

Legislative session ends well for George County

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This year's legislative session was a good one for George County, thanks to local legislators.

"This is the second year in a row that George County has punched out of our weight class," said Economic Development Director Ken Flanagan. "Even with COVID we had a tremendous legislative session with funding and now, following up with 2021, we have had two very successful legislative sessions back-to-back. It is important to note the back-to-back side of it because we are building on funding, we got in 2020. It keeps these projects going."

The projects Flanagan points to are the nearly \$500,000 for the County's share of widening and resurfacing Scott Road, and other \$850,000 for widening and resurfacing Evanston Road from its intersection with Hwy 198 E past Tri-State Pole and Piling, and \$400,000 to remove the "J" turn at the intersection of Old Hwy. 63 N and Hwy 98 and replace it with stop lights.

Scott Road is a joint City/County project that has been in the planning, development, and lining up financing stages for several years. According to Flanagan, this should be the final piece of funding necessary for the County, and construction may begin as soon as the fourth quarter of this year.

The Evanston Road project is critical due to the increased traffic it will carry when the Enviva pellet mill opens and the branching G.M. Luce Road becomes the main employee access to the facility. Evanston Road is already heavily traveled by employees of the adjacent American tank & Vessel, Tri-State Pole and Piling, and through traffic between Hwy. 198 and Hwy 613.

"It will really set up Evanston Road for service to the Industrial Park for years to come, so it was important," Flanagan said. "We defined Evanston Road as the true entrance way into George County Industrial Park." Flanagan said this project "bounced around quite a bit" as it was considered by the various legislative committees and he credits Representative Manly Barton for getting it put in a bill and approved.

The third project was somewhat of a surprise, Flanagan said. "This was a very good legislative move by Senator Dennis Debar, the way he timed it and presented it."

The intersection of Old Hwy. 63N and Hwy. 98 was dangerous with several fatal crashes occurring there over the years. A couple of years back MDOT redesigned the intersection in such a way that instead of Old Hwy. 63N traffic being able to cross Hwy. 98, vehicles had first to enter Hwy 98 and then use a J turn to cross the median before driving a short distance and exiting Hwy. 98 back onto old Hwy. 63N. According to Flanagan

engineers intentionally designed the intersection to be “aggravating” to keep attention levels high. It worked. Serious accidents occurring there fell to near zero.

With ever increasing traffic flows, it may now be too aggravating.

Flanagan said each year has brought more traffic on Hwy. 98 during spring and summer months, now reaching levels of 10,000 vehicles per day. That is a number expected to only grow larger in the future.

“This was a tremendous second year in a row as funding goes. I think the Board is very pleased with our legislative effort, both in the work that we did to get point and with what our delegates did.”