

Monthly Report for Mayor Takisha D. James



Lieutenant Governor Aruna Miller visited the Town of Bladensburg to meet with the Port Towns Mayors (October 17, 2023)

Town of Bladensburg

4229 Edmonston Road, Bladensburg, MD 20710

(301) 927-7048 | tjames@bladensburgmd.gov

October Activities & Meetings

October 5: Meeting with The Phoenix Apartments | An increasing concern for property managers in the county is the ability to remove renters in a timely manner when they are in violation of their leases for activity that jeopardizes the safety and welfare of other residents on the property. Support was requested for advocating to the County government for tools to assist the property managers, so they can maintain a safe environment for their residents.

As many may recall, due to the COVID-19 global pandemic, all evictions and foreclosures were suspended for a few years. With things returning to normal (people returning to work physically and transitioning out of 100% telework, businesses reopening and bringing back staff who were laid off or furloughed, etc.) the courts have resumed evictions. As can be expected, there is a significant backlog of these cases, which places property managers in an impossible situation with trying to legally remove residents who are in violation of leases. This request is not aimed at those who may be behind on rent, but those who are engaging in illicit activity and who are known to local law enforcement. TA Bailey-Hedgepeth and I agreed to work to engage the County Council government for support in developing a more timely and useful process to manage these situations.

October 5: Networking Opportunity with Governor Wes Moore and Lt. Governor Aruna Miller | The First Gentleman, Walter L. James, Jr. and I were honored to be invited to join our distinguished Governor and Lt. Governor as their guest for the Washington Commanders Football game. Being a part of a small group of invited guests afforded an opportunity to discuss the Town's priorities at a high level with the administration and their staff. Out of the conversation with the Lt. Governor's team, they asked me to coordinate a meeting with the Port Towns mayors so we can talk further and provide more information.

October 6: Celebrating the life of Mrs. Willie Mae Footman | Council Member McBryde and I joined with the family members and friends of Mrs. Footman to celebrate her life. Mrs. Footman was a resident who lived in the Town of Bladensburg for 27 years and was active for many years with the Park View Senior Apartments Tenant Council. She left an indelible mark on those of us who were blessed enough to call her a friend. We will work to honor her legacy of love, compassion, and service as we move forward.

October 7, 2023: Eighth Annual Walk for Bullying Prevention and Child Safety | To continue the legacy of Grandmaster Dr. Clifford L. Thomas, Founder of We Lead by Example, Inc. and the Tae Kwon Do Ramblers and in support of National Bully Prevention Month during the month of October, this annual walk was held for the eighth year. Mr. Andrian H. Seemangal (the current President of the two organizations) and I led the march through the community. Participants recited chants and held up signs as we marched through the community and encouraged residents to stop bullying. Following the march, participants returned to the Bladensburg Community Center for the rally, where Mr. Seemangal and Ms. Susan McCutchen led talks from community leaders who gave students advice about how to deal with bullying, whether they experienced it directly or witnessed another student being bullied.

I salute Ms. McCutchen and Mr. Semangal for their continued efforts to educate and empower their students.

October 12: Meeting with the Deputy Chief Administrative Officer Barry Stanton for Public Safety and Homeland Security and Prince George's County Mayors | The meeting was a part of the continued series of meetings scheduled by County Executive Angela Alsobrooks' Municipal Liaison Denise Ross. The purpose of these meetings is to enhance stakeholder engagement between the mayors and Deputy Chief Administrative Officers for the Alsobrooks Administration. Assistant Chief Hale of the Prince George's County Police Department provided updates on crime statistics in the county as well as efforts they are making to address fentanyl overdoses among high school students. The majority are at High Point High School. They are also setting up a shooting team to track illegal guns. It was also noted the county is down by 90 crossing guards. This is a major concern given the large number of students attending public schools across the county. In the discussion about the increase of carjackings and other violent crimes involving juveniles under the age of 13, we discussed the need for legislative reform to include accountability for parents of these juveniles.

Director Ronnie Gill of the Office of Emergency Management noted an upcoming meeting to discuss the upcoming meeting with CSX and leadership from the Office of Homeland Security. Municipalities were invited to attend with no more than two representatives due to limited meeting space. He noted they held a CERT training recently, so I followed up to let him know Chief Collington, and I have been awaiting the inclusion in this training for an extended period of time. I will follow up with our staff and OEM to facilitate this important training and restart the Town's CERT team. Deputy Chief Tony Hughes of the Prince George's County Fire Department provided updates. We expressed concern with the appearance that there seems to be an effort to eliminate the volunteers. He stated there are no plans for immediate changes with career and volunteer firefighters in the county. It's vitally important that municipalities continue to advocate for the support of volunteer firefighters across the county as they perform critical services for Prince George's County residents and alleviate the service demand for career firefighters.

