

# TOWN SQUARE LIVE

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# Community

TOWN SQUARE LIVE



# MATT MEYER, LAUREN COOKSEY MARRY IN REHOBOTH

BY BETSY PRICE

New Castle Council’s highest-ranking elected official married his girlfriend of two years Sunday night on the Rehoboth Bay waterfront. County Executive Matt Meyer and Dr. Lauren Cooksey said I do in an intimate ceremony before 90 guests at [Rehoboth Beach Country Club](#). It is his first marriage and her second.

Their romance and wedding seemed to largely fly below the state’s political and social radars. Meyer joked Tuesday that he uses his skills as a former diplomat in Iraq to keep his private life private.

“We did a lot of redirection there,” he said. “I learned a lot of the tricks of the trade. I still have a few up my sleeves.” Then he started laughing. “It wasn’t like it was a big secret,” he said. “It was private.”

“We’re both in sort of big loud environments,” Cooksey said. “So it was nice to keep something just for us and our family and friends.”

Their busy schedules mean they can’t attend every political or social event together. His job as county exec keeps him on the move for long days, often through weekends, as does her job as an emergency room doctor. She is vice chair of ChristianaCare’s emergency department. Meyer and Cooksey met through a friend two years ago.

“It was sort of a no pressure situation,” Cooksey said. “We just sort of hung out with a mutual friend and really hit it off.”

Meyer said he always wanted to get married.

“I think I was always determined not to settle,” he said. “And I feel like I didn’t settle. I’m not one of these guys who’s like, ‘I’m never getting married.’ You wait and you look until you find the right one. I feel like I’ve found the right one.”

Cooksey said their relationship seemed so natural from the start that she never feared getting involved with Meyer, even with the added stress of a political career. Meyer is expected to run for governor in the 2024 race.

“I think we’re really good at separating it,” she said. “Both of us compartmentalize work and home and are really respectful of the boundaries of both.”

## TRAVEL ADVENTURES

The couple made it a point to vacation together as they got to know each other. “We’ve traveled quite a bit,” Meyer said. Not only did they take trips together to Washington, D.C., New York and Vermont, but also Kenya, Honduras and Hawaii.

That is going to make planning a honeymoon hard. “We’ve gone to all these honeymoon destinations already,” Meyer said.

Cooksey said she came to admire Meyer’s commitment. “What you see with Matt is what you get,” she said. “He’s really committed to his career, but he’s also fiercely committed to family and his private life.”

At the same time, he’s never pressured her to be more visible or engaged in his political life.

“He lets me be involved where I want to be and I am able to step back,” she said. “I’ve got my own career and kids, and I’m able to focus on that. So there’s really a good balance.”

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BY BETSY PRICE

It's Instacart in reverse: Delaware's letter carriers will be picking up food at home mailboxes Saturday and taking it away to donate to neighbors in need via the Food Bank of Delaware. This will be the 31st year that the **Stamp Out Hunger Postal Food Drive** will take place across the country. It's a program of the National Association of Letter Carriers. It's also the single largest one-day food drive for the **Food Bank of Delaware**.

Before mail delivery on Saturday, postal customers may place a bag full of nonperishable items by their mailboxes, and their letter carriers will take them away after delivering mail. No donations will be ignored, even if the route truck fills up.

"We have letter carrier volunteers that we send out in to the communities where the donations are too much for the carriers to carry or where there just is not enough

# LETTER CARRIERS TO COLLECT FOOD SATURDAY

room in the trucks to put it all," said Aishia Tolson, who has been the food drive coordinator for the NALC Newark Branch 1977 since 2012. "In that time, no food has ever been left behind," she said.

Carriers are still delivering mail and packages while they are picking up, she noted.

"In the event a subdivision or other community does get missed, I personally have gone out and collected the residual donations myself," she said.

Some customers forget to put out donations or are unable to on that day. "We continue to accept those donations for the entire week after the drive," she said. "All they need to do is leave the donations next to their mailbox for pick up."

Most customers should receive bright orange bags in the mail to use for donations, but the letter carriers will take them in other bags or containers.

The drive also has donation bins set up in lobbies at the Newark Post Office at 401 Ogletown Road for anyone who prefers to deliver donations and for P.O. Box customers.

The Food Bank specifically requests canned fruits and vegetables, peanut butter, canned meats such as tuna fish, canned soups, cereal and spaghetti that are within their use-by dates.



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**BY BETSY PRICE**

Four-time Grammy winner **Angelique Kidjo** will be the opening headliner for the first night of the Clifford Brown Jazz Festival, which is being held June 21-24. Joining her will be **Marquis Hill** and **Monty Alexander** and the Harlem Kingston Express.

The Jazz Festival, sponsored by the city of Wilmington, is the largest free jazz outdoor festival on the East Coast, with city residents and regional guests packing Rodney Square for four days of concerts.

The festival is named for trumpeter and Wilmington native resident Clifford Brown, known as “Brownie.” He died in 1956 at the age of 25 returning from a show. Even though he only had a few years of recordings, many jazz trumpeters still praise his work and his “Joy Spring” and “Daahoud,” have become jazz standards.

The city is rolling out the names of the performers day by day rather than releasing them all at once. All ages are welcome for the concert and guests are advised to bring lawn chairs or blankets for seating. The square will be lined with food trucks and vendors throughout the festival week. Opening the show will be the Boysie Lowery Living Jazz Residency Ensemble, a Wilmington tradition. Track updates on the festival [website](#) and on the [Facebook](#) page.

