

COMMISSIONERS OF OXFORD
Regular Meeting Minutes
February 9, 2021

Due to the Covid-19 pandemic, the Commissioners Meeting was held virtually in a Zoom Meeting Room on Tuesday, February 9, 2021. 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 town website. President Pepe called the meeting to order at 6:00 p.m.

PRESENT

Attending the meeting were Commission President John Pepe, Commissioner Gordon Fronk, Commissioner James Jaramillo, Police Chief Pat Maxwell, Public Works WW Superintendent Matt Ozman, Town Manager Cheryl Lewis, and Town Attorney Lyndsey Ryan. Multiple residents, including the Murrs, Steve Gibson, Philip Logan and Barbara Paca, David Poe, Dale Benson, and others were in attendance.

APPROVAL OF MINUTES

Commissioner Fronk motioned to approve the January 26, 2021 meeting minutes, Commissioner Jaramillo seconded the motion, all were in favor, and the motion carried.

President Pepe stated that the Commissioners held Special Meetings for the purpose of going into Closed Session were on February 2, 2020 at noon and February 5, 2020 at 3 pm for the purpose of discussing a matter related to a negotiating strategy and legal advice regarding the same.

MAINTENANCE REPORT

Wastewater Superintendent Matt Ozman gave an update for Public Works: Landscaping was completed around the main lift station last week. Bartlett will also be removing the dead trees and trimming the remaining cedar trees behind the lift station. The big oak tree at the dog park has been trimmed and all dead branches have been removed work was completed by Bartlett Tree Service. Public works has been working to keep all trenches filled and top coated now that all the tie in's and work has been completed on North and South Morris. Barkers has completed all the new piping for the water main project, everything has been tied in and charged. They are now waiting on the weather to break to finish clean up and patching all the cross over trenches, this work is scheduled for the coming weeks if weather permits. The filter air compressor is still down, and we are working with Pact and GMB to have this resolved and fixed. Public works had a great day of training on 2/10/21 for the sludge belt filter press; BDP did a dry startup of the press and trained all employees on how to start up the press. BDP will return when we have enough solids to do a wet start up and have another training session. For the past two weekends we have had snowstorms, with this past Sunday being the worst so far. Public works was out and plowed the entire town without any troubles, and with the forecast predicting more snow for this coming week, public works will be standing by ready and waiting. Ozman also noted the benches outside of the MEWS were at the shop for painting.

POLICE REPORT

Chief Patrick Maxwell gave a brief update for the Police Department: Have been busy with Public Works through the recent weather, but no accidents to report and they continue to keep an eye around town as there continue to be concerns elsewhere in the county.

FIRE COMPANY

No formal report, but it was noted the Fire Co has been responding to numerous mutual aid calls in Dorchester, as one of the Cambridge ladder trucks is down and Oxford and Hurlock are on standby.

UNFINISHED BUSINESS

With continued discussion on the Strand Coastal Resilience Design, Town Manager Lewis provided some history regarding the beginnings of the project and reasoning behind the current plans. She noted that since the last meeting, the engineers have placed stakes along the Strand to assist residents in understanding the height of the proposed dune, and that they are also trying to accommodate comments from the last meeting within the current design, including the incorporation of a green walking path along the roads edge. She continued that it was citizens living along the Strand that originally prompted the investigation into possible solutions, as increased storms and flooding in the area prompted concerns. She also noted that the town experiences tidal and stormwater flooding throughout town and that this project is only looking at the northern edge of the town and the solutions developed here will not solve all of the town's problems. This project is just one piece of a bigger picture and is one-step towards the preservation of the town for the next 50 to 100 years. She explained that a good deal of effort is spent convincing State funders that Oxford intends to be around in 100 and 200 years, and that after the first 300 years there is no plan to throw in the towel now. Sea level rise is going to require a lot of adapting in order for Oxford to continue to exist in the future, and with 330 years of past success, forwarding thinking planning only seems natural. Lewis provide photos showing the impacts to the Strand and road during a strong storm, explaining the intend of the proposed green infrastructure is to reduce the impacts beyond the beach, which includes critical infrastructure like water and sewer and electricity, along with the only road connecting the homes at the north east end of the Strand. Any serious storm that was able to encroach into this road would damage this critical infrastructure, creating health, safety and welfare concerns for the residents, and requiring the town to immediately respond with costly repairs. The town is responsible for the stability of this area.