October 14: Port Towns and Gateway Arts District Historic and Artistic Tour as part of the MML Fall Conference 2023 | I had the great opportunity to work with the mayors of Mount Rainier, Brentwood, North Brentwood, and the Port Towns to hold a for MML Fall Conference attendees interested in learning more about our communities. This tour aimed to highlight historical and artistic sites in our respective communities to MML attendees who may not travel to this part of the state normally or those looking to learn more about this area. The Port Towns and Gateway Arts Districts are going through rebranding efforts to establish themselves as the historic, artistic, and sustainable gateways to the State of Maryland. This tour supported the MML legislative priority approved by the Board of Directors to enable and establish Local Tourism Zones within our municipalities.

October 15 – 17: MML Fall Conference is held in College Park, MD | Engagement & Outreach Committee Meeting | I chaired the meeting along with my Vice Chair Deb Burgoyne of Burkitsville. During the meeting, we shared information on the newly launched Hometown Series Ambassador Visits that are being held to support MML Board President John Carroll's vision and mission to leave no town or city behind. Members of the committee will partner up and visit communities identified as under-engaged or not at all engaged with MML as a means to share the importance of the league and encourage participation in order to help provide resources to help them.

We also discussed the 2024 “If I Were Mayor” Contest, which will consist of the theme, Inspiring Leadership in your City/Town/Community. Members of the committee were encouraged to visit schools within their respective municipalities and neighboring municipalities to increase overall contest participation.

Maryland Mayors Association | The regular business meeting for the organization was held to review the financial reports and upcoming plans for engagement. I provided a report on the “If I Were Mayor” contest since the association sponsors that program.

MML Board Meeting | The Board received reports from the standing committees, chapters, caucus reports, Maryland Mayors Association, task forces, CEO, Executive Committee, audit report, and NLC. We also voted to approve the audit report.

MML Leadership Reception | This reception offered a much-needed opportunity to network with members of the league who are in leadership in the various committees and on the Board.

Monday, October 16: Opening General Session | This session featured Jake Day, Secretary of Housing & Community Development for the State of Maryland. During his remarks, he noted efforts being taken by the administration to tackle the affordable housing crisis. Our state has underbuilt housing for over 15 years. We now have an average of 40,000 more residents moving to the state each year. If we're only building about 15,000 new units annually, this is not keeping pace with our needs. This situation has created a supply problem affecting the most vulnerable citizens. Our only way out is more rooftops.

Secretary Day also noted the local barriers to development, such as predictability, permitting challenges, delays, and residents who don't want to see change.

There is an emergency loan fund of \$30 million to help take the community development to the local entities, so it's not left up to the big developers who aren't as concerned with restoring local communities to their former glory.

Mayor Brandon Scott of Baltimore also spoke during the Opening Session. He shared examples of programs that he and his administration found success with. One of which was a program where he prepared letters that he signed and gave to people in the local communities who were not doing the right thing. In the letter, there was an offer to assist with resources, whether it was housing, food assistance, employment assistance, etc. The letter also noted the government would be working to make neighborhoods safer in partnership with law enforcement, so it provided help before coming down hard on this population and offering them a way out of a negative lifestyle.

He also found success with charging higher property taxes for those sitting on vacant properties compared to those who have resident in their properties.

Time to Care Act Session: This session was led by Bill Jorch, Director of Public Policy and Research for MML. In summary:

- On April 9, 2022, the Maryland General Assembly voted to override Governor Larry Hogan's veto to enact the legislation.
- The Act establishes a Paid Family and Medical Leave Insurance Program to which employers, employees, and self-employed individuals will make contributions.
- Provides up to 12 weeks of paid leave to care for oneself or a qualifying family member.

Most municipalities are concerned with the cost of this plan in addition to other benefits provided to staff. To that end, note the following:

- Employers will be required to contribute at least 50% of the total premium costs.
- Total contribution cannot exceed 1.2% of wages (up to Social Security Wage Base)
- By October 1, 2023, the Secretary of DOL must publish the total contribution rate; this rate will be in effect from October 1, 2024 to June 30, 2026
- Beginning in 2026, the Secretary of DOL must publish, by February 1st, the contribution rate for the 12-month period beginning on July 1st
- Employers with <15 employees are not required to contribute

In October, the Town Council voted to sign a letter of intent to enter the Maryland Public Sector - Time to Care Act Collaborative in an effort to have administrative support, benefit from economies of scale, and benefit from access to benefit design support, financial modeling, and compliance resources to assist employers.

