

**Town of Westernport
Council Meeting
February 14, 2022**

COMMISSIONERS PRESENT: Phil Whetstone, Judy Hamilton and Allen Shapiro

ATTENDEES: Town Attorney Mike Llewellyn, Pete Davis, Robert Lee Wilson, Jr., Rusty Wilson, Sharon Wilson, Kitty Mitchell, Kristi Williams, Sandy Corsaro, John Lepley, Clinton Bradley, Mary Catherine Bernhard, Margaret Ann Wade, Pam Burkett, Josh Burkett, Bobbie Lee Wilson and County Commissioner Candidate Bill Atkinson

Mayor Laura Freeman-Legge brought the meeting to order with the Pledge of Allegiance and a prayer by Kristi Williams. She welcomed all. A motion was made and seconded to dispense with the reading of the previous meeting minutes. Motion carried.

RESOLUTION NO. 2.14.22 was discussed. This resolution allows the town to accept the bid from Carl Belt, Inc. on the Lincoln Drive Sewer Rehabilitation Project. This bid was received on August 10, 2021. Commissioner Whetstone made the motion to accept this bid from Carol Belt, Inc. on **RESOLUTION NO. 2.14.22**. There was a second from Commissioner Shapiro. Motion carried.

Mayor Freeman-Legge continued with the Lincoln Drive Sewer Project. A pre-construction meeting is expected on February 17 where the Town will issue the "Notice to Proceed". We will know on 2/17 when construction will start. The mayor is thinking it will start in about 2 weeks. This is a \$600K project funded through USDA. MDE suggested to us on February 4 that we shut down Lincoln Drive until the completion of the project. The mayor could not see spending \$46,000 on a temporary fix.

Phase IV of the Water Distribution System is about 90% complete. When completed, paving will begin as soon as the paving company opens up. Perhaps Lincoln Drive will be ready for paving when the new waterline areas are paved.

The mayor announced that this is an election year for Westernport. There is an opening for a mayor and for 2 commissioners. Candidates must file by April 26. They must have 25 registered voters sign their petition. Mayor Laura Freeman-Legge asks for a motion to appoint Kitty Mitchell as Supervisor of the Board of Election for Westernport. Commissioner Hamilton made this motion with a second from Commissioner Shapiro. Motion carried.

Mayor Freeman-Legge announced that the town would be closed for President's Day on February 21. The next council meeting will be on Monday, March 14 at 7 p.m. We may evaluate the office closure due to COVID at that time.

The mayor then introduced County Commissioner Candidate Bill Atkinson. Mr. Atkinson said he retired from the State of Maryland, working in planning and zoning for 30 years. He said he still has a burning passion to do things for the communities in Allegany County. He was deeply involved in the Great Allegheny Passage Project. He wants to get things done; not just talk about things. Mr. Atkinson stated he knows how to get money for projects. He thinks Allegany County is special. Mr. Atkinson got a question about a Police Force in Westernport. Mr. Atkinson answered, "If the council wants to pursue a Police Force in Westernport, he will find a way to get it done." "There can be no promises or guarantees." Mr. Atkinson is a Republican and he thanked the group for their time. The mayor told the group that Bill is the only candidate to contact her. He is working with her on the project of making the 7.2 miles of abandoned RR tracks to a trail. There are other Republicans running for county commissioner: Creade Brodie, Dave Caporale, Jonathan Dayton and Bill Todd.

Mayor Laura Freeman-Legge announced that the Allegany County Library System is considering closing Westernport's Branch for another day a week. Currently it is open 4 days a week. This would be really bad for our community. The mayor encouraged all to write a letter to the county commissioners in support of keeping the Westernport Branch open 4 days a week. The Library System is requesting \$90,000 to

Westernport Branch open 4 days a week. The Library System is requesting \$90,000 to keep open the Westernport Branch, George's Creek Branch and the Washington Branch open 4 days a week. This change is because of a decline in population in Cumberland and Lonaconing. Westernport has had an increase in its populations since the census.

