

9

Conferences & Meetings

Under SACCOM, the County Commissioners were a unified force in 1951. With membership representing Maryland from the mountains of Garrett County to the ocean shores of Worcester County, they were also a diverse force. It was only logical that they began to meet as a group to share common concerns, discuss legislative issues, and become acquainted. MACo conferences have afforded them that opportunity from the very beginning and continue to be a driving force behind the activities of the Association today.

Education for Local Government Officials

Since 1959, Summer and Winter Conference programs have been preserved in MACo's archives. As one pages through these programs, the titles of the individual sessions, presentations, and events often reflect the national and State historical context in which each conference occurred, such as civil defense issues in the 1960s and technology issues from the 1980s to the present. However, since only titles, and no explanations, are given for sessions, the actual content of some sessions require guesswork. Such titles range from the intriguing, to the humorous, to the downright enigmatic. A prime example is the 1968 keynote speech given by Ralph Reppert, a journalist from the Baltimore *Sunday Sun* magazine, who spoke "All About Women." It is unclear from the Conference program how or whether Reppert was a certified expert on the subject.

These programs also list highlight session speakers, often including local government officials who have since risen to higher positions in State and national government, or, alternatively, have fallen from the spotlight. One such example is 1966 Baltimore County Executive Spiro Agnew, who was later Governor and then Vice-President of the United States. In 1975, Prince George's County Council members Parris N. Glendening and Francis B. Francois teamed up for a discussion on "New Developments in Regionalism." Both councilmen would later serve as MACo president. Councilman Francois would also serve as President of the National Association of Counties, and Councilman Glendening would later serve as Maryland's Governor from 1995 through 2002.

First Summer Meeting

The first SACCOM Summer Meeting was held at the George Washington Hotel in Ocean City in September 1951. At the early "Summer Meetings," as they were first named, the group elected the officers and board of directors and announced committee appointments. During the past five decades, the traditional backdrop of vacation spot Ocean City has promoted an inherently casual atmosphere. 1960 President Delbert S. Null of Frederick County remembers the early meetings fondly: "my wife would go to Ocean City with me. We spent a few pennies there and attended the seminars." All Summer Meetings and Conferences since that first one have been held in Ocean city, though the specific venue has changed over the years. *The Appendix lists Summer and Winter Conference dates and locations.*

Conference Sessions

Summer Conference sessions through the years include a virtual laundry list of hot topics for those times. Reviewing it, one is reminded that for county government, some issues never change. Discussions have perpetually included schools, roads, public health, and the environment, though the specific concerns with each of these issues has understandably evolved. Post-General Assembly summaries and new laws have always been emphasized during the conferences.

The 1960s and 1970s

In 1960, a panel moderated by Honorable John B. Funk, Chairman of the State Roads Commission, discussed county highway problems. The 1962 Conference of the newly renamed Maryland County Commissioners Association (MCCA) included issues such as storm drainage, a highway needs study, and "Future Trends in County Planning." Topics pointed at the fairly new and steadily growing concerns of transportation and growth management. The Jones Falls Expressway and 695 Beltway were new, and county commissioners and planners in those areas faced a rapidly expanding and needy government responsibility. Since these first conferences, growth management and highway maintenance have secured a permanent spot on conference programs. Of particular interest, the 1962 program included a timely session on "The Outlook for Civil Defense in Maryland" with an address by General Rinaldo Van Brunt, Director of the State Civil Defense Agency. This topic was practical for the time: it had been just over a year since the "Bay of Pigs" invasion, U.S. involvement in Vietnam was in the hearts and minds of everyone, and the Cold War was, in general, in full swing.

In 1964, the Summer Meeting was renamed the Summer Conference and, for the first time ever, election districts in Maryland crossed county borders. Accordingly, "The Impact of Reapportionment on Counties in Maryland" was a premiere session at that year's conference. The 1966 program featured a Clean Water Institute, addressing such concerns as water pollution, water and sewer programs, a reflection of the 1965 creation of the Department of Water Resources.

