



Eyes on County Council – March 4, 2025

The March 4th agenda included two sessions, a presentation by Delaware Department of Transportation (DeIDOT) in the morning and the general meeting in the afternoon. The DeIDOT discussion was enlightening – providing clarity into the workings of this critical department. However, the public attendance at the presentation was disappointing. There has been extreme frustration regarding our roads and the relationship between DeIDOT and County officials. This was the opportunity to hear directly from the Secretary of DeIDOT and key members of staff.

NOTE: Council will consider three conditional use applications regarding the Northstar development at its March 11th meeting – 1:00pm at the County Administrative Office, 2 The Circle Georgetown.

DeIDOT Presentation and Discussion – 9:00am

Attendees included members of Council and Planning & Zoning and related staff and from DeIDOT: Shante Hastings – Secretary, Lanie Clymer – Finance, Mark Luszcz – Transportation Solutions, John Sissone – Delaware Transit Corp. and Pamela Steinbach – Planning.

The presentation focused on key areas of DeIDOT's work including Safety, Funding, Capital Transportation Program (CTP), Transportation Improvement Districts (TID), Transit, Corridor Capacity Preservation Program (CCPP) and Transportation Planning in Sussex. The Secretary and her staff took questions from County Council and other officials during the course of the presentation.

Key takeaways:

- Secretary Hastings opened her comments with an emphatic statement: “We are friends and we look forward to working together!”
- Safety is a high priority, DE has high pedestrian fatality rate
- Interesting stats:
 - DeIDOT is responsible for 89% of public roads in Delaware
 - 238 miles of sidewalks/37 miles of bike paths
 - 1,781 bridges and one ferry
 - Over 1,200 traffic signals
 - 3,500 miles drainage swales, 1,300 storm drains, 600 storm water facilities
 - 1,150,424 DMV transactions annually
 - 80 million toll transactions annually
 - 858,000 paratransit trips (elderly and disabled individual service)
- Annual Revenues – \$1,049.6 million: Federal Funds 32%, DMV 24%, I-95 Tolls 13%, Motor Fuel Tax 13%, Bond Proceeds 8%, Rt. 1 Tolls 6%, Other 4%

- Transfer taxes are NOT part of DeIDOT revenue
- Developer's contributions (TID's) not included in DeIDOT numbers – direct spending
- Motor fuel tax funds flat recently – impact of electric vehicles
- \$100 million of federal funding is currently “on pause”
- Projections for federal funding going forward are “conservative” based on what is currently happening in DC
- Annual Spending - \$1,049.6 million: Operating 45%, 31% Federal Capital and 24% State Capital
 - Sussex will receive about 30% of DeIDOT funding for Fiscal Years 2025-2030
 - Project Funding for Sussex has grown over the last five years from \$102 to \$178 million
 - Cost for one mile of a roadway can run \$7 to \$9 million (engineering, utilities, etc.)
 - Programs are developed based on needs and priorities
 - 50% of federal funds must be spent on federal highway projects, per federal law
- The Capital Transportation Program (CTP) is a rolling six-year planning tool, updated every two years. More needs than funding!!
 - Multiple steps in a cycle: collect requests, analysis, assess recommendations, ranked, selected projects added to CTP, implementation
 - Developed in cooperation with Metropolitan Planning Organizations (MPO) – plans for urbanized areas as defined by Feds
 - DeIDOT does MPO planning for Sussex, Sussex does not have required density to have an MPO
 - CTP prioritization process weighted to Safety, Operating effectiveness and economics. State and local priorities low on the scale.
- Transportation Improvement Districts (TID) used for long term planning for critical areas.
 - TID's provide the transportation improvements needed to support land development in locations identified as appropriate for development in local Comprehensive Plans.
 - Fourteen TID's statewide, Four in Sussex – Henlopen. Roxanna, Milton and Milford.
 - Henlopen plan includes \$321.6 million improvements within 24 square miles.
 - Roxanna (south east section of Sussex) plan still in development, largest TID area in state (37 sq. miles).
 - Eliminates need for individual Traffic Impact Studies (TIS)
 - The SR1/SR16 overpass project is on track, Hastings defused rumors of project issues
 - Developers contribute to road improvements
- Transit/DART challenged in Sussex due to density issues.
 - Two main concerns: beach/tourist season and rural connections east-west
 - Out of box strategies are being investigated – Uber type bus service being tested in Georgetown.
- Corridor Capacity Preservation Program (CCPP) manages main north-south routes: Route's 1, 113 and 13.
 - The CCPP is designed to maintain the regional importance and preserve the intended function and capacity of existing designated transportation routes within the Program.
 - Five primary goals: • Prevent the need to build an entirely new road on a new alignment. • Minimize the transportation impacts of increased economic growth. •

