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**SNOW HILL MAYOR AND COUNCIL MEETING**

**Work Session Meeting Minutes**

**Wednesday, August 2nd, 2023**

**5:00pm – Regular Session**

A Work Session of the Mayor and Town Council of Snow Hill, Maryland was held at The Old Fire Hall on Green Street on Wednesday, August 2nd, 2023, with Mayor Pruitt presiding.

**PUBLIC OFFICIALS PRESENT**

Mayor Mike Pruitt

Councilmember Janet Simpson

Councilmember Diana Walsh

Councilmember Margaret Ann Fletcher

**STAFF IN ATTENDANCE**

Carol Sullivan, Executive Administrator

Jerry Jeffra, Clerk

Maureen Howarth, Esq.

Rick Pollitt, Town Manager

Andy McGee, Police Department Chief

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1. **Call to Order – Mayor Pruitt**

Mayor Mike Pruitt called the meeting to order at 5:00pm. He announced that the pavilion at Sturgis Park is showing signs of structural deterioration and the Town has cordoned the area off from public access until the situation can be addressed. He added that the Maryland Municipal League is hosting a symposium on the new cannabis regulations and how they relate to local government on August 11th in Annapolis and Town Manager Rick Pollitt will be attending to gather as much information as possible to bring forth to the Mayor & Council.

1. **“Seeking Solutions to Discrimination in Our Public Schools” a presentation by Eddie Lee and others to include public input and consideration by the Mayor & Town Council**

Mayor Pruitt introduced Eddie Lee. Before starting his presentation, Mr. Lee handed to Mayor & Council a newspaper article entitled ““Discrimination in Snow Hill Public Schools follow up to Community Truth and Reconciliation Meeting”. Mr. Lee acknowledged the participants that helped construct the article and the conversations around an incident at Snow Hill High School, and has gathered speakers that would share their stories, perspectives and wisdom on the matter. Mr. Lee discussed the importance of the Mayor & Council getting more involved in responding to racial incidents like this, and asked the Town to endorse a letter to the Superintendent of Schools for the State of Maryland requesting him to investigate specifically the matter of March 8, 2023. A copy of Mr. Lee’s draft letter was shared.

Mr. Lee introduced Dr. Kimberly Purvis, former principal of Snow Hill High School and a representative from the Caucus of African American Leaders on the Eastern Shore, who has 30 years of experience in the school system. Dr. Purvis said that in her belief this incident was not isolated. She is also concerned that addressing these issues are blocked or hampered by prejudice, and that organizations, people or places of lower stature are not considered or treated equally as members of the community majority.

Ms. Kathryn Culbertson voiced her support for sending the letter. She read aloud her concerns over racism and finding strategic solutions to abolish it.

Mr. Lee strongly believes that continued and unanswered racism will only continue to harm Snow Hill’s children. Mr. Lee asked the Mayor when the Town will reply to his query, and Mayor Pruitt replied that the council may be poised to answer it tonight.

Mayor Pruitt replied that, unless more information is given to sway him otherwise, he believes this situation to be a responsibility of the elected Board of Education and not a matter for Town government. Mayor Pruitt also said that his position is not to provide oversight or to go over the rulings of the Board of Education and Worcester County, but he does sympathize with the matter.

Councilmember Fletcher said that she does support signing the letter. Councilmember Walsh also supported signing the letter. Councilmember Simpson asked if anyone was present from the Board of Education and there was not. Councilmember Simpson remarked that she has been a principal for several schools and has worked in the school environment for many years and has great respect for Dr. Purvis. Councilmember Simpson is also in favor of signing the letter.

There was more discussion about how this matter was handled in the school and the position of the Board of Education in dealing with it.

Ms. Armstrong said that she has seen little difference in the incidents occurring in Snow Hill even after many years living away and returning to live in Town.

Dr. Purvis stated that she loved Snow Hill school and her daughters grew up attending Snow Hill’s schools. She also expressed that the minority of people who do face these types of incidents, feel as if they cannot voice their concerns.

