



## **Eyes on County Council – February 3, 2026**

### **HIGHLIGHT EVENTS:**

- The presentation by the Opioid Settlement Distribution Commission was noteworthy. The major financial settlement with Big Pharma is making significant impact on remediating the opioid crisis in Delaware. Please see details below.
- Change of zone approved for a sub-division, Swan Lake, see below.

### **Public Comment:**

- First comment was from Janet LeDigabel, mainly focused on the affordable housing issue in the coastal area. She presented a concern for corporate purchases of multiple housing units which affects purchase pricing/availability. She:
  - Emphasized the difficulty for essential workers such as medical assistants, retail workers, and restaurant staff to afford living near where they work.
  - Questioned whether data exists showing that people seeking housing locally have the credit and income to qualify, and whether county planning and zoning codes should be overhauled to serve a relatively small group of workers who want to live near their jobs.
  - Challenged claims that developers cannot make projects financially viable, pointing to developer wealth and private aircraft as evidence. She argued that coastal real estate has become primarily an investment market, and raised concerns that new apartments and condos will be converted into vacation rentals unless regulated.
- Alison White presented her concerns for projects increasing density, asking Council to proceed with sensitivity to unintended consequences affecting the character of the area. She supports affordable housing but is concerned about proposals to incentivize the Sussex County Rental Program by increasing density and allowing projects by right without broader planning. She:
  - Argued that changing density rules in isolation, without considering infrastructure, resources, and neighborhood character, will lead to unintended consequences. While high-density projects were suggested in

last week's workshop for major arterials and collectors, those corridors vary widely in character, making blanket density increases risky.

- Emphasized that effective land-use planning should be orderly, long-term, and resource-aware, anticipating impacts on community character and quality of life rather than reacting to problems after they arise. Increasing density without ensuring adequate capacity for services and infrastructure could worsen existing issues, create overcrowded and unattractive communities, and fail to solve affordability if rents are not truly affordable.
- Urged Council to protect outcomes for both new and existing residents and to avoid piecemeal zoning changes; and noted that any reforms should include sustainable growth controls that address capacity, resilience, and quality of life, aiming for positive, well-planned community outcomes rather than chaotic development.

### **Presentations:**

- **Todd Lawson, County Administrator:**
  - Recognized retiree Gordon Serman, a Facility District Manager, for his service
  - Public interview of Board of Adjustment nominee (from Rieley), Chuck McClure. Unanimously approved by Council
  - Public interview of Planning & Zoning nominee (from Rieley), David Pettyjohn. Unanimously approved by Council for term effective March 1 through June 2026.
  - Library Advisory Board appointment made by Hudson for nominee Dianna Boehm, approved unanimously by Council.
  
- **Opioid Settlement Distribution Commission** – presentation to Council made by Bradley Owens, Director. Following a national settlement of \$26 billion with Big Pharm distributors in 2021, programs were established to parcel monies to states and subsequently to local governments. The Delaware commission created a process to grant monies to appropriate organizations to best utilize these funds. The objective being to remediate and abate the opioid crisis in Delaware.

Delaware expects to receive \$200 million over 15 years for the commission. About \$20 million has been spent in Delaware to date, with plans to spend \$15 million per year for the next 12 years. Delaware distributes 15% to local governments. Bottom line, Sussex County is awarded approximately \$480,000 per year. Local agencies submit applications and awards are granted based on various requirements. Programs receive grants for education, training,

treatment, etc. Todd Lawson was named the chair of the local government committee.

- **Hans Medlarz, Project Manager**

- Council heard several requests for infrastructure projects related to the Wolfe Neck RWF upgrade and expansion and Inland Bays Extension SCRWF treatment process upgrade.
- Council approved, based upon the recommendation of the Sussex County Engineering Department, that Amendment 31 to the Base Engineering Contract with GHD Incorporated be approved in the amount not to exceed \$1,050,000 for preliminary engineering services associated with the Wolf Neck Regional Wastewater Facility Upgrade.
- Council approved, based upon the recommendation of the Sussex County Engineering Department, a purchase order to Harold Beck & Sons, Incorporated, in the amount of \$159,565 for actuated valves associated with the Inland Bays Expansion Project.
- Council approved, based upon the recommendation of the Sussex County Engineering Department, that BW Electric Inc.'s change order number IB-001 for the Inland Bays Phase II Electrical Program in the amount of \$2,400,000
- Council approved, based upon the recommendation of the Sussex County Engineering Department, the RK&K five-year wetland data collection implementation proposal revision one in the amount of \$13,355.

**Old Business:**

- Change of zone number 2021, filed on behalf of Crosswinds Landing, LLC:
  - This is an ordinance to amend the comprehensive zoning map of Sussex County from an AR1 Agricultural Residential District to an AR1 RPC Agricultural Residential District residential planned community for 352 dwellings. The public hearing was held before County Council at its meeting of October 7, 2025. At the completion of the public hearing, County Council deferred action on the application for further consideration.
  - This is the Swan Lake development to be located off of Rte. 54.
  - Following approval of an amendment to protect an adjacent road, the Council voted. The motion was approved by a 4-1 vote with Ms. Gruenebaum the sole dissent.
  - Gruenebaum in support of her vote stated, *“This is a challenging and difficult one for me because I agree with the comments that my colleagues have already made about the positive attributes. At the same time, I do not*

*believe the road infrastructure is sufficient to handle in a safe manner this kind of development. So I will vote no.”*

- *Mr. Rieley supported his yes vote, “I also find this challenging. I agree with the comments made by my colleagues, but I'll take note that the Transportation Improvement District has been talked about, but I don't believe it's been fully launched yet and this would be a bit outside that district. Route 54 continues to be a very congested road, particularly in the summertime, and we continue to add additional housing units on that road, and it's becoming a challenge.*

*I mean, traffic in general, as we've known many times, is problematic throughout the county, but in this particular area, you know, it's becoming problematic. I take note that they could essentially build these same units, whether we approve this change or not. I prefer the RPC approach over what the alternative would be, and though I have reservations about traffic and congestion, I will vote yes and agree with planning zoning overall.”*

#### **Grant Requests Approved:**

- Eastern Shore AFRAM Festival for Martin Luther King Day - \$1,000.
- Tether Foundation for their Camp Abilities Delaware Winter Camp - \$3,500.
- East Sussex Public Broadcasting, Inc. for equipment upgrades - \$1,200.
- Clothing Our Kids for their Clothe a Kid Program - \$2,500.

#### **Introduction of Proposed Zoning Conditional Use Ordinances:**

- Four new proposals approved for consideration, three were for solar array projects and one was a boat storage facility.

#### **Council Meeting Schedule: Tuesdays – check agenda for timing and location**

- February 10 – 1:00pm [021026.pdf](#)
- February 17 – no meeting
- February 24

#### **Council Meeting Broadcast**

[County Council Meeting - February 03, 2026](#)

#### **Related Articles:**

[Sussex County Council approves Swan Lake proposal | Delaware Public Media](#)  
[Sussex County appoints Millsboro businessman to planning and zoning panel | News | coasttv.com](#)

[Sussex council fills P&Z, board of adjustment seats | Cape Gazette](#)

[P&Z change allows applicant rebuttal | Cape Gazette](#)

[County priorities include affordable housing, environmental protections | Cape Gazette](#)

***Note: Eyes on County Council makes every effort to render events at public meetings accurately. It either explicitly quotes speakers, or paraphrases their statements as accurately as possible. If any representation in these notes is inaccurate, please contact us.***