

# Fur flies again at state Public Works session

by Walter Lee Dozier

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ANNAPOLIS — Wednesday's state Board of Public Works meeting ended with a number of projects being approved for state money, including nearly \$5 million for nine Open Space Projects in Montgomery County and \$100,000 for one in Prince George's County.

Montgomery County and Prince George's County also will receive \$2 million each from the state's Rural Legacy program, which is aimed at protecting open space from development.

But the spectacle the overflow crowd of state and county officials were treated to while waiting to plead their cases was vintage William Donald Schaefer. The former governor and current comptroller harried speakers and exchanged sharp words with his two colleagues on the board, Gov. Parris N. Glendening and Treasurer Richard N. Dixon.

Schaefer opened the meeting with an intense questioning, almost an interrogation, of state Budget Director Eloise Foster about the state's delay in funding of cancer research projects from its share of the tobacco settlement money.

"I know the governor tells you to beat around the bush whenever I ask you a question," Schaefer said. "I know he sits in there and tutors you. Can you answer my question? Why is there an embargo?"

The blistering remarks referred to the state's litigation with tobacco settlement lawyer Peter Angelos. Initially, the state had agreed to pay Angelos 25 percent of the state's \$1 billion settlement share, but the General Assembly reduced that to 12.5 percent.

With the original amount (\$250 million) being held in escrow pending resolution of the Angelos suit,

Foster tried to explain to Schaefer, the state has had a budget shortfall.

"Oh, get off the propagan-da," Schaefer replied. "Can the governor embargo the funds?"

Using carefully chosen words, Foster tried to explain.

And, again, Schaefer rejected the explanation.

"Eloise, can you answer a question?" an obviously exasperated Schaefer interrupted. "Cancer is not important when you have a billion dollar surplus?"

Glendening intervened, calling Foster a professional who does her job well.

That, too, provoked Schaefer who lobbed this one out at Glendening:

"Professional! You ought to treat the people with professionalism. I don't take that from you. I'll take that from the guy," he said, gesturing to Dixon. "...I got elected, too, with more votes than you got."

Not that Dixon escaped the comptroller's sharp tongue, but he gave back as good as he got when Schaefer complained about being outvoted on the board.

Dixon responded, telling Schaefer he has some options, including not missing as many meetings as he has.

"If you come to the meeting, you can make a motion," Dixon said. "I've learned in church not to angry."

"Gentlemen," Glendening intervened, "perhaps we should focus on the agenda."

"Oh, here's the calming influence," Schaefer responded.

After the meeting, Schaefer said the Glendening administration is wrong to hold up the cancer research funds.

"The governor reneged on paying Angelos the money that was set aside," he said. "Now he's retaliating by embargoing cancer research funds. What a petty move."

Foster said after the meeting that there is no attempt to renege on any agreements.

"We told them their \$12 million will be delayed," she said. "I don't know anything about an embargo."