

**COMMISSIONERS OF OXFORD**  
**Regular Meeting Minutes**  
**June 9, 2015**

The Commissioners Meeting was held in the meeting room of the Community Services Building on June 9, 2015. Commissioner President Carole Abruzzese called the meeting to order at 6:00 p.m.

**PRESENT**

Attending the meeting were Commission President Carole Abruzzese, Commissioner Gordon Graves, Commissioner Gordon Fronk, Town Administrator/Clerk Cheryl Lewis, Chief Patrick Maxwell, and Town Attorney Brynja Booth.

The meeting was opened with the Pledge of Allegiance.

**APPROVAL OF MINUTES**

President Abruzzese made a motion to approve the minutes as amended of May 26, 2015, the motion was seconded by Commissioner Graves, all were in favor, and motion carried.

President Abruzzese announced that at the conclusion of the last meeting on May 26<sup>th</sup>, the Commissioners convened a closed session for a personnel matter. Those present were Commissioners Abruzzese, Graves and Fronk, Clerk Lewis and Attorney Booth. A written statement setting forth any vote of the Commissioners and the topics that were discussed will be filed within the minutes of the Commissioner meeting.

**PUBLIC WORKS**

Clerk Lewis presented the following public works report as Superintendent Delude was on holiday.

- The public works department worked on a leak at Market Street which was repaired with only a 20 minute delay in water for a few residents. Cost of repair was \$200.00.
- The fire hydrant at the end of Pier Street was moved in anticipation of the county's new park to allow a future entrance from the town's existing street.
- Two of the public works employees spent last week in Chestertown at a wastewater class for the town's new 5A plant. A test was given at the end of the class for possible certification. Test results will be available in month.
- The public works department installed 40 tons of rock on the Strand in a maintenance effort to slow down the erosion of the beach area. Cost of the project was \$1600.

**POLICE REPORT**

Chief Maxwell presented the Police Report, which consisted of the following:

- 1 – Animal complaint
- 5 - Assist other Police Agency
- 8 - Police Information/Service
- 12 – Property checks
- 2 – Assist the Fire Department
- 3 – Suspicious vehicles
- 5 – Suspicious persons
- 1 – Alarm

Chief Maxwell reported that the month of May was very busy, particularly with weddings. Recent events, such as the Bayside Quilter's Show and MS bike ride were well attended. One accident involving two bicyclists occurred outside of town. Lt. Thomas assisted the riders who suffered only minor injuries. Memorial Day weekend was very busy and speeding in town was a problem. The beach was packed during the holiday weekend and many bicyclists were in town.

Chief Maxwell also gave a brief report on the status of the Talbot Co. Narcotics Task Force. Anyone with information regarding drug related activity is encouraged to contact the Talbot Co. Narcotics Task Force or any of the local police jurisdictions, including Oxford.

**OXFORD FIRE COMPANY REPORT**

David Baker, Secretary of the Oxford Fire Company, presented the Oxford Fire Company report for the period May 12 to June 6, 2015. During this period there were 10 fire calls: 1 woodlands fire in Easton, 1 fire in Trappe, 1 water rescue in Cambridge, 1 standby in St. Michaels, 1 building fire in Easton, 3 automatic fire alarms in Oxford (all of which turned out to be false alarms), 2 building fires cancelled en route. There were 62 personnel participating and a total of 133 personnel hours. During the period April 23 to May 14, 2015 there were 5 medical calls; 4 calls with patients transported, and 1 transfer to Talbot County EMS. A total of 19 personnel responded, 6.1 hours, 18.2 personnel hours, and 86 miles traveled.

The next Fire Company breakfast will be Sunday, June 14, 2015. The Ladies Auxiliary rummage sale on May 30<sup>th</sup> was very successful, and the Auxiliary thanks all who donated items and all who purchased these items the next day.

### **PROCLAMATION**

President Abruzzese called forth Victor and Susan Barlow, owners of The Scottish Highland Creamery, to read aloud and present them with a Proclamation recognizing the creamery as an important part of Oxford and in celebration of their 10<sup>th</sup> anniversary. Commissioner Graves made a motion to approve the resolution as read, Commissioner Fronk second the motion, all were in favor, the resolution was signed and presented to the Barlows.

### **PUBLIC HEARING**

President Abruzzese introduced Ordinance 1507: An ordinance of the Town of Oxford to repeal Ordinance Number 1405 and to set new Water and Sewer rates for the Town, commencing July 1, 2015. Administrator Lewis explained that 3 years ago the town began incrementally increasing the rate for two reasons: 1) funds that were being collected at the time were not sufficient to cover necessary operations cost and not providing enough for future improvements, and 2) it was identified at the time that the WWTP plant would need to be upgraded. Grants were applied for and the town received 75% in grant funding for the construction of the plant. A 7% increase was started three years ago with this year possibly being the last year for the 7% increase. Next year the operational and debt service will be re-evaluate and once the town reaches a plateau where it is sufficient to cover the expenses, the increases will reflect the normal market increases.

