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National Harbor Celebrates Cherry Blossom Season With More Special Activities and Entertainment From March 21 to April 12

Early Blooming Cherry Trees Provide a Beautiful Backdrop

By PRESS OFFICER
National Harbor

NATIONAL HARBOR, Md. (March 11, 2026)—National Harbor, a 350-acre waterfront destination, is a prime location in the Washington, D.C. region to see spectacular (early) blooming cherry trees along the Potomac River. Visitors can enjoy more than 200 Okame trees along the 1.2 mile waterfront trail. (The trees are just starting to bloom!)

Cherry Blossom celebrations will take place March 21 to April 12 with National Harbor also serving as an official participant of the National Cherry Blossom Festival. Seasonal celebrations will be filled with en-

tertainment, food and drink specials, classes and more. Some of the classes and offerings include a bonsai class for beginners, origami classes, kite making classes, Muse Paintbar classes, Wigenton Candle Co. classes, cherry blossom buttercream cake decorating and Japanese whiskey tasting (at Gaylord National). These classes require additional costs and advance registration so please be sure to visit the National Harbor website for exact dates, times, cost, locations and to register.

The annual Sakura Sunday festival, an official participating

See BLOSSOM Page A3



PHOTO COURTESY OF NATIONAL HARBOR

Explore the Patuxent Watershed: 2026 Recreation Season Opened Sunday, March 15

Watershed Recreation Areas Open from Sunrise to Sundown March 15–November 30

By PRESS OFFICER
WSSC Water

LAUREL, Md. (March 13, 2026)—Outdoor recreation returns to WSSC Water's Patuxent Watershed as the 2026 season opened Sunday, March 15. Visitors can once again explore more than 6,000 acres of protected land and reservoirs, with permitted activities including boating, fishing, hiking, horseback riding and picnicking from sunrise to sundown.

The watershed spans across Montgomery, Prince George's and Howard coun-

ties and includes the Triadelphia and T. Howard Duckett reservoirs, which serve as drinking water sources for WSSC Water.

Due to low water levels, some boat ramps will be closed until levels rise. Visitors are encouraged to call 301-206-4FUN or the Brighton Dam Visitor Center at 301-206-7485 for the latest information.

All watershed visitors who are 16 years or older must have a valid permit, which can be purchased online at wsscwater.com/watershed or in person at the Brighton Dam Visitor Center, 2 Brighton

Dam Road, Brookville, Maryland 20833. The Visitor Center is open daily from 7 a.m. to sundown, including weekends. To reach staff at the center, please call 301-206-7485. Complimentary permits are available for visitors 65 or older, active military and disabled veterans.

WSSC Water is the proud provider of safe, seamless and satisfying water services, making the essential possible every day for our neighbors in Montgomery and Prince George's counties.

Proposed FY 2027 Budget Presented to Prince George's County Council

By PRESS OFFICER
Prince George's County Council Media

On Thursday, March 12, 2026, Prince George's County Executive Aisha Braveboy presented her proposed \$5.9 billion fiscal year 2027 budget to the County Council, representing a \$114 million, or 2%, increase over the county's fiscal year 2026 budget. The FY 2027 budget closes the county's structural deficit through a \$154.3 million increase in General Fund revenue, strategic debt prepayments, and the streamlining of county agencies.

The County Executive's budget proposal places an increased emphasis on education with an allocation of \$2.97 billion to the Board of Education, a \$20.8 million increase from FY 2026. It also provides an increased investment of \$75.1 million in public safety, totaling \$1.1 billion dollars across all agencies. That includes \$453.5 million for the Prince George's County Police Department, up \$32.1 million over last fiscal year, and \$325.9 million for Prince George's County Fire and EMS, up \$11 million. Those proposed FY 2027 allocations include funding for 150 new police recruits and 100 new fire and EMS recruits.

Other budgetary highlights include \$55.5 million for Health and Human Services programs, \$27.6 million for economic growth and development, \$25.5 million for transportation and in-

frastructure, \$204.5 million for the county's Stormwater Management Fund, and \$144.1 million for Prince George's Community College.

Additionally, the County Executive's budget proposal provides funding for several Council priorities, including \$250,000 for a new early autism detection campaign and \$1 million for senior electricity assistance.

"I want to congratulate County Executive Aisha Braveboy on closing a \$155 million structural deficit, while increasing spending in key areas and initiatives across the county," said Council Chair Krystal Oriadha. "That is a huge accomplishment, and I am grateful for the hard work and smart decisions made by the County Executive and her talented staff. This budget proposal, and some of the priorities already funded, represents the unity we as a Council have with the County Executive. As my Council colleagues and I dive into this budget proposal and begin refining it prior to final approval, I feel confident that we will have an amazing, balanced budget that benefits all Prince Georgians."

The Council will now thoroughly analyze the budget, solicit input from the community, and approve a final budget by June 1, 2026. The FY 2027 budget takes effect July 1, 2026.

Governor Moore Highlights \$3 Million in Proposed FY 2027 Budget for Business Revitalization Projects Along Purple Line Corridor

By PRESS OFFICER
Office of the Governor

ANNAPOLIS, Md. (March 9, 2026)—Governor Wes Moore today joined elected leaders at the Flower Theatre in Silver Spring to highlight a \$3 million investment through his Fiscal Year 2027 budget proposal to drive economic development along the Purple Line corridor. The proposed funding supports renovation projects to upgrade storefronts and restore historic buildings—revitalizing local business districts as the Purple Line nears completion.

"We are investing in the Purple Line corridor because you cannot have a competitive state without thriving communities," said Gov. Moore. "When it opens, the Purple Line will not just move our people from point A to point B, it will move entire communities forward. By expanding Montgomery County's Facade Improvement Program, we are strengthening communities, supporting small businesses, and making Maryland more competitive."

The governor's proposed investment supports exterior upgrades for businesses within a half-mile of Montgomery County Purple Line stations—significantly improving the aesthetic appeal of older properties. Facade renovations will foster a more inviting and safe commercial environment, attracting additional private investment and ensuring that local businesses are fully prepared to leverage the economic connectivity provided by the Purple Line.

The funding would be administered by the Montgomery County-wide Facade Improvement Program to support projects in communities such as Long Branch—Maryland's most recently designated Main Street. Past projects supported by the program include Montgomery Housing Partnership's restoration of the historic Flower Theatre, which is part of the organization's revitalization strategy that includes phased facade improvements for surrounding Long Branch businesses near the future Purple Line station.

"As the Purple Line creates new connections and brings more

people into Long Branch—and communities along the corridor—these investments help ensure small, local businesses are not displaced," said Maryland Department of Housing and Community Development Secretary Jake Day. "Facade improvements strengthen commercial districts, attract investment, and help small businesses thrive because a strong downtown tells the story of a strong community."

In addition to physical improvements, the State is continuing to provide direct financial assistance to entrepreneurs most directly impacted by Purple Line construction through the Purple Line Small Business Grant Program. In 2025, the Maryland Department of Transportation awarded \$2 million in grants to nearly 200 small businesses. The program provides direct grants of up to \$50,000 to eligible small businesses for critical expenses such as payroll, rent, utility payments, and marketing.

The Maryland Department of Transportation secured the funding for the Purple Line Small Business Grant Program—launched in February 2025—through a contract re-negotiation with the project's concessionaire, Purple Line Transit Partners. The contract was approved by Maryland's Board of Public Works in March 2024.

The application period for the first round of 2026 grants opened last week. The application can be found on the Maryland OneStop Portal.

"The future Purple Line will serve to connect Marylanders with local businesses, spurring economic development all along the route from New Carrollton to Bethesda," said Maryland Transit Administrator Holly Arnold. "Governor Moore's support for small businesses along the Purple Line, and his commitment to Maryland's transit investments, will help further uplift communities where people want to live, work and shop."