The 1968 Summer Conference of the newly-renamed Maryland Association of Counties featured a full day of school facility issues including "Affordability and School Construction," "The Concept of an Educational Park," and the "Thermal Environment in School Buildings." The latter topic was likely of interest since air conditioning use became widespread in commercial and residential buildings in the 1960s.

An Impertinent Look at the State of the State: The 1970s

At Ocean City's Commander Hotel in 1970, Deputy Attorney General Robert F. Sweeney, future Chief Administrative Judge of the State District Court, addressed banquet attendees on Saturday evening with "An Impertinent Look at the State of the State." Unfortunately, the text of this address was not available and one can only speculate as to its curious content. However, a definite aspect of the state of the state in the 1970s was "The Energy Crisis", which Baltimore County Councilman John W. O'Rourke, a future MACo President, discussed along with four other panelists at the 1979 Summer Conference. At that same conference the Parks and Recreation Officers' affiliate held a session entitled "Energy Crunch Crunches Parks."

Summer Conferences of the 1980s

The 1980 Summer Conference began a decade of more progressive discussion topics and entertainment. 1981 topics included the effects of chlorine on the Bay, governmental immunity, and public official liability. The health officers presented "Men— An Endangered Sex," another session of questionable content, as an affiliate topic that year. In the 1985 Conference program, "Eye Pollution" was listed as a discussion of satellite dishes, sign ordinances, billboards, junkyards, and Chesapeake Bay critical areas. Other notable and "new" topics of the decade included a 1987 session about "Video Display Terminal Claims," recycling at the 1988 Conference, and a 1989 presentation, "Guns, Drugs & Sex: A Public Health Perspective."

Also of note, for the first time ever in 1986, the conference was supported by sponsor donations. Sponsors continue to play an important role in MACo conferences.

The 1990s: A New Reality

The early '90s were a time of transition for governments around the world. Mirroring these events, the 1990 program included "Breathtaking Events Sweeping Across Europe as Seen by the Crumbling Berlin Wall." The 1992 Conference addressed the changing face of this country with its theme, "Governing in the '90s: Adjusting to the New Realities."

The mid-nineties featured many topics that continue to be discussed today. 1970's Clean Air Act, to which amendments specifically affecting certain counties in Maryland were made in 1990, was an issue that year, as well as the 1990 Americans with Disabilities Act. 1994's theme, "The Information Age - Networking Our Future" featured technology issues and topics such as language barriers, computers and the law, eco-tourism, mining your landfill, and inmate drug and alcohol problems. A perennial favorite, school board fiscal accountability, and a new one, emissions testing, were slated for the 1995 Conference.

The Roland Powell Convention Center

After years of anticipation, in 1998 the MACo Summer Conference was held in the newly expanded and renovated Roland Powell Convention Center, formerly the Ocean City Convention Center. The facility nearly doubled in size, adding modern meeting rooms, additional parking and perhaps, most significantly for MACo, a brand new exhibit hall. To commemorate the occasion, a Grand Opening of the Exhibit Hall was held. Exhibit Hall A/B enabled the Association to add 70 additional exhibit booths that year, bringing the total number of exhibits to 204. All the exhibit booth space was sold out that first year, after many years of waiting lists for exhibit space.

This was also the first Summer Conference featuring credit courses for the Academy for Excellence in Local Governance, a two-year voluntary certificate program for local government officials, which is discussed in detail in Chapter 8.

The Millennium

The 1999 Conference was a testament to our modern time. "Please turn off your cell phones, pagers and beepers, out of courtesy to our speakers and others" was posted on signage, in

the program, and was requested by every session moderator. "Kids in the Hall" became the first children's program at a MACo conference, driven by exhibitor concerns that too many children were allowed in the Exhibit Hall, taking expensive giveaways intended for adults.

