

**Town of Westernport
Council Meeting
March 21, 2022**

COMMISSIONERS PRESENT: Judy Hamilton and Allen Shapiro
No Quorum

ATTENDEES: Town Attorney Mike Llewellyn, Dick Wallis, Pete Davis, Candidate for County Commissioner Jonathan Dayton, Kristi Williams, Kathy Murphy, Mary Catherine Bernhard, Sandi Corsaro, Clinton Bradley, Sarah Price, Pam Burkett and Kristi Wilhelm

Mayor Laura Freeman-Legge welcomed all and asks the audience to stand for the Pledge of Allegiance and a prayer by Kristi Williams. The next council meeting will be on April 11 at 7 p.m.

Lincoln Drive is open right now but will be closed again with no date for this at the present time. Open date will be put on Facebook. The recent sewer leak cost the town \$48,000 but there was enough in our contingency fund to cover this expense. The second leak is on private property and the landowner said he would fix it. The town has a contract with Belt on the Lincoln Drive Sewer Project and we cannot dictate their timeline. They have until June 18 to finish the project. If they have not finished the job, they will be required to repay the town what we have already paid them for this project. There is a lot to do with this project including TV cleaning of this line. We just don't know when this job will be completed. The original complete time was to be March 1.

Phase IV of the Water Distribution System is complete. Milling of the streets has begun and paving will follow. Today and tomorrow will be Wood Street; Wednesday will be Spruce and Walnut; Thursday Cromer, Hickory and Waverly and Friday they will do Maryland Avenue. Information on this milling and paving will be put on Facebook in a timely manner.

The mayor gave some background on the Maryland Avenue Ball Fields. Verso owns everything on the fields and has for a long time. When Verso shut down the Luke Mill, Westernport approached them about selling this property as well as the Franklin property attached to Creekside Park. They said, "No." They wanted to sell the lots as one. They did eventually split up the properties and sell to another buyer. The new buyer has been great to work with and has signed a lease with us. We are coming to the end of this lease. We have to buy them from him or he will be selling these properties to someone else. The owner wanted to close in a month and a half. The county will be giving us Open Space Acquisition Funds of \$45,000. This will not happen for another six months when the Board of Public Works Meets. The owner is willing to wait the six months and then Westernport will own the Ball Fields and everything on them.

Mayor Laura Freeman-Legge announced that the town **may put out** for bids a 2008 Ford 4 x 4 F250 Excel Super Duty, 6.4 Diesel Truck. It has 154,000 miles on it. The council could not vote on selling this truck because there was no quorum. The town attorney stated that they could advertise the truck now and then wait for a quorum to vote to sell.

The mayor announced that Commissioner Sarah Llewellyn sent her letter of resignation from the council. The mayor read the letter and thanked Sarah for all she did for the town.

The mayor introduced candidate Jonathan Dayton. Jonathan thanked the council for his opportunity to speak. He introduced himself as a resident of Westernport for 19 years until he moved to Cumberland. He is a Republican. He talked about the three most important things for him and why he is running for county commissioner: **Public Safety, Population Growth and Taxes**. He is for more funding for police especially for nighttime duty. He feels that 2 deputies cannot cover the entire county overnight. Jonathan is a member of our Potomac Fire Company and the Baltimore Pike Fire Company.

Allegany County has seen a decline (6,000) in its population from 2010 to 2020. Cumberland and Westernport have lost the greatest. He wants to bring people to the county for work and play. Mr. Dayton is concerned about the new drawing of the electoral map. The new map represents a larger portion for our representatives to cover.

Mr. Dayton wants useful and responsible taxpayer spending. The state now has a surplus and he wants it used wisely. He stated that Westernport would see his face often. He will be around. He thanked all again and said he will be willing to meet with anyone to discuss further his plans.

Mayor Laura Freeman-Legge explained the election of commissioners. With the resignation of Commissioner Llewellyn, there will now be three commissioner spots open. The candidate with the least amount of votes would serve out Commissioner Sarah Llewellyn's term. Petitions for town offices have been picked up but so far only Donald T. Smith has turned in his.

The mayor will give the Water Department report. There was a major water leak on Church Street. We had lots of help from Carl Belt, our town workers and the fire police. All worked together to fix this problem.