Construction for the Purple Line—a 16-mile light rail line that will connect communities from College Park and New Carrollton in Prince George's County to Bethesda and Silver Spring in Montgomery County—is nearly complete. 88 percent of the track is laid, including all of the track in Prince George's County. All 21 stations



PHOTO COURTESY MARYLAND GOVERNOR'S PRESS OFFICE

On March 9, 2026, Governor Wes Moore joined elected leaders at the Flower Theatre in Silver Spring to highlight a \$3 million investment through his Fiscal Year 2027 budget proposal to drive economic development along the Purple Line corridor.

are under construction, and all 28 light rail vehicles are now onsite. The construction project has been an economic driver for the region with more than 2,000 skilled workers employed throughout its construction phase. The Purple Line project has also paid out more than \$500 million to socially and economically disadvantaged small businesses for the design and construction.

"In District 22, we view the Purple Line as more than just transit—it is a launchpad for local economic opportunity for our people and small businesses," said Delegate Ashanti Martinez. "I look forward to working closely with the Moore-Miller Administration to secure the resources our people need to flourish as construction concludes and as the Purple Line begins to run."

"In partnership with Governor Moore's administration, we are turning a new transit opportunity into a bridge for shared prosperity," said Delegate Nicole Williams. "Our focus remains on ensuring that as this critical project nears completion, we aren't just moving people, but lifting up every community along the route. By partnering with the Moore-Miller Administration, we will continue to make sure that our region's local business hubs experience economic development that our people can feel."

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TOWNS *and* NEIGHBORS

Brandywine-Aquasco by Audrey Johnson 301-922-5384

RIDGELEY ROSENWALD SCHOOL

"Ridgeley School was opened in 1927 as Colored School No. 1 in Election District 13. The small school was located in central Prince George's County in the African American community of Ridgety. A recipient of a Rosenwald Fund grant, the school was one of nearly 5,000 Rosenwald schools built in the south for African American children. The fund provided seed money for the schools, and the local African American community provided the rest with tax revenue, cash, and in-kind donations. Along with a nearby church and society hall, also named Ridgety, the school was one of the focal points of the community until it was closed in 1954. Ridgety was then used as a special education center and as administrative offices."

"Having remained largely intact, the Ridgety School is one of the best examples of a Rosenwald school in Prince George's County. The building originally consisted of two large classrooms (each of which served at least three grades), a central passageway; and an entrance flanked by two cloakrooms. A third classroom was added by the 1950s. Of 27 Rosenwald schools built in Prince George's County, the Ridgety School is one of nine that remains. Newly restored, the school has retained many of the original design elements. The facility is operated in partnership with the Prince George's County Alumnae Chapter of Delta Sigma Theta Sorority, Incorporated. The school address is 8507 Central Avenue, Capitol Heights, Maryland. Telephone 301-333-6560. This facility is operated by the M-NCPPC, Department of Parks and Recreation, Prince George's County, and the Natural and Historical Resources Division."

SENIOR PROM NIGHT

Dance the night away and relive the magic of Senior Prom Night. Whether you went to prom, you missed it, or went but wish the memory could be rewritten, this night is for you. Our Senior Prom for Ages 45 & Better is a night created specially to celebrate life and joy. Come solo. Come with friends. Come with your sweetheart. Come dressed in Royalty. Saturday, August 15 from 6 p.m. to 11:30 a.m. This isn't just a dance, it's a moment of restoration. Event is 5 hours 30 minutes. Location: Life's Journey Banquet Hall, 2960 Technology Place Suite 102 b, Waldorf, Maryland 20601. Eventbrite for tickets. Refunds up to 7 days before event.

ZION WESLEY UNITED METHODIST CHURCH

Join us for Zion Wesley 148th Church Anniversary Sunday, March 29, 2026, at 3 p.m. Church address is 11500 Berry Road, Waldorf, Maryland, 20603. Guest Speaker will be Rev. Nurbert Hughes, Pastor Alexandria Chapel United Methodist Church, 5605 Chicamuxen Road, Indian Head, Maryland, 20640.

MAKE THIS SUMMER UNFORGETTABLE

Get ready for sunshine, smiles, and adventure. M-NCPPC, Department of Parks and Recreation, Prince George's County Summer Day Camps are perfect for kids to make new friends, explore the outdoors, and discover

new talents. Every day brings something exciting, from creative arts and sports to nature walks and splash days. Most camp sessions are two weeks long, but many sites offer one-week sessions. Most camps offer before and/or after-care to help working parents with safe children options. Join us for a season of laughter, learning, and lasting memories. This summer, the Department of Parks and Recreation offers more than 450 camp sessions.

Summer Day Camps June 15–August 21, 2026. Ages 4–17. Before and After Care available. One week or two-week sessions. Hours 9 a.m.–4:30 p.m. Variety of camps: art, sports, nature, coding, sign language, video games. Fee Assistance available. Payment scheduling is available with deposit of \$50 per child, per session.

SHOW PLACE ARENA

"The Show Place Arena is a 5,800-seat multi-purpose arena just south of Upper Marlboro, Maryland, which is used for sporting events, concerts, boxing and professional wrestling events, consumer shows, trade shows, religious services, graduations and other events." Wikipedia. Address: 14900 Pennsylvania Avenue, Upper Marlboro, Maryland 20772. Capacity: 5,800. Opened: 1993. Phone: (301) 952-7900.

BILL PICKETT INVITATIONAL RODEO

Bill Pickett Invitational Rodeo for Kids' Sake will be held Friday, September 18, 2026, 10 a.m. at Show Place Arena, 14900 Pennsylvania Avenue, Upper Marlboro, Maryland, 20772.

KC AND THE SUNSHINE BAND

Enjoy KC and the Sunshine Band on Friday, March 27, 2026, at 8 p.m. MGM National Harbor, Oxon Hill, Maryland. Box office hours on show days; 3 hours prior to ticketed event. Location from the Hotel Valet enter the hotel doors and proceed right, past the Lobby Bar and proceed right, past the Lobby Bar, and down the escalators. The Theater will be immediately on your right. From the Casino Valet.

CELEBRATE JUNETEENTH

Celebrate Juneteenth. Understand the history and celebrate the emancipation of African Americans from slavery in the United States at National Harbor. Our Annual National Harbor Juneteenth Celebration is back on Friday, June 19 starting at 11 a.m. National Harbor's Black owned Marketplace, Rhythm & Roots Stage Performances.

CLINTON UMC VACATION BIBLE SCHOOL

Save the dates: Vacation Bible School will be held at Clinton United Methodist Church Monday, July 13 through Friday, July 17, 2026, from 9 a.m.–Noon. This will be a fun week of Arts & Crafts, Science, Recreation, Music, Bible Story Telling, Music, Reflections and Snacks. Please contact Audrey Johnson VBS Director 301-922-5384 or email ajohnson@yahoo.com. Registration forms will be on the church website by the end of March, or I can mail you a registration form.

Around Maryland

Maryland State Police Urge Marylanders to Be Cautious of Phone Scam Circulating

PIKESVILLE, Md. (March 11, 2026)—Maryland State Police are urging Marylanders to be cautious of a phone scam circulating in which impersonators pretend to be law enforcement officers in order to steal personal information.

Police are receiving reports from citizens about scammers who are fraudulently identifying themselves as police officers or troopers to gain financial information or money from residents. The impersonators tell the potential victims that they need to obtain the information from the caller due to a police investigation, or they are asking for a donation to support law enforcement and their families.

In some instances, the impersonator uses a real name of a law enforcement officer in an attempt to gain the trust of the victim. **The Maryland State Police do not call or text individuals and request money from anyone under any circumstances.**

- Some tips to remember:
- Never provide any personal identifying information over the phone unless you have verified the source.
 - Never provide any payment information over the phone unless you have verified the source.
 - Police will never call and request money for fines, arrest warrants, fundraisers, etc...
 - If you do not trust the source and want to verify, look up the unit/group/barrack they said they are from on the internet, and call the listed number directly.
 - If you believe you have provided information to a scam, please immediately notify your financial institutions.

Those who believe they have been the victim of a scam are encouraged to contact their local police department or the Maryland State Police barrack that serves your area. If you believe you have fallen victim to any type of online crime, file a complaint at ic3.gov.