Mayor Laura Freeman-Legge introduced **ORDINANCE NO. 12.16.21**. This is an ordinance to Reduce the Salaries of the Mayor and Commissioners. This is the second reading. Salary of the incoming mayor will be \$1,500 a year. Salary of the incoming commissioners will be \$1,200 a year. According to the Town Charter, the present council cannot give themselves a raise or reduce salaries. Changes will be effective after the upcoming election. For the second vote, Commissioner Shapiro made the motion to accept **ORDINANCE NO. 12.16.21** with a second from Commissioner Whetstone. Motion carried.

The mayor announced that one person has signed up to run for Westernport's mayor. That is Donald T. Smith. Two commissioner seats will be open.

Water Commissioner Phil Whetstone gave his report. New water line project continues in town. Carl Belt, Inc. working crossovers now. We have had some significant water line breaks due to the age of the water lines. Commissioner quoted the utility rates from Westernport.

In Town	Water	Sewer	Garbage	Surcharge	Bay
	\$20.00	\$25.00	\$16.50	\$30.00	\$5.00 = \$96.50
Out of Town	\$20.00	\$37.50	\$17.50	\$35.00	\$5.00 = \$115.

Commissioner Whetstone continued with his report. There are 185 customers behind in paying their water bills with late penalties of \$4,915.00 and total outstanding is \$45,796.53. Mayor Laura Freeman-Legge announced that a couple of late fee penalties were incorrect and it is not known how this happened or what caused it. So far only 4 people are involved. This has been corrected. Residents should check their bills for mistakes and let the town office know.

Mrs. Sharon Wilson had a question about water going through one meter into 4 apartments. Is each apartment charged the minimum of \$20? The mayor stated that the town has a resolution or an ordinance for apartment buildings concerning water usage. The charge is made per unit not per meter. Property owners can choose to put in a meter for each apartment unit they have. With MDE grants, the water usage is based on EDU'S and not necessarily the amount of households we have.

Police Commissioner Judy Hamilton had nothing to report.

Commissioner Allen Shapiro gave the Financial Report. Town council did not meet last month so 2 reports were given.

	General	Water	Sewer	Garbage
Beginning 12/01/21	\$464,831.33	\$44,357.89	\$122,121.11	\$18,942.98
Ending 12/31/21	\$249,451.81	\$82,324.94	\$128,597.08	\$6,747.86
Beginning 1/01/22	\$183,449.33	\$82,324.94	\$128,597.08	\$6,747.86
Ending 1/31/22	\$215,954.58	\$78,378.89	\$126,117.23	\$21,383.76

Commissioner Whetstone made a motion we accept the Financial Report with a second from Commissioner Hamilton. Motion carried.

Mr. Bob Wilson spoke and asked what was happening at the end of Spruce Street Extended. The mayor stated she thought it might be a new or old fire hydrant being installed. The mayor is not sure and will check into this issue. Mr. Wilson stated that there is a sinkhole

in this area and it keeps happening. The mayor will also talk to Carl Belt, Inc. and see what they can do about this. There is a waterline loop being put in at Wood Street with the water being tested for bacteria. One of the workers on this project said it was a sewer line issue.

Mrs. Sandy Corsaro spoke on the shut down of Lincoln Drive. She had talked to MDE and they said that they did not shut down Lincoln Drive. The mayor shut down Lincoln Drive. If an area is shut down, multiply signs/notices must be placed in the area. Mrs. Corsaro said that when closing down Lincoln Drive, consideration was not made for the school buses and the safety of the children. She stated that some of Westernport's streets are narrow and it is hard to get around corners, especially with cars parked so near to the corners. Mayor Laura Freeman-Legge stated that work on Lincoln Drive should start in about 2 weeks. Mrs. Corsaro wants plenty of notice to get to residents and visitors.

Mrs. Corsaro ask if Lincoln Drive could be made one way going up the drive during the construction. The mayor felt this was a bad idea and may lead to accidents. The mayor stated that this sewer project is well overdue but delays happened. But council is doing the best they can considering the circumstances. This is a \$600,000 project. Commissioner Hamilton gave Mayor Laura praise for a job well done. Commissioner Shapiro told the audience that for some reason the state did not like this project. The town has been trying to get money for this project since 2011. Mrs. Sharon Wilson made the comment that she has been coming to council meetings since 1985 and it depends on who you are and your complaint. Commissioner Shapiro continued that we must consider the safety of our children and the buses. The council should talk to the county school system and their transportation department to see what is going on during the transportation of school children. Commissioner Shapiro stated that the council did talk to first responders and their ability to get around the town.