Maintain an existing road's ability to handle traffic efficiently and safely. • Preserve the ability to make future improvements. • Sort local and through traffic.

- Current priorities: Route 16 in Milton (Bay Bridge traffic), accommodating traffic growth on Route 9 (new land use challenges), Redden Road and others
- Q&A and Discussion:
 - County officials expressed perception that the agency's priorities are to get people in and out of Sussex, rather than supporting Sussex residents
 - Challenges include estimating where next growth will be, hard to keep it within TID's
 - Frustration with timing of project implementations – funding limitations, sourcing contractors, process bottlenecks, environmental issues, etc.
 - Sewer availability is a major factor in the planning and implementation
 - General agreement that DeIDOT and County need to coordinate effectively going forward

General Session – 1:00pm

Public comments:

- Lissa Delaney requested timing of revised Osprey Point site plan. Council replied it is delayed until this summer.
- TJ Hughes, traffic engineer, commented on the morning session regarding the Henlopen TID and delays in implementation. Suggested Council refer to comprehensive plan versus regular zoning.
- Third individual called in and made charges against Council for infringing on his property rights for keeping chickens.

General Housekeeping Items:

- Council approved unanimously two separate existing wastewater infrastructure agreements.
- Council approved 5-0 a request for a six-month extension requested by P&Z for the Turnberry application (normal procedure when issue is out of applicant's control).
- Airport Manager made two requests for services contracts, which Council approved both, 5-0. One was a five-year contract to Delta Airport Consultants for engineering services.
- Council approved unanimously the purchase order for the water tank in Millsboro as part of the Inland Bays Loop Project.
- Matt Lloyd made comment regarding the morning session with DeIDOT indicating its positive results.

Public Hearings:

- **Community Block Grant Program (part of Sussex County Government)**
 - Director Brandy Nauman was making request for the 2025 Grant – which the total application was for \$2.4 million. Council provided \$1 million in 2024 – likely assisted from American Rescue Program Assistance, which expired as of 12/31/24. The prior four years annual funding was \$300,000. (We will follow up on actual funding received).

- The primary goal of this program is to preserve the housing stock throughout the County. By rehabilitating substandard homes, it ensures the affordability of those homes in the future.
- The Department's funding comes from the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development, the Delaware State Housing Authority, and the Sussex County Council.
- The program guidelines narrow eligibility to those families of low to moderate incomes (at or below 80% of the Area Median Income for Sussex County). The home must be the homeowner's primary residence and must be a permanent resident of Sussex County.
- Major work is providing emergency rehabilitation to lower income homes in disrepair. These fixes allow homeowners to pass inspections and remain in their homes. Last year 126 homes were "saved".
- Council unanimously approved the issuance of a \$9.963 million general obligation bond for the septic elimination project for the Warwick Park Phase II (community in Millsboro). This sewer collection project will significantly reduce nitrogen pollution. Upon successful completion, more than half of these funds will be excused by the EPA.
- Two sewer annexation projects (Millville and Angola Neck locations) were approved. These will allow connection to Sussex sewer district.
- Three conditional use applications were addressed:
 - Change of zone to allow creation of four building parcels (BR-1 neighborhood business to AR-1). The owner had a portion of his property for his commercial business (funeral home) he was not utilizing and wants to build four homes for family members. Council approved 5-0 based on the testimony and P&Z's positive recommendation.
 - Land owner in Seaford area applied for conditional use for constructing a solar panel field on part of his 49.7 acre farmland. Motion was deferred unanimously.
 - Small business owner requested a change of zone on his five acre business to allow for his landscape business. Motion was rejected by a 4-1 vote (Lloyd voted yes) as request appeared inappropriate for this area of mostly individual homes and past behaviors of the applicant.