Governor Moore, Senate President Ferguson, and House Speaker Peña-Melnyk Unveil Legislative Package to Lower Energy Bills for Marylanders

ANNAPOLIS, Md. (March 13, 2026)—Governor Wes Moore, Senate President Bill Ferguson, and House Speaker Joseline Peña-Melnyk today announced the Utility RELIEF Act, a comprehensive legislative package to lower energy bills for Marylanders. The legislation—which incorporates elements from the governor's proposed Lower Bills and Local Energy Act as well as key priorities from the Senate and House—reflects a unified strategy between the Moore-Miller Administration and the Maryland General Assembly to generate more energy in the state and hold big utility companies accountable while saving Maryland families at least \$150 on their energy bills every year.

"Marylanders deserve energy bills they can afford. But because of the Trump-Vance administration's actions and failures by regional operators like PJM, too many families are seeing skyrocketing utility costs—and that is unacceptable," said Governor Moore. "That is why we are taking action where we can: holding utility companies accountable, moving faster to build new energy generation, and delivering \$100 million to lower energy bills for Maryland families. While Washington keeps making life harder for working people, we are staying focused on the issues that matter—lowering costs, making Maryland more affordable, and protecting Maryland families."

"Fundamentally, the legislative package being announced today is

about maximizing savings for working families in the midst of a historic increase in energy consumption in a tightening energy generation market," said Senate President Bill Ferguson. "If the measure of a government is how it supports those most in need, Maryland will lead the way both in its targeting of assistance and the ease with which eligible residents can access it."

"Our Utility RELIEF (Reducing Energy Load Inflation for Everyday Families) Act will provide Maryland ratepayers at least \$150 in annual savings while holding utilities and data centers accountable, strengthening the long-term reliability of our energy system, incentivizing new generation, and reaffirming our commitment to achieving our clean energy goals," said House Speaker Joseline Peña-Melnyk. "Savings from this bill will make life more affordable for all Marylanders. We are delivering on our affordability, accountability, and opportunity agenda."

As energy costs continue to rise nationwide, the Utility RELIEF (Reducing Energy Load Inflation for Everyday Families) Act mobilizes more than \$200 million from the Strategic Energy Investment Fund to secure local clean energy generation, modernize Maryland's electric grid, and lower energy bills. The legislative package reduces Marylanders' average monthly energy bills by an estimated \$150 annually, and introduces measures to hold major energy users, like data centers, accountable to the people of Maryland.

Key actions the Utility RELIEF Act takes to lower energy costs and protect Maryland residents:

- **Energy Bill Relief:** The legislation allocates \$100 million from the Strategic Energy Investment Fund to refund Maryland ratepayers to offset utility fees and lower energy bills.
- **Local Clean Energy Generation:** To promote local energy generation, the legislation establishes an annual bidding process for renewable energy sources using Alternative Compliance Payments. Maryland Energy Administration, along with the Public Service Commission, will establish the program and leverage \$100 million from the Strategic Energy Investment Fund to support clean energy projects.
- **Grid Modernization:** To modernize Maryland's transmission infrastructure, the legislation requires utility companies to prioritize advanced transmission technologies and grid-enhancing technologies. These modern technologies are designed to increase the capacity and efficiency of existing transmission lines—increasing reliability and driving down costs for ratepayers.
- **Holding Utilities Accountable:** The legislation mandates greater oversight of federally approved projects totaling \$3.5 billion in actual and projected spending, and caps what utilities can recover for supervisor pay. The legislation also eliminates the current 0.5% Regional Transmission Organization (RTO) participation incentive that allows utilities to collect additional profits and mandates that utility companies join Maryland's RTO, PJM Interconnection. The mandate will promote accountability for utilities, saving Maryland families an estimated \$20 million annually.
- **Data Center Guardrails:** The bill builds on the Next Generation Energy Act by requiring data centers to pay for their own energy infrastructure upgrades and protects Maryland families. These guardrails aim to hold data centers accountable for responsible development—neutralizing their impact on the grid and Marylanders' energy bills.
- **Protecting Working Families:** The legislation streamlines existing energy assistance programs to cut red tape for working families who urgently need State support, while helping fund the Public Service Commission's new Limited Income Discounted Rate program, which will save eligible customers up to \$1,400 per year.

In & Around Morningside-Skyline by Mary McHale 301-735-3451

97th-birthday biography

Last week I threatened to do a biography for you. Well, here it is:

I was born March 12, 1929, at Henry Ford Hospital in Detroit, Michigan, to Dr. Richard Mudd, an intern from Washington D.C., and Rose Krummack Mudd, a nurse from Nebraska.

I grew up in Dearborn, Michigan; Cincinnati, Ohio; and Saginaw, Michigan; and got my education with the nuns at several Catholic schools.

By 1941, America was at war. Dad moved us to Kelly Field in San Antonio, Texas, where he headed the medical department, and I attended Our Lady of the Lake High School.

World War II ended. The Mudds—Mom and Dad and seven kids—house-trailed back to Saginaw. Then, I went off to St. Mary's College in South Bend, Indiana. It was there that I met Jack McHale at a tea dance. (Tea was never served. Instead, we gathered in the Social Hall with a Victrola and stack of big-band records.)

I danced with Jack McHale, a Notre Dame journalism major from Houston, Texas. In 1950 we both graduated. On Jan. 3, 1951, we were married at St. Mary's Cathedral in Saginaw. Then, we packed the car with all my earthly belongings and motored to Houston where Jack was a reporter for The Houston Press.

However, shortly thereafter, Jack joined the FBI. So, we drove to Washington for FBI training and to meet J. Edgar Hoover.

Jack's first FBI office was Los Angeles. Then San Francisco. In 1958, we transferred back to Washington and settled in Skyline where we raised our seven children. I still live in the same house.

As my children grew up and moved

away, I became a librarian at St. Philip's School and continued my education by earning a master's degree in Library Science at Catholic University. I retired from St. Philip's Library in 1999.

I started editing the Skyline Newsletter in 1970 and began writing this column in 1976.

In 2004, I lost my husband Jack and in 2016, my son Brian. I miss them so much!

This year, my March 12 birthday was busy! I had visits from son John McHale, and Will Foreman (and I missed a visit from Jim Reilly), plus many phone calls and emails. For lunch, I enjoyed eggplant parmesan and a glass of wine at Nonna Angela's in Crofton. Daughters Kathleen Shearer and Elaine Seidman, and grandson Conor McHale were there, as was nephew Mike Mudd, who was nice enough to grab the check.

I especially appreciated that Mike drove since it was snowing as we left the restaurant—a surprising difference from the 84-degree weather we'd had the day before.

Now, I have a stack of 126 birthday cards, six bottles of wine, five puzzles, and a variety of snacks to keep me busy.

Oh, thank you so much to those of you who wished me a happy 97th birthday.

Town Council seats up for election

Candidate petitions were due March 2. The seats are currently held by John Anthony and Sharon Fowler, the only candidates to turn in petitions by the deadline.

Voters can register at the Town Hall by 9 p.m., April 6. The election will be at the Town Hall on May 4, from 8 a.m. to 8 p.m.

Upcoming Town meetings include the March 10 work session at 7 p.m. and the regular meeting March 17, at 7 p.m. See you there!

2nd Allentown Road speed camera has arrived!

When I was visiting Karen Rooker at the Town Hall, Councilman Todd Mullins stopped by to chat. He is the Council member who oversees streets and roads, and he's had his hands full recently.

Todd reports that, after several months of preparation and study, Morningside has installed a speed camera on the Joint Base Andrews side of Allentown Road. It joins the camera that covers the Andrews Manor side, which was installed last summer.

The speed limit for this stretch of road also has dropped. Previously, it was 40 mph on that side of the road, even though it was 35 mph in the other direction. Now, Allentown Road in front of Andrews Manor is 35 mph in both directions.

Slow down!

New red-light camera, and potholes

Morningside also is installing a new red-light camera on Allentown Road at the Suitland Road intersection. This traffic light had a camera in the past, but it has been gone for several years. The new camera is operated by a different vendor and will have upgraded technology.

