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**SNOW HILL MAYOR AND COUNCIL MEETING**

**Town Hall Meeting Minutes**

**Tuesday, May 9th, 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, May 9th, 2023, with Mayor Pruitt presiding.

**PUBLIC OFFICIALS PRESENT**

Mayor Mike Pruitt

Councilperson Regina Blake

Councilperson Janet Simpson

Councilperson Jenny Hall

**STAFF IN ATTENDANCE**

Lounell Hamstead, Finance Manager

Andy McGee, Police Department Chief

Carol Sullivan, Executive Administrator

Jerry Jeffra, Communications Officer

Rick Pollitt, Town Manager

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1. Mayor Mike Pruitt called the meeting to order at 7:00pm and led the **Salute to the Flag followed by a moment of silence.**
2. **Public Hearing: Constant Yield Tax Rate**

Mayor Pruitt asked Town Manager Rick Pollitt to describe the Constant Yield Tax Rate process. Mr. Pollitt explained that the state of Maryland requires local municipalities and counties that intend to adopt a tax rate that yields more revenue from the current year to the next to publicly advertise their intentions following strict criteria for making the public aware. He went on to explain the reasoning behind the concept and noted that since the proposed Town budget for the next fiscal year establishes a property tax rate above the constant yield rate, the Town is required to hold a public hearing, explaining the increase and offering the public an opportunity to weigh in with their opinions. Mr. Pollitt added that normally the public hearing would not be held at the same meeting where the budget is adopted but due to a publishing mistake in the local newspaper, the original date was voided and the hearing rescheduled to this meeting.

A motion from Councilperson Blake, seconded by Councilperson Simpson to open the Public Hearing for the Constant Yield Tax Rate was approved by the following vote.

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| **NAME** | **AYE** | **NO** | **ABSTAIN** | **RECUSED** | **ABSENT** |
| **Regina Blake** | **X** |  |  |  |  |
| **Janet Simpson** | **X** |  |  |  |  |
| **Jenny Hall** | **X** |  |  |  |  |

Question from former Council member Rob Hall: Where is the additional tax revenue being used? Mayor Pruitt replied by saying that the tax rate increase is specifically devoted to public safety through the police and fire & ambulance departments.

Councilperson Simpson read aloud a letter given to the council by former Council member Alison Gadoua. She questioned why the Mayor & Council needed to raise the water & wastewater rates and the tax rate at the same time. While she sees the benefits of supporting the police department, she believes now is not the time to implement such changes due to the economic stress many people are experiencing. She also shared the same sentiments with the increase in the water & wastewater rates.

There was no other public testimony regarding the Constant Yield Tax rate.

A motion from Councilperson Blake and seconded by Councilperson Simpson to close the Public Hearing on the Constant Yield Tax Rate was approved by the following vote.

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| **NAME** | **AYE** | **NO** | **ABSTAIN** | **RECUSED** | **ABSENT** |
| **Regina Blake** | **X** |  |  |  |  |
| **Janet Simpson** | **X** |  |  |  |  |
| **Jenny Hall** | **X** |  |  |  |  |

1. **Approval of Minutes**:

Mayor Pruitt asked the council if they had any questions or changes about the minutes for the following meetings: March 13th 2023’s Work Session, April 11th 2023’s Budget Work Session, April 11th 2023’s Town Hall Meeting, April 18th 2023’s Budget Work Session, and April 25th 2023’s Budget Public Hearing. One correction was made by Councilperson Simpson for April 18th’s Budget Work Session’s minutes. During April 18th’s Budget Work Session, Fran Price had asked if there was a difference in the water rates being charged between residential and commercial properties, and Finance Manager Lounell Hamstead was quoted responding to her saying yes. Finance Manager Hamstead later discovered that no, there was not a difference and she called Fran Price to clarify her answer.

