

# HOWARD COUNTY ISSUES

A Civic Publication from the Independent Voter Group providing critical data on local issues. Publications are posted on the website indefinitely.

## \$\$ Was That a TAX INCREASE OR TAX DECREASE? \$\$



Del. Malone

1. What is the cause of the budget shortfall? The cause included several things. Economists say the economy is not doing well,

and the housing industry is not doing well. Another reason is that in 1999 we gave everyone a 10% income tax reduction costing about a billion dollars. Additionally, the State was sued and as a result, Thornton made recommendations that the legislature pour more money into education.

2. Why was a spending cut not feasible? The governor held the budget to ~ 4% of the spending affordability (every year spending affordability says this is how much we can spend and cannot go over, but we stayed under that amount). The Governor and Legislature has cut several hundred million in this budget and the legislature will be cutting even more; 500 million more.

The Governor put money back into Dept Natural Resources, Transportation and open space programs.

3. How will this affect your constituents?  
Continued on page 12



Del. DeBoy

1. What is the cause of the budget shortfall?

Thornton Education Plan and Medicare.

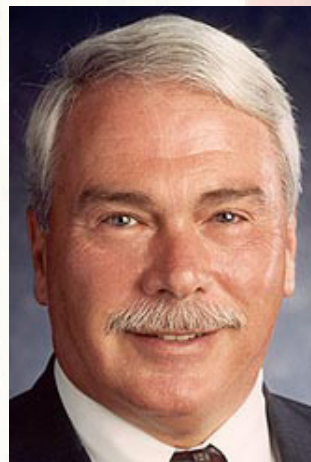
2. Why was a spending cut not feasible?

Spending cuts were an option. Recommendations were made for the governor to cut \$550 million in the 09 budget.

3. How will this affect your constituents - will they receive more services, same services, higher taxes, lower taxes? Same services, higher sales tax, pretty much same income tax rate.

4. What is your estimate on the impact to a family of 4 and

Continued on page 12



State Senator Robey

1. What is the cause of the budget shortfall?

The budget deficit has been ten years in the making. A \$600 million income tax cut in 1997, combined with \$1.5 billion in increased education funding (mandated by court order and the Thornton Commission) resulted in a \$1.2 billion deficit as early as 2002.

2. Why was a spending cut not feasible?

The Governor has proposed \$400 million in cuts and the Senate Budget and Taxation Committee has added an additional \$100 million in cuts, bringing the total to half a billion dollars in spending cuts. Cuts any deeper would mean

Continued on page 6



Del. Guzzone speaking for Del.s Pendergrass and Turner

1. What is the cause of the budget shortfall?

An impact to the budget can span more than a single year, and can Continue to impact revenue and

**96% of citizens will pay less in income taxes** programs during a multi-year period.

The reality is that the underlying factor driving tax revenues and costs occur over long periods of time. What drove this current structural deficit were: 1. a significant tax cut during the middle of Glendenning administration where a 10% cut reduced revenues to the State by 1 billion dollars. This, combined with the last year of

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### IN EACH ISSUE:

- Multiple perspectives on the same issue
- Writer contributions with minimal editing
- Voting records for offices that serve as feeder positions for moving up the political ladder

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COLUMBIA REDEVELOPMENT

From Alex Hekimian



1. How specific should the plan become at this point? (the word ‘vibrancy’ can translate into very different directions) The proposed “Vision” document and proposed

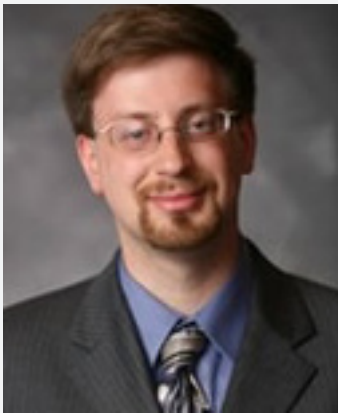
master plan for Downtown Columbia should be specific enough to give citizens reasonable assurances of the amount, type, and location of land development and the supporting public infrastructure that would occur within certain time frames. The master plan will need to include a phasing program that shows, in five-year increments, which developments and associated public infrastructure projects would be implemented within each phase, and which entities would be responsible for construction and maintenance of the various elements in the plan. The plan should be consistent with the priorities expressed by the 300+ citizens who attended the first Saturday of the week-long Charrette that was held in 2005. The area’s citizens, after all, are the ones who would have to live with the results of development and would have to foot the bill for construction and maintenance of new public facilities.

