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Expanded Wilmington Airport Project Among Others



Wind Farm Deal "Rushing to Outcome"



St. Georges Wins At Odessa

photo link: [Longwood Gardens](#)

photo by *Hank Davis*

Community

TOWN SQUARE LIVE



EXPANDED WILMINGTON AIRPORT AMONG DRBA'S \$132.7M CAPITAL PLAN

BY KEN MAMMARELLA

The Delaware River and Bay Authority will spend \$6.6 million to improve and expand the Wilmington Airport terminal, according to its five-year capital investment plan. That is one of 120 major improvement projects costing \$132.7 million at the Delaware Memorial Bridge, the Cape May-Lewes Ferry, the Forts Ferry, the Millville Executive Airport, the Cape May Airport, the Delaware Air Park and the Civil Air Terminal. The most expensive project involves designing and building new ferries, budgeted at \$109,130,000.

The two capital projects planned at Wilmington Airport, which include demolishing a nearby hotel, will delight the passengers of Avelo, an airline that expanded its routes out of Delaware twice last year.

Consumers may also notice two projects to improve the roadways near the Cape May Ferry terminal, plus restoration of the war memorial near the Delaware Memorial Bridge. The plan includes the following major capital projects, with costs assigned to 2024 and “the out years,” meaning 2025-28.

WILMINGTON AIRPORT'S CAPITAL PLANS

Hotel demolition: The authority has acquired control of a hotel adjacent to the Wilmington Airport terminal building, which it does not plan to operate. The project will demolish existing hotel buildings and provide for immediate temporary parking. This project has an estimated authority cost of \$2,847,000 in 2024 and \$502,000 in the out years.

Terminal improvements: This project programs the cost to finalize design of the improvements to expand and modify the terminal, including hold room capacity, frontage improvements and customer service. This project has an estimated authority cost of \$1,951,000 in 2024 and \$4,659,000 in the out years.

DELAWARE MEMORIAL BRIDGE

Annual bridge steelwork repairs: This project makes miscellaneous steelwork repairs to preserve the bridge’s steelwork while maintaining safety and operational service levels. Work typically includes replacement of worn bearing assemblies, access platforms, maintenance of steel connections, installing new safety features, suspender rope replacement and other items. This project has an estimated authority cost of \$6,200,000 in 2024 and \$47,000,000 in the out years.

Annual maintenance bridge span painting: The annual bridge inspection report recommends continued repairs to the coating system. The project will strip affected areas to bare metal and recoat with a three-layer protective overcoat system. This project has an estimated authority cost of \$8,338,000 in 2024 and \$25,525,000 in the out years.

Ship collision protection: This project provides a protection system meeting current standards and consists of eight 80-foot diameter dolphin structures, two at the approach of each tower pier. Through 2023, the authority has expended nearly \$44 million on this project. It has an estimated authority cost of \$25,240,000 in 2024 and \$18,016,000 in the out years.

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SALESIANUM, URSULINE, PADUA JOIN IN SPIRIT OF SERVICE

BY JAREK RUTZ

Ninth-graders Juliana Carranza and Caroline Lober were complete strangers coming into Monday, but a day of community held by three Wilmington Catholic schools quickly changed that. Carranza and Lober — students at **Padua Academy** and **Ursuline Academy**, respectively — were two of the 450 freshmen that experienced the second SUP Day, which brought together the full ninth-grade classes of **Salesianum School**, Ursuline and Padua.

“It’s nice to have this experience because you get to learn about the other schools and then you get to be able to relate to each other on a different level that we don’t get everyday,” Carranza said.

Coming off the heels of Martin Luther King, Jr. Day, the day was focused on service and community, and how the young students can have an impact on the world around them.

This is the first year of the SUP Days — the first was in October and was based on based on the **El Camino Pilgrimage**, also known as the Way of St. James, which is a pilgrimage in Spain in which people walk hundreds of miles from all across Europe to Santiago, the traditional place where the apostle James is buried. During the pilgrimage, strangers get to know each other and often leave their experience with new friends and shared memories.

“That was all about journeying together through different activities, building community and having that outreach,” said Maureen Ripsom McAleenan, the dean of academics at Ursuline’s Upper School, “and then today they’re back together to strengthen the bonds.”

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Business

TOWN SQUARE LIVE



JUDGE: CABELA'S CAN'T HIDE BEHIND FED ISSUES IN STOLEN AMMO CASE

BY BETSY PRICE

A U.S. District Court judge has told Cabela's it has no grounds to have a stolen ammunition lawsuit tried in federal court and sent it back to state courts. The suit began with Cabela's refusal to answer a subpoena and provide information to the Delaware Department of Justice, which is investigating the theft of ammunition said to have ended up in criminal hands. The case drew a huge amount of attention when it was revealed in court records in July 2023.

