

**COMMISSIONERS OF OXFORD**  
**Regular Meeting Minutes**  
**March 9, 2021**

Due to the Covid-19 pandemic, the Commissioners Meeting was held virtually in a Zoom Meeting Room on Tuesday, March 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. with the Pledge of Allegiance.

**PRESENT**

Attending the meeting were Commission President John Pepe, Commissioner Gordon Fronk, Commissioner Jimmy Jaramillo, Police Chief Pat Maxwell, Public Works WW Superintendent Matt Ozman, Town Manager Cheryl Lewis, and Town Attorney Lyndsey Ryan. Multiple residents, including Julie Wells, Phillip Logan, Norman Bell, Liz Hasbrouck, Dick Deerin, the Murrs, Barbara Ranson, David Poe, Dale Benson, members of the Oxford Garden Club, and others were in attendance.

**APPROVAL OF MINUTES**

February 23, 2021 meeting minutes were deferred to the March 23, 2021 meeting.

President Pepe stated that a Special Meeting for the purpose of going into Closed Session was held on March 2, 2021 at 7 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: Barkers Landing will be out this week to look at all the sites with the paving contractor to coordinate and schedule patching, and any other clean up that is needed. Dead trees have been removed behind main lift station and the rest have been trimmed by Bartletts tree service. New trees have been planted around bio swales and around dog park by unity, this work was done while crews were on site to clean out bio retention ponds and bio swales. The main lift station generator transfer switch unit was found to be faulty and a new one has been ordered in its place and will be replaced upon the unit's arrival. Public works has had two water leaks this past month one was on Oxford road adjacent to the fire house and crews found a bad bell joint this section was cut out and replaced. Leak number two was on the corner of North Morris and West Stand and this was a leaking valve. The valve was cut out and replaced after an attempt to pack it was unsuccessful. Public works has patched the water leak spot on Oxford road with cold patch asphalt this past Monday. Public works will be digging up a hydrant on Bachelor's Point road tomorrow please use caution in the area this should not have any impact on town residents, as this looks to be contained in between the shut off valve for the hydrant and the hydrant itself.

**POLICE REPORT**

Chief Patrick Maxwell gave a brief update for the Police Department: With the nice weather there are more people utilizing town facilities, beaches and parks. Speed enforcement and regular checks on businesses continue. Continued reminder regarding phone call and text scams, including calls asking for money to help a family member and utilization of 226 numbers to confuse the receiver.

**FIRE COMPANY**

No new information provided.

**UNFINISHED BUSINESS**

Lewis provided an update on the Speed Camera Legislation, stating the County Council had provided a letter of support for the legislation, and that a hearing is scheduled for this Thursday in front of the Environmental and Transportation Committee, for which she was registered to represent the town. A formal letter of response to the legislative request was submitted by Attorney Ryan to the committee through the online portal.

Regarding the Strand Coastal Resilience Design continued discussion, Pepe stated that hearing that there have been numerous recent calls to the town office regarding stormwater issues throughout town, it is worth noting that this design along with all the other initiatives the town has been working on are in an effort to increase the town's sustainability against the impacts of sea level rise. Lewis said she had nothing new from the engineers regarding the beach design, but expects something in the next few weeks. With regards to the noted phone calls concerning standing stormwater, that because of this winter's unusually frequent heavy precipitation the ground is completely saturated, not allowing for normal absorption forcing considerably more stormwater into above ground areas. It is not a single problem but a town wide concern and one that does not have a quick solution. The town's drainage consists of holding areas, run off, and ground absorption, a system that is greatly impacted by ground saturation and high tides. All concerns will be reviewed, but most will need to wait for the ground to be dry to really investigate. Some concerns can easily be addressed, while others may take more effort or a combination of efforts and are not so easily resolved. With spring approaching the town will be doing what they can to improve areas that have been impacted, including areas that were part of the watermain construction project, and document future improvements that will need to be looked into. Pepe stated that, although the change may not be apparent to all, there is no doubt that sea level rise is having an impact in Oxford and will continue to do so in the future and continued attention to these efforts are important.

#### **NEW BUSINESS**

President Pepe reminded the Commissioners that in March of 2020, just prior to the start of COVID, there was discussion of putting together a committee to review the volume of signage found within town, along with sign restrictions and regulations, with the intent of making recommendations back to the Commissioners. Pepe felt that the increase in homemade signs and multiple signs on a property were making the town look bad. He stated he completely understands resident's rights to speak their mind and promote their cause, but was concerned about the visual impacts to the community. Fronk stated that he too was concerned with the volume of signs, and remembers that a year ago one of the concerns was the number of real estate signs. Lewis stated that there was language in the planning code that did address temporary signs and language that required a permit for any non-temporary signs. She suggested that a simple reminder could be prepared regarding placement of temporary signs. Jaramillo expressed concerns regarding proposing of new legislation regarding someone expressing their opinion, unless there was already enforceable language. Pepe stated it was not an issue of politics, it was an issue of how we want our town to look, stating everyone has the right to express a political view and he would never consider changing that, but one sign on a property for an appropriate period of time would seem sufficient. Five or six signs on an individual property for months on end may not be what we want for the town. Fronk stated that he understood the concerns, he too would not want to express his will on others who have a right to express their own will, but if there was already an ordinance that would address the esthetics he would like to review it. Lewis read the current language.