2. Does the current vision support citizen requirements? Can we do better? The County’s current draft of the “Vision” document is very deficient. It is so vague and non-committal that practically anything would conceivably be allowed to occur in Downtown Columbia. The draft should be revised to be more precise about the direction that Downtown Columbia would go and to guide how citizens’ priorities will be translated to the proposed master plan. Because the “Vision” document is a policy document, the County Council, which is the County’s policy-

Continued on page 5

From Evan Coren - Columbia Council

1. How specific should the plan become at this point? (the word ‘vibrancy’ can translate into very different directions) The plan needs to show how the items in it will be achieved. Declarations without the way to achieve them are not a plan. What concerned me the most with the county’s draft in 2006 was that the details would not have achieved the declarations. Not only



did it paint a pretty picture of vibrancy without the mechanisms to achieve it, but many aspects of that plan would undermine vibrancy. Several aspect of that plan that concerned me include: 1) its street layout, 2) its insufficient amount

and range of mixed income housing, 3) having a road run over the top edge of the grass amphitheater at the Lakefront, 4) the Corporate Boulevard being dead at night and creating an area where there isn’t eyes on the street to deter crime, and 5) not providing adequate protection from future residents of housing build next to Merriweather from complaining about noise and creating pressure to restrict concerts.

With this county track record in mind, I was further concerned when the most recent county draft plan came out in 2007 with even less detail than the previous plan. Before a plan is approved the mechanisms of how it will achieve its goals must be spelled out. To declare vibrancy will not necessarily achieve vibrancy.

2. Does the current vision support citizen requirements? Can we do better? What are the citizens’ requirements? The four things I heard most at the charrette were: 1) mixed income housing, 2) mixed use, 3) save Merriweather, and 4) better walking connection across Rt. 29. During the Focus Group the most commonly agreed concern was that the amount and range of mixed income housing was insufficient, though I also heard concern about parking and street layout and preventing an

Continued on page 5

Del.Guzzone, Tax Decrease, from pg 1

Glendenning and carried into the Ehrlich administration spending on the Education program named Thorton, after the Thorton commission to provide increased excellence in education were the primary sources of the structural budget deficit. The Thorton spending was a major commitment for state to dramatically enhance education was known to be a commitment of 1.3 billion dollars and when passed, and unfortunately, didn’t pass with a funding source.

The Thorton program represented great things for education, however, no one found a funding source. So during the Ehrlich years, other funds were raided to make up for the shortfall. The funds which were decreased included the transportation trust fund, program open space, which represented dedicated funds and were depleted to support Thorton, and Ehrlich also raised user fees to add revenue. One example is that car registrations doubled in cost to citizens. Accounting gimmickry, then huge gaps in those funds left the transportation short \$4-\$600 million a year.

2. Why was a spending cut not feasible? Future cuts were put into the budget, so cuts are planned. \$500 million in spending cuts were made to future growth of the budget. Fully two thirds of the state budget consists of mandates from the federal government, state mandates and items the Governor must put into the budget. My committee is the appropriations committee, so we went Through a projection of what would be in a future budget and put together a list of cuts that we think the Governor should go forward with. When the governor presents a new budget, we’re only giving the Governor the half billion less in or to make up the cut. He doesn’t have to take the legislature list of

Continued on page 6

Listen to voters on the issues from across the country, including Howard County callers at 90.1 FM starting at 7am daily on C-Span’s Washington Journal, or at [www.c-span.org](http://www.c-span.org).

# COMMENTARY, EMAIL, EDITORIAL

## Bloomberg Accessible to Howard County Independent Voters - From Mona Eurice



One of the great things about being a Political Independent is the possibility of having a two way conversation with Independent national figures. After emailing Michael Bloomberg on the topic of a trade article he wrote and including some encouragement should he seek national office, I received a gracious personal response in November.

Accessibility isn't the only reason to like Mike. Newsweek had an excellent in-depth story on Bloomberg in November 2007, including personal things that can give a level of comfort that comes from a rounded profile. I particularly liked the story about Bloomberg's postponing a meeting with Bill Gates because it was important for Bloomberg to attend his daughter's riding competition on the day Gates would be in town.

Some of us are watching and waiting for character. not perfection, but some indication of sensible priorities. It's good to know that the candidate knows what it's like to stand in a grocery line, compare prices on socks, and forgo an important meeting because we are the only parents our children will ever have.

I may not agree with everything Bloomberg has done or will do, but his defining fatherhood goes a long way toward capturing my attention.

And it's good to have a two-way conversation.

### Link between Local and National

Local politics is connected to national politics during years like this when, as some describe, we have a 'perfect storm' regarding an Independent run for the nation's highest office. Howard County Issues will continue to provide information on local politics and will provide perspectives which link local and national issues where relevant.

### Reader Feedback

" Your publication is really packed with useful information with regard to local government. Keep up the good work. "  
Tom - Damascus

" Outstanding job! Thank you! "  
Henry - Ellicott City

### Accessibility Important for Local Politics

While we're on the topic of accessibility and taking the time to meet the average citizen and talk about their concerns:

The experience of printing and distributing this publication has provided us with a tremendous perspective on local politics and elected people. It would be good if this experience could be transmitted effectively to all citizens but maybe our experiences are just our own - good with some elected leaders and less than positive with others.

It's difficult to continue to print what we know if the information puts people we believe are good leaders in an less than positive light.

But in order to maintain our middle-road determination, presenting both sides and being thorough, we believe our credibility resets on printing what citizens want to know without regard for whether or not we admire the person's work. Our loyalty is with the citizens, and this will help the good leaders we have.  
From Mona Eurice-Brinegar

## Reserve Judgement on Ralph Nader Until After Viewing *An Unreasonable Man*



Ralph Nader has had more positive influence on our nation without ever having held elected office than anyone in our history. He devoted his life to protecting consumers.

