

COMMISSIONERS OF OXFORD
Regular Meeting Minutes
March 28, 2017

The Commissioners Meeting was held in the meeting room of the Community Services Building on March 28, 2017. Commission President Gordon Graves called the meeting to order at 6:00 p.m.

PRESENT

Attending the meeting were Commission President Gordon Graves, Commissioner Carole Abruzzese, Commissioner Gordon Fronk, Chief Patrick Maxwell, and Administrator/Clerk Cheryl Lewis. Several citizens were also in attendance.

The meeting opened with the Pledge of Allegiance.

APPROVAL OF MINUTES

Commissioner Fronk made a motion to approve the minutes of March 14, 2017 as distributed, Commissioner Abruzzese seconded the motion, all were in favor, and motion carried.

A motion was made by Commissioner Abruzzese to file the reported disbursements for February 2017 for audit, Commissioner Fronk seconded the motion, all were in favor, and motion carried.

MAINTENANCE REPORT

Superintendent Delude remained out on sick leave. Clerk Lewis gave a brief report stating that Superintendent Delude was doing well. Public Works employee Richard Copper has retired and a retirement luncheon send-off was given to him on March 24th at Latitude. The public works crew has almost finished painting the downstairs municipal building. The crew has also been working on getting their equipment ready for spring and preparing for Oxford Day.

POLICE REPORT

Chief Maxwell presented the police report, which consisted of the following:

- 74 – Patrol/Business checks
- 15 – Police Information/Service calls
- 1 – Check the Welfare
- 1 – MDOP
- 2 – Alarm Calls (Weather related)
- 1 – Suspicious Activity (Delivery of Goods)
- 1 – Motor Vehicle Accident (Parking lot - exchanged information)
- 1 – Check the Welfare

Chief Maxwell reminded everyone of the recent increase in phone scams.

GUEST SPEAKER

Bunky Luffman, Intergovernmental Affairs Eastern Shore Liaison from the Office of the Governor, introduced himself and indicated that he was interacting with local governments and offered his assistance if the town should have any needs or questions that the governor's office could help with.

Mr. Luffman gave a brief report on a few of the State Bills that were recently on the floor. SB 397, pertaining to income tax forgiveness, passed unanimously in the Senate, crossed to the House, and is still in the Ways and Means Committee. SB 705, regarding payment of legal fees resulting from a lawsuit, passed the first committee but has been special ordered four times. HB 453, regarding delinquent water/sewer bill collections, has passed the House. Attorney Booth noted that she is going to Annapolis to testify against that bill and will discuss in more detail in her comments. The Commissioners thanked Mr. Luffman for his attendance.

UNFINISHED BUSINESS

The Tilghman Street parking area bids have been reviewed by Administrator Lewis, who reported that R. L. Ewing had provided the lowest bid. In speaking with them, Lewis informed them that they were the lowest bidder and confirmed their bid included several details other bidders had mentioned in their bid packets. Her recommendation to the Commissioners was that they award the bid to R. L. Ewing. A motion was made by Commissioner Fronk to accept R. L. Ewing's bid for \$21,859 to pave the Tilghman Street Parking Area. Commissioner Abruzzese seconded the motion, all were in favor, and the motion carried.

Lewis reported regarding the Working Waterfront Strategic Planning RFP that had run in January that no bids had been received by the cutoff date. One quote had been presented after that date though and she informed the bidder that she was extending the cutoff date a few weeks, and placing the RFP on eMaryland, but that their submittal was sufficient and would be held until the new due date. Requests were received from 8 to 10 people from the online listing, but only one other company submitted a bid. Bids were received from Lardner/Klein \$40,000 and Biohabitats \$65,000. Since the grant is for \$35,000, Clerk Lewis stated that her instinct is to go with the lowest bidder, who has performed similar work in Rockhall, Chincoteague, and other waterfront towns. The additional \$5,000 needed for the work would be earmarked in the town budget. Clerk Lewis thought if the project could be started in 3 months, it would be completed by the fall. Commissioners Graves moved to accept the proposal by the lowest bidder, Lardner/Klein. The motion was seconded by Commissioner Abruzzese and unanimously carried with all in favor.

Commissioner Abruzzese asked Lewis if she had worked with the business owner located on S. Morris Street who had inquired about grants at the last meeting. Lewis stated she had met with her assistant for about an hour and a half and explained to her what was needed in order to participate in the mini grant program.

Commissioner Fronk asked about another commercial building under construction on S. Morris Street, to which Lewis reported that they were still working on the building and that she had been working with this along with several other businesses in town with regards to the availability of the mini grants.