Danielle Brookens, 38, was arrested in the process of stealing ammunition. She told police she had been doing it for a year and stole as much as 500,000 rounds of ammo. She then sold it at one-third of the cost to others, including drug dealers and violent criminals in Delaware and Philadelphia. Brookens, who had a history of substance abuse, was sentenced to a treatment program.

The state said that the **Cabela's** at Christiana Mall had stacks of ammunition in the middle of the sales floor

and that violated rules about ammunition needing to be stored out of customer control. Cabela's would not cooperate with the Department of Justice investigation and when sued tried to move the case from state to federal court, relying on federal rights.

Judge Richard G. Andrews of the District Court for the District of Delaware said Cabela's lawyers "do not describe any issue of federal law" that the state "must win to prove any element necessary to the enforcement of the subpoena." Andrews awarded legal fees to the Department of Justice, adding emphasis to the ruling, saying none of those appealing to the higher court met the legal test that courts use to determine federal jurisdiction.

"It should have been obvious," Andrews said. "There is no qualified civil liability action...There was no basis to remove the case." The state case essentially argued that Cabela's itself contributed to the thefts through its hands-off approach to the shoplifting.

CABELA'S LEGAL MOVES

After the DOJ sent Cabela's a subpoena, the company relocated ammunition in the Christiana store to behind a sales counter. The company would not produce any meaningful answers to the state's questions and instead tried to move the case to delay and ultimately block the investigation, according to a Department of Justice press release.

"I'm grateful to the Court for its ruling and glad that Cabela's legal games continue to be unsuccessful," said Attorney General Kathy Jennings in the press release. "Almost a year into this investigation, Cabela's is still evading basic questions and trying to hide the truth."

Every round of ammunition that walked out of the store is capable of ending a life, she said,

"Cabela's apparently casual attitude about that fact raises serious questions about just how pervasive their issues were." she said. "Gun dealers need to take reasonable steps to prevent gun violence — we are still waiting for evidence that Cabela's did. We're looking forward to stating our case in Superior Court."

The Department of Justice's investigation explores potential violations of several laws, including the Keshall "KeKe" Anderson Safe Firearms Sales Act. The Act, passed into law in 2022, is named for KeKe Anderson, an innocent bystander who was killed in a 2016 shooting involving a firearm bought through a straw purchase at Cabela's.

The bill repeals **special immunity** granted to gun dealers like Cabela's under state law, making Delaware the first state in the country to repeal a gun industry liability shield.

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Coollest THING MADE IN DELAWARE BY DELAWARE STATE CHAMBER OF COMMERCE



BY BETSY PRICE

A new state contest seeks the coolest thing manufactured in Delaware. The **Delaware State Chamber of Commerce** and the **Delaware Manufacturing Association** have started the **Coollest Thing Made in Delaware** contest to highlight Delaware’s vibrant manufacturing industry and promote the sector as a top career path. Manufacturing now employs 28,000 Delawareans.

The contest will be structured in a bracket format that hopefully will draw the interest of the general population while educating them about the diversity of manufacturing industry’s economic outputs, innovative products, impact, careers opportunities and more.

“Delaware’s low cost of doing business, central location and skilled workforce position the state as a center for manufacturing. With an output of nearly \$5.6 billion, the industry is a major force in Delaware’s

THINK YOU MAKE THE COOLEST THING IN DE? ENTER THIS CONTEST

economy and the third-largest traded sector,” said DSCC President Michael J. Quaranta. “Not only do manufacturers make products that meet the needs of consumers right here in the First State, but they have global — even galactic — impacts.”

Nominations will be accepted until Feb. 21.

RULES, EVEN FOR THE COOLEST

Eligible companies are manufacturers whose nominated product is manufactured in a Delaware-based facility. The product must be made using a manufacturing process. Participants are welcome to nominate as many products as they’d like during the initial nomination period.

On Feb. 22, all qualifying nominees will be announced and the popular vote will commence. Manufacturers, employees and consumers alike are welcome to participate in the voting. Votes can be cast once per day, per device at www.DSCC.com/MFG.

After the popular vote round ends on Feb. 29, the top 16 products — one per company — will proceed to compete in the bracket-style contest, ultimately culminating in one champion. Nominees will be cut to eight on March 14 and then four on March 21.

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Food & Dining

TOWN SQUARE LIVE



BY BETSY PRICE

Matt Kern, chef and owner of **One Coastal** in Fenwick Island, is a semifinalist for a **James Beard Award** in the Best Chef Mid-Atlantic category. This is Kern's third semifinalist nomination. He was a semifinalist in 2019 and 2020 while working at **Heirloom** in Lewes.