Even so, he is a controversial national figure for some.

I viewed *An Unreasonable Man* during the pre-screen at the American Film Institute in October 2006. Kevin Zeese, Nader's 2004 Press Secretary told me about the film, and so the night I attended I watched the door for his entrance.

He is as animated and unassuming in person while meeting a stranger as he is on the screen.

While Kevin did not appear that evening, Ralph Nader walked in, much to my surprise.

I was with my son; he turned 14 that day. He pressed me to talk with Ralph Nader, and since I'd been in indirect communication by sending messages through Kevin, and I did eventually walk over to his seat to introduce myself. I was struck by his lack of pause - he didn't miss a beat. He was as animated and unassuming in person while meeting a stranger as he is on the screen. He was genuine, on-point with a mission, and very communicative.

The documentary is extraordinarily objective. It would be wise to reserve unfavorable judgement until after viewing this documentary that presents a history of controversy, service, and results.

Mona Eurice-Brinegar



Alex Hekimian, Columbia Redevelopment

Continued from page 3  
making body, should approve it.

Another serious problem is that the County has abdicated its role to prepare a master plan for Downtown Columbia by handing that responsibility to General Growth Properties (GGP). To correct this problem, the County should consider not only GGP’s suggestions, but those of Columbia’s citizens as well, and take back the responsibility for preparing the draft master plan for County Council approval.

3. Does the current vision direction support business? Can we do better? In its current form, the draft “Vision” document cannot be labeled as supporting businesses, or citizens for that matter, because it does not present a clear vision. The final draft will need to correct this problem before the “Vision” document can be characterized in any way.

4. What will be the plan for sensible growth, or do we need to be concerned about overcrowded roads, schools?

The County has a long-standing policy of ensuring adequate public facilities. Consistent with that policy, many Columbia citizens have been very vocal about not wanting service levels on roads, schools, and other public infrastructure to deteriorate. That is why a phasing program as part of the proposed master plan is essential. The phasing program would ensure that new development would not be approved unless it was accompanied by commitments to fund and construct the public infrastructure needed to maintain public services at levels acceptable to citizens.

5. Is this redevelopment being considered in combination with expectations brought by BRAC?

The impact of BRAC on Columbia is as yet uncertain. New development in Downtown Columbia will likely not depend on the needs of BRAC.

6. What would we not want to do regarding redevelopment?

Redevelopment in Downtown Columbia would be unacceptable if it (1) does not provide housing that reflects the needs of a wide spectrum of incomes in the area, (2) does not preserve via a historic district the original cluster of buildings and open spaces established at the Lakefront, (3) is not in scale with its surroundings, (4) does not mitigate its impacts on roads, schools, and other public infrastructure, and (5) does not enhance the liveliness, environmental quality, and livability of the area.

7. Is there an element of agreement among disparate group visions?

The vision expressed on the first Saturday of the Charrette a couple of years ago continues to best represent the will of the citizens of Columbia. Since that time, some people have suggested other visions, but they do not come close to having the same credibility as the vision that was achieved by a broad cross-section of citizens

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Evan Coren, Columbia Redevelopment

Continued from page 3  
extension of Wincopin Street through the Hug Park and over the top edge of the grass amphitheater. In the most recent round of public hearings some of the most common concerns were over: 1) the extension of Wincopin Street, 2) the general lack of detail, 3) the proposed lowering of the standards on congestion to accept more congestion, and 4) the proposed changing of the ramp from southbound Rt. 29 onto eastbound Rt. 175 from a cloverleaf to a light similar to the westbound Rt. 32 ramp onto Brokenland Parkway intersection.

I think all of these concerns are not yet fully addressed and it is important to address them before the plan gets approved.

3. Does the current vision direction support business? Can we do better? If the plan leads to so much congestion downtown as one of the county hired traffic engineers testified to at the county’s hearing on their most recent traffic study that “downtown will go from being a regional draw to being a local draw” then businesses downtown will not be well served by the plan. Businesses want it to be easy for their customers to get to them, so it is very important that we get the road system and parking right before the plan is approved.

In addition to congestion, one of the concerns that has been brought up that will effect people’s decisions to shop downtown or work downtown is whether the parking will be paid parking or free parking.

4. What will be the plan for sensible growth, or do we need to be concerned about overcrowded roads, schools?

I think downtown is a sensible place to absorb growth, if it is well planned ..it is important that residents speak up now, ask the tough questions now so that the infrastructure meets the communities needs and if developers pay for the costs they create so that the community is able to maintain the infrastructure needed to meet the needs of the community. We always need to plan ahead to address the additional burden development puts on roads, schools, sewers, hospital beds, fire fighting capacity, and other infrastructure issues. This is the reason it is important that residents speak up now, ask the tough questions now, and work to

make sure the plan addresses these issues now. Letters to the editor, contacting county and Columbia elected officials, and attending public hearings/forums are vital and your actions and a little investment of your time during the next year may impact your quality of life for decades to come.