While the festival is free, donations to **Cityfest Inc.**, a 501c3 non-profit, are encouraged. Make them at [www.cityfestwilm.com](http://www.cityfestwilm.com) or via a check payable to Cityfest, Inc., 800 North French St. Wilmington, DE 19801. Please put them to the attention of Tina Betz, president.



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# LONGWOOD BRINGS BACK ILLUMINATED FOUNTAIN SHOWS THIS SUMMER

BY BETSY PRICE

Longwood Gardens’ main fountain complex comes to life again this summer with illuminated shows choreographed to light and music as the region’s favorite attraction starts its summer schedule.

The gardens’ popular Fireworks & Fountains shows will not return until the summer of 2024, and already one new segment of the illuminated fountain shows—drones and fountains—is already sold out. Fountain shows will run from Thursday, May 11, through Sept. 24, with performances Thursday through Sunday evenings and programs rotating through a [schedule](#).

New this year are “Put Me In, Coach,” featuring a variety of sports-related tunes; “Rachmaninov: Power and Passion;” “Shake It Off: Taylor Swift;” “Starman: David Bowie;” “To Infinity and Beyond,” highlighting songs from animated movie favorites; and “Where the

Heart Is,” a showcase of coming-home hits by the likes of Bon Jovi and Ed Sheeran.

The Illuminated Fountain Performances are included with Gardens admission. Purchase tickets [HERE](#).

Other entertainment options at the Kennett Square, PA, attractions will include:

- Longwood’s Beer Garden, offering pub fare and brews from Victory Brewing Co. They include the Longwood Seasons series brewed with ingredients grown at Longwood. Regional artists perform live instrumental music, including Hawaiian-Inspired Steel Guitar from Slowey & The Boats, Jazz Age Blues from Drew Nugent & The Midnight Society, and Traditional Cuban Son by Conjunto Philadelphia.
- The Summer Performance Series. Free and ticketed performances kick off with the May 12 [Curtis Sym-](#)

[phony Orchestra](#) performance, marking the first time the full orchestra will perform at Longwood; experimental folk-rock duo [Watchhouse](#) June 7; Mexican power duo [Jesse & Joy](#) June 18 and Grammy Award-winning singer songwriter [Lila Downs](#) in September.

- The return of the [Wine & Jazz Festival](#) Sept. 23. The award-winning performers include Chucho Valdés Quartet, Emmet Cohen Trio, Anat Cohen Quartet, Terell Stafford Quintet, The Dale Melton Trio, and High and Mighty Brass Band. Guests can enjoy wines from around the world, including selections from France, Spain, Argentina, South Africa and Italy, as well as domestic vintages from California, New York, Oregon, Pennsylvania and more. Tickets are available now for \$65 and \$43 for designated drivers. Longwood Members receive a discount.
- [Festive Fridays](#) feature themed fountain performances, concessions, entertainment and more. In addition, on Festive Fridays, patrons can climb to the top of the Chimes Tower for a stunning view of Longwood’s 62-bell carillon and the surrounding landscape. The first is May 26’s “Bollywood Blockbusters,” celebrating Hindi film and featuring the Daksha Dance Troupe at 6:30 and 7:30 p.m. in the pumphouse plaza. Others include the June 30 “Make Some Noise,” during which keyboards will be set up around the gardens for guests to play from 5 p.m. to 8 p.m.; “It’s a Philly Thing” on July 14 highlights Victory Brewing Co. and live music from Polkadelphia; “To Infinity and Beyond” on Aug. 4 brings...

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# Community

## 'SENIOR ASSASSINATION GAME' ALARMING

“While this may seem harmless fun, it can lead to serious consequences.” New Castle police warned in a press release. The game can cause a lot of disruption in a community, it said.

“Participants may become preoccupied with the game, causing them to become distracted while driving or engaging in other important activities,” the press release said.

The game also can alarm people who don’t know what’s going on. “The activities of the game could be misconceived by a witness as actual violence or a real firearm,” the release said. “There have been reports where participants dress in dark clothing with masks while using water guns resembling real firearms.

Potential dangers include the students themselves taking things too far, causing serious injuries or even having legal consequences. The release urged parents, teachers and community members to speak with their children and students about the potential dangers of this game.

“If students continue to participate, please exercise common sense,” the release said. “Avoid trespassing on private property, don’t operate a vehicle during and please refrain from using realistic-looking guns.”



BY BETSY PRICE

An eye-raising game that seems to be sweeping the country has shown up in Delaware. New Castle County police were warned May 5 that the “senior assassination game,” which involved high school seniors tracking each other down and shooting each other with water guns, caused a disturbance May 4 in the Deerborne Woods Community.

Officers were dispatched about 2:32 p.m. after calls that someone was running through the community with a silver and black handgun. Officers responded, located the individual and realized the weapon was a gun. News reports from around the country say the same thing is happening elsewhere.

The students use water guns, Nerf guns or other harmless items to strike, usually after school hours.