Councilman Mullins also mentioned that the new development on Suitland Road had cut into the road pavement to run utilities to the six house sites. That work resulted in four

COMMUNITY

Blossom from A1

event of the National Cherry Blossom Festival, will be held on Sunday, March 29 from noon to 5 p.m. The free, family-friendly celebration will feature cultural performances, culinary delights, a Sakura Spirits Garden, a Water Lantern Festival, a Japanese artisanal market and more. A curated market includes a wide array of Asian foods as well as anime art, Japanese kimonos, Japanese skin care, home decor, Japanese inspired wood art, and more.

Due to its popularity, the Water Lantern Festival has expanded to three nights from March 27–29. The ticketed event brings families, friends, couples and individuals together for a meaningful evening experience that illuminates the waterfront with messages of hope, unity, and remembrance. Participants decorate lighted lanterns, which are released into an enclosed area, creating a peaceful and visually striking nighttime display.

Throughout the month, National Harbor restaurants will also join in the celebration with a wide array of food and drink specials from a seasonal cherry blossom milkshake to Sakura cheesecake and matcha mousse to a cherry blossom princess cake and cherry pie a la mode, and more! Drink specials include a cherry blossom margarita, a blooming margarita and a hibiscus margarita; cherry vanilla ale, cherry blossom punch, cherry blossom spritz, Sakura Ume, and strawberry lemonade. A full listing is on the National Harbor website.

"We're excited to expand the cherry blossom celebration at National Harbor this year. After such a harsh winter, our bright pink cherry trees are a welcome and cheerful sign that spring has finally arrived! It's a special time across the region, and we celebrate by turning the Harbor pink — from The Capital Wheel and waterfront trail to our beautifully illuminated buildings," said Deborah Topcik, senior director of marketing at National Harbor. "We're also delighted to once again be part of the National Cherry Blossom Festival with our annual Sakura Sunday event on March 29."

Both MGM National Harbor and Gaylord National will have special spa offerings. The Westin Washington National Harbor and Gaylord National have a special Cherry Blossom Package. MGM will change out its famous conservatory at the end of the month/beginning of April to celebrate the country's 250th birthday. The exciting new display will also have some cherry blossoms.

For more information on National Harbor and cherry blossom activities and offerings, go to www.nationalharbor.com/cherryblossom/. Events and activities will be added to the schedule as confirmed.

Situated on the banks of the historic Potomac River and just minutes from the nation's capital, National Harbor is a waterfront resort destination unlike any other. National Harbor is home to two of Maryland's Four Diamond rated hotels—Gaylord National Resort and Convention Center, the East Coast's largest non-gaming hotel and convention center and has almost 2,000 hotel rooms and 660,000 sq. ft. of meeting space and MGM National Harbor, an integrated luxury casino resort with renowned chef-driven restaurants, a 3,000-seat state-of-the-art theater and one of the largest gaming floors outside of Las Vegas. The vibrant Waterfront District features boutique shops, restaurants and entertainment options along picturesque promenades. The iconic Capital Wheel, a 180-ft observation wheel, Tanger Outlets' 85 designer brands, and a robust calendar of events round out this destination that welcomes more than 15.2 million visitors a year. For more information, visit www.NationalHarbor.com.

Bowie Resident and Filmmaker Dee Penn Announces DMV Debut of New Indie Romance "Still US"

By DEE PENN

BOWIE, Md. (March 10, 2026)—Dee Penn, filmmaker and longtime resident of Bowie, MD, is proud to announce the upcoming release of "Still US", a poignant new independent romance film. After spending more than two decades immersed in the culture of Prince George's County, Penn is returning to the area to share a project deeply influenced by the spirit and vibrancy of the DMV.

"Still US" explores the complex journey of love, focusing on the raw challenges couples face in maintaining happiness and connection as life evolves.

"Bowie was more than just a place I lived; it's where I became the man I am today," says Dee Penn. "The DMV has an energy you can't find anywhere else, and I'm honored to bring this film back



IMAGE COURTESY DEE PENN

"Still US" is a poignant new independent romance film scheduled for release in June 2026.

to the community that helped shape my vision."

The official trailer for "Still US" is scheduled for release in June 2026.

Surrattsville High School Team Wins Local Junior Achievement's 2026 3DE Competition for 9th Graders

By PRESS OFFICER
JA of Greater Washington

On Wednesday, March 11, Junior Achievement of Greater Washington (JA of Greater Washington) hosted the Arby's Regional Case Competition, a culminating event for 9th grade students participating in JA of Greater Washington's 2026 3DE program.

Thirty students from high schools in Washington, D.C. and Prince George's County, Maryland, competed in the competition, designed to bring real-world problem solving into the classroom. Five teams of 9th graders presented bold, research-driven strategies aimed at helping Arby's better connect with 13- to 17-year-old customers.

The winning team, from Clinton, Maryland's Surrattsville High School, recommended a new mascot to help

Arby's attract teens by increasing interest on social media and at in-person gather-

ings. They even suggested a possible mascot.



PHOTO COURTESY JUNIOR ACHIEVEMENT OF GREATER WASHINGTON

Surrattsville High School winning team with teachers and judges

Healing and Connection This Spring at Chesapeake Life Center

By ELYZABETH MARCUSSEN
Hospice of the Chesapeake

PASADENA, Md. (March 11, 2026)—Spring can be a season of renewal, but for those who are grieving, it can also bring tender reminders of loss. Chesapeake Life Center offers a variety of workshops and support groups designed to provide connection, comfort and hope during this time of healing.

From creative art experiences and nature-inspired programs to skill-building workshops and supportive community groups, these offerings create gentle spaces to honor loved ones, share experiences and reflect on the many emotions that come with grief. And a few of them, like Hope After Hours, are even a bit playful.

With options available both in person and virtually, the grief experts at Hospice of the Chesapeake are committed to supporting individuals in the community as they navigate loss with compassion and opportunities for healing.

WORKSHOPS AND SPECIAL PROGRAMS

- **Sprouting Hope:** A Springtime Workshop for Remembrance and Release— Welcome spring with this nature-based activity to honor your grief. Write a letter in honor of loved ones lost or something you wish to let go of in your life and bury it with symbolic seeds to release any difficult feelings into the earth. Finish with a garden-walking meditation and burial ceremony for centering and connecting to healing. This workshop will take place from 5 to 6:30 p.m. Tuesday, April 7, on the John & Cathy Belcher Campus, 90 Ritchie Highway, Pasadena. The cost is free.
- **Creating Hope: Therapeutic Art Exercises in Griefwork for Teens and Adults**—Creating can help us express things we have no words for, discover more about ourselves and glean beauty through our sorrow. In

this workshop, people can participate in a therapeutic art project to help with personal grief work and connect. This workshop is open to teens, as well as adults. Supplies are provided. No art skills are required. It will be held from 1 to 2:30 p.m. Saturday, April 11, at the Burnett Center for Hope and Healing, 4559 Sixes Road, Prince Frederick, Maryland. The cost is \$10 per session, which pays for supplies.

- **Heart & Soul Grief Support Group**—Join a Chesapeake Life Center grief counselor for this grief support group that allows adults to reflect on loss, explore self-care and find meaning in their grief. Each monthly session includes guided conversation, a meaningful activity and a discussion exploring community resources and support. The group will meet from 6:30 to 8 p.m. Tuesdays, April 14, May 12 and June 9, on the John & Cathy Belcher Campus, 90 Ritchie Highway, Pasadena. The cost is free.
- **Pet Loss Workshop**—The loss of a beloved companion animal brings a deep grief that is often only minimally acknowledged by others. Join Chesapeake Life Center grief counselors for a workshop where you are invited to share and reflect on your loss, as well as find meaningful ways to honor your pet and cope with your grief. Adult grievers experiencing the loss of any kind of pet are welcome. The event will take place from 11 a.m. to 1 p.m. Saturday, April 18, at Perfect Pet Resort, 840 West Bay Front Rd., Lothian, Maryland. The cost is free.
- **Hope After Hours**—This workshop offers a relaxed, welcoming space for people navigating loss together. Come as you are, raise a glass to the ones you love, and find connection and understanding in community space. Both wine and non-alcoholic drinks will be available. Though individuals ages 18 and older are wel-

come, those wishing to consume alcohol must be age 21 or older and provide a valid ID. This will take place from 4:30 to 6 p.m., Thursday, April 30, in the Hope & Healing Center on the John & Cathy Belcher Campus, 90 Ritchie Highway, Pasadena. The cost is \$10.