5. Is this redevelopment being considered in combination with expectations brought by BRAC?

BRAC is just one of the many things that will lead to the likely doubling of the county’s population over the next 40 years. Our great schools and

Continued on page 12

Tax Decrease, Del. Guzzone, from page 3

items to cut, but he will likely comply. We didn’t make an actual cut now, but we are cutting the future budget by not providing the governor the originally planned amount.

3. How will this affect your constituents – will they receive More services, same services, higher taxes, lower taxes? Many of the cuts are cut in Thorton (\$150 million) which represents education. An inflationary factor was built in to the mandate, and we cut the inflationary factor. As school systems grow, the inflationary factor won’t be in the budget. They’ll have to cut back. The other \$350 needed is line item by line item throughout the budget. Aid to community colleges cut, cut to nursing homes, cuts to many non-profit budget supplementation requests.

The new one-penny sales tax increase starts Jan 3, the computer sales Tax July 1. Income tax rate changes next tax year; next April 2009 for tax year 2008. 96% of citizens will pay less in income taxes. The income tax bracket changed for households with \$350,000 and \$500,000 annually and they will pay more. Also, we increased the personal exemption which went from \$2400 to \$3200. Family of 4 will get an addition \$3200 exemption. We recognized that the sales tax increase is somewhat regressive, and so we increased the exemption. Personal exemption is phased-out after \$150,000 per family.

5. How will the state tax change affect local taxes? There will be no effect. On a larger scale, the overall impact includes cuts to local government. For example, Howard County funds from the State will be cut by \$9 million dollars. I’ve talked to the County Executive and this is something that is well within county ability to absorb without increasing taxes locally.

6. Will the added sales tax affect all sales, or targeted Products and services? The sales tax was raised by a penny and solved most of the budget issues, combined with \$500 million in cuts. The sales tax applies to all sales; there are 140 goods and services that can be taxed and of the 140 types, in Maryland we tax 40 things. This has been expanded to include computer services. The sales tax raised \$800 million and \$200 million came from expansion of tax into computer services.

7. Please support your position on the slots referendum. My vote to send this issue to referendum is consistent with my position throughout. After 5-6 years of wrangling in legislature with no conclusion, it’s time to give citizens a vote on this. I believe in doing our job and making the tough votes when we have to take them, but after this much time on this issue it’s clear that it’s time to move on and quite frankly this was an easy vote for me.

Tax Decrease, State Senator Robey, from page 1  
drastic cuts in education, public safety and other core services.

3. How will this affect your constituents – will they receive more services, same services, higher taxes, lower taxes? For Howard County, 12% of income tax filers will see an increase in their income taxes; 88% will pay an increase of \$4.00. Benefits to our constituents include the first dedicated higher education fund in Maryland history, to keep college affordable; healthcare will be more affordable for small businesses, insuring 100,000 more people; transportation investment, to reduce traffic and gridlock; and the Chesapeake Bay 2010 Trust Fund, to clean up the Bay.

4. What is your estimate on the impact to a family of 4 and an income of \$150,000? Family of 2 and \$150,000?  
...healthcare will be more affordable for small businesses, insuring 100,000 more people  
The state income tax for a household with a joint income of \$150,000 remains at 4.75%, and the income tax deduction will increase from \$2,400 to \$3,200.

Based on spending habits at this income level, the sales tax increase from 5% to 6% would mean an estimated increase of \$450.00/year.

5. How will the state tax change affect local taxes?  
Howard County will receive 8.8% less state aid than originally planned - \$273 million in 2009 instead of \$282 million, up from \$266 million received in 2008.

6. Will the added sales tax affect all sales, or targeted products and services? The added sales tax applies to the same products that are taxed now, but adds computer services to include consulting and programming help, software installation, and hardware maintenance.

7. Please support your position on the slots referendum. During the previous administration, when I was Howard County Executive, I served as President of the Maryland Association of Counties, which supports slots. I favored slots in carefully-selected locations to address the State’s declining revenue, and there are many who would rather spend their entertainment money in Maryland than in other states. The slots debate has polarized the General Assembly for years, and it’s time to let the people decide.