"It's way different," this time, said Kern, who purchased One Coastal from Scott and Carlie Carey in 2022. "I have put everything I have into this tiny 50-seat strip mall restaurant — everything. I've spent God knows how many hours believing in this place — painting, struggling, failing, thriving, teaching and believing in my staff — just to be able to do this on my own terms," he explained.

Kern is the only Delawarean nominated this year. He had no idea he was on the selection committee's radar and he didn't know that he'd earned a semifinalist spot until a friend congratulated him. The announcement was posted this morning.

ONE COASTAL'S MATT KERN IS JAMES BEARD AWARD SEMIFINALIST

"I cried a little bit," said Kern, who immediately called his wife, Karen, a business partner.

The Bethlehem, PA, native came to coastal Delaware to work at a restaurant that quickly closed, but by that time he'd met Karen and decided to stay in the area. Before Heirloom, he worked at Salt Air and the Blue Moon in Rehoboth Beach.

KERN'S FOCUS

One Coastal originally was an extension of the Careys' farm and Kern respected their mission. "Out of the many restaurants in Sussex County, few are really farm-to-table," he said when he purchased the restaurant. "This place already has such a loyal following and we have similar interests."

Kern, who is passionate about supporting local farmers, said community involvement is part of the criteria for a James Beard nomination — a culinary Oscar honor.

Kern doesn't have half the equipment he had at Heirloom, but he buys top-shelf ingredients and has the chops to prepare beautiful food.

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Government

TOWN SQUARE LIVE



FENWICK MAYOR: WIND FARM DEAL 'RUSHING TO OUTCOME'

BY KATIE KAZIMIR

Fenwick Island Mayor Natalie Magdeburger has a lot of questions about the state embracing a plan to bring an offshore wind power cables ashore in a Delaware State Park near her town:

- **US Wind** is an Italian company and could be sold, she pointed out. Could that give an unfriendly company access to the United States' power grid?
- What exactly is the impact of sonar and radar to be used to build the US Wind turbine farm off nearby Ocean City? How long will that impact last?
- What's the plan to close or remove the farm or its turbines if they outlive their usefulness, and who will pay for that?

Magdeburger wants to see more time taken exploring the impact of the project before any action is taken. "I think they are rushing to an outcome," the mayor said. The wind farm cable possibility has been discussed

for years. In December, Gov. John Carney announced the state is **negotiating** with US Wind, which is building a wind farm in the Atlantic off Ocean City, to bring power cables onshore at Delaware State Seashore Park's 3Rs Beach. That beach is 12 miles north of Fenwick Island. The 3Rs Beach would be leased by US Wind from the state for \$350,000 a year, Carney said.

The cables would continue under the bay to the old Indian River Power Plant, where US Wind already bought the surrounding 142 acres for \$20 million.

FENWICK SAYS NO

US Wind late last year offered a Community Benefits Package of \$2 million, payable in \$200,000 installments over 10 years, to seven beach towns in the Association of Coastal Towns. Fenwick refused the deal.

"We felt we needed to get real answers," Magdeburger said.

Nancy Sopko, US Wind's senior director of external affairs said Henlopen Acres, Rehoboth Beach, Dewey Beach, Bethany Beach, South Bethany and the city of Lewes have begun to evaluate the offer via their respective public meeting processes, "all of which we've participated in."

"We will continue to work with the coastal towns to provide them with information about our projects and answer any questions they might have," she said in written answers to questions.

The Ocean City farm is US Wind's first, and Magdeburger said she and others worry about how safe it will be. But she worries more about what would happen if the company or farm sold to a country that was not a friend to the U.S.

US Wind is majority-owned by Italian company Renexia SpA, a subsidiary of Toto Holding SpA of Italy. "Are we going to allow a Trojan horse to be built on our seashores?" she asked.

Sopko said there are safeguards against such sales. "US Wind will not be sold to China, North Korea or Russia," she said, referring to countries listed in a question.

"The federal government retains certain powers over the transfer of companies operating on federal lands, such as the Outer Continental Shelf, where our projects will be located," she said.

In addition, the wind farm would interfere with sonar and radar technology, Magdeburger said, which the U.S. Coast Guard relies on to keep our shore waters safe. The impact would be widespread should there be a military conflict, she believes. .

"It's not just Fenwick," the mayor said. "It's our entire coast."

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HEARING ON MILFORD HOMELESS VILLAGE IS COMMENT-PALOOZA

BY KATIE KAZIMIR

A Milford City Council hearing on a proposed tiny house village for the homeless packed the council chamber, lobby and a basement overflow room on Monday with people who spent four hours expressing their opinions. No vote was taken.

Everyone who spoke agreed that it was important to help the homeless. They also stressed that the city should do something to help with skyrocketing apartment and home costs. But many opposed the plan to put 40 small houses on property either near the old and new police stations or near a former homeless encampment on the city's west side. The village would be built by non-profit **Springboard Collaborative**, which opened a homeless village in Georgetown last year.