Signs Permitted Without Permits - The following signs may be erected without issuance of a sign permit: No more than one (1) temporary sign advertising the sale, lease or rental of the premises upon which the sign is located. The total area of the sign may not exceed four (4) square feet. Such sign shall be removed within five (5) days following the sale, lease or rental of the premise. Professional name

plates or signs denoting the name and address of the occupants, which sign shall not exceed a total of four (4) square feet in area.

Signs Relating to Political Elections and Activities - Signs relating to political elections and activities shall be permitted under the following conditions: That no sign be located on property owned or maintained by the Town of Oxford or upon any street, sidewalk or public right-of-way. That no sign be installed without the owners of the site giving permission in writing for the sign to be installed. That all signs be removed within five (5) days after the date upon which the election or activity occurs.

Lewis stated that she supposed there could be a discussion as to whether a sign represented an ongoing activity, but added that the town had not and was not taking any steps regarding any of the current political signage.

Fronk stated that aside from political signage, the discussion began regarding the numerous other signs found throughout town and the condition of the signage, and he recalled that a committee had been started. Pepe said that Ray Stevens had volunteered to be on a committee, and the intent was to address the esthetics, but nothing further took place once COVID hit. Pepe stated he would speak with Stevens again and clarified that the concern was esthetics, this was not about residents taking a stand on an issue, and that he agreed that those signs should be appropriate for a matter of time. Jaramillo added that when he first joined the commission, in coordination with Lewis, he had made notes regarding the street directional signs that were missing or damaged, and he would provide that to the committee once it was set.

#### **LETTERS AND REQUEST**

The Oxford Garden Club provided a letter requesting permission to use town park. Lewis provided the currently health regulations regarding COVID, including the Governor's action today allowing restaurants to go back to full capacity, but the requirement for 6' of distance and masks was still in place and his message was to remain cautious. She has not had an opportunity to speak with the county health department regarding their coordination for events. Up until now the Commissioners have not approved any request to use public lands in the best interest of all residents. Pepe inquired as to whether the OGC had spoken with the OCC regarding the use of their property. Reenie Rice of the OGC stated that they could use the OCC, but had a preference for the town park. Pepe stated that as it stood at the time he did not see how he could allow one group to use a facility considering others had been turned down prior to this evening and felt that we should continue to follow the protocols that have served the community well over the last year. Jaramillo agreed that after turning down two other groups that it would be best to continue with the policy. With the consideration that the OGC had the alternate location available to them, the Commissioners determined it would be in the town's best interest to turn down the request for an event in the park. Fronk stated that in his efforts with the HTOX, the professionals do believe with the reduction in infections and the push to get vaccines out, we may see some positive numbers in the future, but at this time he agreed that considering the vulnerable population in our community, we should hold the course, continue to utilize social distancing and masks, and that we could consider this in the future if things do change for the better.

#### **ATTORNEY**

Ryan requested a closed session for legal advice following the meeting. With regards to the upcoming boat auction she and Lewis had been considering options, including social media. Lewis is currently involved an auction of a vehicle for her fire company and she can provide feedback following their auction.

## **TOWN MANAGER**

Lewis provided a proposed draft of the R Gordon Graves Award for the Commissioners to consider, which she had emailed to them for their review prior to the meeting and asked if there was any feedback. Following an agreement on the draft, a Resolution would be a means for establishing the program. Fronk stated he was in favor of the proposal with the minor changes discussed and felt they would be ready to approve it in an April meeting, leaving plenty of time for student to apply for the fall semester. Pepe stated that he felt a portion of the funding from the sale of the boats that are to be auctioned would be good away to get the award funded for the next several years, assuring its success.

## **COMMISSIONER COMMENTS**

### **PUBLIC COMMENT**

Liz Hasbrouk stated in her experience at the Maritime Museum, that with solicitations in the newsletter for donations this could possibly be an ongoing auction of boat products to fund the scholarship, as locally there are plenty of opportunities to donate unused kayaks, etc. She also felt it would be good to have a short video and narrative walk around of the boat for the online auction. In regards to a signage committee, she has prior experience with signage and also understands the current regulations and would be willing to serve on the committee.

Being no further business, Commissioner Jaramillo motioned to adjourn the meeting into closed session for legal advice, Commissioner Fronk seconded the motion, and the meeting was adjourned at 6:59 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".*