Howard County Board of Education Votes

HC BOARD OF EDUCATION VOTES		Elected		Elected	Elected	Elected	Elected		Student
Issue	Date	Frank J Aquino	Lawrence H Cohen	Sandra H French	Ellen F Giles	Patricia S Gordon	Diane B Mikulis	Janet N Siddiqui	Andrew Gavelek
Motion to Close Session to Public 5/0	10/29/2007	A (absent)	Y (yea)	L (arrived late)	Y	Y	Y	Y	A
Motion to Close Session to Public 5/0	10/25/2007	L	Y	L	Y	Y	Y	Y	A
HCEA Agency Fee - Negotiations and Superintendent's recommendation for teacher's 10 day suspension	10/25/2007	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	A
Motion to Close Session to Public - Interview candidates for Ombudsman position	10/24/2007	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	A	A
Approve Agenda	10/11/2007	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y
Approve General Consent Agenda	10/11/2007	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y
Approve Restricted Consent Agenda	10/11/2007	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	?
Approve Hand Sanitizer, Leonard paper Co. \$84k, Boiler Replacement for Pointers run, Hurley Company \$39k, Consultant Services, CampbellJones & Assoc. \$160k	10/11/2007	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	?
Approve operating budget review committee: Bus/Ed Partners, Chamber of Comm, CAC, PTA, Special Ed, Econ Dev Auth, HCEA, HCAA, Fed State County Mun Emps	10/11/2007	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y
Adjourn meeting	10/11/2007	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y
Approve Agenda	10/1/2007	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	A
FY 2009 Capital Budget Request *	10/1/2007	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	A
FY 2010 - 2014 Capital Imprv Prog Request	10/1/2007	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	A
FY 2009 - 2018 Long Range Master Plan	10/1/2007	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	A
Approve FY 2009 Priority Listing	10/1/2007	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	A
(Agenda Approvals continue, but are omitted from further listing here)	9/20/2007	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y
(Minutes Approvals continue but are omitted from further listing here)	9/20/2007	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y
Comprehensive Facilities Maintenance Program Approval	9/20/2007	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y
Religious Observances changes from the Sept 6 closed meeting approved	9/20/2007	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y
Accept the Bridge to Excellence Comprehensive Master Plan	9/20/2007	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y
Motion to Close Session to Public 6/0	9/6/2007	Y	Y	L	Y	Y	Y	Y	A
Motion to Close Session to Public 6/0	8/29/2007	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	L	A
Motion to Close Session to Public 5/0	8/22/2007	L	Y	L	Y	Y	Y	Y	A
Move to approve agenda	8/16/2007	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	A	Y
Motion to Close Session to Public 5/0	8/8/2007	Y	Y	Y	Y	L	Y	A	A

Board of Education Meeting Minutes - Layman’s Perspective  
From Mona Eurice-Brinegar

We really need a team of volunteers to try and sift through the Board of Education meeting minutes, interpret, and provide data to citizens (see help wanted ad below). I sifted through hundreds of prints taken from the internet pages of the Board of Ed site, and the voting seemed severely repetitive. I was unable to locate information easily and was continually switched to a screen that contained no data but a skeleton of a format where information might reside. In situations like this I usually contact the government agency repeatedly until someone helps me and then I can help citizens with the data. But we do not have the volunteer resources to take on yet another agency that doesn’t communicate well with the public.

Please consider making a difference. Contact us. 443 889-9070

WANTED: COLUMNIST

The hours are great - totally up to you when and how much you work. You’ll meet very interesting people in government. The pay is rewarding: knowing you are making a difference. Pls contact us at Howard County Issues for more information: [mona@howardcountyissues.org](mailto:mona@howardcountyissues.org) or 443-889-9070.



DAYS END FARM HORSE RESCUE

Days End Farm Horse Rescue, Inc. is a 501 c3, volunteer based, animal welfare organization established in 1989 to ensure quality care and treatment of horses through rehabilitation, humane education and community outreach.

Since it's beginning in 1989, Days End Farm Horse Rescue, Inc. has been a place where children and adults have found enrichment, satisfaction, sadness and purpose through helping to provide care for unwanted, abused or neglected horses. Since it's inception, DEFHR has gone from a small non-profit sheltering only a few horses annually, to a full scale and well respected rescue and rehabilitation facility housing on average 50 – 60 horses at any one point in time. Its budget, and corresponding donations, has grown from \$50,000 annually to over \$600,000over a 10 year period.

Over 500 adults and children volunteer their efforts in helping the Farm to achieve its mission. Equally as important in its successful growth has been Days End Farm's increased focus on humane education, both on the local and national levels. As Days End continues to grow, so does the need for adequate space all the horses and programs require. The current location, which served us well over the years, is now literally bursting at the seams, with every square inch in use.



- Donate your gently used tack for resale in
- You or your group could do a fundraiser to
- Donate feed, hay, or straw!
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# BENEFITS CONNECTION - County Republicans Donate Time

From John Bailey, Howard County  
Republican Party

Howard County Republicans supported the Salvation Army for the 12th Year in a Row Columbia, MD, December 7, 2007 at the Wal-Mart on Ridge Road. It is particularly important this year that groups such as the Salvation Army are provided with as much support and resources as possible. While Howard County is a prosperous and thriving county, there are many among us that find it difficult to make ends meet. The Salvation Army is just one of the hard working groups in our community trying to make life a little easier for those individuals that need a little extra help during the holiday season.

The Howard County Republican Party would like to commend the Salvation Army and all the non-profit organizations that are working on a daily basis in the community to help those in need. We believe that it is this community centered support that is the driving force in solving many of the problems that our society faces. The Republican Party has always been a strong believer in local government and local organizations working in the community to improve the lives of local citizens. Big government and intrusive legislation is not the solution to local issues. It is the hard working local activists and the local community that knows what is best for their area.