On a motion of Councilperson Hall and seconded by Councilperson Simpson, the minutes for March 13th 2023’s Work Session, April 11th 2023’s Budget Work Session, April 11th 2023’s Town Hall Meeting, April 18th 2023’s Budget Work Session, after edits, and April 25th 2023’s Budget Public Hearing were approved by the following vote.

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| **NAME** | **AYE** | **NO** | **ABSTAIN** | **RECUSED** | **ABSENT** |
| **Regina Blake** | **X** |  |  |  |  |
| **Janet Simpson** | **X** |  |  |  |  |
| **Jenny Hall** | **X** |  |  |  |  |
| **TALLY** | **3** |  |  |  |  |

1. **Treasurer’s Report**

Mayor Pruitt asked Councilperson Simpson and Finance Manager Hamstead if they had anything to add to the Treasurer’s report. They each indicated they did not.

On the motion from Councilperson Blake and seconded by Councilperson Simpson, the treasurer’s report was approved by the following vote.

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| **NAME** | **AYE** | **NO** | **ABSTAIN** | **RECUSED** | **ABSENT** |
| **Regina Blake** | **X** |  |  |  |  |
| **Janet Simpson** | **X** |  |  |  |  |
| **Jenny Hall** | **X** |  |  |  |  |
| **TALLY** | **3** |  |  |  |  |

1. **Town Manager’s Report**

Mayor Pruitt asked Town Manager Pollitt if he had anything additional to add to his report. Mr. Pollitt replied that he has had communication with people who have interest in purchasing the Black-Eyed Susan. However, just last night, a serious snag developed with the plans of one interested party that could alter their proposal. He noted that he has given them until Friday, May 19th to present their final proposal. Mr. Pollitt also reported that a portion of the absentee ballots from the recent election had been counted that afternoon and that no change in the results from the May 2nd election had happened.

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

Mayor Pruitt asked if we could meet with the Mainstreet Maryland committee, and Mr. Pollitt replied that he wanted to devote the next work session to the program and to the Sustainable Communities effort, as well. He noted that the goal of the current effort is to upgrade the Town from an affiliate membership of Mainstreet Maryland to full membership, opening more opportunities for grant resources to promote the economic well-being of the Town.

* 1. Code Enforcement Report

Mayor Pruitt asked Mr. Pollitt for the status of grass violation enforcement. Mr. Pollitt responded that Code Enforcer Marty Sullivan has been issuing letters of violation and it is their intention to vigorously enforce the deadlines established for eliminating any violations.

* 1. Public Works Report

Mr. Pollitt said that the current projects, such as the Purnell Street water, sewer, sidewalk and paving project, and the Market Street sewer lining project are all going well. He added that before Grants Administrator John Rankin retired, a State grant to repair and upgrade several features of Sturgis Park, such as the public bathroom and picnic tables was approved. Our street sweeper is also scheduled to be picked up soon as repairs have finally been completed.

* 1. Water & Wastewater Report

Mr. Pollitt had nothing to add to the report.

* 1. Museum Report

Town Manager Pollitt had nothing to add to the report. Mayor Pruitt wanted to highlight and honor the Anne Hope exhibition displayed at the museum.

* 1. Police Department Report

Mayor Pruitt asked Police Chief Andy McGee about the biking events. Chief McGee spoke about the events, such as last’s week Coastal Bike event and the Community Bike Ride happening on May 13th hosted by the Worcester County Bicycle & Pedestrian Coalition. One police officer will be there to assist if needed. There will also be a Memorial Day event on May 29th at 10:45am and ending around 12:00pm.

* 1. Fire Department

Mr. Pollitt had nothing to add to the report.

* 1. Grants Office

Mr. Pollitt stated that we are in the process of advertising for the Grants Administrator position left vacant by Mr. Rankin’s retirement. With the new budget expanding the position to full-time, it is hoped that a healthy group of applications will be the result. Mayor Pruitt asked and was told that no one has applied to fill the role in its part-time status.