ATTORNEY

Attorney Booth reported that all the paperwork to the MDE and USDA has been completed and approved for the new WWTP. A pre-construction meeting has been set for April 18, 2017 to make sure the funders, engineers, and contractor were communicating and on the same page. A notice to proceed will be issued at that meeting. Attorney Booth went over the payment information and how the line of credit will work.

Booth presented a follow-up to HB 453, a bill that is still pending. This bill would put a moratorium on municipalities sending delinquent water/sewer accounts to tax sale. This would create a huge impact on small towns because this is the only way in which to get people to pay their water/sewer bills who normally do not. The concern state wide is that people are losing their homes for a \$300 water bill, which is not the case. This bill did not get a lot of attention by MML and was not an MML bill. However, Booth stated that she had asked the MML to look into it as one of the bills they would fight and they, in turn, asked Booth to be on a panel with a representative from MML and MACO. To collect past due money on a water/sewer bill, you either have to sue for the past due amount, cut the water off, or send it up to tax sale. If you cut the water off on a rental home, often the landlords won't pay the bill because it assist them in eviction of a tenant who is not paying their rent. Tax sale is the way to collect the money and normally the property owners/tenants do not lose their homes. Booth added that she had drafted a letter stating what towns she is representing which she was planning to circulate in an email in the hopes that the Commissioners would sign off on it. Commissioner Fronk expressed some concern and asked for some statistics on the number of foreclosures. Clerk Lewis responded that there has not been a property lost at tax sale in Oxford due to water/sewer billing in the past 5 years. There was one next to Town Park but it had other bills attached to it as well. She explained that the office does not cut off water or charge late fees but at the end of year, if a property owner hasn't been paying their water/sewer bills, they get sent up to the county for tax sale. The office usually starts off with about 80 names but that number drops down to about 15 in the end. Moreover, those 15 names are usually the same names that are on the list every year, the majority of which get paid before the counties deadline. If you do not have the ability to take an owner to tax sale, you have to fight for the money and many part-time homeowners in Oxford do not care if you cut their water off because they are not here fulltime and will not be immediately affected. Cutting off water/sewer can also be difficult, especially when it comes to landlords and tenants. Lewis reiterated tax sale is the most effective way to collect money, especially since it is annually. Booth added that was why the letter was so important and that most of HB 453 pertained to Baltimore City and Calvert County expect for this one little line at the end, which would affect small towns like Oxford.

Attorney Booth reported that she was working on the MEWS contract and would like to advise the commissioners on legal matters with regards to a contract negotiation, and was requesting an executive session at the close of this meeting.

ADMINISTRATOR/CLERK COMMENTS

Lewis reported that she was working on a residential rental letter in order to get a notice out to notify people that the town has started a rental housing program and that certain steps need to be taken. A simple letter has been created along with an application form that Booth has approved. The only fee that will be charged will be a rental inspection fee of about 50 to 60 dollars. The letter will be sent out to all town residents in a separate mailing and landlords will be given 30 days to respond.

Lewis reported that she had prepared another letter in support of the third application for the Causeway Stormwater Retention Areas Project that the town has just recently completed engineering for. This application would request construction funds of \$650,000. Matching funds of \$50,000 would come from the town's SMSP utility fund. The town's state representatives have provided letters of support for the project along with NOAA and the county. Lewis asked the Commissioners to approve the President's signing of the application letter. A motion was made by Commissioner Abruzzese for the President to sign the letter. The motion was seconded by Commissioner Fronk, all were in favor, and the motion carried.

Lewis requested an executive session for a personnel matter.

PUBLIC COMMENT

Hershel Claggett, neighboring farmer on Boone Creek, offered the Commissioners a few suggestions. He suggested that the Commissioners think about making changes to the new park on Oxford Road because of future issues with mosquitos. His also suggested the town irrigate his farms with WWTP effluent instead of discharging it into the creek and upgrading the plant. Booth responded that she had worked with spray irrigation permitting in other jurisdictions and was aware of the need for nitrogen removal prior to spraying, adding that the town currently had a construction permit to upgrade to enhanced nitrogen removal and would be ready to break ground in the next month or so. Claggett asked the Commissioners to think about it along with raising the water level in the pond because it is going to create a mosquito issue otherwise.

There being no further business, a motion was made by Commissioner Fronk to adjourn the meeting to go into executive session for legal advice and a personnel matter at 6:50 pm. The motion was seconded by Commissioner Abruzzese, all were in favor, and the motion carried.

Following the executive session, the regular meeting was reconvened and at 7:48 pm Commissioner Abruzzese made a motion to adjourn the meeting, it was seconded by Commissioner Fronk, all were in favor and the meeting was adjourned.

“ 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”