Traffic Calming, Road Diets, and Speed Management: Moving to Pedestrian Safety: This session offered a range of potential solutions to resolving issues related to slowing down traffic while still having good traffic flow in local communities. I look forward to working with the staff and Council to further discuss using some of these ideas to decrease speeding and increase traffic safety in the community.

Lunch Keynote Speaker | We were delighted to have Lieutenant Governor Aruna Miller as the speaker for the lunch session. She highlighted the importance of municipal leadership and the benefits of not being partisan to serve residents. Lt. Governor Miller is always inspirational and left attendees feeling motivated to continue our public service.

Emergency Management Officials Department for a Meet and Greet: I attended this to learn how the Town of Bladensburg could join and benefit from working with this group of experts in emergency management. Attending this meet and greet allowed people interested in joining the opportunity to learn more about the work of this department and also ask for resources to help municipalities with emergency preparedness. We discussed the need for the committee to develop COOP and Emergency Operations Plan templates to aid municipalities. Note the EOP is a plan for how the organization will function during the mitigation, preparedness, response, and recovery phases of a given emergency or the emergency response to an event/incident. The COOP should detail all the procedures that define how the organization will continue to operate within the emergency and/or recover the minimum essential functions in the event of a disaster.

Following the conference, I'll follow up with TA Bailey-Hedgepeth and Chief Collington for a recommendation on a staff member who could participate.

Tuesday, October 17: The Plenary Session featured Keynote Remarks from Governor Wes Moore. His remarks focused on the accomplishments of the administration so far. A panel on tax differential was also part of the session to help municipalities who are pushing for this benefit for residents. The residents in a municipality pay a reduced tax rate for the economic value of the services they receive from the county. Without tax differential, municipal residents would be paying about 15% more in taxes.

Academy Core Class: Conducting Effective Meetings | This class was taught by Council Member Lynne Galletti of Mount Airy. I'm pleased to say I completed my final class needed in order to graduate as part of the Academy of Excellence. This class was very helpful in understanding the important elements necessary to conduct effective municipal meetings.

A few takeaways:

Debate policies, not people. Debates should be focused and civil. This is important when ensuring respect amongst all. Consider setting a maximum time for public comment to ensure the meeting doesn't get sidetracked from legislative matters. The meetings aren't the only time residents can talk with the Council and staff about concerns, so there isn't a need to wait until the public meetings to express feedback.

This is a legislative meeting, so be intentional with the timing for important matters on the agenda.

October 17: Port Towns Mayors Meeting with Lieutenant Governor Aruna Miller | Being invited to join the Lieutenant Governor and Governor at a recent Washington Commanders game led to the opportunity to host Lieutenant Governor Miller in the Town of Bladensburg. The purpose of the meeting was to partner with the Port Towns Mayors and Town Managers/Town Administrators to formally present our legislative priorities. This led to discussions about our needs and areas where the Lt. Governor can help advocate for our needs.

Lieutenant Governor Miller serves as the Keynote Speaker for Elizabeth Seton's Mental Health Awareness Session | I was truly grateful for the opportunity to help Elizabeth Seton High School leaders secure the Lt. Governor to speak at their the Seton BE WELL Mental Health Awareness Initiative as part of their homecoming week. During her remarks, she shared her commitment to removing the stigma associated with mental health, her commitment to providing resources to those in need, and she shared her personal connection to this important issue. The students were so attentive and engaged during the session and also had the opportunity to engage in a question-and-answer session with the Lt. Governor.

October 18: Meeting with High Street Consultant | Town Administrator Bailey-Hedgepeth and I met with our consultant to discuss the next steps for support needed for economic development.

October 19: MDE Water Quality Hearing | I joined the Maryland Citizens for Responsible Transportation and the Bladensburg Citizens Against the Maglev as we testified in opposition to the certification of the Baltimore-Washington Rapid Rail (BWRR) Superconducting Magnetic Levitation (SCMaglev) project application for Water Quality Certification (WQC) from the Maryland Department of the Environment (MDE).