Ms. Debra Baines also shared her stories of herself and others’ experience of racism.

An attendee voiced her support for the Mayor signing the letter.

Dr. Purvis believes that the incident has been covered up and not investigated fully by school officials.

Janet King wishes to see the Mayor sign the letter.

Kathryn Culbertson appealed further to the Mayor by saying that Snow Hill can set the example for addressing issues like this.

Mr. Lee expressed that he does appreciate the Mayor, despite their disagreements. He addressed the fact that the Mayor’s friends may not be fully telling him the truth about incidents due to the friendship. Mr. Lee also shared some statistics related to incidents such as the one in Snow Hill.

Rob Hall also shared his encouragement for the Mayor to sign the letter.

Councilmember Simpson wants to see a coalition formed to tackle issues of this nature.

Councilmember Walsh agreed with Councilmember Simpson’s idea, and appreciated the audience’s time and voices.

Dr. Purvis wanted to thank the community for the support shown to her over the years. She would like to see Snow Hill High School better recognized by Worcester County.

Mr. Lee’s last message was that the submission of the letter is time sensitive.

1. Discussion of future work session topics such as cannabis from a zoning & permitting aspect

Mayor Pruitt asked the Council for further items for the agenda that they would like to discuss and their order of priority. He stated that an answer tonight was not necessary and encouraged them to contact Mr. Pollitt with their suggested topics. Councilmember Simpson mentioned she still wants to discuss the legalization of cannabis. Mr. Pollitt stated that he would be attending a Maryland Municipal League symposium later this month in Annapolis on the subject and advised saving that topic for the late August work session. He also would like to discuss the bike plan as part of Bank Street/Riverview Square economic development project then, as well. There will be a discussion related to State grant funding as part of that session. Councilmember Walsh asked if requesting any transfer of grant money would hold us back, to which Mr. Pollitt responded he did not believe so.

Councilmember Walsh asked if the brochure about the water assistance programs is a draft. Clerk Jerry Jeffra responded that it was approved by Executive Administrator Carol Sullivan and Mr. Pollitt, and that 500 official copies have been ordered.

Mayor Pruitt asked about the status of the door hangers, which Mr. Jeffra responded that they are being developed and would be released closer to October. The door hangers are to be distributed to all the residents, whereas the brochures were a different project meant for mass circulation at area businesses and other locations.

Councilmember Fletcher remarked that some people may not have the technical means to access the full report. Mr. Jeffra responded that people can request a copy any time from Town Hall.

Councilmember Walsh believes that the brochure about the water assistance programs is not thorough enough. Mr. Jeffra explained that the brochure mentions how and where to find the full report which has much more information, including addresses and phone numbers of local churches of the Snow Hill area.

Rita Williams asked for the current status of the Circuit Rider program and Mr. Pollitt replied that the grant for the program was approved by the State.

Fran Prince asked who is in the charge of publicity in Town. Councilmember Walsh asked if there is a way to work with the Chamber of Commerce over its publicity. Mr. Pollitt responded that TV stations and reporters selectively choose what to include and exclude and despite giving relative, contextual information surrounding any topic, they ultimately decide what angle of a story is presented.

Councilmember Walsh asked if the Council will see any corrections or adjustments made to the letter to be sent to the State Superintendent of Schools. Mayor Pruitt said yes, and that he will make a decision on his support of the letter within a day.

1. **Adjournment**

With no other business to conduct, on a motion from Councilmember Simpson, seconded by Councilmember Walsh, the meeting was adjourned by the following vote. The time was 6:48pm.

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| **NAME** | **AYE** | **NO** | **ABSTAIN** | **RECUSED** | **ABSENT** |
| **Margaret Ann Fletcher** | **X** |  |  |  |  |
| **Janet Simpson** | **X** |  |  |  |  |
| **Diana Walsh** | **X** |  |  |  |  |
| **TALLY** | **3** |  |  |  |  |

Respectfully Submitted,

Jerry Jeffra

Clerk I