



**MONDAY, JULY 15, 2024**  
**BLADENSBURG**  
**TOWN COUNCIL MEETING**



**Monthly Report for Mayor Takisha D. James**  
**Town of Bladensburg, Maryland**  
**4229 Edmonston Road, Bladensburg, MD 20710**  
**(301) 927-7048**

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## MEETING, EVENT & UPDATES

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**June 1: Celebrating Edmonston's 100<sup>th</sup> Anniversary** | The Bladensburg Team supported this special centennial celebration for our sister city. Council Member Brown, Deputy Chief Dickerson and I joined the parade and festival. I'm grateful for their participation along with members of the Bladensburg Police Department who supported the parade with traffic support to keep parade participants and viewers safe.

**June 3: America in Bloom** | Earlier this year, the Town Council authorized the Town of Bladensburg to join the America in Bloom program. AIB was formed in 2001 by professional horticulturists to provide the opportunity for beautification through education and community involvement. Two judges came to the town to do an overall assessment of the community. Mr. Christopher E. Williams, President/Chief Executive Office of Anacostia Watershed Society, was gracious to provide an educational boat tour of the Anacostia River for the judges. He was able to point out areas where the health of the river has been significantly improved. Council Member McBryde enjoyed joining the boat tour and seeing the evidence of the improved conditions as demonstrated by the increased presence of wildlife, such as the beavers and our beloved American Bald Eagles.

**June 4: MML Leadership Lunch** | The luncheon is organized to allow the MML Executive Committee to allow for a report out from the Committee Chairs on the outcomes of the activities over the last year. During my report out on the MML Engagement & Outreach Committee Activities, I shared the following updates on the activities for the year:

### *If I Were Mayor Essay Contest*

- Number of volunteers this year to review and score the essays – 18
- Number of essays read – 1,326 essays
- Number of officials attending the award ceremony – 22
- The ceremony was attended by Governor Wes Moore for the second year in a row.

We launched a new program to engage members through our Hometown Series. This program encouraged committee members to visit MML members or non-members who may not be very engaged in the league. The visits also provided an opportunity for us to learn about other communities and share ideas to help each other.

### Banner cities and towns program:

- This year there are 46 Banner Cities & Towns. We were pleased to welcome two new to the program this year with Port Tobacco and Preston.
- For the first time the Banner Cities & Towns will be honored, for the first time during the Closing General Session which will elevate the status of this program.

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**June 5: Bladensburg Elementary School Promotional Ceremony** | I had the privilege of giving remarks at the promotional ceremony for the 6<sup>th</sup> grade class of Bladensburg Elementary school. I enjoyed having the opportunity to address the students and their families on this special occasion. Congratulations to the 6<sup>th</sup> grade students who completed their educational career in elementary school and are continuing to middle school. I'm so proud of each of them and wish them success in the next chapter of their educational journey.

**June 6: Meeting with Autumn Woods Owner** | Town Administrator Bailey-Hedgepeth and I had the opportunity meet with one of the property owners and view the significant renovations on the property and get a status on their progress. We will follow up later this summer to continue discussion opportunities to partner with the Town.

**June 7: Meeting with Boys & Girls Club** | Council Member Dixon and I met with the local Boys and Girls Club to continue coordinating on the development of a club in the Town of Bladensburg. We agreed to postpone our launch until later in the year to provide enough time to have it well planned and organized. This will also provide sufficient time for the marketing of the program to fill the available program slots.

**June 8: Port Towns Workshop at the Lariscy \*Spark event** | In an effort to continue gathering community input this event was held in Colmar Manor at Lariscy Park.



**Eastern Star Community Church Unity in the Community Day** | It was a joy to attend this event that provided community resources for county residents as well as inspiration. Council Member Brown did a great job of organizing this event to provide free resources from government agencies to County residents. The event also offered inspiration and motivation to those who may have needed their spirits lifted. The event was also attended by Delegate Fennell, Delegate Ivey and Senator Augustine, Council Member Dixon and Council Member McBryde.

**50<sup>th</sup> Class Reunion for the Bladensburg Class of 1974** | Council Member McBryde and I had the opportunity to attend the gala to celebrate this occasion and present a proclamation to the class. They were the first integrated class at Bladensburg High School, so it was an honor to hear stories about how they learned to have mutual respect for different cultures as a part of this experience.



**The Town of North Brentwood Celebrates their 100<sup>th</sup> Anniversary** | I had an opportunity to briefly attend this event and express congratulations on behalf of the Town. The celebration was well attended and the emcee for the event was Sam Ford, formerly of WJLA.