Lewis provided several additional documents by video, reviewing elements of the reports, including Maryland's Come High Water, which focuses on sea level rise impacts on the eastern shore, noting that Oxford is prone to all four identified threats, coastal erosion, tidal flooding, storm surge and land subsidence. All of these impacts should be considered when deciding what steps Oxford should be taking now for the future. The study provides numerous examples in the Bay that demonstrate the need to identify concerns and plan for the improvements now. The recommendation of three strategies is included, Armor, Adapt, or Avoid, which clearly leaves the only option for Oxford to be adaption. The study includes strategies like building elevations and shoreline stabilization, which are two of the best opportunities for Oxford to improve on. Lewis also provided information on those participating from the State on this project, including Bhaskar Subramanian, the states Shoreline Conservation Chief, and explained their interest in this project as an opportunity to create a living shoreline for the protection of the community, while still allowing for the historic recreational use of a sandy beach. A living shoreline power point prepared by Bhaskar, and available online, was reviewed demonstrating the depth of experience with shoreline projects in Maryland. A recent case study regarding the cost effectiveness of living shorelines for coastal protection, based on post Sandy reconstruction in New Jersey, was also provided. Links to all the documents reviewed will be posted on the town's website.

Lewis closed by stating the information was provided to assist understanding in several areas including identifying the towns real needs, identifying why we are addressing these concerns now as opposed to in the future, better explanation of the State's is interested in Oxford, the reasons behind the welcomed grant funding, and to point out that this project may in fact be a one-time opportunity providing the choice to take action now or take a wait and see position and there is sufficient evidence that a wait and see position would not be best solution.

Fronk acknowledged that Lewis has focused on these needs since coming to Oxford, but inquired as to whether there has been other Oxford work. Lewis noted the work began when the town went through a series of class and citizen meetings reviewing the storm and tidal issues in town and resulted in the initial 2013 Stormwater and Flood Management Financing Study, continued with the development of the Stormwater Management and Shoreline Protection Inventory and Master Plan, the NOAA Sea Level Rise Vulnerability Study and the Critical Area Coastal Resilience Study. Fronk added that he was wondering whether consideration should be given to an ongoing Commission that would assemble and

reviewed the gained information annually and keep a continued eye and constant vigil on Oxford's adaption to future concerns. Jaramillo agreed a Commission was a great idea, but wanted the first priority to remain on the current project. Pepe agreed with both Commissioners and stated the putting a small Commission together to keep an eye on was a very good next step, stating that as a long-time resident, he realizes the changes we have seen in Oxford and acknowledges the changing technology and that has been utilized to attempt management of the shorelines, which have finally come full circle in the preferred method of natural shorelines. A Commission to keep track of the history, what we are doing currently, and where we are going in the future merits further discussion and should be considered going forward. Lewis agreed that as a separate tract a Commission to continue this discussion and effort into the future, and one that is inclusive of young minds so that the knowledge is long term, was a very good next step. Pepe finished by stating the easiest thing to do, is to do nothing, and we have seen the results of in action on the eastern shore and the decision to move forward and take bold action is the right thing to do for Oxford. He acknowledged that the recent input, comments and concerns expressed by the residents are educated and well thought out, but cautioned we all need to keep in mind the end game of saving our shoreline and protecting our community is paramount.

Art Murr agreed that action is necessary, but expressed concerns regarding ongoing maintenance. Lewis reminded all that one of the earliest steps the town took was the establishment of the Oxford Stormwater and Shoreline Utility for the purposes of establishing maintenance funding for future mitigation projects and explained this was a perfect example of information that a Commission would continue into the future. Steve Gibson asked with regards to this project, if/why the funding was tied to the preservation of the beach or premised on the beach being preserved. Lewis stated that yes it was based on the concerns of the Oxford citizens in the desire to maintain what is actually a historic sunbathing beach, the public expressed very early on that they were not willing to give up the use of the beach. She added that one of the things that was required in the current work was to not remove the current hardened structure, meaning the living shoreline will be incorporated into our hardened structures maintaining that additional protection. Phillip Logan stated they were in full support of the living shoreline and would be providing additional comments, but did want to present a rendering that would move the shoreline dune further from the roadway, which Lewis said she would provide to the engineers as a suggestion, but to keep in mind that the construction does have a per square feet cost and moving into the water would increase the cost. Barbara Paca stated that in a recent meeting with the State, which included Secretary of the Environment Ben Grumbles, that she understood one of the reasons the State was interested in working with Oxford was because the town had an excellent PI in Lewis and she appreciated the job Lewis has done in representing the citizens of Oxford.