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- URSULINE ACADEMY

photo by Mailchimp / Unsplash

The laptop screen displays the Mailchimp homepage. At the top, the Mailchimp logo is visible on the left, and the text "Sales +1(800) 315-5929 Log in" is on the right. The main heading reads "Outperform your last campaign". Below this is a diagram of an email automation flow: "No Abandoned Carts" (Subject: You left something behind) leads to "Float left in their cart", which leads to "Wait 1 hour", which leads to "Gets reminder email". A central graphic shows a yellow float with a pink box and a blue box, with the text "BIG ON FLOATS" and "Don't let this one float away!". To the right of the flow diagram, the text says "Sell more with email automations" and "Generate more orders with our prebuilt automations: remind abandoned cart shoppers, reengage lost customers, or cross-sell your products. Marketers have seen, on average, 4x more orders with our Customer Journey Builder than with bulk emails." A "Sell more" button is located at the bottom right of the text area.

*Business*

TOWN SQUARE LIVE



# JANE BRADY JOINS A BETTER DELAWARE AS BOARD CO-CHAIR

BY BETSY PRICE

A familiar face will join the board of **A Better Delaware**. Jane Brady, a former Delaware Superior Court Judge and three-term state attorney general will become co-chair, along with founder Chris Kenny, of the organization's board.

A Better Delaware describes itself as a non-partisan public policy and political advocacy organization that supports pro-growth, pro-jobs policies as well as greater transparency and accountability in state government. It mostly champions conservative issues and during elections its political action committee has supported conservative candidates. A Better Delaware is also leading an effort to help conservative groups create meaningful relationships and work better together.

Kenny, president and CEO of the Kenny Family ShopRite Stores of Delaware, also owns Delaware LIVE, which operates this website, Town Square Delaware and Milford Live.

## BRADY'S EXPERIENCE

Brady joins the board a few weeks after losing a re-election bid as chair of the Delaware State Republican Party to challenger Julianne Murray.

"I am quite familiar with and have admired the significant work that A Better Delaware has done in a very short time," Brady said in an ABD press release. "I look forward to working with Delaware's business and civic communities to make Delaware a better place to live and do business."

Brady graduated from the University of Delaware and Villanova University School of Law. She recently received her Master's of Business Administration from the University of Delaware-Lerner School. She lives in Lewes with her husband, Michael Neal, and their son, Trent, who attends Cape Henlopen schools.

Kenny said he was pleased to have Brady bring her experiences to the board.

"Her grasp of the issues affecting Delaware today is keen and will be a great asset to our advocacy for improving Delaware for the families and businesses here," he said.

Sam Waltz, who currently serves as vice chair of A Better Delaware, said he had known Brady for quite a while and was thrilled to have the opportunity to work with her.

A Better Delaware also recently hired a new executive director, Ethan Lang, a Milford resident and undergraduate research fellow at Dartmouth College. Lang also has worked as a deputy recorder of deeds in Kent County, as a Delaware Supreme Court intern and as a Delaware LIVE freelancer in 2020 and 2021.

Other members of the board include former U.S. Congressman Mike Castle; Elder Law lawyer William W. Erhart; Dr. Greg DeMeo; retired professor of climatology, geography, and spatial sciences David Legates; former Christiana Fire Co. assistant chief Dennis E. Godek; former Kent County Judge William L. Witham Jr.; and Susan Cascells, who serves as treasurer.



photo by Spencer Davis / Unsplash



# Food & Dining

TOWN SQUARE LIVE



BY PAM GEORGE

If you haven't been to the old Chrysler site in some time, you're in for a surprise. Gone is the manufacturing plant, built in 1951. In its place is the [University of Delaware's Science, Technology and Advanced Research Campus](#), a collection of sleek, new buildings with futurist facades. However, the newest resident on the STAR campus isn't inventing biopharmaceuticals, editing genes or coming up with new chemicals. Instead, [Grain Exchange](#) is preparing wraps, sandwiches, cocktails and salads for employers, students, faculty, locals and visitors.

The restaurant, which opened May 10, at 591 Collaboration Way, is part of [OMG Hospitality](#), which owns and manages Grain Craft Bar + Kitchen in Newark, Trolley Square and Kennett Square; Grain H2O in Bear, Grain on the Rocks in Lewes, and Lewes Coffee Co., which has space next to Grain on the Rocks and Grain Exchange.

#### A LOGICAL STEP

To recap: Grain is the brainchild of friends and neighbors Lee Mikles and Jim O'Donoghue, who spent time chatting around the Mikles' firepit. The University of Delaware graduates discussed the need for a family-friendly restaurant with casual food and great drinks. The friends did more than talk—in 2015, they opened the first Grain on Main Street in Newark, and more followed. Grain H2O and the Kennett

## GRAIN EXCHANGE OPENS ON UD'S STAR CAMPUS

Square site both debuted in 2017.

By 2019, the partners were in talks with the University of Delaware to put a restaurant on the STAR campus, which many dubbed a "food desert."

"We thought it was a great customer base that we wanted to tap into long term," Mikles said of the employers taking up residence on the site. "We're not a college bar, but we felt what was happening at STAR was significant."

The existing buildings weren't designed to accommodate a restaurant. Enter the six-story FinTech Innovation Hub, built from the ground up. Not only does the 100,000-square-foot structure have space for a dining room and outdoor patio, but it also has room for a catering and commissary kitchen.

#### GROWING WITH GRAIN

So why the name Grain Exchange? Primarily to avoid confusion, Mikles explained. Tell a friend to meet you at Grain in Newark, and your GPS might take you to the flagship restaurant in downtown Newark. It's not unusual for the Grain restaurants to have distinct identities depending on the location. For example, the Kennett restaurant serves mushroom soup and the Lewes site has steamed shrimp.

