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**MAYOR AND TOWN COUNCIL**

**Work Session Meeting Minutes**

**Tuesday, November 28th, 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 Tuesday, November 28th, 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

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 5:01pm.

1. **Continued discussion on Surplus Property**

Mayor Pruitt greeted everyone and gave a brief outline of the meeting’s agenda. The Mayor asked Town Manager Rick Pollitt to give an update on the Town’s surplus properties.

Town Manager Rick Pollitt presented a brief recap of the progress of the Town’s surplus properties. Mr. Pollitt recapped the interest of moving Town Hall’s offices to the Former Peninsula Bank property and summarized the project thus far.

* 1. **Former Peninsula Bank property**

Town Manager Pollitt asked Councilmember Diana Walsh to present her research into the Former Peninsula Bank property.

Councilmember Diana Walsh recapped the research into the former Peninsula Bank property. She stated that the building had been purchased by Mayor Charlie Dorman and the Town Council in June 2018 for $265,000. She added that grant money in the sum of $150,000 was used to help purchase the building and that further research by the Town Financial Manager is being done to determine which specific grant helped fund the purchase. Mrs. Walsh shared her concerns of having to pay back the grant if the building is sold.

Councilmember Walsh shared data from an appraisal requested by the Snow Hill Town Council. On August 25th, 2023 the former Peninsula Bank building appraised for $295,000. Mrs. Walsh stated that a presentation given by the Director of Economic Development, Lorissa McAllister, had been shared the process of moving Town Hall to the previous bank building. Mrs. Walsh also share that a walkthrough had also been done by Marty Sullivan and Mark Shockley. Mark Shockley estimated the cost of renovations to be $100,000.

Councilmember Walsh invited Mr. Brown, to speak about an inspection of the building. Mr. Brown spoke about maintenance and repairs to the interior and exterior of the building that need be addressed. He shared the bulkhead was in need of repair, he estimated the cost at $50,000. Councilmember Simpson asked about the sale of the building. Town Attorney Howarth mentioned that more research into property lines needs to be done. Mr. Brown addressed concerns about floodplain issues and suggested a flood plain expert, Kevin Wagner.

Mayor Pruitt opened the floor to public comment on the former Peninsula Bank building. Local realtor and resident, Eddie Lee stated that he felt the appraisal value is too low. Mr. Lee said that the possible repayment of the grant money and the dollar amount of renovations would change the conversation about selling the building.

Mayor Pruitt asked the Town Manager, Rick Pollitt to share Billy McCain’s thoughts on the appraisal he had given the town for the former Peninsula building. Mr. Pollitt stated that he doesn’t have real estate experience and is not qualified to second guess the results of the appraisal. Mr. Pollitt went on to say that, William. R. McCain & Associates are a top- notch appraisal company of the Eastern Shore and has total confidence in the quality of his company and staff. Town Attorney Howarth stated that many of her clients use W.R. McCain & Associates, but that there were other reputable appraisers in the local area.

Additional public comments were added. Mr. Lee stated that expert opinions are just that, opinions and suggests getting a second opinion. Another town resident, asked if the town was already looking to relocate Town Hall or were we looking at moving as a target of opportunity. The man also questioned the return on investment into the former Peninsula building and if the sale of the building could be applied to any deficits or funding improvements to the water system that would better benefit the town and the citizens. He ended saying that he would like to see a cost/benefit analysis to see the real value in the building’s potential.

Councilmember Walsh ended with addressing the council that a cost/benefits analysis needs to be done. She discussed the $100,000 needed for repairs and how we currently don’t have the funds. She expressed that if the town waits on the repairs while raising the money, that the building would slip into further disrepair. Mrs. Walsh added that if the building is sold and all debt is paid back that we could break even or close to or possibly have a surplus that could go to renovating another of the town’s buildings.

Mayor Pruitt states that action is not being made at this meeting. Mr. Pruitt adds that direction will soon have to be given to the Town attorney and Rick Pollitt on what is to be done with the property. The mayor asks to move the next property.

