



**County Executive Pittman's  
State of County Address  
December 10, 2024**

**“Healing Wounds and Building Trust”**

Each year I report directly to our residents on what I perceive the state of our county to be.

Are we managing our finances responsibly, facilitating future economic prosperity for all, managing growth and development in accordance with Plan2040? Are we contributing positively to the social determinants of good health, things like housing, transportation, parks, public safety, and education?

These are important questions, and I'll answer them.

But the bigger question we must ask ourselves in these post-pandemic years is are we recovering? Are we healing the wounds left by the deaths of 1.2 million Americans and 1,147 of our county residents? Are we healing from the pandemic isolation, schoolchildren's loss of social connection, supply chain-driven inflation, trauma at the low end of the economic scale as wealth moved to the top, and elevation of conspiracy theories into mainstream politics?

I often quote disaster recovery expert Dr. George Everly's words from one of our early pandemic virtual town halls. "Division delays recovery," he warned, and he was right.

The world and our country have yet to heal from the impacts of the pandemic, largely because we remain victims of division. Victims, I say, because wedges were driven between us by forces outside our communities.

But the daily work of delivering local government services, as mundane as it may seem, can and will heal us. It will heal us, and it will build the trust that we need - both between one another, and between our residents and their government institutions.

So that - healing wounds and building trust - is the ultimate goal of the work I will now review.

## **FINANCES**

Let's start with money - your money that supports county services.

The government of Anne Arundel County is in better financial condition than the state of Maryland and than most counties. We can thank our increasing property values, our residents' increasing income, and the fiscal discipline that county government practiced before, during, and since the pandemic for that condition.

But when you come to one of our eight Budget Town Halls in January and February, you'll be presented with revenue and expense projections that leave little room for new spending, and then you'll hear passionate pleas for greater investment in very worthy initiatives. That's the reality of governing everywhere.

This year's budget proposal to the County Council will be made after updating revenue projections, listening to residents at town halls, hearing from department heads and agencies, and consulting individually with all seven members of the Council. It's a collaborative process led by our brilliant team in the Budget Office, and it's driven by shared values.

## **ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT**

When I meet each year with the bond rating agencies, they look beyond current finances and project future economic growth. All three of our agencies awarded us triple AAA ratings again this year because that picture looks strong. Businesses are expanding. Visitors and residents are spending. Our economy is growing.

Economic growth is a good thing if it delivers higher wages to support our families, and more revenue to invest in schools, police, fire, and public infrastructure.

That's why our economic development agency is tasked not only with growing our economy, but in doing it in ways that deliver public benefit and, as Governor Moore often says, leave no one behind.

The Inclusive Ventures Program is now graduating three business-owner cohorts each year, an effort is in the works to grow new childcare businesses in coordination with our Childcare Taskforce, and a new Economic Development Strategic Plan is underway to better align the agency's economic growth efforts with public benefit.

## **DEVELOPMENT AND LAND USE**

What the residents of our county will not support, however, is environmentally destructive or poorly planned sprawl development in the name of economic growth.

We are fortunate to be a place that businesses, including real estate developers, want to operate. That fact allows us to enforce environmental protections, adequate public facilities laws, fair housing initiatives, and smart growth principles without losing the investors we need to move forward.

By engaging the public in the planning process, and all stakeholders in the establishment of our regulations, we have maintained public support for implementation of Plan2040, our award-winning smarter, greener, more equitable development plan.

I highly recommend that you read our [Plan2040 Annual implementation reports](#), but I want to take a moment to focus on both the affordable housing and the conservation aspects of that work. Some people believe those things aren't compatible, but we're proving that they are.

## **HOUSING**

Our residents, our elected officials, and county government have come a long way since 2015, when a County Council majority rolled back legislation that allowed workforce housing in neighborhoods of opportunity.

The most recent Anne Arundel Community College public opinion survey says that housing affordability has risen to become the second ranking concern of our residents, and while most of our pro-housing legislation has been passed along partisan lines, the success of the work and demand for it by local businesses is broadening its appeal.

We have quadrupled our pace of affordable housing production, because we

1. brought back the workforce housing density bonus,
2. reopened school feeder areas with redistricting and new legislation to prevent overcrowding, and
3. most importantly, we created an affordable housing trust fund paid for with real estate transfer taxes on properties that sell for over \$1 million.

And we're not done. We have legislation passed or in the pipeline

1. to require a percentage of new units in subdivisions of ten or more homes to be moderately priced,
2. to allow homeowners to build accessory dwelling units, and
3. to remove restrictions on building new housing in high-density commercial areas.

Possibly our greatest housing challenge is to preserve the affordable units that exist today, and protect the families living in them.

We are working with the Housing Authority of the City of Annapolis on a recovery plan to improve and protect its subsidized units, and with our Department of Public Works on a wastewater treatment plan for the mobile home parks along the Patuxent River in south county,

so that they can continue housing hundreds of our essential workers and seniors for years to come.

I don't buy the argument that we'll solve our housing problems by increasing the supply of luxury homes. Those will be purchased by wealthy people from all across the mid-Atlantic region who don't do the essential jobs that make our county thrive.

Our next housing initiatives MUST be targeted to our essential workers.

Planning for those efforts is underway, and you can share your ideas by participating in our [five year consolidated housing plan](#).

## **TRAFFIC**

Maybe the greatest obstacle to responsibly addressing our housing shortage is legitimate concerns about traffic.

The two large multifamily developments on Riva Road have generated a lot of traffic concerns, because getting past Annapolis High School and the county and school system offices is already a struggle at peak hours.