"In the FinTech building, we want to show off our pride in Delaware and get people excited about that," said Mikles.

It's not the first time. The Newark Grain was named for quirky Delaware inventor Oliver Evans, who created an automated flour mill for—wait for it—grain.

At Grain Exchange, Work Progress Administration-styled artwork pays homage to Delaware innovators, including Evans, also the inventor of the steam-powered Oruktor Amphibolos. Many consider it the first automobile. Another poster salutes Aunt Sallie Shadd, a caterer who served ice cream to freed black people in Wilmington. Reportedly, First Lady Dolley Madison traveled to Delaware to taste it, and she adapted the recipe for the 1813 inaugural ball.

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# BARDEA OPENS THE GARDEN, OFFERING RAW BAR, LIGHT BITES

BY PAM GEORGE

The coronavirus pandemic created an increased demand for outdoor dining, which continued after the restriction eased. Today, many Delawareans seek out an alfresco experience. Enter The Garden, an attractive terrace sandwiched between siblings **Bardea Food & Drink** and **Bardea Steak**. The new lounge and eatery had a soft opening May 4 and a launch party is scheduled for Thursday, May 11.

The attractive landscaped area has been in place since Bardea Steak opened last year. Customers could relax near the foundations and fire features while waiting for a table inside the restaurants. However, staffing issues made it difficult for the partners to fully execute the concept.

“Last summer, we just played around,” said Scott Stein, co-owner of Bardea Restaurant Group. “This is what we always envisioned. We are putting all of our energies into this.”

## THE GARDEN LINKS BRAND

Stein’s partner, Antimo DiMeo, crafted a casual menu that showcases the talents of the hospitality group’s kitchens yet is unique to The Garden. (Bardea Restaurant Group also owns Pizzeria Bardea and Taqueria El Chingon in **DE.CO**, a downtown food hall.

The Garden’s pizzas are \$18 to \$20 and snacks include a trendy breadboard with cultured butter and extra-virgin olive oil (\$6), a corn dog with mortadella wagyu (\$15) and bao bun with beef cheek (\$16).

The Garden also offers raw bar selections, including oysters on the half shell, tuna sashimi and salads. The star, however, is The Crossbreed, a dry-aged smash patty made with wagyu, Angus and Piedmontese beef, served on a bun baked in-house.

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## BING'S BAKE & BREW EXPANDS WITH CAFÉ IN NEWARK

BY KEN MAMMARELLA

The family that owns Delaware's oldest bakery has set up a second coffeeshop in downtown Newark, across Main Street from where Bing's Bakery opened in 1871. **Bing's Bake & Brew** bought the Little French Café of Newark.

"It's quaint," Carla Guzzi, who owns Bing's with her husband Tom Guzzi, said of the new location "It has a lot of charm."

It's keeping many items popularized by owner Martha Barrier and adding "a delicious dessert menu from Bing's Bakery," Bing's announced on **Facebook**.

The new Bake & Brew is at 64 E. Main St. **Bing's Bakery** opened at 57 E. Main and now operates at 253 E. Main St., less than a half-mile to the east. The first

Bing's Bake & Brew is in Amstel Square, 57 S. Main St., a half-mile to the west of the new cafe.

Guzzi said the new location features a half-dozen crepes, several sandwiches on croissants, side salads, quiches, fruit cups and desserts. It does not offer bagels because they're already a common choice on Main Street, she said, but she hopes that crepes are a rare and inviting item.

The drinks menu includes eight varieties of espresso, nine frozen and blended drinks, eight drinks over ice, three alternatives (chai, hot chocolate and brewed coffee), four teas and a weekly feature.

Bing's on Main is about 1,000 square feet, compared to 1,500 for Bing's on Amstel Square, so Guzzi said

they're looking to focus the menu. "A few things, done well," she said. A grand opening is planned this summer, and the Guzzis will also be developing a branding strategy. Right now, the spots will be known as Bing's on Main and Bing's on Amstel Square.

"We've worked so hard to build the **Bing's brand**. It should be in the name, and I want it to grow, like Grain," she said, referring to Grain Craft Bar + Kitchen in downtown Newark, Grain H2O along the Chesapeake & Delaware Canal and the planned Grain Exchange at the University of Delaware's STAR campus.

### BIG WELCOME FOR BING'S

The opening announcement for Bing's on Main on **Facebook** generated dozens of congratulatory and welcoming comments, including one from Barrier ("I can't think of a better family to pass off our hard work to. Bon courage!") and National 5&10 ("We will miss Martha & TLFC, but we couldn't be more excited to have you as our new next door neighbors").

National 5&10 actually share the same building, and the proximity evokes Guzzi's fond childhood memories of countertop refreshments at 5&10s in New York.

Former mayor Vance Funk displayed his deep-rooted civic mindedness by hoping that Bing's Bake & Brew has "better luck in getting those stairs fixed" and suggesting that Bing's ask the city to "reduce the truck parking area by one spot so customers who take out will have easy access." Bing's said it was a good idea.





photo by Charlie Megginson

LEGISLATIVE HALL

*Government*

**TOWN SQUARE LIVE**



# LEAD REMEDIATION BILL SEEMS TO BE HEADING TO SENATE FLOOR

BY SAM HAUT

A bill looking to address lead across Delaware seems likely to pass to the Senate floor after a warm reception by the Senate Health & Social Service Committee Wednesday. **Senate Bill 9**, sponsored by Sen. Sarah McBride, D-Wilmington, creates the Delaware State Lead-Based Paint Program.