A recurring theme from supporters was that it was the town's Christian duty to approve the plan for the village. One woman, however, took the microphone to announce she was Christian, but did not want the village.

Those opposed, mostly local business owners, urged the council to consider the impact a homeless village would have on Milford's larger economic picture, especially being built in what's considered a gate to the community.

"It's not a good look," said downtown business owner Marissa King, a business owner and the first to speak when the council asked for comment from people who opposed the project.

A homeless village would drive down the local economy because of the fear factor, many said. They cited public safety concerns about mental issues and substance abuse, common among the homeless. Several of those opposed suggested a location further from the business district would be a better solution, King said.

Many residents said they were worried about increased time and safety, especially walking after dark, and increased crime.

Carrie Casey, general manager of the county's Department of Community Services, said that 15% of the 3,470 residents that the New Castle County **Hope Center** has taken care of come from Kent and Sussex counties.

"That's more than 500 people who have had to be displaced from where they know their children go to school," she said. "People want to be able to get their life back in the town where they live and where their community is."

VILLAGE FINANCING

The Springboard Collaborative received \$1.4 million in American Rescue Plan money to build a central Sussex village and they want to do it in Milford. The money will cover site plans, lawyer fees and more.

The Milford village will cost about \$1 million a year to operate, the same as Georgetown's, said Springboard Executive Director Judson Malone on Tuesday. That breaks down to about \$65 per day per person since there are 40 to 50 people per village, and most goes to staffers who oversee the site and occupants.

"It may seem like a lot," Malone said, but it's similar to the costs the state paid for housing vouchers during the COVID-19 epidemic.

Additional costs that will be covered include utilities, insurance, business expenses or anything associated with the operating the facility, Malone said.

In Georgetown, the land is being borrowed under a temporary land use agreement, with no conditions from the planning for zoning commission. In Milford, the agency is seeking a conditional use for a shelter agreement.

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BILL TO CHANGE STATE TAX BRACKETS HALTED IN COMMITTEE

BY BETSY PRICE

A bill that would alter Delaware’s tax code in a way the sponsor says would ultimately lower tax payments for everyone, was put to death Tuesday by the House Revenue and Finance Committee. Another was delayed for consideration until the next meeting.

Votes for **House Bill 233**, sponsored by Majority Leader Mike Ramone, R-Newark/Pike Creek, split along party lines in the Democrat-dominated committee. All four Republican members voted yes. No Democrats did.

The bill would have raised the minimum income subject to income tax from \$2,000 to \$2,500 and collapsed the state’s six income tax brackets into three brackets, giving all a slightly reduced tax rate, Ramone said. He said the bill had been designed to give every Delaware resident some tax relief and to simplify Delaware’s income tax guidelines because they were one of the most complicated in the nation.

Rep. Kendra Johnson, D-Bear, said she was all for helping taxpayers, but worried about the loss of revenue and how that would ultimately affect nonprofits and others who relied on state grants. Ramone responded that if the state finances are as tight as expected, there was a budget smoothing fund that could be used. He also pointed out that with the coming change in governors in 2025, there was no guarantee that fund would be continued. It only exists as a result of an executive order from Gov. John Carney, who is in the last year of his second term, and is not a matter a law, Ramone said.

He also said that Delaware continues to attract people to move here because of low property taxes and the lack of a sales tax. They will bring more money into the state, he said.

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STATE OF THE STATE ADDRESS RESCHEDULED

BY JAREK RUTZ

The annual State of the State Address has been re-scheduled after Gov. John Carney had to cancel last week's originally planned event due to illness.

Carney now will deliver his 2024 address from the House of Representatives Chamber in Legislative Hall on Tuesday, March 5, at 2 p.m. The event will be livestreamed on de.gov/sots and on the governor's YouTube channel.

At 1 p.m. on Thursday Carney will present his budget proposal for fiscal year 2025 at the Delaware Public Archives building. The event will be livestreamed on de.gov/budget and on the governor's YouTube channel.



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WILMINGTON COUNCIL REJECTS VOTE OF NO CONFIDENCE IN MAYOR

BY JAREK RUTZ

A resolution for a vote of no confidence in Wilmington Mayor Mike Purzycki led to some strong words from the public and city council Jan. 18, but it didn't pass. The discussion in city council meeting was in response to public comments Purzycki made describing the council's new law to keep city jobs open to only city residents as "mob rule."

Purzycki, who is in the last year of his second term, announced in fall 2023 that the city would no longer enforce city residency for current and newly hired city employees. Council members and others immediately pushed back, saying living local offers enough home-grown talent and also means accountability and responsiveness. They were angry for the timing of Purzycki's decision, which was made just hours after he announced he would not be seeking re-election. It's widely believed

outgoing Gov. John Carney will run for the mayor's job. A motion or vote of no confidence is a formal expression by a government body that an officeholder is unfit to occupy their office.

