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**SNOW HILL MAYOR AND COUNCIL MEETING**

**Mayor & Town Council Meeting Minutes**

**Tuesday, July 11th, 2023**

**7:00pm – Regular Session**

A regular meeting of the Mayor and Town Council of Snow Hill, Maryland was held at The Old Fire Hall on Green Street on Tuesday, July 11th, 2023, with Mayor Pruitt presiding.

**PUBLIC OFFICIALS PRESENT**

Mayor Mike Pruitt

Councilmember Diana Walsh

Councilmember Margaret Ann Fletcher

**STAFF IN ATTENDANCE**

Randy Barfield, Public Works Director

Lorissa McAllister, Economic Development Director

Cynthia Byrd, Museum Director

Marty Sullivan, Code Enforcement Officer

Michael Creech, Fire Chief

Maureen Howarth, Esq.

Lounell Hamstead, Finance Manager

Andy McGee, Police Department Chief

Carol Sullivan, Executive Administrator

Jerry Jeffra, Clerk

Rick Pollitt, Town Manager

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Mayor Pruitt called the meeting to order at 7:02 pm and asked for a silent prayer for Councilmember Janet Simpson’s mother in her declining health and the passing of Account Clerk Connie Watson’s mother-in-law. He then led everyone in the Pledge to the Flag.

1. **Approval of Minutes**:

Mayor Pruitt asked the council if they had any questions or suggestions for changes for the minutes for June 13th 2023’s Town Hall meeting, which the council did not.

On a motion of Councilmember Walsh and seconded by Councilmember Fletcher, the minutes for June 13th 2023’s Town Hall meeting were approved by the following vote.

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| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **NAME** | **AYE** | **NO** | **ABSTAIN** | **RECUSED** | **ABSENT** |
| **Margaret Fletcher** | **X** |  |  |  |  |
| **Janet Simpson** |  |  |  |  | **X** |
| **Diana Walsh** | **X** |  |  |  |  |
| **TALLY** | **2** |  |  |  |  |

Mayor Pruitt asked the council if they had any questions or suggestions for changes for the minutes for June 27th 2023’s Work Session. There were no questions or suggestions by the council.

On a motion of Councilmember Fletcher and seconded by Councilmember Walsh, the minutes for June 27th 2023’s Work Session was approved by the following vote.

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| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **NAME** | **AYE** | **NO** | **ABSTAIN** | **RECUSED** | **ABSENT** |
| **Margaret Fletcher** | **X** |  |  |  |  |
| **Janet Simpson** |  |  |  |  | **X** |
| **Diana Walsh** | **X** |  |  |  |  |
| **TALLY** | **2** |  |  |  |  |

1. **Treasurer’s Report**

Mayor Pruitt asked Councilmember Walsh and Finance Manager Hamstead if they had anything to add to the Treasurer’s report. Councilmember Walsh remarked that she does not have the beginning balance, but has addressed the amount that the Town has during the end of June was $5.015 million. Boardwalk in Sturgis Park was completed for $340 dollars, and to celebrate the news of being awarded a grant for $63,000 to go towards the boardwalk, 20 picnic tables and a refurbishment of the bathrooms in Sturgis Park are also on their way. Finance Manager Lounell Hamstead had nothing to add to the report.

On the motion from Councilmember Fletcher and seconded by Councilmember Walsh, the treasurer’s report was approved by the following vote.

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| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **NAME** | **AYE** | **NO** | **ABSTAIN** | **RECUSED** | **ABSENT** |
| **Margaret Fletcher** | **X** |  |  |  |  |
| **Janet Simpson** |  |  |  |  | **X** |
| **Diana Walsh** | **X** |  |  |  |  |
| **TALLY** | **2** |  |  |  |  |

1. **Town Manager’s Report**

Mayor Pruitt asked Town Manager Pollitt if he had anything additional to add to his report. Mr. Pollitt said there’s nothing additional to add.

1. **Department Reports:**
   1. Economic Development Report

Economic Development Director Lorissa McAllister had nothing further to add to her report. Mayor Pruitt noticed there is a new design team working on a new logo. Ms. McAllister replied that this is a Main Street project and is for Downtown Snow Hill Inc., and is not to replace any other logos currently in effect.

Councilmember Walsh asked if the new event committee is under her charge. Ms. McAllister responded that she only operates Main Street and Arts and Entertainment Program, which are community led through committees. Arts and Entertainment program is currently under restructuring.

