

ECA News www.eastportcivic.org

Newsletter of the Eastport Civic Association

May 2007

2007 ECA Board

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Next ECA Membership Meeting

Thurs., May 17, 2007

7:30 pm at Eastport Elementary

- Home and Garden Tour
- Housing Authority Presentation
- Gateway Sign Issues: Long and Foster
- Alderman's Report

Second Annual Eastport Home & Garden Tour— Sunday, June 10th

Get out your walking shoes and gather your friends and neighbors for a delightful stroll through the neighborhood near Sarles Marina. The Second Annual Eastport Home & Garden Tour is from 1 p.m. to 5 p.m., Rain or Shine. When we say rain or shine, we mean it. With any luck, you will not battle torrential downpours like last year. But even with the rain, folks attending last year's event had a wonderful time. Imagine the home tour in sunny weather. Keep your fingers crossed.

Speaking of rain, this year's tour features two rain barrel displays that may inspire you to do your bit for the Bay by reducing surface runoff from your yard. There are nine houses and gardens to tour and one garden of a local landscape architect. So there is plenty to see and—new this year—a Treasure Hunt!

Home & Garden Tour, cont'd on next page

Inside: Housing Authority Chair to Speak at May ECA meeting, Police Update, Alderman's Notebook, Be a Docent for the Home & Garden Tour

Home & Garden Tour, cont'd

This year's tour celebrates the 100th anniversary of Sarles Boatyard and Marina. The tour will begin at Sarles (808 Boucher), where you pick up your tour brochure and map anytime after 12:30 p.m. Advance tickets are for sale for \$20 at Ahh, Coffee, Café Guru, Prudential Carruthers Realtors-Estport, Fawcetts, and Windwood Garden. On tour day, you can purchase a ticket for \$25 at Sarles.

The generous support the tour receives from Eastport businesses enables ECA to cover the costs of the tour and use every dollar from ticket sales to support worthy causes in the Eastport community. So come and join in what promises to be a fun day in Eastport—and a worthy cause to boot.

Police Department Update

Lt. Brian Della of the Annapolis Police Department spoke at the March ECA meeting on community policing, and how residents can help the police address crime in the city. Lt. Della is the Commander of the Community Services Division. Lt. Della reported that for all of 2006, the overall crime rate in the city was up 18.9 percent, but that in Oct. 2006 the rate trended down. As of mid-March 2007, the downward trend had continued. The police believe an important part of reducing crime in Annapolis is stepped up enforcement and getting the community involved to be the eyes and ears of the police. Lt. Della urged residents to get involved in the Neighborhood Watch program and if you see something that seems suspicious, pick up the phone and call the police at **410-268-4141**.

Some residents sign up for the daily e-mail report Officer Hal Dalton put out a daily report on all crime incidents. You can read it (or sign up to get an e-mail version) at <http://www.ci.annapolis.md.us/report.asp?page=7243>. The police want you to know when crime happens. The more aware residents are of what's going on in our neighborhoods, the easier the Police Departments job is.

Trudy McFall, Housing Authority Chair, to Speak at May 17th ECA Meeting

[We asked Trudy to give us some background on Housing Authority issues for this issue of the newsletter. At the May 17th ECA meeting, Trudy will speak for a few minutes and then answer questions.]

Dear Eastporters:

I am looking forward to joining you at your upcoming meeting on May 17th to get acquainted and talk with you about current and future public housing issues. After five years, I am retiring in July from the volunteer position of Chairman of the Board of Commissioners of the Annapolis Housing Authority. This will be a good time to reflect on the things completed, describe the major new directions underway that could drastically change the face of public housing in Annapolis, and talk frankly about the challenges yet to be resolved.

In recent years we have been able to get many important things completed, including: completing \$8 million in property improvements; getting all of the community centers and recreational facilities open with operating programs; establishing the first comprehensive public safety program; having on-site property managers at all properties; having residents pay excess utilities; getting the budget balanced in the face of severe federal cut backs; adopting a plan for the redevelopment of the Clay Street area; and getting the boards off the properties, among other things. Something I am proud of is a rather new policy of giving preferences to local working families. In a few months after this initiative began, the number of working families being admitted had doubled from 30% to over 60%. This change should begin to get more responsible families in public housing communities.

A sea change for Annapolis public housing is underway. This is a movement from totally Housing Authority owned and managed properties to public-private partnerships. This will bring private sector capital, know-how and capabilities

into the ownership and property management of our public housing communities. These joint venture approaches between the Authority and experienced affordable-housing developers will allow the public housing communities to be rehabilitated or redeveloped using federal and state resources not available solely to the Authority. Private professional property management will also be a part of improving the operations of the properties. This approach will hopefully also include increasing homeownership opportunities as part of the redevelopment plans, such as is proposed for the Clay Street area. These approaches are underway, and developers have been selected and are starting to work on implementing these public-private strategies.

