



MESSAGE FROM THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR



The Chamber and the Eastern Baltimore County Task Force

As a long-time advocate for responsible development in eastern Baltimore County, the Chesapeake Gateway Chamber has lent its support for many projects, including the new developments of Greenleigh and Tradepoint Atlantic and the revitalization of areas like Essex.

Three years ago, a dedicated group of community leaders began a grassroots effort to address issues in Essex, including vacant homes and businesses, rat infestation, drug use, crime, graffiti, trash, tree and shrub overgrowth, and other problems. From these initial meetings, a new committee was created in 2017 by the Chamber called the Eastern Baltimore County Task Force. Task Force leadership includes co-chairmen Cliff O'Connell from Cliff's Hi-Tech Auto Body Shop and Sam Weaver from Weaver's Marine Service. Task Force members include Andy Wasmer of J&H Tires, former Police Chief Jim Johnson, retired attorney Bob Romadka, Earl Oxley from The AIMS Group, and John Gontrum from Whiteford, Taylor & Preston LLP. Laurie Hay and Krystle Patchak from Baltimore County's Department of Planning have been of tremendous assistance and are regular participants in Task Force meetings. In addition to being the Chamber's Executive Director, I serve as Program Manager for the Task Force's streetscape initiatives.

What is being done by the Task Force to help revitalize Essex?

The Eastern Baltimore County Task Force, with significant help and grant funding from Baltimore County government and the State of Maryland, has accomplished much over the last two years to begin to improve conditions in downtown Essex for local businesses and residents. Here is a list of improvements which were made possible through this team effort:

Phase 1 – Eliminating Blight (will continue well into the future)

Replaced damaged or missing metal trash cans that go in the green liners along Eastern Blvd.

Encouraged businesses to improve their dumpster habits and clean up trash near their businesses; citations issued when they did not comply; volunteer clean-up scheduled for this fall

Cut down trees along the Blvd. (largely dead trees and ones which had outgrown the area where they were planted, as the roots were causing damage to the sidewalks and creating tripping hazards) and cut back trees, shrubs and overgrowth, especially in the alleys, so emergency vehicles can pass through

Cleaned up vacant properties

Encouraged businesses and homeowners to paint over or clean off graffiti

After a "sweep" from Baltimore County, abandoned vehicles, unsafe structures and other large debris from behind businesses and homes were removed.

Successfully fought to have Baltimore County initiate a rat attack pilot program, including public education, code enforcement, extermination and an extra trash pick-up. This program now is being utilized in other parts of Baltimore County as well.

Convinced Baltimore County to repave an alley which had horrible potholes and broken concrete

Worked with the owner of the building housing Social Services to clean the black mold off of the building and sidewalk and keep the area clean of debris

Phase 2 – Beautification (in conjunction with Phase 1; accomplished largely through grants from Baltimore County and the State of Maryland)

Obtained a Sustainable Community designation for Essex, which provides access to a comprehensive package of financial and other resources that support strategies for community development, revitalization and sustainability

Hired a contractor to fix the brickwork on planters along Eastern Blvd. and at a bus stop

Installed parking blocks in the parking spaces to protect the planters from future damage

Replaced rotting wood on 32 benches on all the cement planters in the business district

Purchased 20 large terra cotta pots and hired a landscaper to fill with flowers, plants and shrubs and maintain them for the last two years (water, fertilizer, mulch, weeding, etc.)

The landscaper also replaced old soil and planted, fertilized and mulched flowers, grasses and shrubs in 26 small and large square planters in the downtown Essex area. They also maintain those planters.

With the assistance of a team of landscape architects and state highway representatives, designed the gateway gardens (near the Essex cube and by Eastern Blvd. and Old Eastern Ave.). The cube garden has been weeded, planted with beautiful plants and flowers, fertilized, and mulched. For the other garden, a volunteer repaired and painted the Essex-Middle River sign, and this garden now has nice plants and flowers and has been mulched and fertilized. Both gardens are being regularly maintained.

Worked with Baltimore County to improve lighting along the Blvd. Baltimore County has inspected all the lamp posts and determined that most of them need to be replaced. These lamp posts, globes and lighting have been ordered, and new ones should be installed by this winter.

With State grant money, the Neighborhood Design Center hired a designer, who created a logo and designs to go on banners on the new lamp posts.

Identified issues in Cox's Point Park, many of which now have been addressed by Baltimore County, including replacing/repairing 8 grills, repairing 4 picnic tables and 3 benches, replacing barrier posts along the roadway, patching part of the parking lot, and repairing the pier in the back of the park. They also are addressing the issue regarding the gates and posts leading into the park and cutting the grass once a week, weather permitting. Boy Scouts added fishing line recyclable containers in 4 locations. We are hoping that signage and additional issues will be addressed by Baltimore County Recreation and Parks before year-end.

Signs reminding people not to litter have been designed and will be placed on all trash cans this fall.

New signs identifying public parking will be printed and installed this fall.

A façade program for businesses will be launched in late 2019, providing businesses with financial support for improving their storefronts.

Helped Our Lady of Mt. Carmel obtain grants to renovate their community center and design and build a new ball field for the community's use.

How can you help?

Years ago, the residents and business owners of Essex were proud of their beautiful waterfront community and were eager to tell visitors that their town was the "Gateway to the Chesapeake." Many of these individuals still live and work in this community and want it to be a place where future generations choose to raise their families. There is still much work to be done, yet there is hope, as the number of involved citizens and businesses continues to increase. Individuals who see something or someone suspicious are saying something. Homeowners and businesses are beautifying their properties and picking up trash that pollutes our neighborhoods and draws rats. Community associations have offered to help the Task Force in implementing streetscape projects.

What ideas do you have? What projects are you and your neighbors willing to complete? The Task Force wants to hear your thoughts and can use your help. Contact the Eastern Baltimore County Task Force at ebctf@chesapeakechamber.org.

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