

## Why the third building is a big deal

Posted by [Martin Fairclough](#) On 05/23/2018

**Hollywood, MD** - The future growth in St. Mary's County cannot be based upon an economic development strategy of sitting back and reaping the benefits of having a \$40 billion Navy client a one horse town. For many years, with some interruption, the economic development community has sought ways to diversify the economic base in St. Mary's. In the late 1990s and early 2000 the private sector in partnership with the government---local, state and federal---initiated strategies to do just that. The effort was hatched by the formation of the Patuxent Partnership. The primary thoughts behind this strategy involved leveraging the advanced technology on board the Patuxent River Naval Air Station. The formation of the Patuxent Partnership was one of the long poles in the tent. This organization linked the private sector, academia and the US Navy into a powerful partnership which was able to implement technology transfer both from the Navy and enabled small companies with cutting edge technologies to provide them for the use by the Navy. The partnership was strongly boosted by the state, in particular, The Maryland Technology organization, known as TEDCO. Other linkages were made with private sector organizations across the national NAVAIR footprint---San Diego, Point Mugu, Lakehurst, Orlando, Texas, Cherry Point, NC and others. This architecture enabled the technology community in Southern Maryland, dependent primarily on the Navy, to share lessons learned and engage in real time information exchange across the nation, a first step to diversification.

During and before this period The Southern Maryland Navy Alliance, created by visionaries, such as former Senator J. Frank Raley, worked quietly but very effectively at the highest levels of the Department of Defense (DoD) to gather information and to ensure the decision-makers understood the critical importance of NAS PAX. They were in essence our first and only line of defense to prevent the technology superiority at NAS PAX to be degraded by Base Realignment activities. Working closely with Congressman Steny Hoyer and at that time his chief aide Delegate John Bohanon, they brought additional capabilities to Pax, such as the Anechoic Chamber, to mention just one.

In addition, a key piece of infrastructure opened its doors to provide the high level engineering education requirements of the region. The Southern Maryland Higher Education Center, (SMHEC) which was a heavy lift to get into top gear, until Dr. Mel Powell took the helm, managed to bring prestigious universities to teach their course work and provide a key hub for the county and the region's growth. Again, with persistent help from Hoyer, Bohanon, the SMHEC Board of Governors and other community leaders.

At the local level, the Board of County Commissioners at that time sorta-kind of got it.

Fast forward to right now. The current BOCC created an Economic Development Commission and a road map based upon diversification was put in place. Central to this plan is the public private partnership being built around the St. Mary's County Regional Airport. With Congressman Hoyer's assistance there is now a technology incubator, a facility to cement the region as the nation's center of excellence for autonomous vehicles (think drones). The private sector group S Hunt Aero LLC has invested in excess of \$20 million to build facilities which will provide avionic services and draw new companies and jobs to the region.

The other vital piece of the architecture was for the addition of a third building at the SMHEC. Work and funding for the third building concept was started a number of years ago. This building will be used for research and development in the field of autonomous vehicles. Eight million dollars has already been spent on the project and Governor Hogan allocated \$28 million in the current budget, so shovels could go in the ground to start construction. The SMHEC Board of Governors coordinating closely with the College of Southern Maryland (CSM) and St. Mary's College of Maryland (SMCM) signed a memorandum of understanding (MOU) to merge with the University Systems of Maryland in December of 2017 and in January the University systems of Maryland, whose point person is Patrick Hogan a brother of the governor ratified the MOU and the operations on the SMHEC will be under the auspices of University of Maryland College Park. This action alone would mean that one could start at CSM, move to SMHEC to gain a Bachelors degree, and, with this new construct go on to earn a Masters and a Phd right here in southern Maryland! The moniker will be all from the U of M College Park.

The advanced research flowing from the third building in tandem with the existing incubator and UAV facility, will feed development to enable the vision of the National Center of Excellence for Autonomous Vehicles based in Southern Maryland to become a potent economic development driver. This "research park" will become a new hub for growth in jobs and attraction of new advanced technology companies in St. Mary's county and the entire Southern Maryland Region. Combine this with the runway extension in process the sky is the limit.

The third building was deleted from the budget, but the political leadership in Annapolis promised as does the governor it will be in the 2020 budget.

The story line presented by the politicians is fuzzy and TheBayNet.com is continuing to find ground truth.

When asked about all of this Commissioner Todd Morgan who is running unopposed for reelection, said, "I really don't think its delay will impact our economic development strategy. We are moving forward. I think an issue will be next year if it is not approved in the 2020 budget. We are aware of interest by other universities in our vision. To my knowledge we did write to the Governor expressing our support. We still have \$1 million in reserves for the building showing our commitment. The delegation supported the building....they didn't support our commitment before....haven't heard much recently on that."

If you want to learn more on the status of this very important evolving story call your local members of the Southern Maryland Delegation, County Commissioners and all candidates running for office. The outcome of whether the 3rd building will ever get built is dependent upon the people who are elected to represent us in Annapolis to "get it done".

One freedom Americans still have is the right to vote. Ultimately it is on us to choose candidates best able to represent us at the county level but more so those who aspire to represent us in Annapolis.

Contact Martin Fairclough at [m.fairclough@thebaynet.com](mailto:m.fairclough@thebaynet.com)