Mayor Laura Freeman-Legge spoke on the W.C. Weil Company's Pump Inspection Service Agreement at a cost of \$5,775.00 over a 3-year period. (\$1,925.00 each visit) This is for the filter plant and we need to be proactive. A vote is not needed on this. We have a cost of \$4,143.00 for a Booster Repair from Shafer, Troxell & Howe, Inc. Current Booster Pump is still working right now. Commissioner Shapiro stated that a vote is needed for this purchase and there is no quorum. This is not in the budget. If this becomes an emergency issue, then a purchase can be made.

The mayor noted that there are 170 customers on the Penalty List with \$44,686 outstanding. There are about 10 mistakes on our Penalty List and the problem is with the computer system. These will be fixed.

Police Commissioner Judy Hamilton gave the Police Report. Commissioner Hamilton did research on the state surplus money for police departments. This money is allocated for existing police departments. This money is to be used for incentives and equipment. Westernport gave up its police department approximately 12 years ago and it would be very difficult to get one back. The mayor and Commissioner Hamilton explored their options and talked with the Town of Luke. Luke does not have a police officer at this time but they did not give up a police department. It was discussed that we might share a police officer, 20 hours in Luke and 20 hours in Westernport. Commissioner Hamilton thanked the residents for calling the sheriff's department to express their concerns and submit complaints. After this, the sheriff's department was patrolling in Westernport numerous times. Council members' complaining is not enough. Residents must also voice their complaints. Sheriff Robertson wants a presence in Westernport but he has problems finding people wanting to serve. Commissioner Hamilton said again that the police grant money that is out there we cannot get.

Commissioner Shapiro talked with the chief of police and two commissioners of Frostburg and they told him that their police budget is \$1.5M. Our total budget is just under \$1.6M. Oakland, MD is similar to us and their budget is about \$3.6M and the cost of their 2 officers is \$350,000. They depend on the sheriff's department for a lot of help and services. According to the Maryland Municipal League (MML) town advisors, the average cost of a police officer for a year in the state of Maryland is \$149,362.00. That includes salary, benefits and supervision.

Westernport's biggest issue regarding a police force is that the town turned in its police charter 12 years ago. Everyone in the know told council members that Westernport would not get a police force back. Commissioner Shapiro tells the group that Luke has their police charter but right now they do not have a police officer. The mayor of Luke estimates about \$30,000 for a part time police officer to be shared with us. A big issue would be to find somebody. The bigger issue would be to keep them. The council will continue to work on this.

Finance Commissioner Allen Shapiro gave his report. There will not be a vote on this report. The commissioner reminded all that the Garbage Fund is a flow thru fund.

| | General | Water | Sewer | Garbage |
|------------------|--------------|-------------|--------------|-------------|
| Beginning 2/1/22 | \$215,954.58 | \$78,378.89 | \$125,785.98 | \$21,381.76 |
| Ending 2/28/22 | \$213,315.56 | \$99,437.70 | \$118,938.99 | \$21,100.51 |

Commissioner Shapiro continued with informing the group that the town will be buying a 2014 Dodge Ram at a cost of \$36,028.00 from Shoes Auto Sales in Frostburg. Our men checked out the truck and it is a good buy. \$40,000 was in the budget for a truck. Due to important issues, the council will have to meet 2 times in April. Also, with Sarah Llewellyn's resignation, the council is short a member. Also, the new budget is coming up for approval.

Ms. Sarah Price spoke on the Stop Sign at Lincoln Drive and Central Avenue and the fact that most drivers do not stop. She mentioned putting lights around the sign and putting up an extra caution sign. Commissioner Hamilton suggested Ms. Price call the sheriff's department for help on this issue. Commissioner Hamilton has talked to them about this but maybe hearing from a citizen would be better. Ms. Price was told by County Commissioner Jake Shade that Westernport received stimulus money in the amount of \$1,444, 585 from the government last year. She would like to know how that money was spent. The mayor told her that Westernport has only received half of this money, approximately \$800,000. Westernport should receive the rest in July of this year. The council voted to use the first half of this money for the Phase IV water project.

Using this money for Phase IV of the water project allowed us to save \$300,000. There was no interim financing or bond counsel. The Phase IV project was to cost \$2.4M and we were required to pay 50%. \$1.2M has been spent and the rest we will be receiving is \$1.9M. Commissioner Shapiro said the council wanted to finished this project first. The federal government has limited us as to what we can spend this money on. There will be a surplus and the council will decide what to do with this money. Ms. Price also questioned the cost of the paving and the timeline of the paving of Greene's Addition and Westernport Hill. Commissioner Shapiro stated that Phases V, VI and VII have yet to be completed. Paving will start when the blacktopping plants open in 3 or 4 weeks.

