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MEMORANDUM

TO: David J. Deutsch
City Manager, City of Bowie

FROM: Len Lucchi, Esquire

DATE: March 12, 2009

RE: General Assembly Update

With the General Assembly entering its third trimester, most of the bill introductions and hearings have occurred, while most of the decisions on legislation still lie ahead. A key date is Tuesday, March 24, 2009, by which the standing committees are expected to vote on all bills pending before them. Here is a summary of the pending legislative matters affecting the City:

1. **State Budget** – What was expected to be a \$500 million decrease in state revenue estimates became a \$1.1 billion decrease when the Board of Revenue Estimates released its revenue projections on March 11. Overnight, this changed the paradigm for the legislative budget committees. Previously, the question was which budget cuts recommended by staff would be adopted. Now, it appears that all of the recommended cuts may be adopted, plus more. Among the recommended cuts is one to reduce highway user revenues to counties and cities by 16.7 percent. Already included in the cuts was a 1 percent decrease in income tax revenue to counties and cities to replenish the piggy back tax reserve fund used to help balance the state budget.
2. **Bond Bills** – Next to Super Bowl Sunday, the most eagerly awaited day in Annapolis is Bond Bill Saturday, the day when the budget committees hear funding pitches for worthy local capital projects from throughout the State. Among the proposals pending this year are ones to contribute to the Bowie Police Dispatch Center, a concession stand for the South Bowie Boys and Girls Club,

and a grant to the Bowie Boys and Girls Club for artificial turf at the City-owned Whitemarsh Park.

3. **Speed Cameras** – Bills to allow local jurisdictions to utilize radar speed cameras are awaiting a vote in their respective committees. There is discussion regarding limiting the scope of the legislation to work zones and school zones. There are also county-specific radar speed camera bills, but they are in a holding pattern pending the outcome of the statewide proposals.
4. **Program Open Space** – Although Open Space funds have been used for indoor facilities in the past, the Department of Natural Resources proposed legislation to authorize such use in the law. Unfortunately, the bill has been bogged down by multiple proposed amendments and its fate is uncertain. Meanwhile, the Board of Public Works has placed a hold on funding indoor Open Space projects, pending the outcome of the bill.
5. **Environmental Standing** – The Community Environmental Protection Act of 2009, sponsored by powerful committee chairs in both the House and the Senate, would greatly expand who can contest and appeal a myriad of state and local environmental decisions. It is opposed by the Maryland Municipal League, the Maryland Association of Counties, the Maryland Association of Realtors and the Home Builders Association of Maryland. The bill also has significant support, but with state agencies stating that it would significantly increase state expenditures, it is not expected to pass.
6. **Cable Franchise Fees** – A bill to transfer the right to collect cable franchise fees from counties and cities to the state was introduced by the Chair of the House Ways and Means Committee, even though such fees are compensation for the use of local rights of ways. The bill is not expected to pass, but is part of a national effort by telecommunications companies to streamline the collection of telecommunications taxes and fees through central collection by state governments.
7. **County and Municipal Revenues** – A bill to establish a Task Force to Study the County and Municipal Revenue Structure is stalled in both House and Senate standing committees, as the General Assembly's year-round staff has stated that it does not have sufficient funding to staff the usual complement of summer-study task forces. The Task Force would be charged with examining revenue sources used by counties and municipalities in other states and making recommendations to the 2010 Session of the General Assembly.

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