By the 2000 Summer Conference, counties were breathing a collective sigh of relief that local government had survived the "millennium computer challenge." It should be noted that MACo introduced and successfully supported legislation in the 1999 Session that would insulate local government from "Y2K" (year 2000) computer system failure lawsuits. With the Y2K concern behind them, counties could focus on new issues in health, the environment, and technology that spawned workshops that Summer on the West Nile Virus, e-commerce, environmental enforcement, and closing the "digital divide," a response to concerns that computer technology was not accessible enough to the public, and not equitable among school children.

2001 was an appropriate year for the presentation on "Election Systems in Transition". The MACo Website Advisory Committee met during the conference to discuss the website and make recommendations for enhancements.

Topics up for discussion at the 2002 Conference included water conservation strategies, vision for educational leadership, housing for the elderly, and "Smart Growth" issues. The children's event prepared future leaders with a Baltimore Museum of Industry production about Maryland inventions.

Affiliate Organization Topics

MACo's affiliate groups first began offering educational sessions during the 1966 Summer Conference. At first, affiliate sessions were held exclusively for members of the organization, but by 1970, all county and state government officials were welcome to attend affiliate sessions. The content of the affiliate sessions was broadened to appeal to a wider audience, with a special emphasis on county elected officials. By 1991, all ten affiliates were holding educational sessions at the conferences for attendees and their own professional members.

Election Year Summer Conferences

Since 1974, election year Summer Conferences have been held in July, rather than August, to accommodate elected officials' busy campaign schedules. In 2001, during multi-year contract negotiation efforts with the Roland E. Powell Convention Center, it was learned that moving the conference to July for an election year was not possible. Other groups had already secured multi-year contracts for the space in July many years into the future. This was the result of recently stepped up sales and marketing efforts at the expanded Convention Center.

Exhibits & The Trade Show

Exhibits have not always been a part of the Summer Conference. It wasn't until 1976 that 50 tabletop exhibits by "state and county agencies and commercial interests" were first displayed in the Convention Hall. In 1980, counties and Baltimore City were invited to exhibit at no charge, which changed later as the convention center expenses per exhibit booth were increased. By 1993 there were 103 exhibit booths in the original Convention Center ballroom.

For many years, that second floor ballroom sufficed for MACo's purposes, holding as many as 135 exhibit booths and serving as the site for the long standing President's Reception. But by the late eighties, a waiting list for exhibition space began to grow. Despite this, in 1995 the Association began aggressive marketing efforts to generate more sponsors, sell program advertisements, and increase exhibit booth space sales. The result was a growing demand for exhibit space and the first conference program advertisement— a full-page back cover ad purchased by Baltimore Gas and Electric. The stepped-up marketing was a result of rumors that the Ocean City Convention Center would soon be expanding to double its meeting space. In 1998, the Center did just that, and MACo was able to expand the offerings of the Summer Conference. There was more space for sessions and meetings, as well as another 70 exhibits. The facility was renamed the Roland E. Powell Convention Center, in honor of the former Worcester County Commissioner and Mayor of Ocean City, Roland "Fish" Powell.

The brand new Exhibit Hall A/B could accommodate up to 207 booths; the first year in the new Hall, the exhibit booth space sold out. Three years later, Exhibit Hall C, located directly across from Exhibit Hall A/B, was opened to accommodate the overflow. By 2002, there were 231 exhibit booths, and finally, no waiting list.

The Crab Feast

No other event has defined the spirit of the Summer Conference as well as the Annual Crab Feast. The first Crab feast was held in 1961 on the top floor Ocean Room of the old George Washington Hotel and was followed by a social hour with music by The Belle Tones.

The Crab Feast has gained huge popularity since that time, so much so that a resolution was passed at the 1968 Conference, honoring "The Crab Man" Ray Redden of Worcester County for arranging a successful feast, despite a crab shortage. Today the Crab Feast is a major political event in the State, drawing federal and state elected officials and, during an election year, candidates for statewide office. As the Association emphasizes its non-partisan status, courtesy telephone calls are often made prior to the summer conferences to gubernatorial candidate headquarters, reminding campaign staff of the policy.