It would require the Division of Public Health to, within 60 days of being notified of a child with 3.5 micrograms per deciliter of lead in their blood, find out where the child is and where they were exposed to lead. The division would then have 10 days to tell the child's parent that the child has elevated blood lead levels, what the division is doing to address the presence of lead, get a contractor to do a lead risk assessment of the site where the child got increased blood lead levels, and inform the

owner of the site with lead that the state will fund lead abatement.

A lead-based paint abatement and remediation fund would also be established, and the bill would require the legislature to appropriate money for the fund. That money could only be used to pay for lead remediation or assessment projects across the state and for temporary housing for people whose property is being remediated.

Because Senate committees do not vote publicly on bills, it was not immediately clear if the bill passed, but it faced no major objections. The bill follows a Monday press conference in which McBride introduced the bill and talked about its benefits.

While a fiscal note for the bill is incomplete, Gov. John

Carney's proposed budget included \$2.9 million to build capacity in the Department of Health and Human Services for lead remediation. Mark Holodick, secretary of the Delaware Department of Education, has also announced another \$3.8 million investment in lead remediation.

Molly Magarik, cabinet secretary for the Department of Health and Human Services, which oversees Public Health, told the committee that lead exposure is extremely dangerous to children.

"We are concerned with everyone's exposure to lead but it is especially important for children under six because their brains are developing so rapidly and because of that they are at the greatest risk of harm from lead exposure," Magarik said. "And again, that lead exposure whether it's inhaled or ingested, can cause long-term neurological damage that may be associated with learning and behavioral problems throughout their lifespan."

Magarik said they are also working to get additional grants from the US Department of Housing and Urban Development, which New Castle County has already received.

Eric Buckson, R-Dover, said he wants to make sure that Kent and Sussex counties are both getting the same assistance for addressing lead as New Castle County. McBride said that she has spoken with people in Sussex County who are looking forward to getting more funding for lead remediation.

During public comment on the bill, nine people spoke in favor of the bill, with no one speaking against it.

[CLICK TO READ MORE](#)

# BUCKSON CRITICIZES MATERNAL BILL FOR DROPPING TERM 'WOMAN'

BY SAM HAUT

Sen. Eric Buckson, R-Dover, had issues Wednesday with a maternal health bill changing the words “woman” and “women” to “person” and “people.”

**Senate Bill 106**, sponsored by Sen. Kyle Gay, D-Elsmere, would replace those words in the Delaware code on maternal health and also change the term maternal depression to perinatal mood and anxiety disorder. These changes would apply to the part of the Delaware code that deals with maternal health, which specifies who receives informational materials on maternal health, including depression, that can occur during and after pregnancy.

During the Senate Health & Social Services Committee meeting, Buckson asked if, as a father of four, the bill as written would include him in spaces meant for expectant mothers.

“Sen. Buckson, I don’t want to make any assumptions about your personhood,” Gay said. “I know that you identify as male and have presented as such to me and asked me to use he/him pronouns with you.

“However, if you are neither in the pregnancy stage and you are neither carrying a baby, or if you are not postpartum, then my understanding of the language of this bill is that it would not apply to you.”

Sen. Stephanie Hansen, D-Middletown, said that she doesn’t understand Buckson’s concern with the bill, as she feels it will only help people. Buckson said that he takes issue with changing the word women to person.

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## BILL WOULD BAN LANDLORDS FROM EVICTING TENANTS FOR CRIMES

BY JAREK RUTZ

A bill that would strip crime-free housing ordinances from Delaware sparked conversation about domestic abuse, racist motives and local control in the Senate Housing and Land Use Committee Wednesday.

**Senate Bill 99**, sponsored by Sen. Marie Pinkney, D-New Castle, would ban municipal ordinances from requiring the eviction of tenants for criminal activity by a tenant, member of the tenant's household or a guest in the house. The legislation is a recommendation of the African American Task Force, established under the 150th General Assembly.

A 2020 statewide analysis report from the Delaware State Fair Housing Consortium lists the removal of crime-free housing ordinances and legislation banning them as one of its goals for ensuring that people have equal access to housing.

Pinkney pointed out that at least six municipalities in Delaware have crime-free housing ordinances. Generally, she said, they require landlords to include an addendum on their lease agreements prohibiting a tenant, member of the tenant's household, or a guest from committing a criminal activity within a specified distance of their unit. If any of those parties commit a certain number of criminal activities within a specified time period, the landlord must initiate an eviction. If a landlord does not file to evict the tenant, the landlord may lose their rental license.

Sonya Starr, policy director at **Housing Alliance Delaware**, said crime-free housing ordinances are particularly concerning because it discourages victims of domestic abuse to call law enforcement. The definition of criminal activity can be vague, she said, and can

include low-level offenses such as trespassing, loitering and disorderly conduct. She noted how honking a horn would be considered disorderly conduct and consequently would fall under a crime-free ordinance.

The Delaware State Housing Authority supports SB 99. "These ordinances are problematic because the way they define criminal activity is vague, and it does not require an arrest, charge or conviction to occur," said Javier Horstmann, the group's chief policy advisor. "Oftentimes, just having the police respond to a residence can be considered an instance of criminal activity, irregardless of the reason for the call."

