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**MAYOR AND TOWN COUNCIL**

**Work Session Meeting Minutes**

**Monday, December 4th, 2023**

**4:30pm – 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 Monday, December 4th, 2023.

**PUBLIC OFFICIALS PRESENT**

Mayor Mike Pruitt

Councilmember Janet Simpson

Councilmember Diana Walsh

Councilmember Margaret Ann Fletcher

**STAFF IN ATTENDANCE**

Rick Pollitt, Town Manager

Carol Sullivan, Executive Administrator

Marty Sullivan, Code Enforcer

Melissa Kempfer, Clerk

Maureen Howarth, Esq. Town Attorney

Andy McGee, Police Department Chief

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1. **Call to Order**

Mayor Mike Pruitt called the meeting to order at 4:30pm.

Mayor Pruitt switches the order of agenda to address Boards and Commissions Vacancies first. Mr. Pruitt stated that there are two vacancies, one on Building and Zoning Appeals and the other on the Ethics Committee.

1. **Boards & Commissions Vacancies**

Mayor Pruitt addresses the Town Council members to see if they are willing to accept a volunteer to fill one of the vacant positions. The volunteer currently has a spouse on another committee, which would need an exception from Town Council. Mayor Pruitt is prepared to nominate the volunteer for the Building and Zoning Appeals committee if the Town Council members approve. All Council members agree to the exception.

Mayor Pruitt shared that Mr. Culbertson is volunteering for the Building and Zoning Appeals committee. Mr. Culbertson will be nominated for the board position at the Town Hall meeting on December 12, 2023 and will be sworn in.

1. **Presentation by Code Enforcement Officer Sullivan**

Town Manager Pollitt gives updates on Code Enforcement Officer Sullivan’s progress in selecting new tracking software and training.

Mr. Sullivan explains that the current system of tracking was not effective. Mr. Sullivan stated that the Town of Snow Hill approved the purchase of new tracking software that will track code enforcement, permits, as well as rental inspections. Mr. Sullivan hopes to have the new system up and running the first of the year. Mr. Sullivan also added that once the program is up and running that he would come back and give a presentation on how the system works.

Mr. Sullivan states that the system does not currently track vacant buildings, but will check with his program trainers to see if it can be added. Mr. Sullivan explained that current code requires vacant property owners to register their property, but said that it can also be determined by water use. Mr. Sullivan said that owners of vacant properties have 30 days to register their property vacant; if they fail to do so, it is $100 fine.

Councilmember Walsh asked if water shut off was the only way to determine if the property is vacant. Mr. Sullivan explained that it is just an indicator. He went on to say that neighbors may also report vacant properties. Mrs. Walsh went on to ask if tracking the vacant properties would be an increase in workload. Mr. Sullivan answered that it would be an increase and added that none of his predecessors had tracked that information. Mr. Sullivan is hoping that the tracking can be added to the new IWORQ software.

Councilmember Walsh asked about the delivery of generated notices; would they be emailed or sent in the mail. Mr. Sullivan stated that the system has the ability to do both, but that violations would be sent by certified mail. Mrs. Walsh spoke about the increase in workload and the possible need for an additional employee. Mr. Sullivan expressed that were previously three people in his department in previous positions. It was suggested that a raise in rental registration could offset the cost of additional staff to assist Mr. Sullivan. Mr. Sullivan discussed options of shifting inspection responsibilities to the owners of the rental properties.

Councilmembers and Mr. Sullivan also discussed rental inspections responsibilities. They spoke about pest inspections and general upkeep responsibilities of rental properties. Mr. Sullivan stated that codes are enforced on the owner of the property. Town Attorney expressed that the rental code would need to be reviewed for better explanation of responsibilities. The major expressed concern about the cost of enforcing lawn upkeep codes and the related cost to of the town. Further research by Finance Manager Hamstead to be done as to the cost the town is accruing.

Councilmember Walsh expressed wanting a list of all the current town rental properties. Mrs. Walsh inquired how the list is generated. Mr. Sullivan stated that the owner of the rental property either registers the property or it can be determined by who is paying the water bill. Mr. Sullivan will be able to give the current number of rental properties once he begins using the new software system.

Councilmembers expressed concerns about owners acquiring rental permits without a rental inspection due to current billing cycles. Mr. Sullivan said the new software should streamline the process. Councilmembers expressed concern about the completion of final inspections. Mr. Sullivan added that the new software will help take care of that.

Councilmembers expressed their desire to get Mr. Sullivan assistance for data entry for when the new system is launched. A circuit rider and college intern are being sought for assistance. Councilmembers discussed the possibility of a short-term employee to assist in data entry.

Mr. Sullivan discussed the Mumford property. He said that he has contact a family member of the property and as of this week are complying with his request to clean out and remove debris from the property. Mr. Sullivan expressed that the property does not have suitable living conditions and that the next step is to put the property on the vacant building list. He shared that the owners plan is to renovate the building.

Councilmember Walsh expressed concern about the current wording of the vacant building ordinance. She stated that the current code is loose and hopes that more deadlines can be enforced.

Mr. Sullivan went on to discuss the Ironshire property. The owner has chosen a contractor to work on the exterior deck structure. Mr. Sullivan is waiting for the owner pull a permit for the work to begin. The owner has come into compliance on other concerns.

Mr. Sullivan gave updates on Ross Street. He stated the property is to be demolished. The potential buyer was told by his council to wait till the property goes to tax sale to purchase the property. The potential buyer is working with the current owner to demolish the property. Mr. Sullivan shared that there is another property on Ross Street that is also scheduled to be demolished but is currently on hold until the multiple owner property is bought out by a single owner.

1. **Mayor and Council comments**

Mayor moves to open up the meeting to public comments at 5:28pm

1. **Public Comment**

John Gilliland shares his frustrations with the Code Enforcement Department. He expressed his displeasure with the lack of progress in enforcement. He shared that his feeling about how the lack of progress is affecting surrounding property values. Mr. Gilliland went on to share his thoughts on the priority of enforcement. Mr. Gilliland is looking for harder deadlines.

Town resident Jenn spoke about her concerns about the property on Ironshire. She shared that a resident that lives there has spoken with her about multiple problems and that they are afraid to complain to the owners. She wants enforcement and movement on the Ironshire property.

Town resident Tony spoke about his concerns with fines, fees, and timeframes. He expressed his displeasure about a property on Martin Street with broken windows and lack of enforcement on codes. Code Enforcer Sullivan updated that the property was sold at a tax sale and has a buyer who plans to demolish the property. The town attorney will research the foreclosure case to check on the progress. The resident wants to see more specific timeframes and would also like to know if the fines are getting paid.

Councilmember Walsh expressed that the town is counting on the Code Enforcement department because of the people who invest themselves in this town. She mentioned that she wants to see movement on the properties that we are able to. She expressed the needs to monitor billing and collections more closely.

Mayor Pruitt asked for closing comments from the council at 5:50pm. Councilmembers thanked Mr. Sullivan for his information and fielding questions. The councilmembers also thanked the town residents for sharing their concerns. Councilmembers shared that they would like to see change in the code to be more specific and that they were committed to getting Mr. Sullivan help in his department. Mayor Pruitt spoke about re-evaluating Code Enforcement’s responsibilities and the possibility of out - sourcing parts of the department.

1. **Adjournment**

Councilmember Simpson made a motion to adjourn. Seconded by Councilmember Fletcher and passed unanimously. The time was 5:55pm.

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

Respectfully Submitted,

Melissa Kempfer

Clerk I