

**Commissioners Of Oxford
Regular Meeting Minutes
September 10, 2024**

The Commissioners meeting was held at 101 Market Street on September 10, 2024. The meeting was called to order and the meeting opened with the Pledge of Allegiance.

Present

Attending the meeting were Commissioner Katrina Greer, Commissioner Norman Bell, Commissioner Tom Costigan, Town Attorney Lyndsey Ryan, and Chief Chris Phillips. Approximately 52 people were in attendance with individuals attending virtually.

Commissioners Comments/Announcements

There were no comments.

Presentation

A presentation was given by the Talbot County Tourism Board on a recommendation to increase the public accommodations tax from 4% to 6%. Presentation was given by The Director of Economic Development and Tourism, Cassandra Vanhooser, and the Board Chairman, Captain Judy Bixler.

A 2% increase to the town of Oxford would bring in an extra \$30,000. The benefits of this are it's requiring your visitor to help pay for the services that they get. An increase in accommodations tax increases revenue without increasing taxes on your local residents. Accommodations tax is to help offset the growing cost of marketing.

There was discussion and questions about the presentation. Will vote on it at next meeting on September 24, 2024.

Oath Of Office

Commissioner Bell gave oath of office to Joshua Coder (Board of Zoning Appeals), Deborah Pulzone (Board of Zoning Appeals-Alternate), and Jennifer Stanley (Historic Commission).

Resolution To Establish Meeting Procedures

Commissioner Bell proposed a resolution, we need to conduct business in an environment where everyone feels safe, no one feels threatened, bullied or harassed. We developed proposed rules similar to those used in other jurisdictions in Maryland and around the country to ensure meetings run more smoothly and efficiently.

The Commissioners of Oxford have the authority to determine their own rules and order of business pursuant to the Charter of Oxford. All meetings of the Commissioners shall be open to the public and the rules of the Commissioners shall provide that residents of the town shall have a reasonable opportunity to be heard at any meeting in regard to any municipal question and to provide a reasonable opportunity for the public to be heard.

Commissioner Bell read the Commissioners rules and procedures. There was discussion about the resolution. Resolution to establish meeting procedures will be on the agenda for next meeting.

Unfinished Business

Commissioner Greer made a proposal regarding the volunteer dinner. I am proposing that the employees have a dinner, which they will do at Christmas, but that taxpayer dollars would be better spent towards something else other than a volunteer dinner. Commissioner Costigan and Commissioner Bell both agreed that the volunteer dinner is a way of showing appreciation to all the volunteers and employees. Has been well received in the past.

Commissioner Greer motioned to proceed with volunteer dinner at Doc's with a cap of \$5,000. Commissioner Costigan seconded the motion, 2 in favor and 1 against, the motion carried.

Commissioners took public comments regarding the volunteer dinner.

Chief Phillips gave comments on hiring a fourth police officer. The fourth officer position has been temporarily put on hold. It is not a decision that taken lightly. One thing that is lingering right now is LEOPS (Law Enforcement Officer Pension System). It's a part of the state retirement system that we currently have but designed for law enforcement officers. It is incredibly difficult to compete, to hire, and retain without a competitive retirement. The issue that we have is that we have made every effort to try and reach out to the state, and I'm not getting much feedback from them. We're not informed enough about what that cost is going to be. The fourth officer would mean a lot for the department and for the town. We wait until we find out what that number is going to be from LEOPS. Need assistance in making contact with LEOPS.

Commissioner Greer would like further justification on why a fourth police officer is needed.

Continued discussion about the needs of a fourth police officer continued and was agreed this issue will be put on the agenda for a future meeting.

Commissioner Bell gave a proposal on behalf of Town Planner, Marilyn Williams. The town uses Beacon Engineering to review stormwater management plans. There's no set rate for the stormwater review we get, but it's typically between \$2,500 and \$6,000, depending upon the complexity of the plan. Town Planner is recommending that the town enter into an agreement with GMB for stormwater management plan review.

Commissioner Greer motioned to move the stormwater management plan review to GMB, Commissioner Costigan seconded, moved that we move our municipal stormwater review plans to GMB. Commissioner Costigan seconded that motion, all were in favor, and the motion carried.