Councilmember Walsh asked where the minutes or reports of the committees go. Ms. McAllister replied that the non-profit organizations’ reports are compiled into an annual report, but as an affiliate they are not required to write minutes.

Councilmember Walsh asked what the support from the community and Town Council looks like for her department. Ms. Allister highlighted the Memorandum of Understanding for the Town for designation to have Main Street fully recognized.

Councilmember Walsh asked if it would aid her department to construct a committee to help with the Sustainable Communities Program. Ms. McAllister replied she would appreciate any help.

Councilmember Walsh inquired about the Maryland Enterprise Zone and if we have that designation, and Ms. McAllister replied that she’s optimistic to having the process reviewed and approved by the middle of July.

* 1. Code Enforcement Report

Mayor Pruitt explained to Code Enforcement Officer Marty Sullivan that there was a lot of discussion about his job and his obligations in the Special Council Work Session, and to have another discussion at the July 25th’s Work Session. Mr. Sullivan had nothing additional to add to his report.

Councilmember Fletcher asked how many new houses were constructed in the last month. Mr. Sullivan replied that there was one, and will add a new section to his report detailing new houses.

Councilmember Walsh asked about the other five residences or commercial permits; are they for renovations? Mr. Sullivan replied that they are.

Councilmember Walsh noted that the Town is over 90 days in landlord registration, and lot assessments, and asked of the process of a complaint being made. Mr. Sullivan replied that upon hearing the complaint, he would investigate the issue, and depending on where the landlord is located, he would either mail a communication or proceed to email or call them. Mr. Sullivan also spoke to the fact that certain violations take different lengths of time to issue violation notices or when to investigate certain claims.

* 1. Public Works Report

Public Works Director Randy Barfield had nothing to add to his report, but did announce that Josh Taylor from Davis, Bowen & Friedel is here to speak on behalf of the Market Street and Purnell Street projects.

Councilmember Fletcher asked why some portions of the pavement are patched while others are not. Mr. Barfield remarked that it mostly stems from the limited budget, and other projects or repairs that spring up during the year requiring some of the money meant to repair the roads.

Councilmember Walsh asked if we are purchasing the picnic tables. Mr. Barfield responded no; the picnic tables are coming from a grant that was awarded during past Grants Administrator John Rankin’s time.

Councilmember Walsh also asked about the bathrooms, to which Mr. Barfield replied that two bids were received for the project, but the successful bid has not been awarded.

* 1. Water & Wastewater Report

Mayor Pruitt announced that since Russ Harrison, the previous Water/Wastewater Treatment Plant Superintendent left the Town, Mr. Barfield would also be presenting the report and any new announcements for the Water & Wastewater Department. Mr. Barfield said that all the monthly and beginning monthly reports have been submitted. The sewer report to be turned in July 28th has been completed, but is awaiting submission. Mr. Barfield has asked Clerk Jerry Jeffra to post a notice on social media, website and kiosk about the coming fire hydrant flushing of July 17th and July 18th, and that water during that time may be murky or cloudy, and to run water for 20 minutes after the flushing is complete to clear up the water.

Councilmember Walsh asked about the septic and the leche money: how difficult is it to get it? Mr. Barfield responded by saying that we must first accept the correct type of septic/leche after conversations with department heads. The haulers that travel to towns to deposit their loads owe debts to the towns, and will move to other towns when certain amounts accrue. Mr. Barfield assured the council that he will collect the money owed from the haulers.

* 1. Grants Office

Grants Administrator Paul Bessette announced that he is in the process of learning everything about the ongoing grants the Town is in the process of applying for. Mr. Bessette also declared that he has closed out two older ones so far during his time working for the Town. Mr. Bessette is currently looking into what’s going to be available, and is in constant contact with the previous Grants Administrator, John Rankin, for training.

Councilmember Walsh asked if a Grants Administrator and Grants Writer are synonymous, which Mr. Bessette said yes; but not all grants require him to necessarily ‘write’ for.

Councilmember Walsh asked what is the process for his work schedule. Mr. Bessette said while there isn’t a particular order yet, he’s prioritizing what’s needed.

Councilmember Walsh asked what if the people deem a certain project or grant important, what would be the process for this? Mr. Pollitt answered saying that grant applications are internally generated and mainly are devoted to infrastructure needs.

Councilmember Walsh asked what training Mr. Bessette has, to which he replied that he is already registered with free classes to aid in his position. He also has experience in science and technical writing.

* 1. Museum Report

Museum Director Cynthia Byrd mentioned the paint event happening tomorrow, July 12th. Ms. Byrd also remarked that the Anne Hope exhibit has been extended through July.

