

COMMISSIONERS OF OXFORD
Regular Meeting Minutes
June 23, 2020

Due to the Covid-19 pandemic, the Commissioners Meeting was held virtually in a Zoom Meeting Room on Tuesday, June 23, 2020. The public was provided call in information for the purpose of listening, watching, and participating in the meeting, notice of which was posted on the bulletin board and the website. President Pepe called the meeting to order at 6:00 p.m.

PRESENT

Attending the meeting were Commission President John Pepe, Commissioner Gordon Graves, Commissioner Gordon Fronk, Police Chief Pat Maxwell, Public Works Superintendent Scott Delude, Administrator/Clerk Cheryl Lewis and Town Attorney Lyndsey Ryan. Citizens Skip Case, Tom Bixler, and Dale Benson were in attendance by phone or video.

President Pepe made note of the following special meetings: The Commissioners of Oxford held a special meeting on June 16, 2020 at 8 am for the purpose of holding a Closed Session to discuss public security including implementation of an emergency plan and legal advice. The Commissioners of Oxford held a special meeting on June 19, 2020 at noon for the purpose of holding a Closed Session to discuss public security including implementation of an emergency plan and legal advice.

APPROVAL OF MINUTES

Commissioner Graves motioned to approve the June 9, 2020 meeting minutes, Commissioner Fronk seconded the motion, all were in favor, and the motion carried.

REPORT OF DISBURSEMENTS

Commissioner Graves motioned to file the May report of Disbursements for audit, Commissioner Fronk seconded the motion, all were in favor, and the motion carried.

MAINTENANCE REPORT

Water/Wastewater Supervisor Delude gave a brief update for Public Works, there were 3 water leaks, 2 on South Morris, Public Works members have been training on the new wastewater plant, they have been experiencing late night alarms as they are working out the bugs, the walking track at the Causeway has been refurbished, the living shoreline at the ferry dock was cleaned up and the grasses were trimmed, and basically trying to catch up on work following the March April shutdown.

POLICE REPORT

Chief Patrick Maxwell gave a brief update for the Police Department, the police have been assisting with fire calls and public works shut downs due to water main breaks, social distancing signs have been placed at the Strand beach and officers are reminding people when they are not practicing social distancing, the new this is your speed signs have been successful at slowing drivers coming into and going through town and resident feedback has been very positive.

FIRE COMPANY

Lewis reported information sent to her by Chief Norbury: Stats for the period June 9, 2020 to June 23, 2020. Fire/Rescue: 3 fire/rescue calls, 3 miles traveled, 3.75 hours worked, with 14 member responses.

There were 4 medical calls, all with transport, 84 miles traveled, 8 hours worked, and 15 member responses. Pepe stated the drive through Bake Sale was very successful.

CITIZEN CONCERNS

President Pepe opened the floor for citizens to express any concerns. Lewis stated that several residents had stated they wish to address the Commissioners, but that none were currently in the meeting. She asked Skip Case if he would like to take this time to share some of his recent comments with the Commissioners. Skip stated that he had concerns regarding the entrance to town, stating the appearance coming into town was important to all. He had previously provided his concerns regarding the town's appearance to the Commissioners by email and appreciated their attention to the items. Lewis said that she felt that many had the same concerns with the appearance of the Main Pump Station, that was still in a state of construction, and that with the end in sight, the town would be working on improvements, hoping to replace the old fencing with something more appealing and were getting prices on installing landscaping to better shield the necessary pump station from the road. She reminded all that normally the town goes through a seasonal preparation for Oxford Day and with Covid19, many normal tasks were delayed as the town focus was on safety for its citizens, with all now playing catchup while still following Covid19 recommendations. Commissioner Fronk recommended that professional help be sought to replace the dying evergreens currently surrounding the pump station. Public Works will seek estimates for new screening plantings. Any new treatments will need to wait for the construction to be complete in order to avoid destroying any new plantings.

UNFINISHED BUSINESS

Commissioner Fronk if there had been any response from the proposed MEWS developers. Attorney Ryan stated that she had received a response from the proposed developers stating that were working through the Commissioners comments and would be providing a response.

Lewis stated that, as discussed at prior meetings and working with the National Wildlife Federation, a second application for grant funding was being prepared for submittal to the National Fish and Wildlife Federation to support the potential grant funds anticipated from the Maryland Coastal Grant Program for the construction of green infrastructure, living shorelines, work at the whole of the Strand area. Additionally the joint Maryland/Army Corp tidal wetlands permit for the construction of these living shoreline improvements was being prepared for submittal, after a meeting with all participants was held at the site this week. Both the application and the permit submittals were imminent. As far as the start of the construction project, Lewis stated there had been discussion of both a fall 2020 and a spring 2021 start date, but much depends on the actual funding, which at this time is questionable with the State shortcomings due to Covid19.