We are excited to be supporting the Salvation Army and look forward to being able to donate our time and resources for the 12th year in a row to help such a hard working and dedicated organization.

Contact the Howard County Republican party by visiting [hocogop.com](http://hocogop.com) or phoning the central committee at 410-997-VOTE.





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- HOWARD COUNTY ISSUES - Local Politics  
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- DIRTYWORKS CONTRACTING - Excavation  
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**HOWARD COUNTY SIGNAGE LAW**

From Mona Eurice-Brinegar

After the County administration began cracking down on the signs put up around the county, particularly the temporary signs, citizens began questioning our signage law. After the first few citizens showed concern, we emailed County government and found the following:

Council Bill 77-1981 was passed unanimously by County Council members more than 20 years ago as follows: Bobo, Keeton, Knowles, Thomas, & Yeager.

Included in this bill is a reference to real estate but the exclusion of the law for builders or large residential land developments is not spelled out. Somewhere along the line, apparently, the bill was weakened.

Two of the Council members at the time this bill passed provided the following response:

**County Law on Signage**  
From Delegate Bobo and Lloyd Knowles

Prior to the county law 77-1981 little or no restrictions on signage existed, so this law represents the first tightening of signage in the county. This law also created exceptions that were traditionally allowed such as Real Estate Sale signs. In addition, many bills are passed through negotiations so it may be that some negotiation occurred in order to gain votes to pass the bill.

The law definitely needs to be changed. We’ve experienced tremendous growth and nothing has been done with this law for 20+ years. Several County Councils should have addressed this bill in the past in order to tighten it up.

In it’s current form, the signage law is too broad. The law needs more strength.

\$\$

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## Independent Thought - Checkpoint Sanity

From Mona Eurice-Brinegar

Driving home from Gaithersburg at 4pm in late November, the color of the trees made a fall glow and the Thanksgiving season added to my peace. I smiled when I heard the words on the radio, "I just want to celebrate another day of living".

Just then, I passed the small Montgomery County park where earlier that week three small children and their mother were violently killed by the other parent. A flood of all the injustices I've ever witnessed returned and shattered my peace.

I took it as a sign to write about the madness we all see.

On another radio station, citizen-callers were speaking to listeners across the nation demonstrating that they were well versed on the issues. But for every one sane experience relayed, there seemed to be three insane situations created by those with more power than most of us would ever want – like the situation with the violent parent.

It's insanity to mandate that children must visit or live with a violent parent and expect things to go well, but this is how our system works. In my work on a grassroots board, I saw photos of a woman in a hospital bed covered in bruises and cuts, and while showing me the photos and standing before me, she relayed that her ex-spouse had been awarded custody of their 12 year old daughter after perpetrating the attack.

Sometimes judges are appointed and sometimes we vote for judges and representatives that support this system because we want to elect people who have been 'sanctioned' or 'vetted'. We're fearful of new faces and new names, and new ideas. Our number one criteria for electing candidates is that they must exhibit legitimacy, and that means that they must have held office prior (incumbent), or they must be Democrats or Republicans and often come to us from a political family. That also means that they must support most elements of the status quo and know how to amass campaign money from just about any source available.

Maybe it's time to rethink this strategy. Here are a few reasons:

Earners with 2 million dollars of income annually can collect government benefits payments, but there is no help for the destitute in need of nursing home care. This situation is so dire that I know of one family who could lose their home because the caregiver had been a primary earner and now is at home full time, caring for elderly relatives.

**it's insanity to  
mandate that children  
must live with  
or visit a violent  
parent**

Further Sanity Checks:

-And speaking of mortgages – some mortgage customers indulged in particular types of loans that were beyond affordability, and now we will all bear the cost of bailing out those whose decisions were too often based on living beyond one's means. It's been said that managing money is a sign of character, and if that's true then circumventing lessons learned in this way only postpones, indeed, exacerbates what will surface elsewhere. Compassion might be better placed considering those who struggle and do without.

-Our County School Board uses 55% of our budget and has in the past held public meetings in private, has contracted with out of state software companies which did not produce intended results, and made the decision to keep the investigation of the two administrators from the public. Our tax dollars were basically lost on all counts. We continue to elect and re-elect those responsible.

-Neighborhoods with shared sewage require extractions several times daily. Meanwhile, more properties are being developed with the same plans and the county offices operate without any change.

-Restrictions on residential building is supposed to be enforced such that only a couple of hundred homes can be built in the West County per year. By "West County" maybe that means 9 square miles inside Lisbon.

-And most importantly, our elected leaders spend far too much time raising money. It's an insane system when a newly elected official immediately begins raising funds to be re-elected, further encumbering them to the funding source, and further encumbering their time. From any perspective, fund raising is bad for citizens and effectively neutralizes our ability to gain consistent representation.

## What does civility mean to you?

Does it equate to justice? Or being polite? Does civility imply awareness of things civil? Or does civility encompass stable behavior evident in the mundane? Does it have anything to do with the virtues like honesty, wisdom, reverence, joy? What does civility mean?