But our Department of Public Works Traffic Engineering team made that a whole lot easier in recent months. The new signal optimization system has cut 4pm travel time nearly in half, and a forthcoming left turn restriction will reduce it further.

We're also adding wider sidewalks for bike and pedestrian traffic, and a transit center at the Park and Ride lot on Harry S. Truman Parkway. With the addition of more frequent transit, and more pedestrian infrastructure, vehicle traffic counts from the apartments will decrease.

A lot of our traffic is on state roads, but we've pitched our transportation improvements to the state so effectively that five of the six top-ranked state projects are in Anne Arundel County, and we're winning federal grants to help pay for them.

Throughout the county, we're moving away from sprawl development and toward multimodal transportation that starts in town centers. That's how we accommodate growth responsibly.

## **GREEN INFRASTRUCTURE**

It wasn't until 2021 that we created, and the next year that the County Council approved, our first Green Infrastructure Master Plan. We needed to recognize the long-term economic and public health value of nature in our county, and establish goals not only for conservation of contiguous and ecologically essential land, but also for the greening of our gray urban spaces.

We've accelerated that work and made that land accessible to our residents through the expanded capital budget at Recreation and Parks, and in partnership with nonprofit land conservation organizations.

Crownsville Hospital Memorial Park, Severn Danza Park addition, Tanyard Springs Park, Bacon Ridge additions, Saltworks Monticello properties, Elktonia Carr's Beach, the McNew property, Jug Bay expansion, and Quiet Waters Retreat.

These are just a sampling of the larger and better known acquisitions we've recently added to the green inventory or have contracts in place. We are laser focused on other large parcels as well, some of which are being aggressively pursued for sprawl development.

I will note here that the Resilience Authority has become a powerful partner in this work, both in making the case for conservation and in securing outside funding to reduce burden on our taxpayers.

## **EDUCATION**

In recent years, our county's school system has moved from being one of the lowest-paying in the state to becoming one of the first to reach Maryland's Blueprint mandate that all teachers start at no less than \$60,000.

We're seen as one of the few that is moving forward on all five pillars of that Blueprint, and our data is showing that it's working.

But the real credit goes to the taxpayers who have been willing to pay more for what we now get, and to Superintendent Bedell and the Board of Education for doing the hard things, like ending overcrowding through redistricting, improving efficiency throughout the system with best practices in management and teaching, and recognizing that teachers should be allowed to innovate.

I especially want to note that we now have zero bus driver vacancies, and are well below our pre-pandemic teacher vacancy numbers.

Our recent test scores show that our recovery from the pandemic is surpassing most of our peers, and that our clearest progress has been in our Community Schools, the ones with the highest rates of poverty. Those schools now have staff engaging directly with whole families and neighbors, and it's working.

But the part I'm most excited about is the Career Counseling in partnership with Anne Arundel Workforce Development. Students as early as middle school are learning about paths to careers - cool stuff like fire and rescue, teaching, and technology. I know that my dream of being a

veterinarian is what carried me through math and science, and that almost every truly engaged student that I meet has a vision for their future as well.

A good measure of whether our school system is healing wounds and building trust, is results from the recent Board of Education races. Candidates who ran on changing course mostly lost. Candidates who expressed support for the current direction mostly won. So our progress will continue.

## **PUBLIC SAFETY**

As long as governments have existed, they have had a fundamental obligation to protect the people they serve, from those who refuse to abide by their laws, from fires and accidents, and from natural disasters.

To deliver on that obligation, this administration has done more than talk the talk. We have increased our investment in Police by 52%, Fire by 71%, and Emergency Management by 76%. Those dollars have been spent on additional personnel, compensation, and equipment and technology that make our lifesaving work more effective.

The quality of our public safety workforce today, and the tools they are working with - the new fire stations, new engines and fire boats, new radio systems, new police training and operations facilities, and our new Real Time Information Center - are actually saving lives.

And so is the innovative work we are doing both inside and outside our detention centers. Our re-entry hub at Ordnance Road, and the full menu of re-entry services being coordinated at Community Action Agency, are turning former offenders into productive members of our community. That's a smart investment.

But what might be the most cost-effective of our new public safety initiatives is our violence interrupters. Our Department of Health led Gun Violence Intervention Team has partnered with neighborhood organizations to hire and train locally respected residents in the Severn area around Meade Village, and in Annapolis in and around Harbour House and Eastport Terrace. These brave men and women have directly engaged with residents who are most likely to be both victims and perpetrators of gun violence, and mediated conflicts that we know would otherwise have resulted in bloodshed.

This work is healing wounds and building trust in places where it's needed most.

## **CROWNSVILLE**

Any discussion of healing wounds in our county must start and end with the magic we are making at Crownsville Hospital Memorial Park.

The Draft Master Plan captures the spirit of healing that our residents called for - the telling of history, nature, active and passive recreation, agriculture, education, and direct services.

As we face the fiscal challenges that this project will present in the coming years, we must not lose sight of its power to heal us.

## **PUBLIC TRUST**

I will close with the question of trust. Are we building it - between groups that have been divided and between government and the people it serves?

I believe that we are. The performance of our agencies, the transparency of our deliberations, and the stakeholder engagement that we invite in our decision-making is getting noticed. People know where we stand, and they know how to engage. Those things invite trust in government.

Our work to push back against the wedges that divide us is also being felt, and being welcomed. Our Office of Equity and Human Rights is carefully navigating this work, seeking always to connect us and never to divide us.

The coming years will bring disruptions, to our lives and to the work of county government. But the state of our county is strong, and by healing wounds and building trust, we will become even stronger.