The council made the residency requirement a law in November 2023 after the public strongly supported it during hearings. Purzycki then released a **statement** that said "mob rule" replaced civil debate.

In the Jan. 18 hearing, several members of the public condemned the mayor's comments.

"When he described it as a mob rule situation, he used a trigger word or what we call a dog whistle word, that says to the general public that a lawless activity is taking place, that possibly intimidating activity is taking place," said The Rev. Derrick Johnson, pastor at **Joshua Harvest Church** in Wilmington.

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STATE WANTS BEACH TOWNS TO PAY SHARE OF BEACH REPLENISHMENT

BY KATIE KAZIMIR

With beach replenishment expected to be needed more often and rising costs of providing it, DNREC is developing recommendations for local governments to help pay for it. Right now the cost is paid by the state and federal government.

“Nothing we’re doing with this study is going to affect current projects or future planned projects,” said Jesse Hayden, environmental program director for DNREC, during a virtual public forum Jan. 18. “We are simply trying to get ahead of the problem while we have the opportunity before we actually run out of money and can’t fund a project.”

The study also will try to determine the benefits of beach nourishment. Delaware has spent around \$68 million with another \$142 million contributed by the federal government through the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers on beach nourishment projects since the 1950s. As climate change accelerates erosion, beach re-

plenishment — usually involving digging up sand that’s further offshore — to rebuild beaches and protect roads, bridges and buildings may need to be repeated more frequently.

Ben Blachly of Industrial Economics Inc., consultants who are advising the state, said Jan. 18 during the public meeting that costs are rising because of fuel prices and contractor fees.

Delaware now pays for replenishment projects with 1% of the state lodging tax. DNREC expects to spend \$4.1 million for fiscal year 2024, which ends June 30. Additional state funding is provided by bond bill appropriations, with \$3.5 million expected this year. The replenishment study is the first step in exploring the concept of a local cost share.

“Intuitively, that seems like a fair proposal but nothing is changing right now,” Blachly said “There is no timeline for implementing or asking for local cost share.”

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DELAWARE PART OF NATIONAL PILOT OF SUMMER FOOD STAMPS PROGRAM



BY JAREK RUTZ

About 80,000 Delaware children are eligible to receive \$120 extra in federal food benefits this summer to replace free lunches at school. Students who will get the benefit must come from families who are already qualified for the benefits, or meet income guidelines and qualify before summer.

The state's cost for the program will be about \$1.5 million to administer, according to Tim Mastro, deputy director of communications at the [Delaware Department of Health and Social Services](#). The [U.S. Department of Agriculture](#) will pay \$120 for each child as part of the pilot program. If the expected 80,000 children take advantage of the program, the total cost will be \$9.6 million.

“Benefits for Summer EBT are 100% federally funded,” Mastro said. “Administrative costs for Summer EBT are covered 50% by federal funds and 50% by state funds.”

Children are automatically certified for Summer EBT if:

- The child is eligible for free or reduced price meals through an application with their school, or
- The child receives SNAP, TANF or Medicaid.

These children will receive Summer EBT benefits automatically and no other action is required by the family.

Families with children who do not qualify through a school meals application, SNAP, TANF or Medicaid must complete a Summer EBT application to determine their eligibility for the program.

Delaware joins 43 other states in launching a Permanent Summer EBT Program this year, with more states expected to join in 2025. The department of agriculture expects this year's program to serve close to 21 million children, providing a total of nearly \$2.5 billion in grocery benefits. This is around 70% of the total population of children eligible for Summer EBT.

EBT means Electronic Benefit Transfer and is a benefit delivery system that provides public assistance recipients with electronic access to their cash and Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) benefits. SNAP benefits are also referred to as food stamps.

Through the new program, states will provide families with \$120 per eligible child for the summer to buy food at grocery stores, farmers markets or other authorized retailers, similar to how SNAP benefits are used.

The funds are divided into \$40 a month allotments for June, July and August. If 80,000 Delaware children benefit from the \$120, it will have a total cost of \$9.6 million.

The Department of Agriculture [cited](#) several evaluations of a multi-year demonstration project that showed providing summer EBT reduced child hunger and improved diet quality. The research also shows that summer grocery benefits decreased the number of children with very low food security by about one-third and supported healthier diets featuring more fruits, vegetables and whole grains.

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BILL WOULD NEARLY DOUBLE STATE BENEFITS IN LINE OF DUTY DEATHS

BY KATIE KAZIMIR

A bill to raise death benefits from \$200,000 to \$375,000 for families of first responders who die in the line of duty passed its first committee hearing this week. **Senate Bill 202** would bring Delaware’s benefits closer to the federal payout for public safety officers of \$437,503.