Mrs. Corsaro wanted to know why the council went to First United Bank and Trust for a \$250,000 bond to purchase the Carl Belt building for the new Town Hall. Mayor Laura Freeman-Legge told all that interest rates have a lot to do when choosing a loan institution for a project. With the exception of a few items, all banking is done at M & T Bank in Westernport. Mrs. Corsaro continued and told all that the people she talks to are not happy with the present council. They are not getting enough information and the town office is closed and most offices in the area are open. The mayor told her that after she opened the town office, she along with others after a meeting, got COVID. Mayor Freeman-Legge has gotten COVID twice.

Mr. John Lepley was concerned about the fire trucks getting around Greene's Addition, Philos Avenue and Oakview with the closure of Lincoln Drive. According to Commissioner Hamilton, the first responders in their vehicles did some dry runs in these areas. All went well with the exception of a church car parked on Philos. This was remedied and there should be no more problems.

Mrs. Kitty Mitchell of Maryland Avenue spoke on behalf of several residents on the subject of a police department. She showed the Cumberland News article on the millions of surplus dollars the state has and the governor wants to use a lot of this for law enforcement. If this is true why can't we get some of this money for our town for a police department? Your residents are asking (no, we are begging) you for local police protection. We deserve it and your first obligation is to protect your residents. She read from the town charter. She mentioned all sorts of crimes in Westernport and the fact that an electric meter at the Williams Community Museum was stolen not once, but twice. Mrs. Mitchell was not asking for 24/7 police protection but some local police coverage. Perhaps, we could join with Luke in this endeavor. State and county police are good but they are usually not in our vicinity when something illegal is going on. She thanked the council for their time.

Mrs. Mitchell continued and asks about the newly purchased town building. Will our town workers be doing the remodeling? The mayor said she wants our workers to do the remodeling. The mayor stated that the town has \$50,000 already for the remodeling of the building and will be applying for a Main Street Grant of \$50,000 through the county. She will also apply for a police protection grant. The mayor has applied for speed cameras. Westernport does not have an active police force and it hasn't for many years. Unofficially, the mayor thinks Luke might want to do something about police with us. Luke does not have a policeman but they have an official police force in Luke.


Mrs. Wilson asks, "Why do we have a Police Commissioner when we do not have a Police Force"? Town Attorney Mike Llewellyn stated that it is in our Charter. In the Charter it states Fire and Police. Commissioner Hamilton and Mayor Laura Freeman-Legge have applied for police grants but to no result because we do not have a police force. The mayor stated that Luke is accepting applications for police officers but the candidates do not like the salary. Mr. Josh Burkett suggested the town put pressure on the county for help. Letters of support of a police department will be needed. Perhaps we need a petition for a police department.

Some information, suggestions and comments came from the mayor and the audience. More information is needed on our Facebook Page. Commissioner Creade Brodie, Jr. has not visited the town for some time. You do have to live in town to run for office or vote in the town election. Homefest meetings are scheduled but no one comes. Thanks came from Mrs. Pam Burkett for allowing the Rescue Squad the use of town garage. Ms. Kristi Williams of the Rescue Squad gave an update on the organization. She announced her officers, subscription information, emergency services and most importantly the lack of volunteers. Training is paid for volunteers. She thanked the town for all their help during their renovations. She feels Westernport is a sustainable community.

Commissioner Shapiro gave some information on our finances: long-term loans, our bonds, interest and principal on loans, etc. We cannot refinance anything until 2025. To cut costs, we did not replace retirees. We cannot default on loans. Piedmont and Luke's water rates will increase based on our agreement. Westernport pays lowest rate on utilities.

Mrs. Corsaro feels Westernport is not the same as it was years ago and is hurting. Mayor stated that our population is growing and Westernport Elementary School is full. She is thankful that Phases 5,6 & 7 of the Water Distribution System are together. Council will be attending PACE after 2 years. It would be nice to have a market and a pharmacy. We have multiple sewer projects and we have \$22M for them.

A motion to adjourn was made and seconded. Motion carried. Meeting adjourned.



Renee Morris, Town Clerk



Laura Freeman-Legge, Mayor