Ms. Price had questions about the upcoming town election. She asks if the candidates' names could be put in the water bills. Mayor will look into this.

Ms. Kathy Murphy, Service Leader at the Westernport Branch, spoke on behalf of the library. On April 7, Allegany County Library Director John Taube will present the library's budget for the fiscal year 2023 to the Allegany County Commissioners. He will be asking for full funding of the library's budget request and presenting post cards from residents supporting the budget. With the full funding of the budget request, we will be able to maintain 4 days of library service at Westernport, George's Creek and Washington Street Libraries. Due to the pandemic, many children and families have fallen behind in their studies. The libraries provide a safe space to rejoin the community and take advantage of the many homework resources, family fun and community support events. Your hometown library is a place to think, create, share and grow. Please take the time before you leave to complete a post card with your name, address and signature. Your comments about the library will be appreciated but not required. Over 238 cards have been collected.

Commissioner Shapiro made the comment that it appears that the county wants to cut back on their funding of the libraries by eliminating one day a week at each library. It would be from 4 days to 3 days a week. He also added that he read where the county has a \$20M surplus. Ms. Murphy mentioned that Westernport has been through some very difficult times: loss of a high school, loss of a middle school and loss of the paper mill. Ms. Murphy ask Candidate Jonathan Dayton if he would be willing to go to a county commissioners' meeting and speak up for the libraries. Candidate Dayton said he would

be willing to do this if his scheduled permitted. Ms. Murphy said she did know that the State of Maryland reduced the money for the Allegany County Library System by almost \$20,000 based on the Census of 2020. Commissioner Shapiro added that Westernport is no longer a low to moderate-income community. Westernport can no longer apply to CDBG for funding. This makes no sense. Ms. Murphy continued. She said if the Allegany County Library System were not fully funded, things would change with employees' hours and where they would work.

Mayor Laura Freeman-Legge read a letter from Commissioner Jake Shade and candidate for State Senator to the Maryland Legislature indicating that he would work to undo the cut in days opened at the 3 local libraries. He did note that the cuts were because of the decrease in population in Allegany County. Commissioner Shapiro suggested that Westernport send a letter to the county in support of a fully funded library system. Ms. Murphy also mentioned that the Georges' Creek Library has a History Room and in it is information about the B-52 Bomber that crashed in 1964. If anyone has any information they want to share about that event, please give it to the Lonaconing Library.

Mrs. Sandy Corsaro spoke about an incident that happened at her nephew, State Trooper Jayme Pritts's house. It was late at night and an intruder entered his house and the neighbor's house. Trooper Pritts called the Cumberland Barracks for help and it took them 35 minutes to respond. Mrs. Corsaro talked to Sheriff Craig Robertson and he told her that he has some troopers out sick and he is trying to get more officers all the time. She stated that Westernport is getting worse regarding crime and she wants some police.


The mayor said that the "Ring and Blink" Cameras will allow people to connect to a neighbor app., called **Neighbors**. Mrs. Bernhard asks if there is a limit to animals at a house. She said her neighbor has 5 dogs and 9 cats and they are loud. Mayor Laura Freeman-Legge said we do not restrict dogs and cats but they cannot destroy other peoples' property. Westernport does have a lease law. The mayor suggested Mrs. Bernhard contact Mike Simpson, Code Enforcement Office.

Ms. Kristi Williams stated that the fire company and the rescue squad use the same company for their donations and/or subscription letters. She talked about the similarities and the differences. The fire company sends one letter a year and the rescue squad sends out two letters a year. Sam Metz handles this operation. The outside of their building will be renovated soon. New generator should arrive end of April. The squad has made 250 calls so far this year. (1303 calls in 2021 and 1326 calls in 2020) They have 8 new members. All are welcome to visit.

The mayor spoke on Mountain Maryland Trails. The project is to turn the Railroad Tracks into a trail. 7.5 miles of track have been abandoned and the DNR has agreed to pay to turn this area into a trail. We will still need letters of support. On our website there is a button you can click on and bring up this letter of support. The trail will start the upper end of Barton. The cost is about \$800,000/mile.

Commissioner Hamilton announced her candidacy for mayor of Westernport. Commissioner Shapiro and Ms. Williams announced that they are running for commissioner of Westernport.

Meeting over.


Renee Morris, Town Clerk


Laura Freeman-Legge, Mayor