



Maryland Municipal League

State of the League Report

July 1, 2007 – June 30, 2008

Challenges/Leadership/Solutions

By Scott A. Hancock, Executive Director

A “Double Dose” of the General Assembly

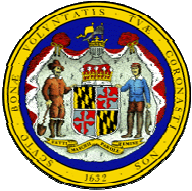
There was much speculation that Governor Martin O'Malley would call a special session of the General Assembly when Stewart B. Cumbo, Councilman from Chesapeake Beach became MML President at the 2007 annual convention in June. The Governor hinted at the strong possibility when he addressed the delegates to the convention on June 27. O'Malley had just wrapped up a state budget educational tour of Maryland explaining why it was important to address the projected 1.7 billion dollar structural deficit sooner rather than later. Not four months after his speech, against the advice of many senior state leaders, the governor called the legislature in to a session that was far from "special".

For 22 long and grueling days, lawmakers grappled with the deficit. At one point it appeared as if municipalities in Maryland would actually be able to break the county monopoly on transfer and recordation tax revenue. Speaker of the House Mike Busch committed to help MML obtain the necessary authority for municipal governments to impose their own transfer tax until negotiations on the state's structural deficit fix became so contentious that adding another controversial wrinkle could jeopardize the fragile legislative deal. We were forced to put our revenue raising initiative on hold for the time being.

Municipalities were initially hopeful that some of the new transportation funding appropriated during the special session would be shared with cities and towns. But because the \$400 million new transportation funding came from one half of one-penny of the sales tax increase, the funding source bypassed the local highway user revenue formula and therefore local governments received no additional funding. It is likely that municipalities will also see an indeterminate dip in income tax revenues beginning in 2009. When the state adjusted existing income tax brackets during the special legislative session, they also included new

income tax exemptions, which will inevitably result in a reduction of municipal income tax revenues.

Just prior to the "not so special" session, the 2007-2008 MML Legislative Committee, under the able leadership of Chairman James B. Kraft, Councilman from Baltimore City and Vice Chair Johnie L. Higgs, Sr., Councilman from Seat Pleasant, chose two overall legislative priorities to present to the membership at the fall conference in Greenbelt; statewide authorization of speed cameras and protecting and enhancing municipal revenues. Mayor Judith "J" Davis and the City of Greenbelt rolled out the red carpet to delegates to the conference, which saw one of the highest attendances at a fall conference in MML history. Lieutenant Governor Anthony Brown was the featured speaker at the Friday luncheon and U.S. Congressman and Majority Leader Steny Hoyer addressed attendees at a reception on Friday afternoon.



Here we go again.....

The regular legislative session convened on January 7th to run its 90-day course following the tumultuous special session. MML staff found legislators tired, still angry about the need to raise taxes during the special session in early November and certainly not in the mood to talk about or even consider other new revenue sources for municipalities during the regular session. However, when the 2008 General Assembly session came to a close on April 7th, the League completed one of the most successful sessions in recent history.

Some of the highlights of the session included adoption of two bills designating all community parks and playgrounds grant monies to municipalities. Previously this Department of Natural Resource grant program had allowed county governments to access the limited grant funds. Also passed was House Bill 1253, which made sweeping changes to the critical areas law while retaining local land use authority. Unfortunately, MML's priority legislation to allow speed cameras in residential areas and school zones failed in the final minutes of the last day of the Session. The legislation ended up in a House and Senate conference committee in the waning hours and conferees completed their work just before the required adjournment of the legislature. The legislation simply ran out of time.

The MML Legislative Committee took a position on a total of 55 bills. Of the 37 bills supported by the League, 16 pieces of legislation passed. More importantly, of the 18 bills opposed by MML only one bill passed and it underwent significant amendment to address the harmful affect of the legislation on municipalities.



MML Banner Cities

The 2007-2008 Communications Committee Chair Wendi W. Peters, Councilmember from Mount Airy and Vice Chair Laschelle Miller, Administrator from Leonardtown shepherded the brand new Banner City/Town program to a successful first year conclusion. Fourteen cities and towns earned MMLs first ever Banner City/Town designation including Bel Air, Brentwood, Gaithersburg, Greenbelt, Havre de Grace, Laurel, Leonardtown, Middletown, Mount Airy, Mount Rainier, Perryville, Rising Sun, Somerset and Williamsport. MML President Stewart Cumbo and I had the pleasure of presenting Banner City/Town banners and plaques to all winners during chapter meetings or city/town hall meetings. This unique program encourages member participation in MML activities, programs and events and is the highest recognition awarded by MML to member municipalities.



Challenges - Leadership - Solutions

MML's 2008 annual convention in June set an all time exhibit hall record and featured a successful second year of the popular *Commerce Day* affording city/town staff not normally in attendance at the convention the opportunity to visit the exhibitors without advance registration for a one day period.

Seven towns applied for and received training grants to attend the 2008 convention this year. This is the fourth year that MML has accepted applications from eligible member towns for scholarships to allow up to two attendees per municipality to attend the convention. MML has always found that once individuals can experience first hand the many advantages of attending MML's premier training and networking event, they tend to return in subsequent years. Special congratulations to Convention Planning Chair Bruce A. Wahl, Council Vice President from Chesapeake Beach and Vice Chairs Jerry Hampton, Director of the Office of Code Enforcement, Hyattsville and Charlina Watson, Councilmember, Bladensburg for their contributions to a highly successful 2008 convention.



Of Note:

- The *If I Were Mayor* Essay Contest for 2008 drew 2,371 entries representing 92 schools statewide. Lieutenant Governor Brown recognized the eleven winners during an award ceremony in early June.

- MML's successful Corporate Partner program entered its third year seeing a nearly 16% increase in participation. In FY 2008, MML was pleased to approve Corporate Partner applications from Citigroup Smith Barney, Council, Baradel, Kosmerl and Nolan, P.A. and Malcolm Pirnie/Red Oak Consulting.
- MML began a long term project of creating a municipal library at the headquarters in Annapolis attempting to gather the most comprehensive collection of histories written about Maryland cities and towns. At the end of the fiscal year, 31 municipalities had submitted entries to the library project.
- As a result of the passage of House Bill 773 during the 2007 General Assembly session, MML was allocated two seats on the state-created Smart Growth Task Force charged with making recommendations for ways to enhance Maryland's smart growth regulations. Immediate Past President David E. Carey, Commissioner, Bel Air and City of Laurel Director of Economic Development Karl D. Brendle both serve as MML's representatives to this important group.
- In response to the great interest expressed by municipal officials across the state, MML and the Municipal Code Enforcement and Zoning Officials Association sponsored an *Overcrowding of Residential Housing Forum* in mid March. The forum focused on the issues that were identified in a survey sent to member municipalities. Experts were on hand to facilitate a discussion on the topic.
- MML convened a new constituency group during the year by forming a group of City/Town Planners to discuss smart growth challenges and to provide feedback in anticipation of the Smart Growth Task Force Report at the end of 2008. The planners group continues to meet regularly and has contributed greatly to the dialogue at MML.

You Create Our Success

MML continues to represent the interests of Maryland's 157 cities and towns and two special taxing districts thanks to strong participation and cooperation from city and town leaders from across the state. The association's success is a direct result of the commitment of its members. Thank you for your service to your association. It is with one voice that 157 Maryland Cities and Towns speak and are heard.