Because of increased costs, in 1971 the Association Board approved moving the Crab Feast to the well-known Phillip's Crab House. In what proved to be a most unpopular move, a clam bake replaced the Crab Feast one year in the mid-1970s. The Crab Feast was quickly reinstated the following year. By 1978, the event had outgrown Phillip's and moved to the Convention Center. It was located on the north side, lower concourse outside until the Convention Center began its renovation and expansion in 1999. That year, the shindig was relocated to the loading dock area on the bayside of the Convention Center. A record breaking 1,400 persons attended the 2001 Crab Feast, including gubernatorial candidates, Lt. Governor Kathleen Kennedy Townsend and Congressman, now Governor-Elect, Robert Ehrlich. The crowd consumed more than 90 bushels of steamed blue crabs, crab cakes, crab soup, Eastern Shore sweet potato biscuits and corn, and Western Maryland apples. Despite the intense August heat and thunderstorms, the crowd stayed late into the evening, enjoying the backdrop of the Chesapeake Bay, cool beverages, hot steamed crabs, and the Dixieland music of the Backfin Banjo Band. The Crab Feast continues to be the premiere event of the Summer Conference, drawing more and more individuals and families every year.

Little Seventeen vs. The Big Seven

Bringing the 1975 Conference weekend full circle was the first Annual Slow Pitch Softball Championship game on Saturday afternoon. The following year, the game featured a match-up between the "Little Seventeen," coached by then Kent County Commissioner Steven Cooper, versus "The Big Seven," coached by then Baltimore County Executive Donald Hutchinson, that was held at the 4th Street ballfield. Although it is not recorded as such, it is likely that the two teams represented the urban and the rural counties. The game's outcome is unknown, but then Mayor of Baltimore, William Donald Schaefer, recalls the intensity of the annual softball game: "There was a lot of rivalry—you had to win." Some of the trophies from these softball games are still on display in the MACo office. In 1992, following the debut of Executive Director David Bliden at bat, the game was discontinued, largely due to the cancellation of the Saturday food event that had preceded it for many years.

In 1984, the First Annual Golf Tournament was held at the Ocean City Yacht Club in Berlin on Wednesday before the Summer Conference program began. The tournament hosted 140 golfers, including State and local officials and commercial vendors. The tournament was later named after the longtime Tournament Chairman, Calvert County Administrative Director, Jack G. Upton, Jr. and continues to this day as a welcome Summer Conference tradition. Joe Schiller, then Wicomico County Finance Director, took over as chairman of the Upton Open Golf Tournament in 1990, holding that position for almost a decade.

The Winter Conferences

Unlike the Summer Conference, which has always been held in Ocean City, the Winter Conference location has always moved to different locations every year since its beginning in 1951. Locations have included: the Loews Annapolis Hotel; the Solomon's Island Holiday Inn; the Hunt Valley Marriott Hotel; the Hagerstown Ramada Inn; and the Stouffer's Hotel (now Renaissance Hotel) in Baltimore. The Winter Conference also draws considerably fewer attendees than the 2,000 who attend the Summer Conference, and as a result, the 400 attendees at the Winter Conference expect a more formal, business-like affair. It should be noted that following a November General Election, the conference is moved from early December to early January to allow time for all counties to inaugurate their elected officials.

Carvel Hall & Early "December Meetings"

The first "December Meeting" of the Association was held December 12, 1951 at Carvel Hall in Annapolis, with about 70 people attending. The December Meeting continued to be held at Carvel Hall through 1961, with a departure to the Annapolis Colony Inn in 1958.

As previously noted, at the 1961 Winter Meeting, changes were made to the Constitution to change the Association name and to officially declare that the secretary and treasurer were members of the Board of Directors. The meeting name itself was changed that year to "Annual Winter Meeting."