* 1. Police Department Report

Police Chief Andy McGee announced that cameras are up and running thanks to the permission of Fran Price to mount them on her building, of which residents can view in a live feed soon. With the budget being passed, Chief McGee is looking forward to hiring his 8th full-time officer. August 1st is National Night Out in Byrd Park, and August 5th is Blessing of the Combines.

Councilmember Walsh asked what’s the process to help out, and Chief McGee replied it’s okay to just show up and help. Chief McGee remarked that there were no calls for service during July’s First Friday event.

Councilmember Fletcher pointed out that there was blockage of vehicles on Willow and Commerce Street during the fireworks, and Chief McGee said that he noticed it too and shutting down the streets a little later would help that next time.

Councilmember Walsh spoke to the arrest recently near the New Hope area. Chief McGee remarked that the incident involved multiple search warrants and is an ongoing investigation.

Councilmember Walsh asked what details can a citizen give to a police officer to be helpful without also potentially putting themselves in danger. Chief McGee suggested many details that could be observed from a distance, such as height of suspect, color and make of vehicle, and others.

* 1. Fire Department

Fire Chief Michael Creech had nothing additional to add to his report. Councilmember Walsh asked about the meeting at the end June. Chief Creech said that it was a meeting with Commissioner Abbott, Weston Young, Mayor Pruitt, Mr. Pollitt and the mayor of Pocomoke, among other representatives to work out issues between county and town departments. He is hopeful of having all vacancies filled before the middle or end of August.

Typo correction made on 8-8-2023

1. **Presentation by the Worcester County Library Riley Fund Committee**

Mayor Pruitt passed the floor to the Worcester County Library Riley Fund Committee. When the last heir of the Riley family passed away in 2009, a gift of $700,000 was donated to the library branch of Snow Hill, and the presenters stated that they were a part of the committee formed to oversee and manage the funds. She remarked that the original funds were first dispersed to the Town, and that the request submitted to the Mayor & Council would be used to purchase additional materials for the library.

Mayor Pruitt wanted to note that it wasn’t his intent to intrude into the library’s affairs and questioned the need for the Town’s continued oversite, beyond the stipulation of the will.

Councilmember Walsh asked how impactful a delay would be since the Mayor & Council would like to have Councilperson Simpson participate in the decision. The presenters replied that they can wait until the next Mayor & Town Council meeting for the Mayor & Council to approve the request.

1. **Presentation by Eddie Lee**

Mayor Pruitt passed the floor to Eddie Lee. Before presenting, Mr. Lee distributed to Mayor & Council printed copies of an article by The Dispatch titled “School Board Mandates Changes Following SHHS Incident”, which is about the racial social media post made by a student. The purpose of his presentation was focused on businesses and developments and how this incident impacts the public image of Snow Hill. Mr. Lee wanted to appeal to Mayor Pruitt about being more open to hosting conversation about the community, especially around the schools and children. Mr. Lee suggested that the Town of Snow Hill take a more proactive role in guiding the community, especially children on a more rightful path. Mr. Lee also pointed out that while our crime rate is low, the state of our schools is in such a trajectory that it casts a shade of doubt on the image of Snow Hill. Mr. Lee asked Mayor & Council to appeal to the superintendent of the schools to conduct investigations in fixing the current situation.

Mr. Lee asked Mayor Pruitt when he could expect a response to his query, and the mayor replied there would be no answer at this time.

Councilmember Walsh asked the mayor if the Town had any commission or board to investigate racism, to which Mayor Pruitt replied he is unaware of any.

1. **Presentation by Diana Nolte on Downtown activities and Bank Street/Riverview Square Project**

Mayor Pruitt passed the floor to Ms. McAllister, who is speaking on behalf of Diana Nolte and the Bank Street /Riverview Square Project. This major project is about redesigning Riverview Square. Discussions began when during the pandemic, a portion of Bank Street was closed, about how to best use that space and potentially revamping it through beautification and changing the style of the street, sidewalks and redesigning parking spaces. There were concerns that the County shared, such as maintaining existing parking spaces, encroachment of County property and roles and responsibilities of maintaining the areas, and others. Many of the concerns however have already been addressed through the process of redesign itself. The last steps are the resubmission of the street plans to accommodate the parking spaces, following up with the County and pursuing funding possibilities.

Councilmember Walsh asked how long will the last steps take. Ms. McAllister is hoping to get the cost estimates by the end of the week., whereas the resubmitted plan is expected anytime soon.