Crime-free ordinances disincentivize tenants from calling first responders in emergency situations, which is a worrisome issue for persons experiencing domestic violence, he said.

"Furthermore, these ordinances can be abused by neighbors or other community members with racist motives who may, for example, call the police in order to lodge frivolous noise complaints," he said. "At a time when there is a severe shortage of low income housing, we cannot allow these types of ordinances to displace tenants based on vaguely defined criminal activity."

Sen. Eric Buckson, R-Dover, called the bill "heavy-handed" and said it would take away local control of municipal officials.

"We have elected councils in these municipalities, who I believe the state has a duty to respect," he said. He said he supports the premise of the bill, but that municipal officials should be consulted first, and they should be the ones to make the change, rather than laying down a legislative mandate on them.

[CLICK TO READ MORE](#)

# FOUR CLIMATE BILLS DRAW SUPPORT, CRITICISM AHEAD OF HEARINGS

BY SAM HAUT

Three House bills and one Senate bill were set to be heard Wednesday by the House Natural Resources and Energy committee and the Senate Environment Energy & Transportation committee. All of them are part of an initiative by Gov. John Carney and Democratic legislators to lower harmful emissions in Delaware to improve air quality. The package includes eight bills, seven in the House and one Senate bill. House Bill 8, 9, and 10 were set to be heard by the House Natural Resources & Energy Meeting Wednesday.

**House Bill 8**, sponsored by Rep. Ed Osienski, D-Newark, requires that sustainability and carbon impact data be considered when awarding construction contracts and preference be given to contracts that use materials with lower carbon emissions.

David Stevenson, director of the Center for Energy & Environment at the Caesar Rodney Institute, said the bill doesn't provide enough details on what alternatives

construction companies can use.

"I don't even know how you're going to do HB 8 with these clean construction materials," Stevenson said. "You start laying out the cradle to grave cost of all these raw materials and decide, gee, we're not going to use concrete anymore. Please, what's the alternative here? It's just impractical."

**House Bill 9**, sponsored by Rep. Krista Griffith, D-Greenville, requires more of the state-owned fleet of vehicles to be zero emission vehicles, starting with 15% by 2026, increasing to 25% by 2029, to 50% by 2032, and up to 100% by 2040.

**House Bill 10**, sponsored by Rep. Deb Heffernan, D-Bellefonte, requires that more school buses be electric, with 5% of new vehicles purchased needing to be electric in 2026, increasing by 5% each year until it reaches 30% by 2030.

Kim Klein, associate secretary of operations support for the Delaware Department of Education, said it would cost an additional \$250,000 per electric bus, along with \$75,000 per bus for electric infrastructure. Klein said buses have been advertised as having a range of 120 miles, but several factors contribute to a decrease in that range.

"So some of that information we expect to really learn as we get buses in place because if you have the air or heat on, obviously that drains your battery faster," Klein said. "If you have hills versus flat area, obviously your battery is going to drain faster. So there are a lot of factors that go into ultimately what the range is for an electric school bus."

While the Delaware Department of Education doesn't now have any electric buses in its fleet of around 500 buses, they received a grant from the EPA for three buses and a grant from DNREC for another bus. Klein said they expect those buses to be delivered by late spring or early summer of 2024.

Also Wednesday, **Senate Bill 103** wavs set to be heard by the Senate Environment, Energy & Transportation Wednesday. SB Bill 103, sponsored by Sen. Sarah McBride, D-Wilmington, requires residential buildings completed in 2025 and beyond to have at least one parking space for charging electric vehicles.

Stevenson said he doesn't think it's necessary to install electric vehicle charging stations in every new home.

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# ANIMAL WELFARE MAY GET DOGGIE BAG OF NEW DUTIES FROM GA

BY SAM HAUT

The 10-year-old state Office of Animal Welfare could walk away from this year's General Assembly with added duties and new money to hire more officers. Two bills recently passed through the House Health & Human Development committee that would impact the office.

**Senate Bill 71**, sponsored by Sen. Stephanie Hansen, D-Middletown, would require law enforcement agencies, the Department of Services for Children, Youth and Their Families, and the Department of Justice to report cases of animal abuse to the Office of Animal Welfare.

**House Bill 124**, sponsored by Rep. Eric Morrison, D-Glasgow, would add a civil penalty for the first noise complaints received from barking dogs, then a \$50 fine for the second violation, \$100 for a third violation and

\$150 for any subsequent violations. All of that would be sent to Animal Welfare to handle.

Mark Tobin, chief of Delaware Animal Services, said the office already gets reports from Child Services about instances of animal abuse, so SB 71 would serve to codify something that's already being done instead of adding more work.

Christina Motoyoshi, executive director of Animal Welfare, said in an email that HB 124 would create more work and response may not be immediate from a staff that's already down some officers.

"Due to staffing and safety concerns, OAW only responds after hours to emergencies, so barking dog complaints could only be handled during business hours," she said.

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# PANEL: STATE SHOULD MAKE 1% EXTRA RETIREE FUNDING THE LAW

BY SAM HAUT

A subcommittee exploring state retiree health plans on Monday voted to recommend that the General Assembly codify putting 1% of the state budget into a fund that pays retiree benefits to lower the billions of dollars of deficit.