1. **Unfinished Business**
   1. Ordinance No. 2023-03 Declaration of Surplus Property: Second Reader.

Mayor Pruitt reminded the public that the Ordinance simply enables the Town to dispose of public property that is no longer serving a public need but does not ensure when or how such disposal will occur. Mayor Pruitt then asked Mr. Pollitt to read the ordinance aloud.

On the motion from Councilperson Blake and seconded by Councilperson Hall, the second reading and adoption of Ordinance 2023-03 was approved by the following vote.

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| **NAME** | **AYE** | **NO** | **ABSTAIN** | **RECUSED** | **ABSENT** |
| **Regina Blake** | **X** |  |  |  |  |
| **Janet Simpson** | **X** |  |  |  |  |
| **Jenny Hall** | **X** |  |  |  |  |
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* 1. Ordinance 2023-02 to adopt proposed budget for FY 2024: Second Reader.

Mayor Pruitt asked Mr. Pollitt if he could speak to how they were able to change the position of the Grants Administrator from part-time to full-time. Mr. Pollitt responded saying after looking at the budget carefully in the area of Capital Improvements funds, the Town was able to upgrade the position from part-time to full-time without requiring any additional revenue. Mayor Pruitt asked the council if they had any questions or comments about this change. After Councilperson Simpson spoke in favor of the change in the grant administrator position, Mayor Pruitt then proceeded to read the ordinance aloud.

On a motion from Councilperson Simpson to amend Ordinance No. 2023-02, to provide that the position of Grants Administrator be upgraded from a part-time position to a full-time position with benefits and to make the necessary adjustments in the numerical portion of the budget, seconded by Councilperson Blake, the second reading and adoption of Ordinance 2023-02, as amended, was approved by the following vote.

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| **NAME** | **AYE** | **NO** | **ABSTAIN** | **RECUSED** | **ABSENT** |
| **Regina Blake** | **X** |  |  |  |  |
| **Janet Simpson** | **X** |  |  |  |  |
| **Jenny Hall** | **X** |  |  |  |  |
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1. **New Business – Ordinance No. 2023-04: Budget Amendment**
   1. Ordinance No. 2023-04: Budget Amendment

Mayor Pruitt asked Mr. Pollitt to explain the budget amendment. Mr. Pollitt reported that recent overages in spending at the wastewater treatment plant had once again caused Finance Manager Hamstead to see the need for a budget adjustment to bring expenses in line with revenue. Mr. Pollitt attributed the overage to unusual impacts of treating industrial waste that was erroneously delivered to the plant for treatment and which caused extensive damage to areas in the treatment process. That incident, coupled with on-going problems with rising costs from inflation and residuals from the Covid experience have combined to cause a serious problem with maintaining permit compliance at the plant.

On the motion of Councilperson Blake and seconded by Councilperson Simpson, the first reading of Ordinance 2023-04 was approved by the following vote.

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| **NAME** | **AYE** | **NO** | **ABSTAIN** | **RECUSED** | **ABSENT** |
| **Regina Blake** | **X** |  |  |  |  |
| **Janet Simpson** | **X** |  |  |  |  |
| **Jenny Hall** | **X** |  |  |  |  |
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* 1. Ordinance No. 2023 -05: Water and Sewer Rate increase

Mayor Pruitt asked Mr. Pollitt to explain this ordinance. Mr. Pollitt reported the ordinance is a house-keeping measure required to establish the new water and sewer rates just approved in the new budget. Mr. Pollitt then read the ordinance aloud.

On the motion of Councilperson Simpson and seconded by Councilperson Blake, the first reading of Ordinance 2023-05 was approved by the following vote.