The floor was opened to public comment. Debbie Hager, resident at 100 Benoni Street, stated that the yearly increased fees were astronomical since first coming to Oxford, the first water plant had never been built and wanted to know when the bleeding would stop. Administrator Lewis responded the initial water treatment project completed four years ago, was an arsenic removal system, required by EPA and the town still has debt service of \$600,000, along with an annual \$50,000 filter replacement cost required for the system. The Water system increase over the last several years has been to meet this expense. The WWTP upgrade is a separate project with a total construction cost of over \$8 million dollars. The 75% in grants acquired will substantially offset this cost, but it will still be necessary to collect sufficient revenues to cover the new debt service. Lewis explained that it can be a hardship to incorporate the cost of the required new technology in communities of 550 homes, but the MDE and USDA have worked with the town to keep this cost to a tolerable amount. Ms. Hager asked if there could be somewhere on the quarterly bill to explain what the "other charges" were. Lewis stated she would look into changes in the program to make the bills clearer. Resident and past Commissioner Peter Dunbar spoke stating that the cost of insuring good water supply and treating sewer was not inexpensive. He added that he had been following how this expenditure had been growing and thought the town had been doing an excellent job, including securing grants. Lewis added that MDE finance representatives had commented that Oxford was one of the towns that was being responsible about their billing and she felt this helped the town qualify for grants. With no more comments, a motion was made by Commissioner Fronk to close the public hearing. The motion was seconded by Commission Graves and unanimously carried with all in favor.

### **UNFINISHED BUSINESS**

President Abruzzese asked if there was a motion on Ordinance 1507. Commissioner Fronk made a motion to adopt Ordinance 1507: An ordinance of the Town of Oxford to repeal Ordinance Number 1405 and to set new Water and Sewer rates for the Town, commencing July 1, 2015. Commissioner Graves seconded the motion, all were in favor, and the motion carried. President Abruzzese requested the Clerk address the breakdown in upcoming town communications.

President Abruzzese asked Attorney Booth to discuss the upcoming Ordinance 1508. Attorney Booth explained that over the years citizens have expressed concern over the future of the Mews due to its continued deterioration and high visibility in the historic section of town. Both she and Lewis have had the building inspected which was found to be in poor condition. An appeal was filed several years ago to keep the façade of the building while demolishing the back of the building and having it rebuilt. However, the property owners don't have the finances to restore the property and have now placed the property up for sale. The owners recently put the building on the market and the Commissioners asked Booth to negotiate an option to purchase the property. After several exchanges the owner agreed to a purchase price of \$525,000 and the Commissioners entered into a contract contingent upon an approved ordinance. The Commissioners cannot purchase property without going through a public process and the ordinance specifically provides that the contract isn't in effect until the Commissioners vote to adopt after a public hearing and public input. If the town wants to see this property preserved, this would be a mechanism for the town to get it under control, work with the citizens, and get grant funding to make it work. There are no plans at this time as to what to do with this property. There are possibilities for grant funding if it is under contract. A commitment has been received from Talbot Bank

to provide a line of credit for short term, leveraged by the town's current CDs. Booth read aloud Ordinance 1508 – An ordinance of the Town of Oxford authorizing the purchase and acquisition of certain real property located at 105 South Morris Street, Oxford, Maryland and authorizing the Town to borrow the funds for the acquisition from the Talbot Bank on the terms and conditions as set forth in the written commitment dated June 5, 2015. President Abruzzese addressed the public, stating that this was an opportunity to move forward with no preconceived ideas. She added that the Commissioners would like the town's input on this project and will have workshops planned and would like to set up a weekend meeting for those residents who aren't here year round to get their input as well. Commissioner Fronk stated to the public that he had recused himself from most of this activity because he had been involved in a contract on the Mews, prior to becoming a Commissioner, but added that he was in favor of the acquisition, and that through government ownership the opportunity would be there to obtain grants and low interest funding that individuals couldn't do, with the hope to get it back to private ownership. He added that Lewis was able to show him several locations where other municipalities had done this successfully through the Sustainable Community opportunities that are now available to Oxford after their successful application for designation in the program. Commissioner Graves stated that he was initially hesitant with the purchase price, but added that he needed to look at what was best for the town as a whole, noting that he supported this step by step process in terms of gathering public input. Commissioner Graves moved that the Commissioners introduce Ordinance 1508 as presented. The motion was seconded by President Abruzzese and unanimously carried with all in favor.