**June 12: Prince George’s County Volunteer Fire Fighters Association Meeting** | Council Member Dixon and I attended this meeting to understand more about the Prince George’s County Fire Chief’s notification to remove career staffing from several local fire stations during the summer. From the letter received from Chief Green she noted:

“An analysis was conducted to identify stations eligible to reallocate career personnel from certain stations with minimal impact on emergency service delivery. This analysis utilized historical incident data from the calendar year 2023 and a drive-time analysis from surrounding stations.

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One (1) out of the four (4) stations identified in this analysis as having a minimal impact on service delivery is Station 855 (Bunker Hill). Emergency service delivery to this area is covered within eight (8) minutes from the time of dispatch by surrounding stations within a five (5) mile radius, which meets a metric supported and recommended by our consultants, Fitch & Associates.”

During the meeting the volunteers and elected officials directed questions to Acting Fire Chief/Deputy Chief James McClelland regarding the decisions. Concerns were also expressed regarding the brief notification period before this major adjustment. When speaking with Acting Fire Chief/Deputy Chief McClelland following the meeting, I stressed the concern that the fire department is creating the same problem for the volunteers that they are seeking to solve for the career firefighters. While we understand the staff shortages the County agency is experiencing due to higher volumes of vacation requests, FMLA and injuries this time of year, it is unfortunate that this is taking its toll on the firefighters. Rather than pulling staff out of fire stations, we'd be better served by modernizing and expediting the onboarding and training process. This process currently takes 6-8 months, which is extremely longer than other agencies in this region. Moving forward we will continue advocating for more communication and collaboration with the County to ensure the problem that is being solved for the career staff isn't created for our volunteers.

**June 12: Coffee with a Cop |** Congratulations to the Bladensburg Police Department on a great interactive event. Community members really enjoyed the opportunity to connect with our officers. I also appreciate Capital Plaza Starbucks for hosting us!



**Latino Political Empowerment Initiative Discussion |** Council Member Dixon and I had the opportunity to meet with our resident Marlon Cruz a long-time resident of the Town of Bladensburg and engineering student at the University of Maryland. We learned about his project over the summer to engage Latino residents in political action and engagement.

**June 14: Washington Council of Governments Farm Committee Meeting - Member Spotlight on Facilitating Urban Agriculture Innovation |** I had the privilege of presenting on the Committee Meeting on the benefits of urban farming and the importance of establishing a strong partnership. I was joined by Margaret Hubbard, Founder and CEO of EcoCity Farms. The presentation was very well received by the audience.

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**June 15: Community Action Team Community Yard Sale** | I want to congratulate the Community Action Team on the successful yard sale. It provided an opportunity for local organizations and vendors to share their products with our community for free or at a very low cost. This is also an excellent sustainability opportunity to give goods a second life rather than allowing them be thrown out and end up in landfills.

**June 15: Volunteer Appreciation Event at Park View Senior Apartments** | I joined Council Member McBryde as she held an event at Park View Senior Apartments to express our gratitude for the ongoing support of the volunteers particularly, during the pandemic. Some of the residents offered support for the Town and residents by coordinating to pick up food from the Town's weekly food distribution and distributing it to residents in the building.

**June 17: Green Team Meeting** | I participated in the monthly green team meeting with Town staff, residents and Council Member McBryde.

**June 18: Juneteenth Celebration** | This annual event was a success thanks to the hard work of Mr. Jeffries. I'm also grateful for the Administrative Team, Public Works and the Police Department for their support of this program. It was beautiful to have the participation of a diverse swath of community members



**June 20: Town Council Closed Session** | The Town Council held a Closed Session to discuss matters pursuant to the General Provisions:

- Article §3-305 (b) (3) of the Maryland Code, the Mayor and Council will meet in a Closed Session to consider the acquisition of real property for a public purpose and matters directly related to the acquisition. (Economic Development) 2. Pursuant to the General Provisions Article §3-305 (b) (4) of the Maryland Code, the Mayor and Council will meet in a Closed Session to consider a matter that concerns the proposal for a business or industrial organization to locate, expand, or remain in the State. (Annexation and Economic Development)
- Article §3-305 (b) (3) of the Maryland Code, the Mayor and Council will meet in a Closed Session to consider the acquisition of real property for a public purpose and matters directly related to the acquisition. (Economic Development) 2. Pursuant to the General Provisions Article §3-305 (b) (4) of the Maryland Code, the Mayor and Council will meet in a Closed Session to consider a matter that concerns the proposal for a business or industrial

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organization to locate, expand, or remain in the State. (Annexation and Economic Development).

**June 23 – 26: MML Summer Conference** | I appreciate the opportunity to attend the conference to continue learning and having the opportunity to participate in productive meetings and discussions while at the end.