October 20: Senior Gala Planning Meeting | Mr. Jeffries, Ms. Caamano, CM Blount, and I met to begin planning this year's gala. The flyer with the details will be released soon, along with the theme. We have many senior residents who live in apartments and single-family housing. The holidays can be a very lonely and depressing time for some. To help offer encouragement, boost their mental health, and bring them holiday cheer, we are looking forward to holding the second annual gala for our seniors.

October 20: Town of Bladensburg & Employ Prince George's Meeting | TA Bailey-Hedgepeth and I have a productive meeting with members of the Employ Prince George's Team. We discussed opportunities to provide a job search resource for residents, the Town's

trade school, and apprenticeship programs that we are in need of. TA Bailey-Hedgepeth has already started working on follow-up items from the meeting to continue the collaboration.

October 22: Prince George's County Mayors Meeting | This meeting was held to discuss legislative priorities to submit to the PGCMA Legislative Committee. There was agreement around:

- Stormwater management
- Affordable housing
- Funding to continue municipal ARPA programs
- Transportation issues
- Tax differential
- Road maintenance/cleanliness on County roads

The legislative committee will consider these items along with other priorities received from the PGCMA leadership.

October 23: TOB Council Retreat | The Town Council and Department Heads took time to focus on teambuilding, reaffirming respect for all team members, and worked to understand our respective workstyles to help us better understand how to work together. The Council went through a detrimental shift in 2019, which led to staff and minority members of the Town Council being treated disrespectfully, and it fostered an era of dysfunction. Over the last two years, we've done a great job of shifting away from that toxic environment, and with changes that occurred in 2023 with the addition of our new Town Administrator along with the new Council Member who will be joining the team, it was the perfect time to reset ourselves and realign with the vision and mission of the Town.

October 25: Prince George's County Executive Angela Alsobrooks' 2nd Annual Mayors Appreciation Lunch | I am grateful to County Executive Alsobrooks, Mrs. Denise Ross, and their entire team who helped organize this lunch to thank the mayors across the county for the work we do. It was truly appreciated, and the featured speaker offered great tips for managing our physical, spiritual, and mental health with the busy roles that we have to fill in serving our communities and keeping up with other demands, including full-time jobs.

October 25: Washington Council of Governments (COG) Congressional Delegation Reception | Strengthening COG's relationship with federal legislators and identifying opportunities for collaboration to advance COG's legislative priorities is a priority for the Board of Directors. COG and the region have benefited from a close relationship with its Congressional delegation, particularly in areas like Chesapeake Bay restoration, homeland security, and funding for Metro. The reception afforded us the opportunity to hear from COG Board Chair Kate Stewart (Montgomery County Council Member), U.S. Senator Ben Cardin (D-MD), U.S. Senator Chris Van Hollen (D-MD), U.S. Senator Mark Warner (D-VA), and U.S. Senator Tim Kaine (D-VA). In addition to sharing areas where they have successfully worked together, they all noted the need for additional federal support for WMATA and the commitment that's required from across the area to ensure the success of this vital resource.

October 26: The Family of David C. Harrington and Access to Wholistic and Productive Living, Inc. Hold a Dedication Program & Ceremonial Ribbon Cutting | AWPL worked diligently to provide a wellness center for county residents in need of critical services from housing, food assistance, etc. This was a wonderful opportunity to honor his commitment to the

physical, mental, and spiritual wellness of individuals. I'm so grateful to Dr. Bettye Muwwakki for her vision for this much-needed resource for Prince George's County, as well as for honoring a champion who advocated for holistic living for residents of the Port Towns.

October 28: Ribbon Cutting Ceremony and Homecoming for the Bladensburg Track and Turf Field | After many, many years of advocating for the new track and field, I am grateful to say this \$5.2 million project has finally materialized. I want to thank everyone who took the time to join us for the ribbon-cutting ceremony, as well as support the Mustangs for their homecoming football game. While we appreciate all of the work of our county and state officials and staff who supported this project, I have to give HUGE thanks to Senator Malcolm Augustine, former CEO of Prince George's County Public Schools, Dr. Monica Goldson, Mr. Will Smith (Project Management Supervisor, PGCPs Capital Programs) and the incredibly awesome Principal Faulkner-Jones. Without the perseverance of these individuals, this project would not have been completed. Our meetings and the email updates were so helpful in discussing project concerns and working toward solutions.

October 29: Celebrating the Town of Bladensburg's 281st Anniversary | I wish a happy anniversary to town residents on this special day!

October 30: PGCMA Legislative Committee Meeting | We discussed input received from members, including the Prince George's County Mayors Group. We will continue to work through the list to see which matters are of utmost importance to the members.