The State Employee Benefits retiree subcommittee asked Cheiron, a consulting firm, to look into additional ways for the state to lower the state’s unfunded liability. The recommendation concerns post employment benefits paid for out of what’s called the OPEB Trust Fund. It includes retiree benefits such as healthcare, life insurance and disability, but not pensions. Money for those benefits should be accrued in advance of needing them, but Delaware has not done that.

Financial experts said there is an \$8.3 billion shortfall as of July 1, 2022, and estimates will increase to \$20.7 billion by 2042 if no way is created to close that gap.

Last year, Gov. John Carney put 1% of the state budget into that trust fund and has proposed doing it again this year with \$51 million. It will not help close the gap fast enough, but does satisfy rating agencies who are aware that the deficit is hanging over the state finances.

The subcommittee, which was formed after the state tried to move retirees off their generous health plan to a more-restrictive Medicare Advantage plan because of budget fears, wants the state to make adding that 1% every year a law. Even so, that money would only add up to about 60% of the gap by 2052.

Jeff Taschner, executive director of the Delaware State Education Association, said the legislature should also consider whether it would be possible to increase that to 1.25% 1.5% 1.75% and 2% of the state’s budget. Joanna Adams, pension administrator with the Office of Pensions, said that if the state funded it at 2%, the money

would amount to around 93% of the liability by 2052.

Rep. Mike Ramone, R-Pike Creek, said that because of the budget surpluses of the last three years, it may be possible for the state to kick in a higher percentage or even a flat dollar amount, but there should be a floor in the recommended budget line for both percentage and dollar amount.

“I would suggest we use a measurement, whether it’s one and a half or whatever, but not be below,” Ramone said. “So in other words, every year we are putting \$100 million towards this, or 2%, whichever is higher or 1.5%. Something that we have a bottom that we will not go lower.”

Ten committee members voted to recommend the set-aside. Four people abstained, all state officials: Claire DeMatteis, secretary of the Department of Human Resources; Richard Geisenberger, secretary of the Department of Finance; Sen. Brian Pettyjohn, R-Georgetown; and Ramone.

In order to cover the remaining 40% of the OPEB Trust Fund liability, the subcommittee will look into reducing benefits, such as lowering coverage for spouses; increasing the minimum retirement age; adjusting the amount of benefits offered based on length of service; and removing people who quit to work somewhere else before retiring.

Each option had an estimate for how much it would reduce the liability and how much it would make up for the gap in funding. All four accounted for around 20%.

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# 2023 ATTEMPT TO ALTER ABSENTEE VOTING PASSES SENATE

BY SAM HAUT

The Senate voted along party lines 15 to 5 to pass a bill that would amend the Delaware constitution to allow absentee voting for any reason. **Senate Bill 3**, sponsored by Sen. Darius Brown, D-Wilmington, ultimately would allow absentee voting for any reason. However, it would require voters to sign an oath or affirmation saying they are free from improper influence before voting. The bill required a two-thirds majority because it will change the state constitution.

The legislature had previously implemented no-excuse mail-in voting through **Senate Bill 320**, which was signed into law last July. But that bill was ruled **unconstitutional** by the Delaware Supreme Court in October 2022 in the case Higgin v. Albence. So the Democrats are back with another bill.

While Senate Bill 320 had a fiscal note of \$130,000 for the 2023 fiscal year and \$132,600 for the 2025 fiscal year, both from the general fund, Senate Bill 3 doesn't require a fiscal note.

“Simply put, this bill allows individuals in the state of Delaware to vote by absentee without omission,” Brown said. “And we believe that we want to encourage the residents of our state to do so.”

Sen. Brian Pettyjohn, R-Georgetown, said that absentee voting makes it easier for people to improperly influence someone's decision and the Senate should move cautiously.

“If you're doing this through absentee and allowing anybody to absentee vote for whatever reason, part of those protections on the voter side are removed,” Pettyjohn said. “There can be undue significant influence when somebody is allowed to vote for any reason, without the security of the polling place that we go to great lengths to protect on election day and during the early voting period.”

Anthony Delcollo, attorney for Senate Republicans, was asked by Pettyjohn how they could prove the voter is being truthful when signing the affirmation on

improper influence. Delcollo said he wouldn't know how to verify the affirmation's integrity.

“A matter of examining that in any sort of substantive way is something that I'm unaware of,” he said.

Eric Buckson, R-Dover, said he might support no-excuse absentee voting, but the bill presented doesn't offer enough protections.

“If it is a restructuring of the absentee balloting, maybe there is a reason to move away from a just cause,” Buckson said. “If that was the only ask, we could have that conversation, but in the language that's presented in this bill, it's not the only ask.”

“We'll be back, we just will. And that's what concerns me...it's important that all Delawareans have the opportunity to participate in a free and fair election...but we must continue to have guardrails.”

Sen. Bryant Richardson, R-Laurel, said he has concerns about the possibility of ballot harvesting.

“I can just imagine a scenario where someone goes to help somebody fill out a ballot and if they didn't like the ballot when they left, might just accidentally get dropped in trash,” Richardson said.

Brown said that all the concerns raised about the bill are already present in Delaware's existing absentee voting law. SB3 has 18 additional sponsors and cosponsors, all Democrats. The bill now heads to the House for consideration.