Lewis gave an update to the public explaining that when the town applied for Sustainable Growth Communities last year and was accepted, one of the center points of the application was the historic commercial area around the Mews. In that application it stated the Commissioners would look at putting together a work group to look at this commercial area to view and plan for the future. A request was made in the recent town newsletter for participants for a work group. The first work group meeting will be held on June 17<sup>th</sup>, at noon in this meeting room and the public is welcome to attend. Initially the purpose of the workgroup was to discuss the whole commercial district but with the most recent change of events, the Mews will be the first topic for the work group. She also added HDC was given an update at their last meeting as to the steps that were reiterated at tonight's meeting. The Commissioners have also proposed having an informal meeting at their next regularly scheduled meeting to be held on June 23. This will be an open discussion with the public concerning the ordinance, the idea of purchasing the property, and what the town might be able to do with it in the future. Additionally an informational meeting will be held and she will contact the Oxford Community Center regarding availability. If the ordinance is voted down, the Commissioners are under no obligation and can walk away from the contract. A question was raised from the audience as to why the town has not considered taking a mortgage out on the property and leaving the town's CD's with Talbot Bank alone. Lewis responded she had discussed the matter with Talbot Bank and that they would be willing to put a mortgage on the town office building, but she had recommended that the Commissioners start with a line of credit as a temporary solution. A question was raised as to the cost of the purchase of the property by area resident Dorothy Fenwick, who mentioned that she had negotiated purchasing the property in the past. Attorney Booth said she had been negotiating the cost of the building with the seller for quite some time. Commissioner Fronk added that he too had tried his own negotiating of the property prior to becoming a commissioner and believed that Attorney Booth had gotten the best price that the seller was will to give.

## **NEW BUSINESS**

President Abruzzese reported that she and Commissioner Fronk had recently attended a county meeting which included the towns of Easton, Oxford, Queen Anne, and Trappe, at which she presented a report on Oxford identifying several of the recent grant opportunities the town was successful in acquiring. At this meeting the second evolution of the flood mapping was presented. Lewis added that for the most part, Oxford would not see an increase in its properties lying within the floodplain but rather more properties are being removed from the floodplain.

Lewis reported that she had met with the Commodore of the Tred Avon Yacht Club, who was requesting additional funding this year for the 4<sup>th</sup> of July fireworks which is technically in the FY 2016 budget. The Commissioners had set aside \$5,000, which was an increase over last's year budget. However, the Commodore stated that the TAYC would like to have \$6,000 for FY 2016 and they would like the Commissioners to consider splitting the cost of the fireworks in FY 2017. She reminded the Commissioners that a \$2,000 donation to the Oxford Day Committee had been included in the 2015 budget, but the committee only used \$1,000. Lewis pointed out that it was feasible for the Commissioners to allocate the remaining \$1,000 to the TAYC from FY 2015 along with the \$5,000 already earmarked in 2016 for the fireworks. President Abruzzese acknowledged that the fireworks were an important Oxford event but pointed out that the town does work from a budget and any requests for money do need to be asked for a year in advance. A motion was made by President Abruzzese to take the \$1000 that was not used by Oxford Day in the 2015 budget and donate it to the

TAYC and they will still receive the \$5000 from the 2016 budget. The motion was seconded by Commissioner Fronk and unanimously carried. Commission Fronk suggested future discussions with TAYC regarding possible cost reducing options. A member from the audience also suggested that contributions be asked for from the town's citizens to help with the funding of the fireworks.

#### **ATTORNEY**

Attorney Booth requested a short executive session for legal advice on a property maintenance enforcement issue.

#### **CLERK COMMENTS**

Lewis reported that the town sent a letter of support for the Critical Area Commission for a grant the CAC was applying to NOAA for, which included studying ways to incorporate Stormwater management in CAC policies. The grant was awarded and includes participation from Oxford. She had met with the CAC in the past week, responded to a basic questionnaire and the CAC went over a proposal of their intended process.

Lewis reported the Community Legacy and Strategic Demolition Grant period opened in the last few days with a July 15 deadline and asked if the Commissioners would be supportive of her looking into two applications requesting funding assistance for acquisition and also for façade work for the Mews. A motion was made by Commissioner Fronk that Lewis look into an application for acquisition of \$525,000 and a second application for \$100,000 for façade and design. The motion was seconded by President Abruzzese and unanimously carried with all in favor.

A park slide for small children has been ordered to place next to the large slide in Town Park, which will address the concerns regarding the use of the large slide by children under the age of 5 years.

#### **COMMISSIONER COMMENTS**

Commissioner Fronk commended Administrator Lewis on the extraordinary effort she put forth in trying to bring the French frigate, the "Hermione", into the Port of Oxford. He added that both she and John Shannahan put in a tremendous amount of work to try to bring the ship here by enlisting all the forces they could. Lewis added that resident Anna Snow was instrumental in getting the town a connection to the French embassy so quickly. Commissioner Fronk added that Administrator Lewis does an extraordinary job for the Town of Oxford and that the town is blessed to have her.

There being no further business or comments, President Abruzzese made a motion to adjourn the meeting in order to go into executive session. Commissioner Fronk seconded the motion, all were in favor, and the meeting adjourned into executive session at 7:30 pm.

Following the executive session, the regular meeting was reconvened and a motion was made to close the meeting by Commissioner Graves, Commissioner Fronk seconded the motion, the meeting was closed at 7:50 pm.

Respectfully submitted,

Cheryl Lewis

*"In accordance with Section 10-508(d) of the State Government Article of the Maryland Annotated Code, a written statement of the closed session is attached to the official minutes of the Commissioners of Oxford and maintained in the minute book in the Town Office."*