



**BOARD OF COUNTY COMMISSIONERS
OF WASHINGTON COUNTY, MARYLAND**

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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**NEWS
RELEASE**

Review of Actions Taken in the Washington County
Board of County Commissioners Meeting
Tuesday, August 19, 2008

**THE COMMISSIONERS ATTENDED A LUNCHEON WITH CHILD
ADVOCACY/SAFE PLACE AT THE NOON HOUR**

PRIORITY RANKING FOR COUNTY AGRICULTURAL DISTRICTS

The Board of County Commissioners approved an amended measure for priority ranking of these agricultural easements by a 3-1 vote with Commissioner Aleshire voting "no". Agricultural Planners Eric Seifarth and Sara Edelman brought this issue back before the Board, for approval of changes to the ranking scale used for applications for the Maryland Agricultural Land Preservation Program (MALPP) easements. On July 8th information was presented to the Board regarding changes to the manner in which priorities are assigned for those easement applications. The Board of County Commissioners requested that the Agricultural Board and staff reconsider several items on the proximity ranking worksheet. Regarding lots withheld or previously developed, points would be given for lots not developed. 100% of the potential lots not developed would be worth 5 points, 90% or more - 3 points, 80% or more - 2 points, 70% or more - 1 point, and less than 70% - 0 points. Up to 3 lots for family members would not draw a penalty. In regards to proximity to other easements, properties contiguous to other easements would garner - 25 points; one-quarter mile or less - 20 points; less or equal to one-half mile - 15 points, less than or equal to 1 mile - 10 points; less than or equal to 2 miles - 5 points; and over 2 miles, no points. Weighting values for proximity to other easements or protected open space would be one point for Agricultural easements and one-half point for Open Space easements. In a meeting of the Ag Board on Monday, that membership wanted to stress that the programs are Agricultural in nature, and suggested that a weighting system be used for land contiguous to property under Program Open Space or other state of federal easement. The Ag Board suggested that such properties should receive 50% of maximum points allowed.. The amended motion was to approve the percentage of lots and the weighted factor for land adjacent to open space preservation.

UNIVERSITY SYSTEM OF MARYLAND AT HAGERSTOWN UPDATE

No formal action was required for this item. University System of Maryland at Hagerstown (USMH) Director Dr. David Warner, staff member Dr. Gaye McGovern, and USMH Board member Greg Snook brought this update on the University System of Maryland at Hagerstown and the scholarship fund for Washington County residents to the Board. Warner updated the commissioners about program development and enrollment. 6 Universities are represented at the center, up from 3 when classes began in 2005. The number of degree programs has increased from 12 to 19. Operating budgets increased from the 1995 level of \$1 million to \$2.016 million, with revenue increasing from zero to \$50,000 and scholarship funding going from zero in 1995 to \$425,000 today. Student services have increased, classroom capacity rate is at 85%, Library space and computer labs have grown over the 2-year period. Student enrollment grew 13% in the period from 2005-2008. Warner told the Board that daytime enrollment fills about 33% of classroom space, and that 6-8 classrooms requested by the School Board to support the School for the Arts will be available. The Center will host its first doctoral program in 2009, Warner said. McGovern provided current information about the local scholarship effort and the fundraiser to be held at Duffy's on Potomac and the Maryland Theater on September 13th to build the scholarship fund. The Board of County Commissioners has supported the scholarship fund from surplus funds after the annual audit in the past. Consideration for a contribution to the scholarship fund was requested if excess funds permit following that audit. Former Commissioner Snook explained the investment of funds that the County has donated for the scholarship programs. A decision on donation of funds will come at a later date.