**MML Board Meeting** | The Board of Directors met and received updates from the league's financial advisor regarding the assets and investment portfolio. Reports were given by the departments and committees to update the Board on their activities. I shared the update that I previously shared at the Executive Leadership Luncheon on behalf of the Engagement & Outreach Committee. We also discussed, approved and adopted the MML FY 2025 Budget. With the dues restructuring initiative this year, there is a 12% decrease in membership dues. Rather than relying on tax assessments (which can fluctuate from year to year) to calculate the amount of dues each municipality should pay, the Board approved moving to a population-based dues structure. This approach is more equitable for the members and provides a more predictable dues structure for the members, so they can better forecast membership dues in their respective municipal budget planning process.

During the meeting we were surprised by a visit from Maryland Governor Wes Moore and Lt. Governor Aruna Miller. They expressed their gratitude for the support their administration has received from the municipalities since taking office.



Following the board meeting I had to chance to talking with one of the other board members, Kevin Simmons who serves as the MML Emergency Management Officials Department President (Office of Emergency Management for the City of Annapolis). He shared the importance of the Town developing a Hazard Mitigation Plan in order to be able to apply for FEMA funds. He also noted we could model it after the county's plan. I believe this is critical as we continue to have discussions about reestablishing a CERT Team for the town and will follow up with our team about how we can incorporate this into the Town's efforts.

I was a speaker at the First Time Attendee Orientation and offered some suggestions for maximizing the MML experience. I encouraged the group to make as many contacts as possible. I shared opportunities that exist for their engagement through the engagement and outreach committee as well.

**Opening General Session:** Governor Wes Moore was our Keynote Speaker this year. His remarks were very sobering as he talked about the serious budget challenges we will be facing in the coming years. During his remarks he made the following points regarding the plans for the state:

1. Take a disciplined approach to budgeting
  - ➔ In FY 22, the state budget grew by 6%

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- In FY 20, the state budget grew by 8%
  - In FY 23, the state budget grew by 34%
2. Follow the data
    - The growth was done without raising the corporate income tax
    - Without raising the sales tax
    - Without raising the state property tax
  3. Invest in ways that grow our economy
    - Child care support (enabling working families to leave home and earn a living)
    - Education (children and adults)
    - Housing
    - Health care
    - Continue to decrease the unemployment rate

Port Towns Booth: I appreciate our staff attending and working the Port Towns booth to highlight the joint projects our communities are partnering on. Shortly after the ribbon cutting to open the Exhibition Hall, Governor Moore stopped by our booth and spoke with the Bladensburg team about the work being done by the Port Towns.

Local Lift: Elevating Communities through Tourism and Economic Development Session: This session centered about HB 1281 and SB 14, Economic Development - Tourism Zones - Designation and Benefits was the focal point of this session. The session featured Wirt Confroy (Director of Business Development, Virginia Tourism Bureau), Mayor Jeanine James (LaPlata), Marci Ross (Sr. Asst. Director, Tourism Development, Maryland Department of Commerce), and Delegate Wayne Hartman. Speakers shared the background on the desire of this legislation along with the benefits for municipalities. A few takeaways were:

- We can use the legislation as a way to attract businesses, to give them an incentive for setting up shop in our towns and cities.
- Think outside of yourself and think about the voids in your community and tie it to business opportunities.
- Be thoughtful about the tourism aspects you want to offer as a draw.
- Think about the demographics. For example, do you have specific age groups that would benefit from certain businesses to create a great quality of life for them.
- There are not any state funds available for this, so the municipality must budget for the incentives.
- You can make the plan as simple or extensive as you want.
- The goal is to give people a reason to come to your community and stay there.

Tourism zones may offer a great opportunity to generate economic development. Given our town's efforts to push on economic development, this could be a way to incentivize businesses for coming into the Town.

I attended the Maryland Mayors Association Luncheon and Business Meeting. We were joined by Governor Moore and Lt. Governor Miller for the annual luncheon. During the business meeting, we held elections for the incoming Executive Committee.



The Pitch Your Policy Session was extremely valuable in helping the attendees better understand the considerations we need to solve for before pitching our policies to our state officials. Senator Malcolm Augustine served as a speaker in this session along with Senator Mary Beth Carozza, Delegate Mike Griffith and Eric Luedtke (Chief Legislative Officer, Governor's Office and former Delegate). While the session was setup up like Shark Tank, the hit show on ABC, the delivery of the assessments of the legislative pitches was valuable in understanding the numerous considerations that go into forming a strong and well thought out policy such as:



- ➔ Is there a budget impact on the state or can the municipality take that on to make it more favorable?
- ➔ Does the legislation positively impact all residents or a portion of them?
- ➔ What data is available to support the request?