New Business

Town Attorney, Lyndsey Ryan, stated the Ethics Commission met last Thursday to discuss revisions to Chapter 13. They also discussed draft policies and procedures for conducting ethics meetings related to hearing complaints and advisory opinions, and a draft complaint form. Some of the revisions that they made from your current town code require more expansive requirements on prohibitions of elected and appointed officials. It also would now apply to candidates for office and employees of the town. This would require employment, and financial interest. There are prohibitions on solicitation and acceptance of gifts, post-employment limitations both for elected and appointed officials and employees if there's a financial interest or if there's a matter that the employee worked on while employed by the town. In the past, the elected and appointed officials have always been required to complete the financial disclosure. This would extend to candidates for elected office. It requires employees of the town to provide the financial disclosure. It clarifies that the Ethics Council is an advisory board, but it gives them the authority to issue an order of compliance directing a respondent to cease and desist from a particular action. They can also issue a reprimand, and a finding of any violation would be public. Confidentiality is something that you all have the discretion to decide. It establishes a three-year term limit. Just like the commissioners, that it would be rolling annually. I think one of the recommendations is establishing the commission, having three members but also include one alternate. If there's something brought against an existing member, you would always have three there to consider a member.

There were questions and discussion among Commissioners and Town Attorney about the Ethics Commission report. It was agreed to wait until the Ethics Commission was completely finished before moving forward.

Letters Received

There were three letters received. Plastic Bag Ordinance, 2 letters. Engineering Fees, 1 letter.

Commissioner Comments

Commissioner Costigan announced the OCC has its fifth annual Oxford Road Rally at 8:00 at the OCC.

Commissioner Bell mentioned the dance contest at OCC. Chief Phillips and his wife will be dancing in the contest.

Commissioner Bell stated there's another issue that drew a lot of attention during the campaign, and that was the flooding issue. The design of the project approved. I'd like to understand what the status of that is. I've asked Matt to see when GMB is available. It probably will be the commissioner's meeting after the next one.

Public Comments

Debbie Perlicki asked will we have a copy of the draft ethics? It appears that the ethics committee is gaining a lot of power or authority to do things. They should just merely be advisory to you, the commissioners.

Peter Clancy thanked commissioners for the great service.

Gordon Brown stated September 30th is the Celebrate Offered Party at Holy Trinity. All commissioners, all employees, all volunteers and committees and commissions are encouraged to attend.

Barbara Baker asked about the letters the public writes. What is the protocol for actually publishing them in minutes? Is there any protocol for actually responding to our questions?

Deborah Pulzone expressed her appreciation for the town staff. They're short-staffed, and they're doing a wonderful job.

Joan Levy would like a report on the town manager search. I think it would be helpful if people in town knew that it was something you're working on and understanding in the process.

Robert Hybert commented on PIA's. The thought is that maybe the town would publish the PIAs and the authors of the PIAs. It will eliminate duplication, and it allows the individual who has interest in the topic to seek out the individual who submitted it and what their response is to the PIA.

Future Meetings

The next commissioners' meetings will be held on September 24, 2024 and October 8, 2024.

Adjournment

Commissioner Costigan made a motion to adjourn the meeting. Commissioner Greer seconded that motion. All were in favor, the motion carried.

From: Pk Baker <pbkbaker@gmail.com>
Sent: Monday, August 26, 2024 3:27 PM
To: Vicky Sharp
Subject: Plastic Bag Ordinance

While I am well aware of the many issues with single-use plastic bags and support minimizing their use, I am opposed to this ordinance as written.

The primary reason for my opposition is that it targets just 2 businesses in our town, both of which are owned by people who have contributed much to Oxford.

One, The Scottish Highland Creamery, serves the residents but also attracts a noticeable number of visitors to Oxford. Their product does not lend itself to paper bags.

The other, The Oxford Market is an essential business for our town. Many residents rely heavily on its being there. I visit the Market regularly and think that the environmental cost of an occasional plastic bag which gets reused is offset by my not having to drive 20+ miles to Easton and back.

These are valuable businesses to our town and should be greatly encouraged not made to adapt to an ordinance that will have a minor environmental impact.

Thank you for your consideration.

Pamela K Baker
507 East Strand

Dave and Rose Donovan
203 N. Morris St.
Oxford, MD

August 27, 2024

To the Commissioners:

We are writing in support of the proposed ordinance restricting the sale of plastic bags in the town of Oxford. Plastic bags are an environmentally disastrous product that provide no advantage over multi-use paper bags or other reusable bags that vendors can supply for a trivial fee or that consumers can supply on their own. Single use plastic bags last literally forever, breaking down over time into microplastics that end up in the air, water, and soil, and ultimately in all of us. Restrictions like those proposed here have proved both effective and easy to comply with, at virtually no cost and truly trivial inconvenience.