# SENATE COMMITTEE GIVES ROAD SAFETY BILLS A GREEN LIGHT

BY SAM HAUT

A package of road safety bills are, well, moving on down the road. Four of the six proposed by Gov. John Carney and various Democrats pattered through the Senate Environment, Energy & Transportation Committee Wednesday with little opposition. All four bills have support from both Democrats and Republicans.

**House Bill 92**, sponsored by Rep. Bill Carson, D-Smyrna, would require drivers to either change lanes and slow down or just slow down for any stopped cars with their hazard lights on. Nicole Majeski, secretary of the Delaware Department of Transportation, told the committee that 13 people were killed either in or approaching a vehicle stopped on the side of the road.

Senate committees do not take public votes. Interested parties have to wait and check the bill's tracking page to see whether and how it passed. HB92 received two

votes in favor and five votes on its merits, which means that the voter didn't want to go on record as for or against.

**Senate Bill 89**, sponsored by Sen. Spiros Mantzavinos, D-Elsmere, would allow state-owned snow vehicles to use green lights to be more visible during snow storms. They now are using white or amber light required by law. Majeski said changing the law could help reduce the number of accidents involving snow plows. In the last five years, there have been 53, she said.

The bill passed with three votes in favor and four on its merits.

**Senate Bill 68**, sponsored by Sen. Kyle Gay, D-Elsmere, would change the requirements surrounding child car seats, change the penalty for not following the law, and require the Department of Safety and Homeland Security to create an awareness campaign.

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# STUDENT 'MENTAL HEALTH DAYS' BILL AMONG FIVE ON WAY TO HOUSE

BY JAREK RUTZ

A busy day in the House Education Committee Wednesday—headlined by a law that would give students mental health days—ended with five bills sent to the full House.

**House Bill 3**, sponsored by House Majority Leader Rep. Valerie Longhurst, D-Bear, provides for excused absences for the mental or behavioral health of a student. It requires any student taking more than two such excused absences to be referred to a behavioral health specialist.

Longhurst said the bill helps destigmatize mental health while also flagging potentially troubled students to prevent them from hurting themselves or others. She said that a CDC survey showed the COVID-19 pandemic exacerbated an existing mental health crisis for students, and one in five school-aged children have a mental health condition, with 45% of children having experienced a traumatic event.

Rep. Rich Collins, R-Millsboro, admitted he had a hard time understanding what behavioral health means.

“My understanding is one of the huge problems we have in our schools today is a lack of discipline among the students,” Collins said. “Nobody can learn when they’re not disciplined, and that’s what I’ve heard from many teachers as to why they’ve left the profession or why they would not go back into it. So why are we legislating in this area?”

Several legislators pointed out that behavioral health is often a byproduct of student anxiety, and can manifest itself into students not being engaged in class or self-isolation.

“They may have anxiety, they may have ADHD, they may have a host of characteristics that create them to not be able to function in school,” Longhurst said.

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## 2023 DELAWARE SCHOOL BOARD ELECTION RESULTS

BY JAREK RUTZ

# ELECTIONS





## LEARNING COLLAB SEEKS PERMISSION TO EXTEND PLANNING PERIOD

BY JAREK RUTZ

The council of the [Wilmington Learning Collaborative](#) will ask the three participating districts to amend their memorandum of understanding to extend the council’s planning period.

“We’ve got one shot at this,” said councilman Lincoln Hohler, who is [Brandywine School District](#)’s superintendent. “We can’t come back to the community with another failed initiative and say we want to reboot, we get one shot and we’ve got to get into it right.”

The council also reported that 100 people have applied for the executive director role and a few admonished the state for not giving it what they felt like was enough administrative support during planning.

The Learning Collab, created in November 2022 with the signing of the [memorandum of understanding](#),

includes nine Wilmington elementary schools from Brandywine, Christina and Red Clay school districts. Its goal is to improve academic performance for city students while giving families and educators in the city more of a voice in policymaking for their children’s education.

In the original agreement, the 2022-2023 school year was designated as the planning year. During it, the governing council would be formed and an executive director hired, with needs and root-cause assessments conducted at each school and more.

Councilman Dorrell Green, Red Clay’s superintendent, pointed out the council wasn’t formally formed until January, just a few months ago.

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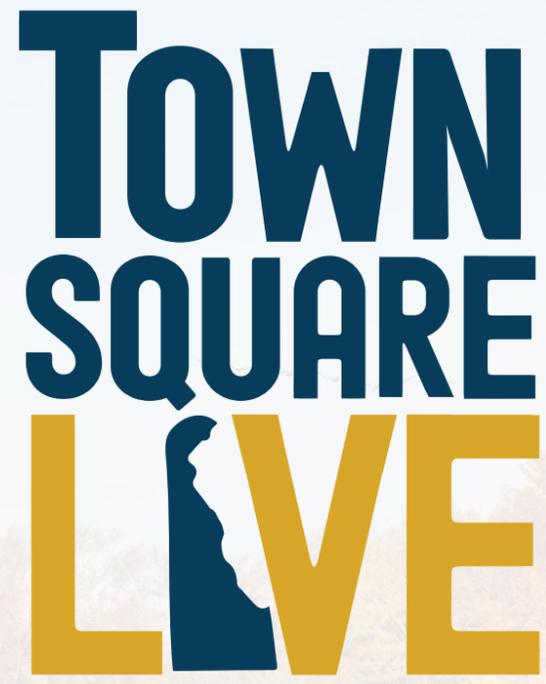
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