On the side of unfinished challenges, who in Annapolis would not put crime on that list? The crime and drug trafficking that is inflicted on our public housing communities and the surrounding neighborhoods by outsiders and non-legal residents is simply unacceptable. Police data shows that only 5% of arrests involve the Authority's legal residents, even less proportionally than the 6% who live in public housing in the City. It is people who flow into the City daily to use, buy, and sell drugs and commit crimes that must be stopped. We are convinced that community policing with foot patrols, police located in on-site offices or substations, and a consistent officer presence is needed to restore trust with residents, identify and crack down on people who do not belong on public housing properties, and ultimately create the resident/ police partnership that is essential to reduce this type of crime. Evidence of the effectiveness of community policing has been demonstrated in many other low income communities and neighborhoods around the country.

I look forward to discussing these and other issues of interest to you soon.

Trudy McFall,
Chairman, Homes for America (located on Sixth Street in Eastport)

Reports

Treasurer's Report: Currently, ECA's cash on hand is \$12,055.

Greenscape: The weather was great, the troops enthusiastic. A hearty thank you to all of you who came out and helped spruce up Eastport's parks. If you would like to lend a hand to a park near you at other times during the year, and want some ideas of how to go about it, e-mail or call Hugh Bernard at fhbernard@flightline.com.

Would You Like To Be A Docent for the June 10th Home & Garden Tour?

Serve as a docent in one of the tour houses for a two-hour shift and you get to tour the houses for free. Contact Dretta Peterson at 443-482-9055 or dpetersod@aol.com.

ECA Summer Picnic

Summer will be here before you know it and that means a lot of things. One of the fun things will be the ECA Annual Picnic—in lieu of an August Membership Meeting—on Thursday, August 20, at Mears Marina. The picnic will be catered by Adam's Rib and is a great chance to catch up with your neighbors.

In Memoriam:

ECA residents were sad to hear of the recent death of Sue Prosen. Sue was a resident of Eastport for 20 years and served as secretary of the ECA. Committed to local civic and environmental causes, she was also an active volunteer with the Chesapeake Bay Foundation. The ECA board has made a donation in Sue's memory to the Bay Foundation. Our condolences to Sue's husband, Bill Cormier.

Alderman's Notebook

Well, it's that time of year—budget time. Not a very sexy topic, but oh so important to the City's well being and to your wallet. I apologize in advance for the amount of numbers sprinkled throughout this discourse. I tried to keep them to a minimum, but some numbers are necessary for context.

At just under \$74.3 million, the Mayor has submitted a balanced budget, in that the revenues cover the expenditures. (You can view the proposed fiscal 2008 budget online by going to the City website). This was accomplished only by not funding several expenditures that are sorely needed by the City, but more on that in a bit.

I want to take a little space to address the revenue side of the ledger. Revenues come from two general sources, general funds (\$52.2 m) and enterprise funds (\$22.1m). The latter are revenues generated by fees we pay directly for such services as water, sewer, parking, docking, transportation, refuse, the market house and stormwater. By law, the fees for these services must cover their expenses. The City has been able to do a good job of keeping these funds in the black with just small positive cash reserves.

The general funds come from taxes (\$28.2m), licenses and permits (\$2.9m), intergovernmental transfers (\$12.7million, with \$5.1 coming from State income taxes, \$1.9m from State highway taxes, \$1.9 m from hotel taxes, \$1.2 from police protection, and many smaller transfers) with the remainder coming from a variety of services, fines and earnings. The \$28.2 million tax source draws the most attention because of the \$25.7 million that comes from our property taxes.

The property tax is generated by applying a cents-per-hundred rate to the assessed value of property. Over the years, the City has been dropping the rate from a high of \$1.15 per hundred to the current \$.53 per hundred rate. Of course, much of this rate drop has occurred because of the dramatic rise in property values over the past few decades. While a direct comparison is not possible, it should be noted that our tax rate is the lowest of any municipality in

Maryland by a considerable margin, and that includes many cities, such as Rockville, in expensive real estate areas. I will return to this topic towards the end of this discussion. By the way, the one-cent per hundred rate equals about \$486 thousand in revenue with the current level of property assessments.