WORKERS COMPENSATION EXCESS INSURANCE RENEWAL

The Board of County Commissioners approved this measure by a 3-1 vote with Commissioner Wivell voting "no".. Human Resources Director Bill Sonnik and Safety Administrator Brian Overcash brought this item before the Board. Staff recommended placement of excess workers compensation insurance with Midwest Employers Casualty Company for a September 1, 2008 through September 1, 2009 premium amount of \$93,544. A full market survey was completed for the County's excess workers compensation insurance coverage. This insurance protects the County from future expenditures for any workers compensation claim that reaches the deductible threshold of \$500,000. The County is considered self-insured by the Maryland Workers Compensation Commission and has been since the early 1980's. Two carriers were responsive to the request for premium quotations, Midwest Employers Casualty Company (\$93,544) and New York Marine and General (\$88,910). While both carriers are responsive and qualified, Midwest Employers Casualty Company has an A.M. Best "Superior" Rating and an "AA-" long term financial rating, while New York Marine only has an "Excellent" Rating and an "A" long term financial rating. Midwest has written excess insurance for many years and was the County's excess carrier for 5 years. New York Marine, the County's present carrier, is relatively new to the workers compensation field and its long term future is unknown. These ratings are important in making sure the County is protected in the event there is a workers compensation claim that reaches the \$500,000 threshold. If this happens, it is usually many years after the initial injury. There

is a \$4,633 premium difference in New York Marine's favor. That difference is offset by the uncertain market stability of New York Marine when compared to Midwest Employers. Due to the nature of workers compensation claims and statutory coverage requirements, an initial injury may take many years to "mature" and reach the deductible threshold. The premium quoted by Midwest Employers is \$13,060 less than the FY 2009 budgeted amount of \$106,604, a 13% reduction.

TRANSPORTATION ADVISORY COMMITTEE BY-LAWS

The Board of County Commissioners approved this measure, as amended, by unanimous vote. Public Works Director Joe Kroboth brought this item before the Board, with a request to approve revisions to the Transportation Advisory Committee's (TAC) By-laws as proposed. TAC was established to advise the Board of County Commissioners on matters of transportation operations, safety and functions. This committee consists of technical professionals and transportation practitioners working in various positions within the City of Hagerstown, Washington County and the State of Maryland. This committee reviews and resolves traffic complaints through education, engineering and enforcement measures. Kroboth said the Committee sought to discuss and reaffirm the role and mission of the TAC to ensure it is meeting the expectations of the Commissioners, and ascertain if any additional duties are required. The By-laws for this committee have not been revised since 1999. TAC recommended that the membership be expanded to include individual positions that did not exist prior to present day, such as the County Transportation Engineer, or to include jurisdictions that may be interested in participating in the process. Discussion centered on the number of members, and whether the Economic Development Commission should have a presence on that committee. The revisions were approved, with the stipulation that Kroboth talk with EDC Director Tim Troxell about possible participation of his agency in TAC.

THE BOARD MET IN CLOSED SESSION TO DISCUSS PERSONNEL MATTERS AND APPOINTMENTS, THEN RECONVENED IN OPEN SESSION TO TAKE SEVERAL ACTIONS.

The Board approved reorganization of the Permits and Inspections Department at the request of Department Director Dan Divito. Several personnel actions and position realignments were requested.

The Commissioners approved promotion of Scott Hobbs to Chief of Capital Projects in the Division of Public Works, and approved advertising the position that was vacated due to the promotion.

OTHER BUSINESS

Appointments to Boards and Commissions: The Commissioners approved several appointments to Boards and Commissions in open session following discussion in closed session.

Tracy Salvagno was appointed to the Housing Authority of Washington County Board as the Hancock representative.

Shelby Penn-Ross was appointed to the Economic Development Commission as the City of Hagerstown representative.

Reappointed to the Adult Public Guardianship Review Board were Dr. Alan Ditto, Katherine Drummond, Mary Jane Sharer, and Pauline Welsh. Appointed as a Community Representative was Forrest Easton.

THE BOARD HELD AN EVENING MEETING WITH THE MAYOR, COUNCIL AND CITIZENS OF KEEDYSVILLE AT 7:00 PM AT THE TOWN HALL.

COMMISSIONERS' REPORTS AND COMMENTS

Commissioner Kristin Aleshire told the Board that invitations have been received for the Remembrance in the Park event set for September 9th, 2008 at noon in Hagerstown City Park. The event will be a tribute to police, firefighters and military personnel who have fallen in the line of duty since September 11th, 2001. Aleshire distributed an article by Delegate Richard Weldon regarding property taxes. The Commissioner said he was contacted by several Maryland Correctional Officers regarding searches conducted at the state prison complex. Aleshire said the process used was not proper.