NEW BUSINESS

President Pepe stated the Commissioners had become aware of some legislation currently being considered that raised some concerns. Lewis stated the first was a piece of emergency legislation to address how employees are handled during an emergency declaration, with the actual concern being the broad language found in the legislation. Attorney Ryan stated the overall intent of SB 486 Employment Standards During an Emergency was good, but took issue with the overly broad language that it does not also protect employers. She briefed the areas of the legislation that were of concern, including providing cost of health care to employees with no evidence that had contracted the disease while working, penalties for not providing PPE or immunizations without taking into consideration a national shortage, increasing employee wages without out taken into considerations benefits the employer was already providing on behalf of the employee, no consideration for the actual impacts to employees in different environments with different levels of risk, and suggested the legislature needs to look more carefully at this bill and tailor it to better address the actual risks and needs . Ryan stated that a letter was drafted addressing the concerns mentioned and was forwarded to the legislature to meet the deadline of earlier in the day. Jaramillo stated that many had expressed concerns regarding the impact to the small businesses on the shore and that he would continue to follow the legislation and provide updates. Fronk stated that he agreed the legislation was too broad and if the intention was to protect the employees, some consideration should be given to the possibility of employees losing their

employers because of the extraordinary expenses that may be incurred, which in reality was penalizing employers who did their best they could to carry their employees on the payroll throughout this recent pandemic.

Lewis stated that SB 245 School Resource Officer, which has been identified by Sheriff Gamble as a concern, would change the current School Resource Officer (SRO) legislation by dictating the officers permitted interactions within the school setting, including restrictions on uniformed officers in the school except in response to violence. Lewis stated that in rural areas, having a uniformed officer in our schools allows students to interact with officers in a positive way, outside of criminal activity, and provides support to students in areas like bullying. Jaramillo stated that as a student who had attended schools with SROs, it is not just the positive aspect of interacting with the SRO, it is also recognized that these officers provided a valuable service in deterring drug abuse in schools and assisting students to stay clear of drugs, and he expressed concern that removing these officers could endanger student's lives. Fronk provided some statistics with regards to the positive impacts of SROs within Maryland schools, and although he felt there were some real concerns regarding the State funding of the program, he did not feel this legislation was addressing that concern. The determination was made that when the next hearing was called a letter should be forwarded recommending that the circumstances of SRO participation in schools be a county-by-county decision depending on the local needs and not dictated by the state in sweeping legislation.

Jaramillo offered congratulations to the new Water's Edge Museum on their virtual grand opening.

PRESENTATION

Steve O'Donnell of the Charcot Marie Tooth Association thanked the Commissioners for allowing his family to participate in a virtual effort last year, where supporting persons could virtually follow Steve and his family members, thanks to a drone, as they completed their annual triathlon in Oxford in the summer of 2020. He was interested in running an actual small triathlon in 2021, but the Commissioners expressed their concerns with regards to any activities that would create a substantial gathering while the community was still following the necessary protocols based on the current state of emergency for the pandemic. Permission was granted for O'Donnell to again provide a virtual event for his supporters.

LETTERS AND REQUEST

A thank you note was received from Phyllis Rambo in appreciation of the flowers and sentiments provided her in the loss of Oxford's beloved former Commissioner Gordon Graves.

ATTORNEY

Ryan stated that she was working on the Bond closing documents for the Water Main Project and expected that to be finalized in the near future.

TOWN MANAGER

Lewis stated she still owed the Commissioners details for the R Gordon Graves Award program. Lewis stated that Delegate Mautz had dropped the Speed Camera Bill and a request to testify on the bill is coming in the near future.

COMMISSIONER AND PUBLIC COMMENT

Nothing additional

Being no further business, Commissioner Fronk motioned to close the meeting, Commissioner Jaramillo seconded the motion, and the meeting was adjourned at 7:40 pm. Respectfully submitted, Cheryl Lewis, Town Manager

"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".