If passed into law, SB 202 would be retroactive to July 1, 2023, and money would be paid to a family at the rate of no more than \$50,000 a year, according to the bill.

“While this is no consolation should they lose their person who passed, it at least compensates the family a little bit more fairly,” said Sen. Russell Huxtable, D-Lewes, the bill’s primary sponsor, in Wednesday’s Senate Banking, Business, Insurance and Technology Committee.

Those who receive the benefits include police officers, firefighters, auxiliary and volunteer ambulance and

rescue company members, paramedics, and others.

The bill received no opposition from the six committee members in attendance. It’s also sponsored by a wide number of Democrats and Republicans.

APPROVAL OF BENEFITS

The same approval was not true in a Wednesday House committee meeting considering whether to allow overtime work hours incurred by police officers and firefighters to be **counted** toward their pensions in county and municipal plans.

One member of the Wilmington Fire Department said he was against **House Bill 39** because of the serious fiscal and operational impact it would have on the department. The fiscal note accompanying the death benefits bill said that claims are usually paid over five years. It’s expected to cost the state an additional



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\$40,000 in fiscal 2025, which starts July 1, for pending and two new claims; \$60,000 in 2026 for two new claims and those occurred in 2024-2026; and \$80,000 in fiscal 2027 for two new claims and new claims from 2024 through 2026. Debra Lawhead, Delaware’s insurance coverage administrator, said the state has two claims for deaths that occurred since July 1, 2023.

“We are waiting for background information to adjudicate those claims and then they go to a hearing in front of the insurance commissioner to accept or deny them” she said.