In 1962, the Annual Meeting was held at the Lord Baltimore Hotel, with 64 attendees representing 20 counties. The issue of civil defense in the event of an attack was a main focus of discussions that winter. Maryland Governor Millard Tawes said he was "hopeful that concrete

measures [would] be adopted to provide the best possible protection to our people from the ravages of a nuclear attack." It was at this meeting that the name change from the State Association of County Commissioners of Maryland to the Maryland County Commissioners' Association occurred.

1970s Winter Meetings

As previously discussed, the energy crisis of the 1970s was at the forefront of the minds of elected officials and their constituents alike. At the January 1975 Winter Conference, discussion topics were on-shore impact of offshore drilling and economic cost of energy conservation. Some sessions in 1976, including "Counties and the Energy Crisis" and the power plant citing program examined possible solutions. In 1977 the theme was "The Challenge of Scarcity: Decision Making in a Time of Limited Resources."

January 1979 discussion topics reflected heightened concern about minority issues and environmental protection. The conference dealt with minority business enterprise, pesticide use and groundwater supply, and an update of the chemical storage situation in Sharptown. Also discussed was an accident in Annapolis during which, according to the November 29, 1979 *Evening Capital*, one patient died and seven became ill after renal dialysis treatment because a fluoride valve at a water plant had been left open all night.

The 1980s: First Female MACo President and First Joint Sessions

It was during the 1983 Winter Conference that the first joint affiliates' session took place between the Health Officers and the Environmental Health Officers. This trend has been encouraged to continue, as hotel meeting room availability is often limited. Today, most sessions are joint affiliate sessions whose sponsors work cooperatively with MACo staff to secure speakers and set the content.

The 1984 Conference celebrated the election of MACo's first female president, Montgomery County Council member Esther Gelman. The County hosted a reception in her honor that year. Gelman remembers leading the charge to move the Winter Conference from the Hunt Valley Marriott after that year: "Hunt Valley became very arrogant." Gelman remembered that some members asked the hotel to keep the swimming pool open later than their 9 p.m. closing time. "People like to go soak at the end of the functions," Gelman said. Their refusal to accommodate the request fueled the move to another facility the following year.

In 1988, membership was updated on "The Chesapeake Bay Agreement: Changes into the Year 2020," AIDS, and aquaculture. The 1989 program boasted sessions with titles such as, "Ducks and Trucks: Environmental Assessment of the Proposed Washington, D.C. Bypass," "Overcrowding in Detention Centers," and "Workforce 2000: Strategies to Empower Today's Youth for Tomorrow's Jobs."

Diversity in the 1990s

Topics at the Conferences throughout the 1990s were diverse and dynamic, including radon, the Cable Act, and indoor air quality in 1993, and the Older Americans Act, "Stresses of a Political Life," and public official liability in 1995. At the latter Conference, then Congressman, now

Governor Bob Ehrlich, and NACo Executive Director Larry Naake discussed “Washington and the Counties.” In 1996, “Government Goes Online,” brownfields, and video traffic control were discussed; state pension proposal and pfisteria topics were offered in 1997.

Name Change

The name of the Annual Meeting was changed in 1992 to the Annual Winter Meeting and again in 1999 to the Annual Winter Conference for a more professional tone.

Beginning in 1999, elected county officials began to meet at an exclusive breakfast or lunch to discuss local government issues among themselves. The event began as an informal affair to help newly elected officials meet mentors.

Year 2000 Winter Conference sessions dealt with the federal religious freedom act, substance abuse challenges, traffic monitoring systems, and the public information act. Academy sessions were offered on effective meetings, consensus and team building. 2001 conference topics dealt with the treatment of sex offenders, bio terrorism, and disaster management.