- **Nature's Healing Power: A Grief Support Group Series**—This free, nature-informed program that will include immersive walks in nature, time spent focusing on the cycle of the seasons and working with natural objects to contain and express the grief experience. It will be held from 11 a.m. to 1 p.m. Thursdays, May 21 and 28, and June 11 and 18, at Greenbelt Park, 6565 Greenbelt Road, Greenbelt, Maryland.
- **One Day Grief Retreat**—Save Saturday, June 13, for a day of healing and self-care at our lovely Burnett Center for Hope & Healing at the Burnett Center for Hope and Healing, 4559 Sixes Road, Prince Frederick. Connect with other adults who are grieving or caregiving as we explore how to honor our loved ones, practice caring for ourselves and lean forward into the journey. Sessions will include mindfulness, self-care, eating for health, flower pressing, music therapy and others. Time and further details will be announced.

VIRTUAL GRIEF SUPPORT

- **'The Pilot's Wife'—A Virtual Book Club Series**—Join other grievers led by a grief expert via Zoom to explore grief through literature. In this four-session group, you will read "The Pilot's Wife" by Anita Shreve and explore the many layers and aspects of grief through the experiences of the novel's characters. Using storytelling and discussion, you can reflect on how the experiences of fictional characters can mirror our own journeys through loss. The book will be discussed in manageable sections to al-

low plenty of time for meaningful conversations. Participants should read four chapters before each session to help prepare for open discussion. You can attend any or all of the sessions. It will meet on Wednesdays from noon to 1 p.m. April 1 and 22 and May 6 and 20 via Zoom. The cost is free.

- **SoulCollage Virtual Support Group for Loss and Transition**— This is a free group with participants creating collages to commemorate lost loved ones and visually journal the grief process. It is a time to virtually share and process unique collages reflecting and expressing the journey through life. The group will meet from 6 to 8 p.m. Monday, April 6, via Zoom.
- **Loss of Life Partner/Spouse Virtual Group**—This is a free group for individuals grieving the death of a spouse or life partner. It will meet from 10:30 a.m. to noon, Tuesdays, April 14, May 12 and June 9, via Zoom.

MONTHLY GRIEF SUPPORT GROUPS:

- **Drop-In Grief Support Groups** are open to anyone grieving. Groups offer participants an opportunity to share their feelings and obtain support from others who are experiencing loss. There is no fee. These groups will meet in Calvert County as follows:
 - *North Beach Senior Center*, 9010 Chesapeake Ave., North Beach, Maryland, from 1 to 2 p.m. Wednesdays, April 1, May 6 and June 3.
 - *Southern Pines Senior Center*, 20 Appeal Lane, Lusby, Maryland, from 2 to 3 p.m. Tuesdays, April 14, May 12 and June 9.
 - *Calvert Pines Senior Center*, 450 W. Dares Beach Road, Prince Frederick, from 1 to 2 p.m. Tuesdays, April 21, May 19 and June 16.
- **SoulCollage Studio**—Join others for a time to create unique collages reflecting and expressing loss and the journey through life. The group will

meet from 2 to 5 p.m. on Mondays, May 4 and June 1, at 9500 Medical Center Drive, Suite 250, Largo, Maryland. The supply fee is \$10.

- **Loss of Parent or Parental Figure Support Group**—This group provides space for adults ages 18 and older grieving the loss of a parent or parental figure to come together to feel supported in their grief. The group will meet from 6:30 to 8 p.m. Thursdays, April 9, and 6 to 7:30 p.m. May 7, on the John & Cathy Belcher Campus, 90 Ritchie Highway, Pasadena. The cost is free.
- **Loss of Life Partner Evening Group**—This support group is for individuals grieving the loss of a spouse or life partner that happened more than 13 months ago. It offers a safe space for individuals to connect with others experiencing a similar loss. It will meet from 6:30 to 8 p.m. Tuesdays, April 14, May 12 and June 9, on the John & Cathy Belcher Campus, 90 Ritchie Highway, Pasadena. The cost is free.
- **Child Loss Support Group**—This group is for parents grieving the death of a child, regardless of age or circumstance. It will meet at 5:30 p.m. on Mondays, April 27 and May 18, in the Center for Hope & Healing on the John & Cathy Belcher Campus, 90 Ritchie Highway, Pasadena. The cost is free.

Unless noted, groups and workshops are intended for adults ages 18 and older. Except for drop-in groups, registration is required and can be completed by calling 888-501-7077 or emailing griefinfo@chesapeakehospicecenter.org. Visit www.hospicechesapeake.org/events for a complete listing of in-person and virtual groups and workshops for adults and children.

Chesapeake Life Center, a program service of Hospice of the Chesapeake, serves hospice family members and the community with bereavement services and activities aimed at enhancing the quality of life for those grieving the loss of a loved one. Visit www.chesapeakehospicecenter.org.

COMMENTARY

Marc Morial

President and CEO, National Urban League



To Be Equal:

Black Women Have Always Led the Fight for Freedom

"If they don't give you a seat at the table, bring a folding chair."

—Shirley Chisholm

It's no secret that women, specifically Black women, have been a driving force for freedom in this country since its inception.

From the words of Phillis Wheatley condemning the evils of slavery on the eve of the American Revolution, and Sojourner Truth's indelible "Ain't I a Woman?" speech at the 1851 Women's Rights Convention held in Akron, Ohio, Black women

have been the heartbeat of this movement.

What troubles me in a modern context is how little Black women are recognized for their contributions to this country and the sordid attempts to strip them of political power and influence today.

We saw it in the attacks on Kamala Harris in the 2024 Presidential election. The reduction of Justice Ketanji Brown Jackson's appointment to a DEI-hire. The attempts to push out Federal Reserve Board member Lisa Cook and Susan Rice from the board at Netflix. And this week, we saw

Congresswoman Jasmine Crockett lose an uphill battle in a primary for the Texas Senate race.

The Urban League movement is an embodiment of the resistance to that line of thinking or suppression of history. Of our 93 affiliates, 46 are led by women nationwide.

In Atlanta, Nancy Flake Johnson has led the Urban League of Greater Atlanta through moments of economic uncertainty and opportunity alike, expanding workforce development, entrepreneurship, and housing programs that help thousands of families build stability and generational wealth. Her leadership reflects what the Urban League movement has always understood: that economic justice is foundational to freedom.

In Columbus, under the leadership of Stephanie Hightower, the Columbus Urban League has become a national model for workforce development and community investment, helping prepare the next generation of leaders while ensuring opportunity reaches those too often left behind.

In Louisiana, Judy Reese Morse has helped guide the Urban League of Louisiana through some of the most complex challenges facing the Gulf region, from disaster recovery to economic resilience, while building pathways for Black families and businesses to thrive in a rapidly changing

economy.

And in Tennessee, where we're holding our Annual Conference this summer in Nashville, Dr. Laurie Shanderson leads the Knoxville Area Urban League, focusing on expanding access to education, economic mobility, and community empowerment work that continues the long tradition of women stepping forward to lead when their communities need them most.

And those numbers are not symbolic. They are proof of a legacy.

These women and dozens more across the Urban League movement are not simply administrators or executives. They are architects of opportunity. They are advocates, bridge-builders, and champions for communities that too often must fight harder just to be seen.

Their leadership reminds us that the legacy of Phillis Wheatley and Sojourner Truth did not end with speeches written in history books. It lives on every day in boardrooms, classrooms, community centers, and neighborhoods where women continue the work of expanding freedom in America.

And during Women's History Month, the Urban League movement proudly recognizes that this work and this leadership remain essential to our collective future. —March 7, 2026

BUSINESS AND FINANCE

Social Security Matters

Ask Rusty:

When Will I Get Full Credit for Delaying my SS Retirement?