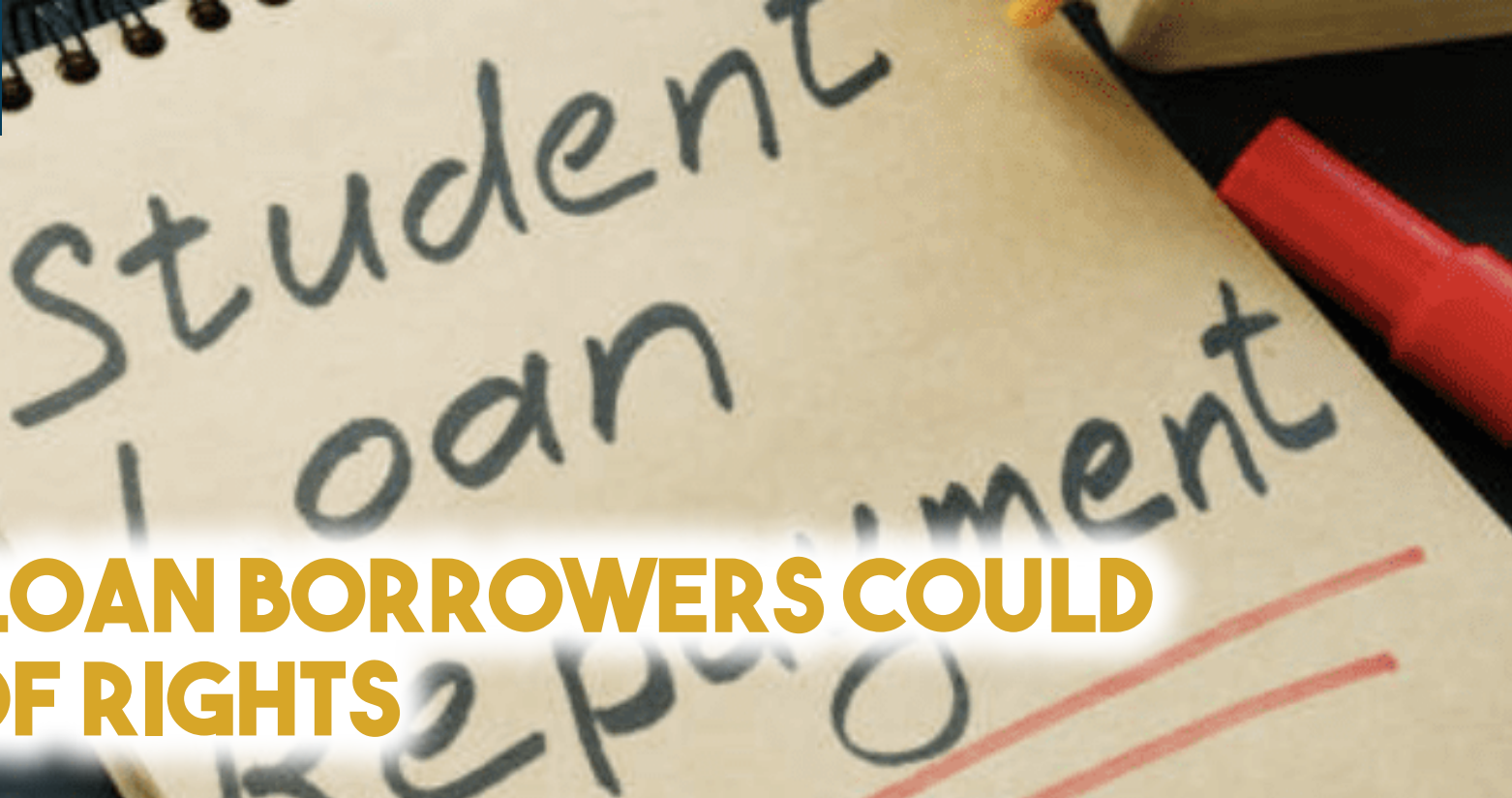


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Education

TOWN SQUARE LIVE



STUDENT LOAN BORROWERS COULD GET BILL OF RIGHTS

BY JAREK RUTZ

Laws that would establish a Bill of Rights for student loan borrowers and adjust the transfer of leave days for educators garnered support in a Senate Education Committee hearing Wednesday.

Senate Bill 132, sponsored by Sen. Sarah McBride, D-Wilmington, would make Delaware the 19th state to have a Bill of Rights for student loan borrowers.

Of the 18 states who already have such, 12 have a student loan ombudsperson — which is essentially an advocate who can help with resources, disputes and assist legal matters — and 13 have a licensing program, with another two states having a registration program instead of a licensing program.

The Student Loan Borrower Bill of Rights would:

- Require student loan servicers to engage in certain practices related to communications with student loan borrowers and cosigners of student education

loans and handling of transactions by student loan borrowers and cosigners of student education loans.

- Prohibit student loan servicers from engaging in certain practices including unfair or deceptive practices or abusive practices.
- Require student loan servicers to retain records related to student loan transactions for seven years and to yearly report non-identifying information about student education loans serviced in Delaware, including default and delinquency rates, to the student loan ombudsperson.
- Establish the Office of the Student Loan Ombudsperson which will receive, investigate, attempt to resolve complaints from student loan borrowers and more.

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STATE RELEASES ONLINE TOOL TO HELP SCHOOLS EVALUATE FACILITIES

BY JAREK RUTZ

The **Delaware Department of Education** released a new tool to establish an evaluation and assessment system to determine whether a school facility is in good repair. The **facility assessment tool** will help school districts review and assess conditions in a standardized way.

Structured like a rubric, the assessments will help identify areas in need of attention, so school facilities are clean, safe and functional for staff and students.

The evaluation is broken up into categories like plumbing, mold and mildew, roofs, gas leaks, water quality, fire safety and more. Attached to each category are questions pertaining to a facility component and a severity index of minor, moderate or major. For example, next to the electrical section, questions touch on whether

there are problems or inadequacies with exterior lighting, as well as whether the electrical system is outdated, undersized or otherwise problematic.

The release of this evaluation tool is particularly timely as five school districts head to referendum this year to increase local revenue through taxes and for state-matching funds. Many of the projects the districts are seeking funding for deal with deferred maintenance, or facility repairs and upkeep.

One of those districts is Colonial, which was approved for \$122 million for maintenance and improvements on all of the district's 13 school buildings. The revenue raised in the referendum will help the district upgrade and renovate the parking lots, roofs, ADA accessible playgrounds, sidewalks, athletic facilities and lighting

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installments to sports fields.

The facility assessment tool will be provided to all 19 districts to allow them to begin using it. They are required to provide the assessments to the Department of Education in May each year, along with a board-approved repair and maintenance plan.

The tool allows for basic school information, including address and building size, to be confirmed or updated so the education department's information is complete and accurate.



photo credit: Nick Halliday



Sports

TOWN SQUARE LIVE



ST. GEORGES WINS A THRILLER AT ODESSA

BY GLENN FRAZER

In what can only be described as a playoff atmosphere, the St. Georges Hawks snapped Odessa’s 10-game win streak Tuesday night in boys’ hoops action.

The night began with students from Old State Elementary singing the National Anthem. Then Blair Thomas of the Hawks converted two free throws as Odessa dunked the ball during warmups, drawing a technical foul. The early two-point lead increased to 8-2, prompting Odessa first year head coach Andre Wilburn to call a timeout. Point guard Jordan Earl responded as he scored four points, created two turnovers and passed to Henry Nysagare for an easy layup to tie the game at 8-8. Earl scored eight of the Ducks’ 16 points as the quarter ended with St. Georges holding a lead of 17-16.

The Hawks dominated the “glass” in the second quarter and raced out to a halftime advantage of 32-25. At one point, St. Georges took the largest lead of the night at 31-22 as Emory Womack poured in eight points late in the second quarter. Head coach Rod Griffin told us, “we talked about keeping the pressure on them on their floor in this playoff atmosphere.”

