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Thursday, Jan. 15, 2009

Roads, public financing among top priorities for Port Towns

Municipalities hope for financial assistance from state leaders

by Elahe Izadi | Staff Writer



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Road projects, special taxing districts and funding for economic revitalization are among the top priorities for Port Towns officials during the current General Assembly session.

Representatives from the Port Towns municipalities—Bladensburg, Colmar Manor, Cottage City and Edmonston—met with state officials Jan. 7 during the annual Port Towns legislative meeting to discuss priorities. The General Assembly session began Wednesday.

Bladensburg Mayor Walter James said the town wants help in buying unoccupied and vacant buildings as part of its economic corridor revitalization project. The corridor stretches from Waterfront Park on Route 450 to the Publick Playhouse on Landover Road in Cheverly.

Bladensburg is also looking for money to improve the health of the Anacostia River, including storm water management upgrades and support for the Anacostia Watershed Society, James said.

Road projects are also important for Bladensburg and surrounding Port Towns. The CSX bridge overpass opened in September on Route 450, and repaving work on the road is set for this spring.

Edmonston Mayor Adam Ortiz advocated for State Highway Administration investment in the Port Towns, particularly improved sidewalks, repaving and median work on Kenilworth Avenue.

Ortiz said the town may request money to help its police department upgrade to the county's new radio emergency frequency. The county's switch from an 800 MHz to a 700 MHz frequency will happen over the next two years.

Colmar Manor Mayor Diane Fennell said her town will try to secure more state money for its community center, slated to be complete in 2010.

"We would just continue with other [funding] measures, to pursue federal funding also," she said. "We just want to make sure we ease the tax burden on our constituents."

Colmar Manor is paying \$3.5 million for the \$5 million center. Federal, state and county grants is paying the remainder. In fiscal 2007, Colmar Manor increased its real property tax rate by 37 cents to \$1 per every \$100 of assessed value to partly pay for the center, as well as for the town to start its police department.

Some Port Towns' officials also said they support the creation of a TIF, or tax increment financing, to finance part of Colmar Manor's 30,000-square-foot mixed-use Riverview project on the Anacostia waterfront.



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"Even though times are really tough, we think we can't lose sight of our bigger goals, and in particular we need help getting development projects off the ground," Ortiz said.

Fennell said she wants a TIF for Riverview's parking garage. Under a TIF, the property tax revenue that rises as a result of the increased value of a revitalized property would essentially pay for public improvements the developer would have to otherwise pay for.

Cottage City Commission Chairwoman Aileen McChesney said her town wants state money for a study examining the feasibility of building a new MARC train station in the town's Eastgate Industrial Center. Bungalow homes on Bladensburg Road in Cottage City may get new facade, if a Port Towns Community Development Corp. grant application for state-administered federal money is approved, McChesney said.

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