1. **Introduction of Town Attorney and orientation regarding the structure of the Snow Hill government**

Mayor Pruitt passed the floor to Mr. Pollitt. Mr. Pollitt announced that to accommodate the mayor’s request to have an on-site attorney sit in on meetings and to provide legal advice and guidance, the law firm of Ayres, Jenkins, Gordy & Almand, P.C. has been appointed the official Town Attorney and that Ms. Maureen Howarth and Mr. Bruce Bright, of that firm, would be representing the Town for the majority of its legal needs. He then introduced Ms. Howarth, noting they had worked closely together when Mr. Pollitt served as Wicomico County Executive and she was one of his attorneys for the county.

Ms. Howarth mentioned she’s worked in Snow Hill with Worcester County, and has worked locally on the Eastern Shore. While her main contact will be with Mr. Pollitt, she would happily accept communications from Mayor & Council. She also listed many of the responsibilities, powers and authority within the Mayor & Council’s respective offices, such as ordinances and how they are passed. Ms. Howarth also remarked that the provisions of Article 7 in the charter, the right of the people to speak, that it is indeed the Town’s responsibility to give the public an opportunity to comment on any matter of Town business at all meetings of the Mayor and Council. Another note she made is that there must be an available list of who’s officially registered as trained in the State Open Meetings Act.

Councilmember Walsh asked about how the administration of the budget between the Town Manager and the Council gets handled. Ms. Howarth replied that the Mayor is authorized by the Charter to craft the budget. He or she works with the Town Manager to assess the needs of the various departments and submits a formal balanced budget proposal to the council for their consideration and adoption.

Councilmember Walsh asked how should Council get in contact with her. Ms. Howarth responded that depending on the inquiry, some questions are best to talk to Mr. Pollitt about, but larger questions that the Town itself has should be asked to her.

Mayor Pruitt noted that personally he plans on not contacting the lawyer often, and to address questions mostly to Mr. Pollitt. Ms. Howarth went on to stress that she is the Town’s Attorney, not limited to just the Mayor, nor the Council, nor the Town Manager. Her job is to provide legal advice in order to keep the Town government in compliance with all applicable local, State and federal laws.

1. **Unfinished Business: Progress updates on Black-Eyed Susan and bikeways project**

Mayor Pruitt passed the floor to Mr. Pollitt. Mr. Pollitt remarked that currently there are interested purchasers of the Black-Eyed Susan and that we are currently in contact with Worcester County about our outstanding debt on the boat. Mr. Pollitt spoke to the bike study that was completed by Toole Inc., and that the phased implementation of the recommendations is still moving forward with a possible acquisition of private property in a re-imagined scenario to expand connectivity.

1. **New Business**

Mr. Pollitt introduced Josh Taylor from Davis, Bowen & Friedel to speak on behalf of the Market Street and Purnell Street infrastructure projects, noting the Town was awarded $500,000 from the State to fund the Market Street sewer lining project.

* 1. **Bid Awards**
     1. **Market Street Sewer Lining Project**

Mr. Taylor announced that Spiniello was the low bidder at $598,330, and that he would be in contact with the State to ask for an increase in the grant award.

* + 1. **Purnell Street Infrastructure Improvements Project**

The Mayor asked Mr. Pollitt to explain why the Purnell Street upgrade project seemed to have potential delays in store. Mr. Pollitt responded that there were more State-based reviews and permitting with Purnell Street as the project involved substantially more work and more money. He added that we have been warned that final State approval may not be in hand in time for the fall construction season, delaying completion of the project until spring of 2024. Mr. Taylor announced that TK Construction was the low bidder at $1,220,678.85. Mayor Pruitt asked for Mr. Taylor’s gut feeling on how likely we are to get the rest of the funding from Maryland Department of the Environment, to which Mr. Taylor replied full funding is likely.

This project will renovate and upgrade the entire water/wastewater, sidewalks and pavement and stormwater drainage for Purnell Street, which is why it is much more expensive than the Market Street project.

Councilmember Walsh asked how much of Purnell Street is being done, which Mr. Taylor said the entire street, a big reason why it is more expensive than the Market Street project.

Councilmember Fletcher asked if the intersection of Purnell Street and Belt Street, where part of the road is caving in, is included in the project. Mr. Taylor replied that it was.

Councilmember Walsh asked if this project would be able to provide service to new properties, to which Mr. Taylor replied in the affirmative.

Councilmember Walsh asked will this involve redoing zoning of the affected streets, to which Mr. Pollitt said no, this isn’t adding water/sewer access to new places but simply replacing what exists now.