Commissioner Jim Kercheval commented on attending the Maryland Association of Counties (MACo) summer meeting last week. The Commissioner also wished students and teachers well on then opening of school for the 2008-2009 year. At a function at Paramount Elementary School, Kercheval said teachers were excited about the coming year and reduction in class sizes. The enrollment has decreased from 600 to 325 students at Paramount due to redistricting and new school construction, Kercheval said.

Commissioners' President John Barr commented on the networking and interaction between County elected officials and staffs at the MACo meetings, citing workshops on team building, community involvement, solid waste management and programs for senior citizens as meaningful. Barr reminded the Board that Augustoberfest is scheduled for the coming weekend in Downtown Hagerstown. An Airplane and Car Show is set for Sunday at Hagerstown Regional Airport to benefit the Aviation Museum, Barr said. A meeting with Senator Don Munson, Delegates Leroy Myers and John Donoghue, City of Hagerstown Officials, representatives of the Chamber of Commerce and Greater Hagerstown Committee, Washington County Free Library management, School Board representatives, leadership of the University System of Maryland-Hagerstown, Barr and Maryland Department of Capital Budget Executive Director Chadfield B. Clapsaddle was an opportunity to show the state the commitment to downtown revitalization taking place in Hagerstown in an upbeat and positive manner, Barr said.

CITIZENS PARTICIPATION

Each week the Board of County Commissioners sets aside time to hear from citizens of Washington County on matters of importance to the community.

Keedysville Mayor Matthew Hull commended the Commissioners and the Sheriff's Department for the support of the town, especially following the severe thunderstorms in early June. County Highways crews worked quickly to clear roads in and around the town, Hull said. Speaking as a private citizen, Hull said that personal property taxes on a piece of equipment he owns may cause him to relocate his private business to Frederick County, where there is no such tax. County Administrator Greg Murray will look into that matter.

Holli Nigh of the Halfway area brought a noise complaint to the Board. A neighbor is playing music very loud on large outdoor speakers all day. Nigh presented a petition signed by residents of that neighborhood requesting assistance. Sheriff Doug Mullendore commented that a state law on noise only affects nighttime hours, and that the individual is playing the music during the day.

Williamsport Councilman Jeff Cline invited everyone to attend Williamsport Days on Wednesday through Friday of this week.

OTHER BUSINESS

County Administrator's Comments: County Administrator Greg Murray told Mayor Hull that requests from residents regarding work in streambeds to remove debris caused by storms in June and July should be forwarded to the Washington County Soil Conservation District for information and advice.

Reports from County Staff: **Director of Public Works Joe Kroboth** received **Board of County Commissioners** approval to issue an emergency Request for Proposals for repair of several hundred feet of sewer line along Virginia Avenue/U.S. 11, in danger of collapse. The problem was noted by the contractor performing sewer repair work when a sinkhole opened on Virginia Avenue at the Massey Boulevard intersection last spring. In the course of that project, the need for replacement of the sewer line in the area was observed.

Kroboth said the estimated cost for the repair is in the \$300,000 to \$500,000 range. Funds for such emergencies are budgeted in a sewer contingency fund. The need for that emergency request arose because of impending repair of the railroad crossing at Bower Avenue, and the State Highway Administration's plans to repave U.S. 11 from I-81 to Noland Drive within the next several weeks, Kroboth said. Realignment of the Smithsburg High/Middle School traffic pattern was completed in time for school opening on August 20th, Kroboth reported. The bids for the drainage project on San-Mar Road and for repair to the pedestrian bridge at Devil's Backbone Park have been opened and were to be brought before the Commissioners for approval this week.

Sheriff Doug Mullendore, Kroboth and Commissioners' President John Barr discussed an ongoing problem with tractor-trailers causing traffic backups at a truck stop at Maryland Route 63 at French Lane, near I-70. Trucks coming off the interstate entering the truck stop are parking along both sides of French Lane, and backing up onto the I-70 off-ramp. Mullendore said that issuing citations to the truckers does not seem to have much effect, since the fine for first-time parking violations is only \$25.00. The County Attorney's office will look into that issue. Sheriff Mullendore also commented on complaints from Greenberry Hills residents of several Pit Bulldogs running loose in that neighborhood.

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