**WE INVITE YOU TO TELL US WHAT IT MEANS FOR YOU.**

[mona@howardcountyissues.org](mailto:mona@howardcountyissues.org)

Tax Increase or Decrease?  
Del. DeBoy from page 1

an income of \$150,000? Family of 2 and \$150,000?  
Sales tax increase for both. Income tax remains the same.

5. How will the state tax change affect local taxes?  
It won't.

6. Will the added sales tax affect all sales, or targeted products and services?  
The same 37 services plus 1 new service computer services.

7. Pls support your position on the slots referendum.  
I voted for the referendum. I support slots.

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Evan Coren  
Columbia Redevelopment

Continued from page 5

our location between Baltimore and Washington also have a large impact on our growth, as does the quality of life in our community. If we plan effectively, we can absorb this immense growth in a way that preserves the values of preservation of green space, maintaining a mixed income community, and planning infrastructure needs in advance to maintain a high quality of life in the county. It will be tough, but with active community involvement and capable elected leaders it is doable.

6. What would we not want to do regarding redevelopment?  
We do not want a sloppy plan that reduces the quality of life in our community or retreats from the values of being a mixed income community and being a community that preserves green space. Columbia is a special place that I have been privileged to grow up in. I have seen the effect it has had on my peers and how they think of each other and the world. We need to carry the values that drove the design of Columbia forward as we evolve and absorb the growth pressures that have come with making Columbia such a desirable place. We can do this if we get involved now and make sure our voice is heard.

7. Is there an element of agreement among disparate group visions?  
I think there is a lot of agreement.

Tax Increase or Decrease? Malone Continued from page 1

uents – will they receive more services, same services, higher taxes, lower taxes?

What I did was to make sure that I voted against sales tax, computer services tax, tobacco tax, titling tax and for income tax changes. As a result, there will be an income tax reduction in my district. Now that this has happened, a lot of money will go to education, higher education, transportation issues (BRAC) and open space projects will now be able to proceed. The end result is that county and locals will be able to offer even more services based on these projects proceeding.

The new income tax is based on three categories. A joint income of 225,000 or less will result in an income tax reduction beginning 2008.

4. What is your estimate on the impact to a family of 4 and an income of \$150,000? Family of 2 and \$150,000?  
The family of four will have an income tax reduction of \$800 per person, \$3200 savings.

5. How will the state tax change affect local taxes?  
No impact – the Governor and Legislature left counties harmless.

6. Will the added sales tax affect all sales, or targeted products and services?  
Again, I voted against the sales tax, but as passed it'll be the same thing the state is targeting now, plus computers starting in July but will be revisited in upcoming session.

7. Pls support your position on the slots referendum.  
In 2005, myself and three other delegates had our slots bill passed in Annapolis and per the Governor's lobbyists it was a good bill. If we'd have taken the bill then we would have passed at that point. I would have preferred slots did not go to referendum. We were able to get some to vote for referendum who were not for slots. Now, the citizens will vote on slots. I've always supported slots – not to add gambling such as lotto etc... but for the additional revenue that now leaves the state of Maryland. My constituents support it.

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\*\*\*\*\*FIRST ANNUAL\*\*\*\*\*

HOWARD COUNTY

LAND USE SUMMIT

FOR CITIZENS AND CITIZEN GROUPS

TO GAIN AGREEMENT, SUPPORT, AND BUILD INFLUENCE AMONG HOWARD COUNTY CITIZENS AND GROUPS

AGENDA: WHAT WE CAN AGREE TO SUPPORT

As citizens with little influence on land use compared with large campaign donors, we might agree:

- Persistent changes to zoning under citizen opposition would be curtailed
- Land Developers follow the same laws as other businesses
- Support immediate neighbors of proposed development
- We do want to hear what Howard County citizens think we can all support

COOPERATION AND SUPPORT AMONG CITIZENS CREATES ORGANIZATION

OPEN TO THE PUBLIC

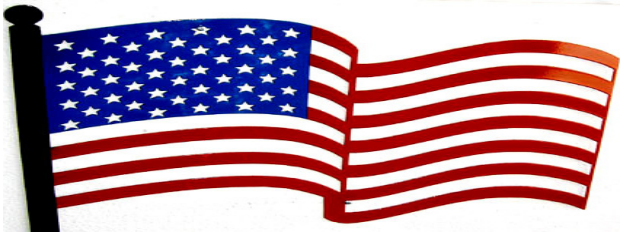
Representative Attendees (as of early January):

- |   |   |
|---|---|
| Angela Beltram - COPE (Citizens for an Open Process for Everyone) | Jud Malone - Howard County Tomorrow             |
| Valerie McGuire - Greater Elkridge Community Association          | Denise Eden - Cattail Creek                     |
| Alex Hekimian - Alliance for a Better Columbia                    | Bill Chesnutt - Project VoteSmart               |
| Rev. L. Dowell - Member Howard County Citizen's Assn              | Mona Brinegar - Unaffiliated Independent Voters |
| Stu Kohn - Maple Lawn   | Alan Klein - Coalition for Columbia's Downtown  |
| Mary Pivar - Coalition for Columbia's Downtown                    |   |

MARCH 12, 2008 MILLER LIBRARY, 7PM, PHONE MONA AT 443 889-9070 FOR FURTHER INFORMATION



One of the things we want to do in the Independent Voter Group in our focus on electing people who will represent citizens, is to outline how we will rate candidates. Included to the right is a chart of attributes that would rate candidates and the level of priority of each. The 8th item is lowest on the list, but because it made the list, it is very important. Please send feedback on things you'd like to see in future candidates.