June 25: I attended the PGCMA along with Council Members Brown, Dixon and McBryde. The keynote speaker was Jolene Ivey. Her remarks focused on the council priorities. She stated they are primarily the budget and looking into data centers to generate revenue. Ms. Ivey noted the County Council is seriously considering data centers as a way to generate more revenue.



Keynote Address: Brandon P. Fleming, Harvard educated and nationally acclaimed speaker. His story rising above his challenging life circumstances and becoming a Harvard educated young Black man. He went on to become the Debate Coach at Harvard for several years. His story offered many takeaways, but one that resonated with me was the need to serve with compassion. There are young people in our community who may be growing up in homes with unimaginable abuse. For these children their only escape can be found during time of retreat at school and extracurricular activities. As we are in the community, it's important to connect with our students and recognize the signs that something isn't right and help them get the resources and support they need to overcome these experiences.

Cabinet Secretaries Roundtable: This session is always valuable as it offers direct conversations with the governor's cabinet secretaries. There were a couple of concerns with the State Highway Administration, so this offered the opportunity to address those concerns. Additionally, in follow up

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to the meeting last October where the Port Towns mayors hosted a meeting with Lt. Governor Miller, she remembered our concerns and introduced us to Secretary Pines to resolve the issue with Bladensburg Road in Cottage City. The pedestrian bridge in Cottage City has been out of service many years. The construction started and then stopped suddenly. This has created dangerous conditions for pedestrians walking in that direction. Additionally, the lane closest to the pedestrian bridge was closed off for an extensive period. It's unclear whether someone randomly removed the orange barrels or if SHA did it. Given this part of the road is sloping we raised our concerns that the surface could give way at any time. Additionally, I talked about the concerns we have for pedestrian safety along Annapolis Road. I shared the incidents where pedestrians have been struck and the concerns that this will continue. I also discussed our request for a pedestrian cross walk/traffic light at the intersection of 53<sup>rd</sup> Street, Annapolis Road and 53<sup>rd</sup> Avenue. As a follow up we are working to schedule our next meeting with our SHA/District 3 team to continue our efforts to improve safety in this area.

During the Secretary's Roundtable I also met with Secretary Pinsky and his staff regarding programs offered by Maryland Energy Administration. There is funding available for electric fleet vehicles, which would benefit our public works and code enforcement staff. I'll follow up with his staff to get more details on these opportunities and invite them to a future council meeting to formally present the opportunities available to us.

I also participated in a meeting with Congressman Ivey's Chief of Staff, Ethan Sweep, Town Administrator Bailey-Hedgepeth and Chief Collington. It was a great opportunity to touch base on our earmark requests and town priorities.

I was pleased to participate in the Closing General Session. As Chair of the Engagement & Outreach Committee, I had the privilege of announcing the Banner Cities & Town for 2024 and calling them onstage for recognition in front of the MML attendees.

Finally, I am humbled to say I was reelected to serve on the MML Board of Directors. I appreciate the confidence I received from those who voted for me and look forward to serving with excellence. The first Board meeting was held on the final day of the summer conference on June 26. During the meeting I was elected to serve on the Executive Committee for the Board. I expressed my gratitude to the Board for this additional vote opportunity and work to elevate the concerns of the 157 municipalities and 3 taxing districts from across the state of Maryland.

June 27: Port Towns Quarterly Meeting | The Town of Edmonston hosted the meeting. The agenda following items were discussed:

- ➔ Walkable Watershed Project
- ➔ Maryland Department of Housing & Community Development Sustainable Maryland certification renewal
- ➔ This Could Go Boom Non-profit
  - ➔ We discussed possible event partnerships
- ➔ Update on the Fireworks
  - ➔ Edmonston will close the Decatur Street Bridge and hold a community event and fireworks viewing

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- Colmar Manor is partnering with the American Legion to offer an event in conjunction with the fireworks event. The location will be the parking lot of the American Legion.
  - Update on Port Towns computer distribution
  - Electric vehicle request for support from Bates Trucking

**June 29: Windom Road Historic Barrier Monument & Park Opening** | Congratulations to the Towns of North Brentwood and Brentwood on this momentous occasion. The collaboration amongst these two communities was special as they worked to find an appropriate way to ensure the history of this area is never forgotten. After the Civil War, African Americans settled in North Brentwood because they couldn't reside or purchase property in Brentwood. Additionally, Brentwood was a "sun down" town so African Americans would face dire consequences if caught in that community after dark. I salute the two Brentwoods for working together to ensure the history of this area is never forgotten!



**Community Resource Giveaway** | The town partnered with Deep Launching and the Salvation Army to host a giveaway of resources from household items to clothing and shoes for families. The event was a huge success with nearly every item being distributed to the community.

