

## **Talbot County Taxpayers Association FY 2009 Summary Issues**

### **Public Safety Concerns: Volunteer Resources and Planning**

- Changing demographics, population growth, and personal commitments are challenging the availability of Public Safety volunteers, a result which could necessitate use of some limited number of fire company career staff in the very near future.
- Once career staff are deployed to support our volunteer system, a clearly developed operational chain of command must be implemented to ensure uniform service delivery and proper organizational management within Talbot's combined career and volunteer service provider system.
- Demands on the County's combined fire and rescue system will increase as the population grows. Services such as ladder companies, heavy rescue, advanced and basic life support, water tankers, new stations, and new apparatus must be added to meet growing demands.
- The construction of campus-like facilities, multi-story buildings, assisted living facilities, large single-family dwellings, townhouse communities and other large facilities is creating new demands for innovative and proactive fire suppression.
- Planning for mitigation of natural and man-made disasters, to include prospective acts of terrorism, remains a key focus of the Office of Emergency Management. Responsible and collaborative regional planning efforts must continue to ensure safe and successful special events coordination with sponsors and agencies.
- Talbot County needs a comprehensive Fire and Rescue Service Plan with which to guide future budget development and service delivery goals.
- A Strategic Plan is needed that links a combined fire and rescue system service plan and the County's budgetary process, providing measurable goals for program development and implementation.
- Implement the Federal grant-supported respiratory protection program, which is mandated by State and Federal regulations for using, maintaining, and testing self-contained breathing apparatus for fire and rescue components.
- Conduct 150 fire and rescue training classes and programs; organize a recruit training program and graduate an estimated 50 recruits over the next 3 years.
- Implement a Talbot County Evacuation Assistance Registry (TEAR) to quickly identify those requiring assistance who are living in evacuation zones.
- Gather additional Geospatial Information System (GIS) data layers for use in the County's EOC / 911 Center to ensure road class and speed limits for automated dispatch of responders to incidents is consistent with best practices and safety.

### **Public Safety Concerns: Law Enforcement**

The Sheriff is a constitutional officer by virtue of the Maryland Constitution, Article IV, Section 44, elected every four years, and has responsibilities outlined by the General Assembly in the form of State statutes. The Sheriff and Sheriff's deputies have criminal and civil jurisdiction and are empowered to enforce the laws of the State of Maryland, and the ordinances of Talbot County. These powers may be exercised on any property within Talbot County.

- Population growth within Talbot continues to create significant law enforcement shortfalls with regard to adequate response throughout the county.
- Staffing levels are having difficulty keeping pace with the County's growth and have fallen below the levels needed to reduce response times and caseloads while expanding community policing.
- Proposed openings of new community-based substations will require additional resources.
- An anticipated increase in the number of local inmates requires future expansion of the County's Adult Detention Center and its associated staffing.
- Increasing workloads are driving the need for additional support staff to handle administrative tasks while ensuring sworn resources are committed to street duties.
- Implementing a Public Safety Master Plan with concomitant identification of funding is critical.
- There is no Law Enforcement Capital Improvement Program (LECIP) for future budgetary consideration.
- Consideration should be given to rationalizing our County's law enforcement resources into a single resource pool under the leadership and management of a single law enforcement authority. This individual would be a direct report to the County Council. The Office of the Sheriff should be reorganized to meet only those constitutionally mandated tasks associated with court and detention matters. Law enforcement resources currently funded by the towns and those of the county should be folded into a unified force and distributed throughout the county at appropriate sub-stations. This is the most economical way to meet both public safety response needs and the need to find more efficient means for future funding.

### **Parks & Recreation Concerns: Hog Neck Golf Course (HNGC)**

- A feasibility study should be undertaken to assess the continuing financial viability of the HNGC as a publicly resourced facility under the purview of the County.
- More than 190 golf courses are now within the same 200 mile radius of Easton that was the original rationale for a "Championship" course on the "Alton" property. At the time the property was donated there did not exist a championship-quality course within 200 miles of Easton – the tables have now turned.
- Given the present costs for personal transportation (with no expectation of any substantial decrease) and other related costs for recreation, we believe annually subsidizing operation costs of the course is not a prudent use of limited taxpayer dollars and that funds presently used for this purpose would be better used for other County priorities.
- There are several professional golf course management companies that should be approached to ascertain if they would assume responsibility for course operation and modernization at their expense while paying a lease fee to the County.
- If no such opportunity materializes, consideration should be given to closing the course and allowing the facility to revert to other recreational uses such as a large game park in keeping with the Alton donation.

- Barring favorable consideration of the above suggestions; as a minimum, we firmly believe the existing 9-Hole Executive course should be closed to ensure operating expenditure containment and put a halt to continued financial losses.