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| **NAME** | **AYE** | **NO** | **ABSTAIN** | **RECUSED** | **ABSENT** |
| **Regina Blake** | **X** |  |  |  |  |
| **Janet Simpson** | **X** |  |  |  |  |
| **Jenny Hall** | **X** |  |  |  |  |
| **TALLY** | **3** |  |  |  |  |

1. **Comments from the Council**

Councilperson Blake wanted to thank everyone for coming out, especially Town Manager Pollitt and Police Department Chief McGee for their hard work. Councilperson Hall also wanted to thank everyone, and for providing the Town with the necessary information to make informed decisions. Councilperson Simpson is happy about the new sound system; making the meetings and the Old Fire Hall more professional. Also wanted to thank everyone for their input.

1. **Comments from the Mayor**

The week was quite hectic and despite juggling so many objectives, and ordinances and minutes to approve, Mayor Pruitt thanked everyone in Town Hall for their hard work.

1. **Comments from the Public**

Rita Williams is concerned about the senior citizens or other residents who do not use or have access to technology for the purpose of knowing that the water & wastewater rates are going to spike. Mayor Pruitt assured her that word will get out.

Debra Baines wanted to talk about the grass being cut on 113 & 108 Purnell Street and wanted to see if the tenant or the landlord can take care of it. Debra Baines also wanted to comment about dogs still being off the leash. Police Chief McGee will be handling it if any of his officers can catch them in the act. There has also been loud music lately. Mayor Pruitt commented that there is a specific code against loud music, and that too needs to be caught in the act.

Rob Hall asked what is to happen to the money owed on the Black-Eyed Susan. Mayor Pruitt stated that they are paying the county $26,000 a year until it is paid off, which happens to be a great deal for the Town as there is no interest payment required on the loan. A grant has helped pay for the first three years of the loan, as well. Mr. Hall also wanted to comment why aren’t the job postings being advertised in the larger papers? Mayor Pruitt wanted to point out that the intention was to first advertise locally, as opposed to a more distant group of people. Lastly, Mr. Hall wanted the Mayor & Council to commit to a specific water & wastewater rate on a specific date. Mayor Pruitt agreed with his point.

Fran Price wanted to highlight Account Clerk Connie Watson’s dedication in working out payment arrangements with residents who needed help. Ms. Price also wanted to stress how important it is to get the information out about the coming increase in rates. Mayor Pruitt agreed with Ms. Price’s comments.

Eddie Lee asked about the transition for the new incoming councilmembers, and what are the steps to get the newly-elected up to speed on all functions of the Mayor & Council. Mayor Pruitt has had conversations with Town Manager Pollitt on giving tours and hosting meetings soon with the incoming councilmembers. Councilperson Simpson asked if MML could come in and help train new officials and Mr. Pollitt replied that due to the pandemic, that personalized training opportunity was stopped. There are, however, classes those members can attend to obtain training and there will be an orientation for newly elected officials, as well, at the summer conference of the Maryland Municipal League.

Clark Beatty read aloud a prepared statement to the Mayor & Council about the crisis he endured when his home was destroyed by fire, and asked the Town if they are willing to consider a change of policies to help property owners in similar circumstances deal with such tragedies. On the table would be the policy for removing and installing water meters, the fees for such work and the billing for services if no use of the water and sewer system is occurring. Mayor Pruitt asked Mr. Beatty for a copy of his letter and suggested he speak with Connie Watson, the Town‘s account clerk, who does a fine job assisting people with their utility obligations. He added that the Town was sympathetic to his problem and would work with him to find a fair solution.

1. **Adjournment**

With no other business to conduct, on a motion from Councilperson Blake, seconded by Councilperson Simpson the meeting was adjourned by the following vote. The time was 8:13pm.

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| **NAME** | **AYE** | **NO** | **ABSTAIN** | **RECUSED** | **ABSENT** |
| **Regina Blake** | **X** |  |  |  |  |
| **Janet Simpson** | **X** |  |  |  |  |
| **Jenny Hall** | **X** |  |  |  |  |
| **TALLY** | **3** |  |  |  |  |

Respectfully Submitted,

Jerry Jeffra

Communications Officer