

COMMISSIONERS OF OXFORD
Special Meeting Minutes
November 2, 2021

A Special Commissioners Meeting was held Virtually in a Zoom Meeting room on November 2, 2021. With the continued HIGH transmission rate for COVID cases in Talbot County, all town meetings have remained in virtual settings temporarily as a precautionary measure. The public was invited to participate in the virtual meeting. This information was posted on the town bulletin board and the town website. President Gordon Fronk called the meeting to order at 6 pm.

PRESENT

Attending the meeting virtually were Commission President Gordon Fronk, Commissioner James Jaramillo, Commissioner Brian Wells, and Town Manager Cheryl Lewis. Resident Jane McCarthy and one other person were in attendance, along with guest speakers.

This meeting was scheduled for the purpose of hearing a presentation from the **Talbot County Economic Development and Tourism Office**. Judy Bixler, President of the Talbot County Board of Tourism and Oxford's Representative on the Board, and Cassandra Vanhooser, Director of the Talbot County Economic Development and Tourism Office provided the Commissioners with an overview of their purpose in wanting to speak with the town. The Talbot County Board of Tourism is proposing a 2% increase to the current Talbot County Accommodations Tax of 4%, with 1% of the increase to go to the entity/area in which the accommodations resided and 1% to go to the Talbot County Economic Development and Tourism Office. They demonstrated that Talbot County currently charged the lowest tax rate in Maryland and with this increase, 6% would become the average accommodation tax charged in Maryland. As an example of distribution, the 1% would add an estimated \$14,208.19 to the Town of Oxford's FY 2021 collections of \$56,832.76. The County's 1% of total accommodations (including municipalities), plus 1% from County accommodations would add an estimated \$508,610.42 to be dedicate to the Talbot County Economic Development and Tourism Board.

The authority to collect this tax is granted by the State. The original 1986 legislation authorizing the collection of the tax provided a fee of up to 5% of the collections to go to the County for cost of collections, with the remaining 95% to disbursed to the entities in which the accommodations resided including one mile outside of municipalities. In order to increase the rate to 6% and include 1% of the total collection to go to the County, the request to the State for a legislative change must come from the Talbot County Council, and must be supported by the municipalities.

Currently the Talbot County Economic Development and Tourism Office/Board provides promotional materials and efforts for all of Talbot County, including the municipalities, and the 1 % increase dedicated to the county department would more fairly support this effort from which both the County and the Municipalities benefit. Town Manager Lewis concurred that the Town of Oxford absolutely benefits from the efforts of the county in support of both economic development and tourism, and that the town would not be able to provide similar services within their own budget. Additionally, she explained that tourism does increases the cost of services for the town, including police and public works efforts, and that the

cost for these services should be shared by the tourist and should not be a total burden of the resident tax payers. For these two reasons should could justify the requested 2% increase, along with the proposed change to the sharing.

The Board representatives are approaching each municipality for support of this proposed change to the legislation. Judy Bixler stated that she had communicated with the owners of the three Inns located in Oxford and they supported this increase, as did the county representative for the short term rental businesses.

After questions from the Commissioners and extensive discussion of the information presented. President Fronk motioned to support the proposed request to the Talbot County Council, Commissioner Wells seconded the motion, all were in favor, and the motion carried.

With no further business, Commissioner Wells motioned to adjourn the meeting, Commissioner Jaramillo seconded the motion, all were in favor, and the meeting was adjourned at 6:41 pm.

Cheryl Lewis, Town Manager