By RUSSELL GLOOR,

National Social Security Advisor at the AMAC Foundation, the non-profit arm of the Association of Mature American Citizens

Dear Rusty: The time is nearing that I want to move from my current Social Security survivor benefit to my own SS retirement benefit at 70 years of age. I have been looking more deeply into the application of Delayed Retirement Credits (DRCs), and I have read that DRCs accumulated in the year that I turn 70 (September 2026) will not be effective when I actually turn 70. Rather, those DRCs won't be paid until the following year. Can you verify that this is correct? I presume that if the DRC's are not applied at age 70, that they will be applied sometime after the first of the year and any increase will be paid retroactively. **Signed: Retiring Soon**

Dear Retiring Soon: The Delayed Retirement Credits (DRCs) you speak of have accumulated at the rate of 8% per year (.667% per month) since you reached your SS full retirement age (FRA), which means that at age 70 your monthly SS benefit will be about 129% of the amount you were entitled to at your FRA of 66 years plus 4 months.

However, your understanding of how DRCs will work for you at age 70 is not correct. If you claim for your Social Security retirement benefits to begin in September 2026 (the month you turn 70) you will receive all DRCs, you have accumulated up to that point in time. In other words, you will get your full age 70 benefit amount immediately, including all DRCs earned until then, effective with your first SS retirement payment (which you will get in October 2026). What you have likely read about is that DRCs work a bit differently for those who claim SS after their full retirement age, but before their 70th birthday month.

For those who claim mid-year but before age 70, only DRCs earned through the end of the preceding year are initially applied, and DRCs earned during the current year are not paid until the following January. This results in a loss of some SS benefit between the time benefits start and the following January, because only the amount earned as of the end of the previous year are first paid, and the full number of DRCs earned during the current year are applied in January. But, as is the case for you, when benefits are claimed to start in the month you reach 70 years of age, all DRCs earned up to the month of your 70th birthday are immediately applied.

Congratulations on selecting a strategy which will maximize your monthly Social Security benefit.

This article is intended for information purposes only and does not represent legal or financial guidance. It presents the opinions and interpretations of the AMAC Foundation's staff, trained and accredited by the National Social Security Association (NSSA). NSSA and the AMAC Foundation and its staff are not affiliated with or endorsed by the Social Security Administration or any other governmental entity. To submit a question, visit our website (amacfoundation.org/programs/social-security-advisory) or email us at ssadvisor@amacfoundation.org.

The 2.4 million member Association of Mature American Citizens [AMAC] www.amac.us is a vibrant, vital senior advocacy organization that takes its marching orders from its members. AMAC Action is a non-profit, non-partisan organization representing the membership in our nation's capital and in local Congressional Districts throughout the country. And the AMAC Foundation (www.AmacFoundation.org) is the Association's non-profit organization, dedicated to supporting and educating America's Seniors. Together, we act and speak on the Association members' behalf, protecting their interests and offering a practical insight on how to best solve the problems they face today. Live long and make a difference by joining us today at www.amac.us/join-amac.

Educational Systems Federal Credit Union Names Michael Gago Senior Vice President/Chief Lending Officer

By PRESS OFFICER

Educational Systems Federal Credit Union

GREENBELT, Md. (March 11, 2026)—Educational Systems Federal Credit Union announced that Michael Gago has joined the organization as Senior Vice President/Chief Lending Officer. In this role, Gago is responsible for leading the Credit Union's lending strategy and execution, including product development, credit and portfolio performance and sustainable loan growth in support of member needs and the Credit Union's mission.

Gago brings more than 25 years of leadership experience across consumer, residential mortgage and commercial lending. His background includes extensive work in secondary market strategy, financial management and portfolio analytics. He joined the Credit Union in late November 2025.

"What attracted me to Educational Systems FCU is the opportunity to be part of a successful, mission-driven organization that is known for its service to members, employees and the communities it serves," said Gago. "As Senior Vice President/Chief Lending Officer, I am excited to build on that strong foundation by expanding responsible access to credit, improving the end-to-end lending experience and ensuring our lending strategy continues to support the Credit Union's mission for years to come."

Prior to joining Educational Systems Federal Credit Union, Gago served at Alltrust Credit Union, where he was

appointed Chief Lending Officer in 2018 and later promoted to Chief Lending and Operations Officer in January 2023.

In that expanded role, he led all lending functions while also overseeing retail and deposit operations, helping strengthen alignment between lending performance and member service delivery.

"Michael's experience and leadership will be an asset to our organization as we continue to evolve our lending strategy," said Girardo Smith, President/CEO of Educational Systems Federal Credit Union. "He brings a thoughtful, disciplined approach to lending that aligns with our commitment to providing accessible financial solutions and supporting the long-term financial well-being of our members."

Gago holds a Bachelor of Science in Finance from Bryant University and an MBA/MS in Accounting from Bentley University.



PHOTO COURTESY ESFCU

Michael Gago, Senior Vice President/Chief Lending Officer

Educational Systems Federal Credit Union serves members of the education community by providing competitive financial solutions, personalized service and resources that support financial wellness and stability. Educational Systems Federal Credit Union has proudly served the education community since 1955. With \$1.3 billion in assets and 13 branches, the Credit Union serves over 80,000 members of the education community including school employees, students, parents and individuals working for education-related organizations. For more information, visit www.esfcu.org.

M-NCPPC Prince George's County Planning Board Announces Location Update for Meetings

Weekly Planning Board Meetings to be Held Temporarily in Riverdale Beginning April 2, 2026

By PRESS OFFICER

Maryland-National Capital Park and Planning Commission

LARGO, Md. (March 4, 2026)—The Prince George's County Planning Board of The Maryland-National Capital Park and Planning Commission (M-NCPPC) announces a temporary location for its in-person meeting option starting in April. Beginning on Thursday, April 2, 2026, individuals will be able to view and provide verbal testimony in person at the M-NCPPC, Parks and Recreation Administration Building at 6600 Kenilworth Avenue, Riverdale, MD 20737. There are no changes for virtual participation.

The Prince George's County Planning Board meets on Thursdays to consider planning, zoning, subdivision, and other matters within its jurisdiction.

For more details, a list of meetings, agendas, and agenda packets, visit www.pgplanningboard.org. Events and meetings are subject to change. Questions may be directed to pgcpb@mncppc.org or 301-952-3560.

The Prince George's Post

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ENVIRONMENT

As Data Centers Multiply, Maryland's Power Grid Struggles to Keep Up

By OLIVIA BORGULA
Capital News Service

A few blocks away from Lexington Market in Baltimore, inside a six-story building adorned with intricate detailing, there's a data center that uses enough electricity to power a city roughly the size of Dundalk, Maryland.

The company that runs the over 150,000-square-foot facility announced in 2024 it would triple the data center's capacity over the next few years to meet the needs of the booming artificial intelligence industry.

That's just one of the dozens of data centers in Maryland that surround the Washington metropolitan area and Baltimore. Opponents say these facilities put more pressure on the state's already fragile energy grid and contribute to rising electricity costs.

Maryland ranks 13th in the U.S. for its residential electricity prices as of October 2025, according to the U.S. Energy Information Administration. Between October 2024 and October 2025, average residential electricity prices in the state rose by about 18%.

That could just be the start. A 2024 U.S. Department of Energy report estimated data centers will consume about 7% to 12% of the country's electricity by 2028, up from 4.4% in 2023. Data centers' proportion of the regional electricity grid supplying power to Maryland and other nearby states will triple between 2024 and 2029, according to a report by the grid operator.

As a result, the regional electricity grid estimated in another report that its peak energy load is estimated to grow 32 gigawatts from 2024 to 2030—enough energy to power at least an estimated 24 million homes.

A sudden surge in power demand, supply issues and a long, bureaucratic approval process for bringing on new power has led to higher electricity prices in Maryland—costs that are only expected to increase.