Odessa came out inspired to open the second half and closed to 43-42 on a pass from Earl to Tyshawn Wilborn for a contested basket in the paint. The third quarter came to a close with the Hawks up by one possession at 41-38.

The largest crowd to attend a game at Odessa this season went wild when Earl created a steal, went the length of the court and made a basket, drawing contact and converted the “and one”. That gave Odessa only its second lead of the night, 45-43 with 3:30 left. However, the Ducks would not score again.

Kionne Lang and Joshua Obiora both made a foul shot, while Emory Womack scored three points at the end to push the lead to 48-45. Odessa attempted a few long range shots in the final 38 seconds, but could not convert.

The seventh ranked Ducks suffered their first loss of the season, falling to 10-1. Earl led the way with 14 points. Jaylen Bernikow and Wilborn scored nine points each.

St. Georges won its third straight game to improve to 8-5. Womack scored a game-high 21 points while Thomas Blair chipped in with 10.

In his post game interview, Coach Griffin told us, “I think we’ve turned the corner a little bit. If we keep playing hard, I feel our best basketball is ahead of us.”





ST. ELIZABETH FINDS WAY TO REMAIN UNDEFEATED

BY NICK HALLIDAY

On a blustery, cold, snowy Saturday afternoon, the No. 1 St. Elizabeth Vikings hosted the No. 3 Dover Senators in a top five boys' basketball matchup that was just that. After a lot of games were canceled on Friday due to the largest snowfall we have seen in a couple years, the two schools made a time change and found a way to get this game in.

The Vikings came out early to take a 11-9 lead early in the game. However, after that lead they found themselves either trailing or tied with the Senators for most of the four quarters of the game.

Dover's aggressive offense led by senior Dorell Little and tenacious defense gave the Vikings trouble the whole game. Even though Dover controlled the lead for more than three and half quarters, the Vikings still found a way to win this game while improving to 9-0 on the season.

Down by two points 58-56 with 2:28 to go, the Vikings took their first lead on a three-pointer from Caden Harris, which were his only points of the game.

This was the first lead for St. Elizabeth since early in the first quarter. After a couple possessions for both teams, the Senators regained the lead with 1:27 left on the clock, Dover's Istavan Norwood hit a floater in the lane for a 60-59 lead.

Dover was able to make another stop on the Vikings' next possession and got the ball back. They looked to just keep possession and run the clock out, but the Vikings' defense of the Vikings forced Senators Coach Stephen Wilson to take a timeout.

On the inbounds play, there was some confusion as the pass was right to a St. E's player. Vikings Coach Mike Cassidy called a timeout with 30 seconds to go in the game so they could set up a play to try to take the lead.

Out of the timeout, they got the ball to their leader Aiden Tobiason.

However, the Senators' defense put the pressure on him forcing him to pass it off to Steven Nixon Jr. Nixon Jr. drove the ball to the left and floated up a shot over two Senators defenders which dropped in with 18 seconds remaining sealing the victory for the Vikings.

The Vikings were led by Tobiason and Julius Wright who both scored 17 points apiece in the game.

Nixon Jr. provided 12 points as the last two of them proved to be the game-winning points. Dover's Little led all scorers with 29 points, which included his 1,000th point in his high school career. Congratulations to him.



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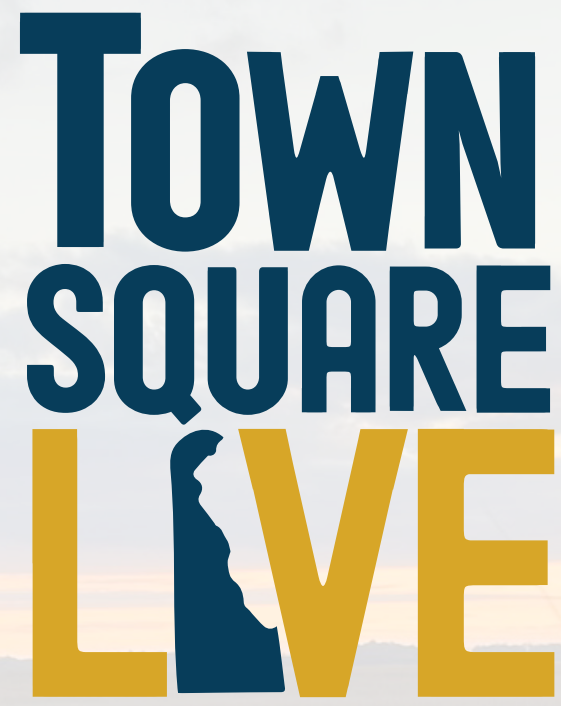
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