Lewis said she had received concerns that shoreline work will discontinue the use of the Strand Beach area. She reminded all that the main focus of the original application to the State was the need to build green infrastructure that will allow the public use of the sandy beach to continue and our award from the State was because of our desire to come up with a solution that will protect from sea-level rise, and provide a natural environment that will benefit the waters, while protecting the infrastructure along the Strand. The incorporation of marshes and dunes will provide that protection, while also allowing for accretion instead of erosion, thereby increasing sand for public access. Lewis stated she has added a construction page on the town's website for citizens to get an overview of the project and where information can be posted as we move forward. She is also going to be setting up individual meetings between the engineers and those properties that will be participating in the shoreline construction. President Pepe requested that when it is safe to have in person meetings, the public should be invited to a meeting to present the work that has taken place and construction that is in the works. Lewis reminded the Commissioners that the engineers were scheduled to attend the second meeting in

March, which was canceled due to COVID, and a public meeting is still part of the contract. She has also posted the proposed work, which had been presented to the Commissioners in April, on the town bulletin board in hopes of prompting citizen interest and questions.

NEW BUSINESS

None presented.

LETTERS AND REQUEST

None presented.

ATTORNEY

Ryan stated she was working on the Morris Street Water Main project and was hopefully the Notice to Proceed could be finalized in the next week. Fronk asked when the project was scheduled to be on the State Public Works Agenda. Ryan explained that although MDE has stated our application was in order and is recommending the project, the Public Works review will now not be until August, meaning we would be proceeding with some risk. Lewis and Ryan have been working on securing secondary funding in the event the town did not receive a positive result from the State. Fronk also asked if the resulting debt would increase the Water rates. Lewis stated that loan/loan forgiveness funding from MDE would still require the town to pay the note for 20 years and then the second 20 years is forgiven. Based on this type of funding the annual debt would still be for the full cost of the project, so any other type of funding would result in a similar annual debt. The rates have been increasing annually with this project in mind, and although there was no increase for FY 2021, so as not to impact the citizenry who may already be feeling the impacts of COVID19, the rates and new debt expenses would be reviewed again next year. Skip Case expressed his curiosity regarding the new operations after having watched the project over the last several years. Lewis stated that it is still too early for public access, but once the plant was turned over to the town, the site work had fully developed, and the staff was accustomed to the workings of the system, tours could be arranged.

Ryan stated she is processing the paperwork for the removal of the abandoned trailer/boats at the Strand.

ADMINISTRATOR

Lewis noted that all town Commissioner and Board meetings have been scheduled virtually for the month of July and as before participation information is noted on the bulletin board and is available on the town website.

COMMISSIONER COMMENT

Commissioner Fronk inquired as to the election schedule and when candidates could sign up. Lewis stated the election is September 15th and generally applications are accepted 60 days out and can be submitted up to 30 days prior to the election date. Lewis also reminded those who are not already registered to vote, to register with Talbot County as that puts them on the

Fronk noted that he has visited the Strand several times during the week and found the decorum to be excellent, visitors appear to be socially distancing, the presences of the officers seems to be helping keep things in order, and he is hopeful this behavior would continue through the summer.

President Pepe reminded all that this is usually the week of June that the Commissioners and Administration attend three days of seminars and group discussions with other Towns and small cities in Maryland at the Maryland Municipal League Conference. As with many planned events of this type, this one was modified to be an on-line conference with none of the personal interaction we get from face to face dialog.

On-line conferences have become the norm for us all, but we all long to get back to the days of face to face discussions. The same is true of our bi-monthly Commission meetings. It is important that we hear from you, the citizens, be it to criticize or commend our decisions. Pepe stated the he is looking forward to having open meetings at the Town Hall, but until then, we will continue to do the business of the Town through on-line meetings and keep you all informed. Please be patient with us, especially your Town Manager who has worked tirelessly throughout this Pandemic.

Pepe thanked the citizens of Oxford for their patience and calm demeanor as we continue to open the Town after almost four months of having been through a series of quarantines and stay at home orders, and restrictions placed on our businesses, that have affected us all to some degree.

He stated that he did not believe that any of us would have thought that this Covid -19 virus would have kept us from enjoying the many attributes of our Town, for so long a period of time.

These changes in our daily routines and the constant uncertainty that we all feel, have left us wondering if we will ever get back normal, the good old days of five months ago. The short answer is hopefully yes, we will, if we continue to pay attention.

It is a tribute to all, our citizens, business owners, the Town Manager, and most importantly our Town employees who have worked tirelessly in the background, that we have up to this point pretty much skirted the effects of the virus, due to your vigilance and selflessness in your daily actions.

Please know that any decisions that have been made during the ongoing pandemic regarding Town activities, were made with only one thing in mind, the safety of our Town and its citizens.

PUBLIC COMMENT

All participants were given the opportunity to speak, no comments were presented.

With no further business, Commissioner Graves made a motion to adjourn the meeting, Commissioner Fronk seconded the motion, all were in favor, and the meeting was adjourned at approximately 6:48pm.

Respectfully submitted,

Cheryl Lewis, Town Administrator-Clerk/Treasurer