"This isn't a community hospital or a school or even a highway that everybody might use," said Steve Black, president of Frederick County's Sugarloaf Alliance, one of six local organizations that make up the Maryland Data Centers Analysis Group. "These facilities, these data centers exist to make money for a private company, and we are all paying for their capital need."

Maryland's Grid Operator

One reason for the rising cost of electricity in Maryland is the pressure data centers are putting on PJM Interconnection LLC, a regional organization that coordinates the movement of wholesale electricity across 13 states between Illinois and New Jersey, along with Washington, D.C. It's run by 10 board members who aren't allowed to have a financial stake in any company that participates in PJM's market.

One part of ratepayers' bill is the "supply" section, which is driven by PJM's annual auction. Power companies and businesses submit bids based on how much energy they can offer and how much it costs them to keep that power reliable during high demand. This is called the total capacity cost.

"What they're doing is trying to guarantee that on the worst days of the year, during the worst hours of the worst days, there are no brownouts and blackouts," said Michael Powell, an attorney with the Energy and Environmental Practice Group at Gordon Feinblatt LLC.

In PJM's 2024 auction, which started affecting customers in June, capacity costs jumped from about \$2 billion to nearly \$15 billion for the upcoming year. The most recent auction to determine the cost for 2026-27 hit another record high at just over \$16 billion, which would have been higher if not for a cap requested by Pennsylvania Gov. Josh Shapiro and backed by Maryland Gov. Wes Moore.

An analysis from the Independent Market Monitor found the capacity hikes stemmed almost entirely from existing and projected data center loads on PJM's grid. Experts said that is no surprise.

"If the data centers don't foot the bill, and they come on and the grid has to pay ... the ratepayers are going to carry the cost," said Andrew Chien, a University of Chicago professor who studies sustainable computing.

Boosting Supply

One way to manage the increased data center demand is to add power sources. But PJM hasn't increased power capacity relative to peak demand as much as other operators around the country.

The time it takes PJM to bring new generation online has risen from less than two years in 2008 to more than eight years today.

Time-consuming studies are required before new power projects come online. Because of a jump in interconnection requests, PJM has had to work through a backlog of queued projects. PJM plans to start reviewing applications that came in since 2022 starting this year.

A group of bipartisan lawmakers from multiple states including Maryland pressed PJM in November to impose more regulations to shield consumers from rising costs.

In January, PJM's board delivered updated recommendations to address load challenges caused by data centers, including allowing the facilities to connect to the grid more quickly if they can bring their own generation.

Alison Williams, vice president of energy policy and research at b Strategic Solutions and representative for the advocacy group Power for Tomorrow, said if there aren't reform efforts, the PJM system could, in a worst-case scenario, suffer blackouts and brownouts along with price increases.

"We know that demand is going to keep going up," Williams said. "The piece that we do not know is how PJM is going to solve their supply problem. And so if there is a time to have answers, it's right now."

Rising Electricity Costs

Another component to electricity bills are rates set by local utility companies—such as Baltimore Gas and Electric, Delmarva Power and Potomac Electric Power Company—based on the cost of delivering that power, maintaining local infrastructure and repairing systems. The

LOCAL WARMING: CLIMATE CHANGE IN MARYLAND

One Part of Maryland's Plan for Cleaning its Air? A More Leafy State

By NATALIE WEGER
Capital News Service

Baltimore City is not known for its lush greenery, but volunteers at the Baltimore Tree Trust hope to change that, one tree at a time.

Every fall and spring, members of Baltimore Tree Trust plant trees in city neighborhoods—and it's part of the state's effort to combat climate change. The greenery is supposed to increase tree canopy, enhance neighborhoods and cool the city's urban heat islands.

"Houses come and go, people have come and gone, but the trees are still there and they are indicators that Baltimore is still growing," said Bryant Smith, CEO of Baltimore Tree Trust.

The effort is part of Maryland's goal to plant more than 5 million native trees across the state by the end of 2031. The state committed to the mass tree planting initiative after passing the Tree Solutions Now Act in 2021.

The 5 Million Trees Initiative is a collaborative effort involving state agencies, community programs and volunteers across Maryland. More than 1.5 million trees have already been planted as part of the initiative, according to a fiscal 2025 report.

Through photosynthesis, trees remove carbon dioxide—a leading greenhouse gas—from the atmosphere. The trees planted through this program could, once they mature in a few years, remove 30,000 metric tons of carbon dioxide from the atmosphere annually. The commitment will support Maryland's goal to cut 2006 carbon emissions levels by 60% by 2031.

The benefits

A central goal of the 5 million trees initiative is to increase healthy forest cover across the state, according to Ashley Triplett-Peltzman, the associate director of policy and planning at the Maryland Forest Service.

Mass tree plantings can help improve the state's wildlife habitats, air quality and biodiversity, which can benefit natural landmarks in the state such as the Chesapeake Bay, she explained.

Triplett-Peltzman said tree planting mitigates climate change because trees capture and store carbon dioxide in their trunks and roots in a process called carbon sequestration.

The Tree Solutions Now Act will help serve Maryland's larger Climate Solutions Now Act passed in 2022. As part of that legislation, Maryland aims to achieve net-zero greenhouse gas emissions statewide by 2045.

Another byproduct of the tree planting effort is increased community engagement across the state, Triplett-Peltzman said.

"When we're working with some of these groups that have gotten funding, we're engaging volunteers and we're also engaging students," she said. "We're using the tree planting to increase environmental literacy and environmental stewardship."

Serving underserved areas

The state requires at least 10% of trees be planted in underserved urban areas—city neighborhoods that have limited exposure to trees. The initiative's fiscal 2025 report said more than 86,500 have been planted in these communities under the program, which is paid for by state funds and local grants.

Underserved areas are determined by income levels, unemployment levels and a history of redlining or housing discrimination, according to Lianna Gomori-Ruben, a senior program officer at the Chesapeake Bay Trust.

The trust is the central organization tasked with overseeing tree plantings in underserved urban areas, which it achieves through its grant program. According to Gomori-Ruben, the trust has already made roughly 150 awards to plant more than 100,000 trees.

One of the biggest benefits of planting trees in urban areas is reducing a city's urban heat island effect, which occurs when



PHOTO COURTESY THE BALTIMORE TREE TRUST

Workers for the Baltimore Tree Trust on the job last year.

a city experiences much higher temperatures than nearby rural areas. This happens because buildings, roads and concrete absorb and then re-emit the sun's heat. Tree plantings in cities can cool surrounding areas, sometimes as much as 10 degrees, Gomori-Ruben said.

But tree plantings also create economic benefits. People have to be hired to plant and maintain trees, she said.

"We know that cities that have trees have higher real estate values," Gomori-Ruben said. "So when you have trees in your community, your housing property goes up as well."

Gomori-Ruben said most of Baltimore City—which has a history of redlining, or racial discrimination in housing finance—is eligible for funds through the trust's program.

Smith, the CEO of the Baltimore Tree Trust, pointed out the tree plantings have made a stark difference in the city's communities. The trust has planted trees in places such as lawns, grass strips, parks and schools.

Abandoned buildings with lots of concrete are now turning into streets lined with trees, said Smith, who was born and raised in Baltimore.

"I've definitely seen the benefits and the major impacts of the work that's been done in urban forestry city, but also other indicators that the work's not done and we have to continue to focus," Smith said.

'It's a partial solution'

Maintaining the trees planted is just as important as putting them in the ground, according to Triplett-Peltzman at the Maryland Forest Service.

"There's just such a history of going to a place, planting trees and leaving," Triplett-Peltzman said. "And then the survival rates for these trees is historically really low."

She added that other factors such as deer and invasive plant species can impact the survival rates of seedlings.

About 30% of new trees planted are likely to die within the first few years of planting, according to University of Maryland geographical sciences professor George Hurtt, who conducts research for the 5 million trees initiative.

As a result, the state aims to plant more to make up for the trees that are likely to die, Hurtt said.

Hurtt also said all trees planted must be native to Maryland, since non-native tree species may invasively outgrow other trees.

Maryland is expected to plant more than 4.5 million trees by 2031 based on the average survivorship of trees committed under state and federally funded programs, according to a 2024 progress report for the initiative.

