and altering certain requirements related to the installation of equipment for the charging of electric vehicles during the construction of certain housing units; clarifying that a county or municipal corporation may require a greater number of electric vehicle parking spaces; requiring the Maryland Energy Administration to study certain issues related to the installation of electric vehicle parking spaces at multifamily residential buildings and submit a report to the Governor and the General Assembly by December 1, 2023; etc.

SB 0011 | Motor Vehicles – Establishment of School Zones | Senator Charles Sydnor proposed this legislation but it was opposed by municipalities, given this would significantly limit the range for speed cameras within school zones, where we are trying to reduce speeding to protect pedestrians, especially students. This was also a PGCMA Legislative Committee priority, so we were pleased it did not pass.

Bill Synopsis: Requiring a school zone to be adjacent to a school, unless recommended by a traffic engineering study; prohibiting a school zone from exceeding a 0.5-mile radius of any school or school activity, unless recommended by a traffic engineering study.

SB 0114 | Property Tax – Real Property Tax Assessment and Tax Rate Increases – Notice Requirements | Senator Antonio Hayes proposed this legislation, which clarifies communications about notices regarding the constant yield. In the past, municipalities would have to advertise the tax rate as an increase if they didn't decrease to the level recommended by the state. The problem with adjusting rates to state levels is that they didn't account for increased costs of services provided by municipalities or higher costs of goods that need to be procured by municipalities.

Bill Synopsis: Requiring certain notices relating to increases in property assessments; altering certain notice requirements relating to the intention of a county or municipal corporation to set a certain real property tax rate that exceeds the constant yield tax rate and requiring instead certain notice when a county or municipal corporation intends to increase its real property tax rate.

SB 0050 | State Finance – Prohibited Appropriations – Magnetic Levitation Transportation System | This bill was sponsored by former Senator Paul Pinsky, Senator Pam Beidle, and Senator Malcolm Augustine. Unfortunately, it did not receive a favorable report and make it out of committee.

Bill Synopsis: This bill prohibits the State (or any unit or instrumentality of the State) from using any appropriation for a magnetic levitation (Maglev) transportation system located or to be located in the State. The bill does not apply to expenditures for the salaries of personnel assigned to review permits or other forms of approval for a Maglev transportation system.