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Design Editor: Michael Cornell  
At-Large Editor: Bill Chesnutt

We are a volunteer organization with no exclusionary inner circle. If you are looking for a way to support voter knowledge, civic involvement, free speech, or interested in levelling the field between those with influence and citizens, contact us:

443 889-9070  
mona@howardcountyissues.org

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**We are actively looking for writing contributions, send your thoughts to mona@howarcountyissues.org. Any writing contribution is appreciated in this publication that connects citizens and government.**

RATING CANDIDATES

Importance	Rating Description
1	Has history of working for citizens
2	Handles power responsibly
3	Demonstrates egalitarian treatment of all citizens
4	Specifies support for increasing voter turnout, election system integrity
5	Campaign fund amounts are small, and from private citizens
6	Demonstrates energy
7	Demonstrates intelligence
8	Background with <i>successful</i> experience applicable to position

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FOUNDING MEMBERS INCLUDE:

- Congresswoman Geraldine Ferraro
- Congresswoman Pat Schroeder
- Senator John McCain
- Governor Michael Dukakis



OUR REPUTATION

*New York Times*  
“Project Vote Smart is so good that even the Federal Government recommends it.” “For reliable, meat and potatoes political information, research experts nearly all recommend Project Vote Smart.”

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“Heaven for political junkies.”

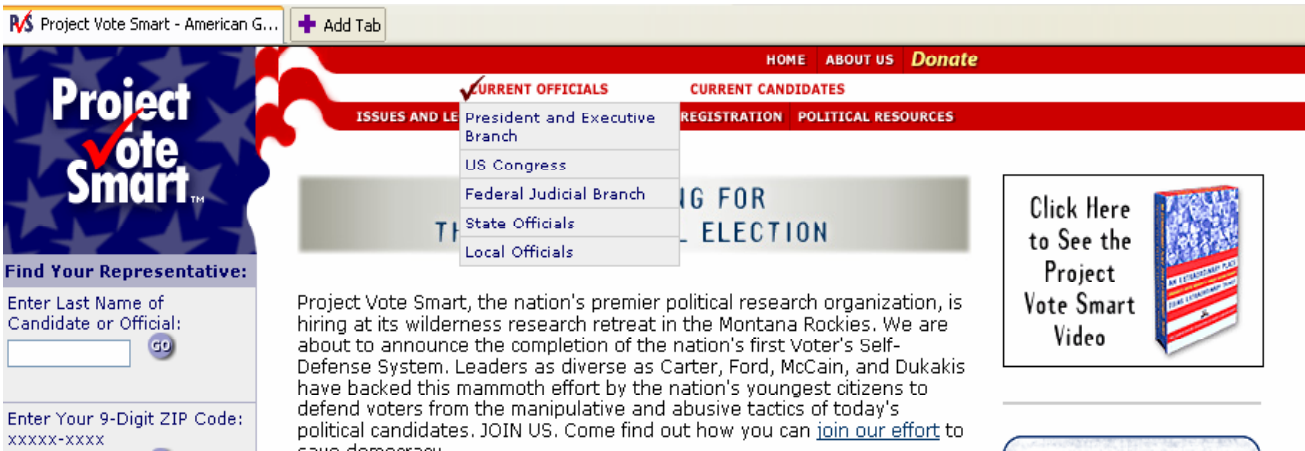
*U. S. News & World Report*  
“Project Vote Smart would make the Founders weep with joy.”

*The Atlanta Journal-Constitution*  
“Project Vote Smart jammed a wrench into the spin machine, the political and media apparatus that anoints candidates and disenfranchises the vast majority of voters.”

*The Plain Dealer*  
“A truly nonpartisan organization, Project Vote Smart (PVS) supports no candidates and embraces no political philosophy. It merely collects information on where candidates stand on a wide variety of issues and attempts to make that information readily available to the public.”

*Los Angeles Times*  
“I think it’s terrific (and fun) to be able to search presidential candidates’ statements. Thank you, Project Vote Smart for putting it all on the web, and making it searchable.”

OUR ACTIVITIES



OUR PLANS

The Rubber Has Met The Road - Literally

Sixteen Years and over 6000 people. It has been the most enormous political research effort in history and now our 2008 road trip includes visits to every state and every town and community that wants us. Tolerance will no longer be your only option!

YOUR CONTRIBUTION



- Three Ways to Help Us:
- Become a PVS Member
  - Volunteer or Intern at the Project’s beautiful Great Divide Ranch research facility
  - Become a Project Vote Smart Ambassador and show the Project’s video presentation to groups and schools in your community.