Despite the benefits of tree planting initiatives, Hurtt added other things must be done to combat climate change. Since fossil fuel emissions warm the planet more than anything else, more efforts need to be made to switch to renewable energy sources, he explained.

"It can't solve the entire problem," Hurtt said of the tree planting initiative. "It's a partial solution."

Frances Marie Panday, a data analyst at the Maryland Department of Environment, said even though the carbon benefit of trees might not be realized until they mature 10 years down the line, it doesn't mean the state can't start mitigating the impacts of climate change now.

"Tree planting is just one level we use to get us closer to that goal," she said. "We recognize that we can't rely on low-hanging fruit to address that."

Nationwide comparisons

Across the U.S., several other states have committed to mass tree planting initiatives, including Wisconsin and New York.

Maryland is unique in its approach to a mass tree planting initiative because it is the first state in the nation to utilize a remote-sensing methodology to quantify the carbon benefits of trees, according to Panday.

Researchers for the 5 million tree initiative use high-resolution satellite data and artificial intelligence modeling to confirm the locations of the plantings. They also detect the amount of carbon stored in each tree.

"That's one of the ways that we are leading the charge on utilizing our natural and working lands, as we want to make sure that the forest carbon sequestration benefits of trees are captured in our greenhouse gas inventory," Panday said.

Maryland's commitment is unique because the 5 million tree initiative is codified in state policy, according to Tanner Haid, the senior director of urban forestry field delivery at American Forests. The statewide commitment gives the initiative authority, accountability and funding, he explained.

Maryland's Tree Solutions Now Act not only represents a statewide commitment, but makes the initiative an interagency effort, according to Haid. The Department of Agriculture, the Department of Environment, the Department of Natural Resources and the Chesapeake Bay Trust team up to lead the initiative.

"The goal is bringing people together," he said. "That's what makes what Maryland is doing, and some others, special because it's like this cumulative approach of all of them working together towards it."

Gary Allen, president of the Maryland Forestry Foundation, pointed out that Maryland's efforts should be viewed as a collaboration with other states, rather than a competition.

The U.S. has a history of losing forest cover due to urban development, Allen explained. He said that in the early 1980s and 1990s, Maryland lost more than 1,000 acres each month because of development.

Although the state has cut that number down to fewer than 200 acres a month, Allen said the 5 million tree initiative is still essential in bringing back the state's forest canopy.

"The highest benefit of a piece of property is not always to have it paved over and a building put on it," Allen said. "Sometimes the best thing that can be done with it ... is to actually preserve and protect the natural cover on that land."

Department of the Environment Prince George's County Climate 101 Training Now Available to the Public
Start the training here:

<https://www.princegeorgescountymd.gov/departments-offices/environment/climate-and-energy/climate-101>

Data Centers from A5

Maryland Public Service Commission regulates those rates, which were rising before the AI-driven data center expansion.

In the last 10 to 15 years, Maryland utility rates have steadily risen, according to a report from the state's Office of People's Counsel, an organization that works on behalf of Maryland's residential customers to advocate for utility performance.

This stems from a variety of factors, including warmer temperatures, increased costs for energy delivery—some of which have more than doubled since 2012—and programs that allow utilities to recoup those costs more quickly, according to the Office of People's Counsel.

Black, of the Maryland Data Centers Analysis Group, said while Maryland rates have increased, they're now expected to skyrocket because of the data center demand.

"It's going to start spiking in ways that nobody, no policymaker has a good way of getting their hands around," he said.

Strain on Maryland's Grid

Amid the rising prices, there's also concern about whether Maryland is getting the electricity it needs.

For example, about 4,000 BGE customers in Howard County had their electric service cut off for 30 minutes in August after an infrastructure issue forced Maryland generation plants offline.

Activists warn these kinds of events could become more common if the power demand from data centers overwhelms the state's electricity grid. Maryland is in a particularly tricky spot because it doesn't have enough energy infrastructure to meet rising energy needs, according to PJM.

Since 2018, Maryland has retired 6,000 megawatts of power production—75 times the

amount of the Baltimore data center—and only added 1,600 megawatts of power. The state relies on other states for 40% of its annual electricity needs, according to a PJM report.

Now, though, heightened energy demand is forcing fossil fuel facilities to stay in power past their set retirement dates. Two Talen Energy-operated power plants located near Baltimore were set to retire at the end of May 2025, but will now run until 2029 to avoid overburdening the grid.

In an August 2024 report, the Office of People's Counsel found consumers will have to pay \$629 million to keep these fossil fuel plants in operation. These costs will be incurred until Chicago-based Exelon—owner of BGE, Delmarva and Pepco—completes transmission projects that will make up for the power that will be lost when those plants shut down.

"It's really the overall shortage between supply and demand that's causing the delay of [closing] those power plants," said University of Maryland Professor Yueming "Lucy" Qiu, who studies energy and environmental economics. "Most of these fossil fuel power plants, they can generate relatively stable electricity compared to renewable energy, which electricity is usually intermittent and not very reliable."

Another project, called the Maryland Piedmont Reliability Project, is designed to prevent strain on Maryland's power grid by making it easier to bring in electricity from outside the state.

The \$424 million project, led by a New Jersey-based investor-owned utility, would build new transmission lines that allow Maryland to import more power from the broader PJM regional grid.

The current methodology for charging customers for new transmission projects causes jurisdictions closest to the load increase to pay a larger portion of the costs, even if those customers are located in a different state.

For example, the expansion of data centers in Northern Virginia could cause Maryland consumers to pay for transmission projects to meet the increased demand these facilities create, according to the Office of People's Counsel.

New fossil fuel resources are frowned upon because of Maryland's push toward renewable energy, said Black, of the Sugarloaf Alliance. Nuclear power plants tend to be built in areas of low population density to account for a possible evacuation, so potential sites are hard to find in a smaller state like Maryland. It's also a challenge to find places in the state with the limitless water supply necessary to cool the plants, Black added.

Angie McCarthy, a conservation advocate with Nature Forward, said as a result, it's not possible to make large amounts of power available for data centers.

"If we build a data center that requires one gigawatt of energy, we are expected to be able to provide that energy within a development cycle of a couple of years," she said. "That is just unreasonable in our current landscape."

Future Expansion

There are dozens of data centers in Maryland, according to an industry-created data set, and plans to develop more. Data center backers say they are necessary.

There's a proposal in Prince George's County to redevelop an abandoned mall into 4 million square feet of data centers. A \$1.2 billion development in Frederick, which will create the largest data center campus in the state, is already underway.

Advocates frame data centers as a growth opportunity for Maryland's tech sector and a potential source of high-paying jobs and local tax revenue, especially as the state grapples with a multibillion-dollar budget deficit.

Kelly Schulz, CEO of the Maryland Tech Council, said the Frederick County project will generate \$40 million in annual tax revenue. That's the equivalent of more than 700 entry-level teacher salaries.

"I'm really comfortable about the benefits financially that this has to the county as far as tax revenues, and that's not even to mention the number of jobs that will come into Frederick County because of this development underway," she said.

Michael McHale, business manager at the International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers Local 24 headquartered in Baltimore, said data centers create jobs, especially because many are large facilities that take years to complete. Every 275 square feet of data center supports one construction job, according to the tech council's report, which provides a boost for a sector that has lost 13,000 jobs since 2019.

"This [Frederick] facility will probably take 10 years to build out. So in theory, at first they could start there and work there for a large part of their career," he said.

Critics of the facilities still worry, however. Chris Miller, president of the Virginia-based Piedmont Environmental Council, said there's a lack of accountability and data about the long-term impacts of data centers, which makes data center development hard for governments to regulate.

Miller added Maryland is experiencing some of the same pressures that transformed Northern Virginia into the world's largest data center hub.

"Data center companies ought to be covering the direct costs in the indirect costs, including mitigation of environmental and community impact, and then distributing those costs on a truly global market. That would be fair, that would be equitable," he said. "Utility bills are ... going up a lot to subsidize the 10 richest companies in the world."

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