Due to holiday and General Assembly scheduling difficulties, the January 2003 Winter Conference and Orientation would begin a day later than the conference’s typical Wednesday start day. On Thursday, the second day of the 2003 Legislative Session, plans were made to include a half-day Orientation Session for Newly Elected Officials. Typical of the high turnover of local government elected officials in an election, nearly 49 per cent of all county positions up for election in 2002 were filled with newcomers, adding to the importance of the Orientation Session. The conference will continue through Saturday afternoon, making it the longest Winter Conference on record. Topics included economic development, The State’s Thornton Commission Education Recommendations, and the “No Child Left Behind Act” in addition to transportation, child health issues and interoperability relating to public safety.

Inaugural Dinners & Awards

Before 1984, the MACo officers and Board of Directors were elected at the Annual Business Meeting and presumably installed at that time as well. That changed in 1984, when, although the Board of Directors was elected at the Business Meeting, a formal installation was held during the President’s Banquet during the Winter Conferences.

The earliest recorded “Legislator Awards” were given that year to Senator Thomas Bromwell, and Delegates Sheila Hixson, Clayton Mitchell, and Lucille Mauer. Since that time, legislators have been honored during every Inaugural Banquet; chosen by the MACo Board of Directors in recognition of assistance on particular legislative issues the previous General Assembly Session.

The entertainment during at least one Winter Conference Inaugural Dinner was memorable. According to former Charles County Commissioner and MACo Past President Jim Dent, he, Maryland Lt. Governor Sam Bogley, and Wicomico County Administrator Matt Creamer “donned floppy hats, played our guitars and a banjo, and sang ‘On the Road Again,’” in recognition of the “road trips that Sam and I took to visit the counties when I was president,” said Dent at the January 1981 Winter Conference. “It brought down the house.” Referencing those road trips, Dent said that

MACo leaders “decided it would be good if we showed up at the Courthouse door in each county. We wanted them to know that we were there [in Annapolis], and we would stay there” for them.

Newly Elected Officials Orientations

Following the November 1970 election, Association leaders noted that, "somewhere in the neighborhood of 50 per cent of county officials taking office following the general election will be newcomers." Association leadership began to recognize the need for an orientation for newly elected county officials. It was proposed that an education program be planned to "acquaint them with a variety of subjects that they will have to deal with during the next four years" and an "opportunity to . . . meet each other and the various State officials who administer important programs." It was determined that such a conference would be offered in addition to the Winter Meeting.

The result was a conference in December 1970 at the Center of Adult Education, University of Maryland - College Park in cooperation with the Maryland Technical Advisory Service at the school. Orientation topics were focused on examining basic local and state relations—the constitutional and legislative sessions, planning and zoning laws revisions, fiscal position of the State, county revenue sources, water and sewer, public safety, roads, and labor law. MACo Executive Director Murnane gave an overview of the Association’s mission and resources. The next year’s orientation conference included an overview of organizations including MACo's affiliates and state government. Dr. Patricia Florestano, then Director of the Institute for Governmental Services, informed the group about the projects her agency provided to municipal and county governments. The Legislative Committee and its function were discussed during the January 1987 Orientation Session.

By 1979 the Annual Meeting and Orientation were combined; the Orientation Conference for Newly Elected Officials and Annual featured the theme “County Government Under Pressure: Providing Essential Services Through Efficient Management Controls.” The conference included discussions about the organization of local and State government, parliamentary procedure, and information resources available to counties. A “Get Acquainted Reception” was held the evening prior to the Orientation Session.

The Academy of Excellence in Local Governance, discussed in Chapter 8, was launched at the 1998 Winter Conference and Orientation. At that conference, Academy core and elective courses for county officials were offered and the Orientation itself provided elective credit.

The January 2003 Winter Conference and Orientation program offered the expanded curriculum for the Academy, including three core required classes including the Public Information Act. National Association of Counties (NACo) President-Elect Karen Miller of Missouri was scheduled to address national issues affecting local government during the Orientation Session.

