



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

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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**NEWS
RELEASE**

**COMMISSIONERS HEAR HANCOCK CONCERNS, PROPERTY
ACQUISITIONS, PARKING GUIDELINES**

As part of its regular meeting on October 27th, the Washington County Board of County Commissioners traveled to the Town of Hancock for an evening session.

Mayor Dan Murphy and Town Manager Dave Smith presented concerns regarding rehabilitation of older buildings in the Town, and a problem with high fees from regulatory agencies. At issue were Flood Plain permits issued by the Maryland Department of the Environment, State Fire Marshal permits and inspections, state Health Department fees, environmental lead paint and asbestos removal processes, federal and state disability regulations and County permitting and inspection fees.

The town cited the high cost of doing business in Washington County as a reason for lagging business development and a high unemployment rate. The Town had suggested employing a third party inspection firm to take the place of County inspectors.

Department of Permits and Inspections Director Dan DiVito offered help from his office, and will meet with the town officials in an attempt to solve some of the problems. Many of the fees, inspections and permits described by the town are not under the purview of the County, and compliance with state and federal regulations would have to be in place no matter what entity performed the inspections.

In its afternoon meeting the Board declined to approve two temporary easements requested on properties adjoining the Massey Boulevard/Halfway Boulevard intersection. The Department of Public Works had requested purchase of temporary easements in the total amount of \$216,000 to allow for construction of turn lanes and sidewalks at the intersection. Commissioners requested further negotiations with the owners of Valley Mall and Valley Plaza Shopping Center.

The Board also declined to approve hiring of 9 Advanced Life Support (ALS) technicians in Phase One of the Emergency Medical Services Plan for Washington County, until additional information can be received regarding support for the plan from County volunteer ambulance companies. The plan, approved in 2007, would provide paid emergency service employees using "chase cars" to support volunteer EMS companies. A decision to move forward was tabled due to a deadlock vote of two Yes and two No votes. Commissioners' President John Barr abstained. Staff will conduct further meetings with the Volunteer Fire and Rescue Association to assess support for Phase I of the plan.

Commissioners gave consensus to move ahead with development of two new policies from the Budget and Finance Department.

A new Annual Appropriation Financing Policy would provide more formalized guidance in the area of component unit financings, and expand the current debt policy on conduit financing by detailing private activity authority and non-profit bond authority, by defining county liability; and by providing criteria on issuance of conduit debt.

The Hotel Rental Tax Fund – Agency Funding Request – Application and Guidelines policy would establish an application process for outside agencies when requesting financial assistance from the Hotel Rental Tax Fund known as the Hotel-Motel Tax; establish a standardized form for the requested assistance, and provide a method of reporting and accountability. Commissioners requested the ability to ask grantees for detailed expenditure reports for those funds.

The Office of Budget and Finance reviews financial policies on an annual basis to see if the need exists to update policies due to new/changes in regulations, internal control updates, or other issues requiring a need for policy change or additions.

Further revisions to the Text Amendment for regulation of off-street parking were discussed. Planning staff reviewed changes to design standards, impervious surface percentages allowed, landscaping requirements, screening using low-maintenance materials, surfacing, loading areas and non-parking uses of parking lots including time limits for seasonal sales and events. Credits for off-street parking when public parking areas are near businesses were discussed and a section allowing the credits will be included in the amendment. That document will be brought back to the Board for final review and approval.

The Board approved the Interim Certification Application of the Washington County Agricultural Land Preservation Program to present to the Maryland Departments of Planning (MDP) and Agriculture (MDA) for approval. The certification process allows the county to retain an additional 42% of state agriculture transfer tax. While the tax varies, in years of high farmland to residential use conversion the additional 42% has yielded several hundred thousand dollars.

In other actions, Commissioners accepted the 2009 Maryland Institute of Emergency Medical Services Systems (MIEMSS) Advanced Life Support Education Grant in the amount of \$25,852.40. MIEMSS allocates funding annually to each region to partially underwrite advanced life support training programs within Washington County. The funding may be used for initial training and re-licensure of technicians. The primary expenditure for the County is the current Emergency Medical Services – Intermediate class.

The Board approved accepting dedication of property along Sharpsburg Pike at Manor Church Road that was originally deeded by a subdivision developer in 1997. The State Highway Administration is working at that intersection, and acceptance of the property into the County maintenance listing was needed.

In the evening meeting, Jeremiah Weddle was appointed to the Agricultural Land Preservation Advisory Committee. The Board recommended that the Historic District Commission provide three names for nominees to fill a position on that board.

Department of Permits and Inspections Director Dan DiVito reported on the Residential Construction Stimulus Plan that the County put into place October 13th. Since that time, permits have been issued for 9 single-family residences, 7 additions, 3 energy-

efficient improvements and one solar panel. The stimulus offers up to \$9,000 in up-front savings to prospective home builders and improvers for permit fee, excise tax and recordation tax waivers. The program has gained national attention, with Washington County being featured in Builder Magazine, a national publication, as an example of how local jurisdictions are providing incentives to the home building industry.

Division of Environmental Management Director Julie Pippel reported that the Halfway Infiltration and Inflow sewer project is underway, with a completion date set for December.

County Administrator Greg Murray reported that the Commissioners will again participate in the annual Mummer's Parade in Hagerstown on October 31st.

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