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Secretary Strickland Visits St. Michaels; Tours flood-prone areas



Russell Strickland, Secretary of the Maryland Department of Emergency Management (MDEM) and his executive team recently toured the Town of St. Michaels to discuss flooding and stormwater issues impacting the town. MDEM has primary responsibility and authority for Maryland's emergency preparedness policy, and for coordinating hazard mitigation, incident response, and disaster recovery. The site visit included presentations at the Town Hall, a walking tour, and a boat ride through St. Michaels Harbor focusing on the town's most flood-prone streets and shorelines.

The Secretary and his team were joined by town officials, members of the St. Michaels Climate Change/Sea Level Rise Commission, the President & CEO of the Chesapeake Bay Maritime Museum, and representatives from Talbot County Emergency Management, the Governor's Office, and RAUCH, inc., a firm providing engineering services for the town.

Casey Rauch, the consulting Town Engineer, gave a presentation on work that is already underway. He emphasized that much of that work is helping to address the town's flooding challenges, but that long-term strategies are also needed to deliver more impactful solutions. By working with the town, local business owners, and the Chesapeake Bay Maritime Museum, he is helping to facilitate coordination amongst key stakeholders.

"This is truly a whole community approach," Rauch said. "Engaging all of the interested parties is allowing us to identify cost-effective solutions and work together in a more comprehensive way."

Roy Myers, Chair of the Climate Change/Sea Level Rise Commission presented on the town's plans to use grant funding they have received from the Federal Emergency Management Administration (FEMA) for two priority project areas. The first project area includes Cherry Street and the Honeymoon Bridge, Mill Street, and the Burns Street area. The second project area consists of Muskrat Park, Church Street, and Mulberry Street. He shared photos of flooding events, including some he had taken that morning, and described future actions the commission would like to take for mitigation.

David Breimhurst, President of the Town Commissioners, shared concerns about how flooding has impacted residents, businesses, and the regional economy highlighting the need for action. "This issue has economic implications that reach far beyond St. Michaels alone. St. Michaels is the driving force of Talbot County's \$300M tourism industry. Two thousand people in the county owe their jobs to tourism, and the people who work in St. Michaels come from as far away as Dorchester, Caroline, and Queen Anne's Counties," said Breimhurst. "We regard sea level rise as the most existential threat to the town and the broader economy."

Kristen Greenaway, President & CEO of the Chesapeake Bay Maritime Museum agreed as she led a walking tour of the museum's campus. Pausing at the museum's boat shop to discuss their workforce training and boat restoration programs, she explained the direct economic impact of compromised boat docking space, losing visitors, and cancelling festivals. The museum's master campus plan includes stormwater management measures and incorporates resiliency strategies for the future of the facility. She led the group through the museum's new welcome center under construction and expected to be completed by the fall as a key example.

"Our decision to build the welcome center on this portion of our property was intentional," Greenaway said. "This is the highest point on campus, so it is an excellent example of good planning and design that protects an important investment."

At the end of the tour, the group thanked Secretary Strickland and his team for their partnership and requested ongoing collaboration with MDEM. Strickland shared that he and his team are focused on supporting vulnerable coastal communities such as the Town of St. Michaels and emphasized the importance of working together to build resilience for better prepared and safer communities.

"In our efforts to support coastal communities like the Town of St. Michaels, collaboration and resilience-building are key," said Russ Strickland, MDEM's Secretary. "By working together, we can implement effective solutions to address flooding and stormwater issues, improving the safety and well-being of our communities. We are committed to ongoing collaboration with other key stakeholders to shape a more resilient Maryland where communities thrive."

For more information on the town's sea level rise activities, visit stmichaelsmd.gov. Visitors to the website can also access St. Michaels Floodwatch, an interactive tool that allows residents and visitors to see the effect that sea level rise and nuisance flooding will have over the next 30 years. For resources and emergency preparedness tips related to flooding, visit MDEM's website at mdem.maryland.gov.

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Secretary Strickland and Kristen Greenaway, President & CEO of the Chesapeake Bay Maritime Museum, view the impacts of wind and waves on the museum's campus and surrounding areas of the town.



Casey Rauch and Dennis Glackin, a member of the St. Michaels Climate Change/Sea Level Rise Commission, discuss flood-prone areas impacting recreational boating and commercial fisheries.