Administrators & Attorneys Conferences

County Administrators began holding a spring and a fall conference annually as early as 1976, rotating the location within the State. Matt Creamer, former Wicomico County Administrator and two-time president of the Administrators’ affiliate, remembers that MACo began asking the affiliate to take charge of certain projects, and “the Legislative Committee began piling on

things for the Administrators to do.” In fact, County Administrator affiliate members planned the first Newly Elected Officials Orientation program, held at College Park.

The Administrators continued to hold these two conferences through 1988. According to Creamer, attorneys and administrators then began to talk about the benefits of holding joint conferences, as the groups shared many issues. The first joint conference was held in 1989. It was so successful that the groups met jointly for both spring and fall conferences through 1992. At that point, the two groups determined that only one joint conference would be needed, now known as the Annual Administrators and Attorneys Fall Conference.

The conference location moves to different regions in Maryland and draws between 35-60 participants. When the Rocky Gap Lodge and Golf Resort was built in the mid-1990s in Allegany County, MACo opted to hold the next four Administrators and Attorneys Conferences there. In 2002, the conference moved to St. Michaels, in Talbot County, where the Attorneys and Administrators enjoyed a crab feast at the popular Crab Claw Restaurant.

Combining educational opportunities with networking social occasions, the conference has offered topics for both county administrators and attorneys. Topics have included the effect of technology on county government management, sexual harassment laws, and other liability issues. After county Human Resources Directors became a sub-affiliate of the County Administrators, more topics regarding labor law and technology were blended into the program.

A highlight of the conference has always been the mid-conference dinner excursion, when conference attendees enjoy the camaraderie of each other’s company and many colorful stories are generated. A hospitality suite for conference attendees each evening has encouraged a few friendly poker games, and more opportunities for stories, mostly too colorful to print.

Partisanship at Conferences

In July of 1994, then MACo President, Carroll County Commissioner Julia Gouge raised the issue of partisan politics in MACo affairs after Executive Director Bliden requested guidance considering a request to include a partisan political meeting notice in the conference packet. He referenced an earlier Board discussion, which he felt reflected a consensus that partisan politics had no role in MACo affairs. He explained that the flyer was denied and the related group "readily agreed to its exclusion."

The Board then approved a motion to "exclude partisan politics from MACo affairs, referencing the divisive nature of including such affairs," expressing reservations about letting the "camel's nose under the tent." "Injection of party politics into MACo affairs was a slippery slope," said then Anne Arundel County Executive and later, Senator Robert Neall.

This policy has been tested several times. During the January 1995 gubernatorial race, a candidate’s campaign workers wanted to hold a political rally inside the Hunt Valley Marriott Hotel, where the Winter Conference was being held. However, they were asked to move it outside the hotel, and did so without incident. On another occasion, another candidate’s supporters were asked to discontinue distributing campaign literature in the Exhibit Hall at the MACo Summer Conference.

Events, Conferences, and Workshops

MACo Conferences often include additional special events, and meetings geared towards specialized groups within the general membership. The County Elected Women meet for a meal and discussion at both the Summer and Winter Conferences. During the Summer Conference, some examples of meetings include the Baltimore Washington International Airport (BWI) Anniversary Event, and the Governor's "Green Awards Presentation."

In addition to the Annual Winter and Summer Conferences, MACo has provided the membership with opportunities to learn more about up-and-coming issues. In 1993, MACo co-sponsored three Recycling Conferences, held aboard the Maryland Pride ship in Baltimore City. In June 1993, MACo also co-sponsored the Mid-Atlantic Regional Conference of the American Planning Association held at Towson State University. An earlier example was the Job Training Partnership Seminar scheduled in conjunction with June 1, 1983 Board meeting.

MACo has seen much change, both internal and external, since 1951. At both Summer and Winter Conferences, members learn from each other during the sessions, honor each other during awards ceremonies, and befriend each other at Crab Feasts and socials. Along with the MACo website and publications, the bi-annual conferences serve a valuable purpose in keeping the counties and their affiliates engaged in active dialogue.