

While you were out, look what happened

We have heard the phrases “development must be paced with infrastructure” and “preserve quality of life in Howard County” bandied about for years. There are varied viewpoints on what all that means.

A financial budget crisis was in the making before the pandemic. Now, we will have to collaborate on how to best prioritize funds in a whole new world.

Will we see any county funded loans or grants for small business? Will we march forward with a better understanding of how to analyze and meet our needs?

Or, will we see little substantive change in our county planning?

Howard County does two things very well. We protect developer profits and we help the needy.

The latter is important and greatly appreciated. The former needs to get more objectively based in reality. We need a broader focus to assist more business sectors so our recovery towards a new normal is palatable for us all.

While most were hunkered down, likely paying less attention to legislative actions, the Howard County Council voted on Bill 1-2020 (CB1), which sought to increase the waiting period for building new homes in the most crowded school areas. The bill failed due to the “no” votes of Council Members Opel Jones, Christiana Rigby and David Yungmann.

The sponsor of CB1, Council Member Liz Walsh, offered many compromise amendments, all rejected by the same three without explanation. Thank you to Council Members Liz Walsh and Deb Jung for continuing to attempt to fix glaring problems effectively and fairly.

Is the council still relying on bad fiscal data?

A study commissioned by the county, by Urban Analytics predicted dire revenue decreases due to stronger



**MY
TURN**
by Lisa Markovitz

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development regulations. That study has been widely debunked for not using actual data but is still used as an excuse to claim residential development currently is profitable.

County fiscal woes going forward clearly will not be due to land use regulation. Going forward into uncertain times, we need forecasts based on accurate, real data. We need our leaders to use real planning tools and not unproven foregone rhetoric to make their decisions.

Improving school overcapacity can be done by restricting residential development, redistricting schools more often or building and renovating schools. The county council and county executive can implement the first possibility, the school system the second, and all are needed for the third.

It is too time-consuming and expensive for the school system to fix crowded schools alone, especially now.

To not use county regulations as planning tools to delay residential construction in the most crowded school areas, like CB1 would have promoted, is passing the literal buck.

Speaking of bucks, there was also a disappointing vote at the state level this year.

For decades, PG County has prohibited developer contributions to the county executive and county council. For years, many have clamored for Howard County to do the same. It was proposed to have PG’s restriction apply statewide, but instead, the Maryland General Assembly overturned it! Only one Howard County legislator voted to not undo the PG ban on this conflict of interest funding, delegate Jen Terrasa. Delegates Terri Hill and Trent Kittleman were absent for that vote.

At this stressful time, people look to our elected officials to protect our quality of life. That can only happen in an effective and fair way by putting community interests over special interests and valuing facts over donations.

As we prepare for the new “normal,” can we finally do this? We can embrace this hope, while we wait to embrace each other again.

Lisa Markovitz, MSF, is president of the Maryland civic/political group, The People’s Voice.

YOUR TURN

Share your views on this month’s My Turn. Submissions must be signed, include a phone number and email address. Please keep your comment to 250 words or less and send them to info@bizmonthly.com

Keep your customer confidence during crisis

Business leaders have a plan for almost everything, but one thing none of us had a plan for is the arrival of a pandemic that would relegate nearly everyone to their homes. Right now, our main priority should be to keep ourselves and our loved ones healthy, but what about our businesses?

Those who are able have moved to an entirely remote workforce or have revised their business plans to allow for greater social distancing. Other businesses have significantly diminished or entirely suspended their operations to comply with social distancing measures.

Regardless of how your business has been affected, we are all experiencing a disruption that we never planned for. Now that we’re in it, we’ve already begun to develop creative business strategies to help us grow throughout this process even if the doors aren’t open.

Now is the time to stand out as a pillar of trust in the business community. I suggest these simple methods for maintaining consumer confidence throughout this crisis.

Leverage your online presence

Whether you currently have a significant online presence or not, now is a perfect time to build it. Share what you’re doing to support other businesses and illustrate how you’re keeping in touch with your employees or planning for the future of your business.

Whether you’re a florist, a hairdresser or an interior designer, you have knowledge and expertise that people want. Offer tips to home-bound workers for creating a



**BBB
ADVICE**
by Angie Barnett

“Now is the time to stand out as a pillar of trust in the business community”

workspace conducive to productivity or suggest methods for keeping your hair healthy while under quarantine.

Don’t wear yourself out but do keep your presence sustained. Remind your clients that you’re thinking of them, and you’ll be there for them once it’s safe to gather again.

Find creative ways of giving back

Show your community that you lead with trust and compassion. Whether you are fortunate enough to be able to support your community, there is a lot that we can do to help one another that doesn’t rely on financial support alone.

At Better Business Bureau of Greater Maryland, we are

keeping consumers informed about the latest insidious methods that scammers are using to take advantage of the coronavirus crisis through regular scam alerts.

We have also created a resource center where businesses can access useful state and local resources in addition to new programs, we are offering to help support businesses through this time.

Share your strategies

Many essential businesses are still hard at work. Emergency roof repairs and plumbing debacles stop for nothing, not even a pandemic. If you’re one of those essential employees still working during this crisis, share how you’re making it work.

Others can learn from your experiences and your customers will know that you’re doing your best to fulfill your promises while keeping both them and your employees safe.

Above all, stay healthy and stay connected but don’t overwhelm yourself or your followers. Keep your employees and your clients up to date about any changes in operations and provide quick updates about any upcoming events or appointments that may be changed due to the crisis.

Use this time to reflect on the past and prepare for the future and keep your business on consumers’ minds.

Angie Barnett is president and CEO of the Better Business Bureau of Greater Maryland.