The principal argument against the proposed ordinance appears to be "I just don't want to." If we were all living far apart and each of us had to live with the environmental consequences of our decisions, that might be a sufficient argument. But we don't. What goes in our waterways affects us all. What goes in our landfills affects us all. What goes in the air affects us all. And with respect to microplastics, it affects our children and our grandchildren and their descendants as well.

I have also heard others argue that we are such a small community that banning plastic bags here won't have that much impact overall. That, of course, is true with respect to just about everything, from run-off from our yards and farms into the Bay to air pollution. Oxford does not get a free pass on doing our part to solve problems confronting our county and our state and nation simply because we are a small community. By that logic, none of our problems would ever get solved.


Another argument against adoption of this ordinance I have heard is that it will still allow some uses of single-use plastics (e.g., to wrap fish, meat, and poultry, prepared foods, etc.). Opposition to a solution because it does not completely solve a problem is unserious. There is no reason not to do what we can and contribute to a solution, rather than do nothing and continue to contribute to the problem. This is especially true when the proposed ordinance will impose almost zero cost on consumers and at most a trivial inconvenience, if any at all.

Finally, I have heard others argue that such an ordinance will raise enforcement issues and that the town has more serious problems to deal with. These arguments are also unserious. Nothing about adopting this ordinance will interfere with addressing any other issue that faces us. And there is zero reason to believe that any of the vendors who will

need to restrict their uses of single-use plastics would choose to disregard this ordinance if it were enacted.

That a handful of our citizens have become vocal in their opposition to this proposal is unfortunate. But the Commissioners are elected to do what they believe to be in the best interests of the town. The arguments in favor of this proposed limited ban are as powerful here as they are in every other community in which they have been enacted, and the arguments against are every bit as weak. We urge the Commissioners to enact the ordinance.

Respectfully,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Dave & Rose Donovan". The signature is stylized and includes a large, circular flourish on the right side.

Dave & Rose Donovan

oxfordplanner@goeaston.net

From: Will Cawley <willcawley@msn.com>
Sent: Wednesday, September 4, 2024 10:41 PM
To: katinahgreer@icloud.com; Tom Costigan; normanbell45@gmail.com; Lyndsey Ryan
Cc: oxfordplanner@goeaston.net
Subject: Stormwater Management Charges
Attachments: Stormwater101South#1.jpg; Stormwater101South#2.jpg; Stormwater101South#3.jpg; Beaconcharges101South#1.jpg; BeaconCharges101South#2.jpg; Beaconcharges101South#3.jpg; Beaconcharges101South#4.jpg; 101SouthStRainGarden.jpg

Dear Town Commissioners,

Please see the attached invoices for our hired surveyor's billing to complete the "Stormwater Management" on 101 South St. The attachments #1,2,and 3 included the site plan work, mapping house location, stormwater drainage, and staking the foundation. Also, they prepared the Sediment & Soil report for Talbot County. The total charge was \$1,000 to complete and submit to the Town of Oxford for review and permit issuance. The \$1,000 was billed and paid by us directly.

Please see attached Beacon Engineering review charges. The attachments #1,2,3,and 4 for the Town of Oxford's hired engineering firm to review a 210' square feet "Rain Garden" to catch gutter water from the new roof. Beacon billed me for 28.5 hours for a total cost of \$3,065. That would be \$107.54 per hour. There were no substantial modifications or recommended changes to my surveyor's original Stormwater Management design.

This was the second house I built within the last year that required engineered stormwater management. Both projects resulted in us paying about one third of the total charges billed by Beacon to review the site plan. I have been building for twenty years in Talbot County and the charges coming from Oxford's review engineer are way out of line with the rest of the local towns that I have permitted in.

I would like to make a request that the town consider hiring another engineer/firm for stormwater reviewing and get back to reasonable billing for the actual work being done. I think it's safe to say that this engineer didn't study this rain garden for 28.5 hours with no changes. Please see the attached picture of the \$4,065 "Rain Garden" not including the plants and lot preparation costs. The "Rain Garden" has been completely under deep water twice since I finished building the house. In the big picture, not sure what we are trying to accomplish here when there are much bigger flooding problems in that area of town than the gutter water from a 14 square roof.

My suggestion for you to consider. I think if we could possibly shift the services to another firm temporarily that might be a cheaper, short-term fix. After that, the town could request bids from other engineering firms that do the same work while checking their pricing and references. Maybe the short-term fix performs well and there will be no need to hire another firm. In my opinion, Beacon Engineering has gotten comfortable having blank check billing with no checks and balances on their invoicing.

Thanks for your time and considering my concerns. I would appreciate your feedback.