Councilmember Walsh asked about the grants process and what happens if there isn’t enough funding from the grants. Mr. Taylor responded that there are two options: let the bid expire, or to reduce the scope of the project. Mr. Taylor noted that he would be discussing with Mr. Pollitt and Mr. Barfield how to reduce the scope of work if it came to it.

On the motion from Councilmember Walsh and seconded by Councilmember Fletcher, the bid for the Market Street project was approved by the following vote.

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| **NAME** | **AYE** | **NO** | **ABSTAIN** | **RECUSED** | **ABSENT** |
| **Margaret Fletcher** | **X** |  |  |  |  |
| **Janet Simpson** |  |  |  |  | **X** |
| **Diana Walsh** | **X** |  |  |  |  |
| **TALLY** | **2** |  |  |  |  |

On the motion from Councilmember Walsh and seconded by Councilmember Fletcher, the bid for the Purnell Street project was approved by the following vote.

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| **NAME** | **AYE** | **NO** | **ABSTAIN** | **RECUSED** | **ABSENT** |
| **Margaret Fletcher** | **X** |  |  |  |  |
| **Janet Simpson** |  |  |  |  | **X** |
| **Diana Walsh** | **X** |  |  |  |  |
| **TALLY** | **2** |  |  |  |  |

* 1. **Consider topics for future work sessions, July 25th & beyond, i.e., code enforcement, marijuana sales, others?**

Mayor Pruitt moved the discussion of marijuana use to the Work Session on August 29th, per Ms. Howarth’s suggestion that MML is hosting conversations about it on August 10th. The mayor would like to discuss this topic after MML’s findings in their conversations.

Councilmember Walsh wished to reserve time to discuss what Mr. Lee discussed in his presentation.

* 1. **Accept offer to purchase surplus Town property at 209 Petitt Street**

Typo correction made on 8-8-2023

Mr. Pollitt said that while we do an offer on the property, we may have to table the acceptance of the offer until the preliminary processes of selling the property are complete. Ms. Howarth stated that the property was confirmed in the ordinance declared as surplus property. The next step would be to schedule a public hearing with a notice of 20 days of the hearing, which should include if the Town is going forward with the sale or not. If the Town does, there must be a 1st and 2nd reading of an ordinance specifically mentioning the property, the buyer and the amount to be paid. Getting an appraisal of the property isn’t a requirement according to the Town’s Charter but having appraisals should be consistent. You can get an appraisal before moving onto the public hearing process. Getting an appraisal of the property will cost the Town money but will prepare for future interested purchasers.

1. **Comments from the Council**

Councilmember Walsh thanked everyone from Town Hall and the Town. Councilmember Fletcher had a question about where we are on mailing the water report. Clerk Jeffra spoke to that by saying the full report is live on the Town’s website and is available to have printed at any time, and that it will be made shortly available as a brochure to be more easily accessible. There will also be a door knocker mailed after the brochure’s printing to acknowledge the coming water rate increase and the report’s existence.

1. **Comments from the Mayor**

Mayor Pruitt had no comments to make.

1. **Comments from the Public**

Eddie Lee wanted to discuss the experience of Mr. Bessette’s experience, and if there was a chance to involve, as part of his duties, to aid with non-profit organizations. Mr. Pollitt said that was a policy change and is hesitant on having a Town Hall employee working for a private organization. Ms. Howarth suggested that it is best for the Grants Administrator to write only in the capacity for the Town as opposed to writing for private organizations as well.

Rob Hall suggested that there could be classes hosted by the Grants Administrator on how to write grants. Ms. Howarth does not see an issue with that.

Cathy Freeman thanked the Mayor & Council for following through with the Purnell Street upgrade project, but is also saddened to see how long it has taken to implement it through previous administrations. Ms. Freeman is glad to see the Town have a local attorney. She also gave thanks for also following through with the bikeways project.

1. **Adjournment**

With no other business to conduct, on a motion from Councilmember Fletcher, seconded by Councilmember Walsh the meeting was adjourned by the following vote. The time was 9:38pm.

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| **NAME** | **AYE** | **NO** | **ABSTAIN** | **RECUSED** | **ABSENT** |
| **Margaret Ann Fletcher** | **X** |  |  |  |  |
| **Janet Simpson** |  |  |  |  | **X** |
| **Diana Walsh** | **X** |  |  |  |  |
| **TALLY** | **2** |  |  |  |  |

Respectfully Submitted,

Jerry Jeffra

Clerk I