Returning to the general fund expenditures, almost 83 percent of the \$52.2 million goes to salaries, benefits and contract services, that is, staffing. Most of that amount, about \$40 million is set by union contract agreements, both the level and the annual increases. Much of the remainder of the \$52.2 million goes to supplies, maintenance and repairs, utilities and debt service. What's the point? There is an extremely small amount of discretionary wiggle room on the spending side of the budget. Furthermore, the heavy preponderance of our spending is on matters of public safety such as police and fire, but also including public works and inspections. These are the fundamental services provided by a municipality and are not easily cut.

For those few who care to examine the details of the budget looking for cuts, one item that draws attention is the \$2.5 million spent for contract services. To be sure, some of this could be reduced a bit, but most is for services where we have no permanent staff. The alternative is to hire staff with the attendant fringe and retirement costs. It's not clear that these are really budget cuts in the long run.

Another target for cuts is the City's grant program, which this year totaled \$382 thousand. The working mark for the current budget is \$500 thousand, which returns funding back up to the fiscal 2006 level. The first thing to note is that we are looking at thousands, not millions of dollars. The current grants selected for funding, out of over 50 applicants, cover 24 wide-ranging programs. The City's funding is only a small part of the total funding for these programs. In other words, our few dollars of contribution leverage many times more dollars coming from private philanthropic organizations or other governmental entities. This year we are giving priority to grants aimed at helping children and persons needing help in coping with a wide assortment of physical and mental problems. We are funding no new

programs this year and are funding one grant for the full amount requested by the applicant.

In putting together the budget, the Mayor looked at millions of dollars of budget “enhancement” requests from each department. From my review, most of these looked not only reasonable, but also, often very desirable. The Environmental Matters Committee reviewed the Public Works enhancement requests and found \$1.5 million in additional items they would fund over what the Mayor submitted. It goes like this throughout the budget; many worthy items did not get funded in order to keep the budget spending balanced with revenues.

So the struggle continues to hold the line on expenditures in fiscal 2008, when we have so many items where additional spending is sorely needed.

But here is the big rub. After fiscal 2008, we are headed for some significant budgetary difficulties. In FY 2009, revenues are projected to level off or possibly even to fall while expenditures are forecasted to continue on their current trend. Given the lack of discretionary flexibility to control spending mentioned above, this will put great pressure on the Council to increase the cents-per-hundred rate applied to the property assessments possible by a large amount—not a happy picture. Though the revenue picture is forecasted to improve in FY 2010, revenues don’t keep up with expenditures and we will face another potentially large shortfall.

By law the City must pass a balanced budget, so, we are either facing major cuts in City services or substantial property tax increases. The latter may be sustainable by many wealthier residents in Eastport and the City but has the prospect of greatly affecting the demographics of our neighborhood and the City at-large.

Obviously, there are things that need to change, and change quickly, to keep the City on a sound fiscal footing. The Council is working on a range of ideas, mostly involving expenditure cuts, and I encourage all of you to take a look at the budget and to share your ideas with me or any other Council Member. I realize this will sound like the typical bureaucratic response, but the Council is going to invite a “blue ribbon” panel to help us evaluate the situation and develop an array

of fixes before the crisis is fully upon us.

In the meantime, crime continues to be a growing concern. There are many different groups working on the problem and each group has its own set of plans to address the problem. The Public Safety Committee, of which I am a member, is planning to hold a meeting of all the different groups in June to see if there is some way to coalesce all the different ideas and energy into one united force to attack the problem. This is still very much a work in progress, with, sadly, very little progress to report.

The Adequate Public Facilities Ordinance (APFO) issue is still working and progress is being made. Mike Christman and I are working with Dave Cordle to get a package together that addresses, in the City code, the Comprehensive Plan, the Capital Improvement Program and the APFO in a coordinated fashion and following the State Annotated Code (i.e., the State Law) and the guidance from the Maryland Department of Planning. We hope to have our work done this summer and have a Council vote, probably in September. One of the side effects of getting this passed is that the building moratoria will be removed and we can start getting permit fees and taxes from work in suspense, help for our impending budget problems.

There is much more going on, but this is all the room I have for this Notebook report. As always you can reach me at 410-295-9743 or EastportRoss@aol.com to discuss these or other issues.

Your Alderman,
Ross Arnett

2007 Membership Meetings

Aug. 16, 2007 – Picnic

Sept. 20, 2007

Nov. 15, 2007 – Annual Meeting

Save The Date:

Second Annual Eastport Home & Garden Tour
Sunday, June 10, 1 p.m.-5 p.m.

Rain or Shine

Buy your tickets at Ahh, Coffee, Café Guru, Prudential Carruthers Realtors, Fawcett's, and Windwood Garden, or, on the day of the tour, at Sarles Marina.

(For more information, see front page of newsletter.)

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