* 1. **Willow Street property**

Mayor Pruitt asks Town Manager Rick Pollitt to introduce details about the Willow Street property. Mr. Pollitt reviews that the property was acquired by the town some years ago. The building has historical significance and is the floodplain. Mr. Pollitt states that the town had solicited interests from developers in the community. Mr. Pollitt went on to say that Town Code Enforcement Officer, Marty Sullivan had spoken with developers and local people in the community that had interest. Mr. Pollitt added that the property has multiple problems, the structure as-is having very little value would reach the 50% improvement threshold very quickly and the building would have to be elevated. He stated that building codes had frustrated interested parties away.

Mr. Pollitt stated that the building has set idle and has become an eyesore and hazard. Mr. Pollitt said that the building has a placard referring to the Department of Housing and Community Development, meaning that some grant money went toward some kind of development of the property. Mr. Pollitt also stated that there is also a town sewage pump station located on the back side of the property and that anything done with said property had to protect the access to that pump station.

Mr. Pollitt recalled at the last meeting, there was interest in possibly offering the building to African American Historical Society as resource for them to highlight the historical connection to workforce housing of the Willow Street property. He said that Marty Sullivan had met with Dr. Blake to discuss the property. Mr. Pollitt said there is a bit of confusion because Dr. Blake is under the impression that the Town of Snow Hill has offered to donate the property to the African American Historical Society and he believes that it is a misinterpretation of the conversation. He believes that it was one of the possibilities that the town was looking into, but said it was to be discussed with the town’s legal council before any decision be made.

Mr. Pollitt stated that Marty Sullivan had met again with Dr. Blake again last week at the Willow Street property. Dr. Blake brought a contractor with her and were unable to get into the building since it is boarded up due to safety. Mr. Pollitt added that Dr. Blake was insistent that the town was going to donate the building to her. Mr. Sullivan explained the floodplain issues and structural issues of the building. Dr. Blake said she would consider demolishing the structure and building a duplex house to generate income or a park setting. Mr. Pollitt had been informed by Mr. Sullivan that the meeting had gone well. Mr. Pollitt also added that a fundamental understanding on what needs to be done before moving forward.

Councilmember Janet Simpson asked if the town did donate the property, would Dr. Blake take care of the property or refurbish and put money into the property? Mr. Pollitt answered that it is his understanding that Dr. Blake would happy to accept the property and offered multiple options of what could be done with the property. Mr. Pollitt also added that his understanding of Mr. Sullivan’s email, that the building could not be salvaged.

Mrs. Simpson asked if donating the building was a possibility or if there could be a MOU. The Town Attorney Maureen Howarth stated that it was something she was going to have to look into. Mrs. Howarth said that the first step was to have the entire property appraised and then decide if we wanted to start the surplus property process in preparation of possible disposing of the property to the African American Historical Society or someone else.

Councilmember Walsh asked Mrs. Howarth if the council would have to research if a town can gift or donate the property. Mrs. Walsh also asked if it is allowed for the donation be for protected purposed; she would like to see the history preserved. Mrs. Howarth stated that if you know that they are not going to use it in the way that you want, then not to sell or donate it to them. Mrs. Howarth went on to say that it doesn’t appear that there is intention of the building to be kept.

Councilmember Fletcher asked if the Heritage Grant could be applied by the town. Mr. Pollitt expressed that it was one of options. That the building could be torn down and erect a pavilion with information about the history of the site. Mrs. Fletcher stated that Snow Hill is in the heritage area. Mr. Pollitt stated that Mr. Sullivan had spoke to Dr. Blake about the potential of grants.

Councilmember Walsh asked if it was possible to work with the African American Heritage Society with joint fundraising to erect a more preserved site highlighting the history rather than building housing in the floodplain. Attorney Howarth brought up again that a grant may have been used. Mrs. Howarth suggested before anything be done, decide if we want an appraisal, figure out the grant, decide if you want to start the process of surplus property.

Mayor Pruitt stated that the Willow Street property is in very bad shape and in danger of falling down. Mr. Pruitt said at some point in time, we have to decide to eat the cost to tear it down, use that property for something that we need it for, or cut our losses and let someone else inherit all of those things and let them decide what they want to use it for. Mr. Pruitt added that the property had already been considered for surplus property. Mr. Pruitt also added that the town is about to begin a blighted and vacant property ordinance and this town owned property is one of the worst. The mayor indicated that he would like to sell or donate the property.

Mayor Pruitt moves to open the floor to public comments on the Willow Street property.

\*Town resident Mr. Brown stated to sell the building. Mr. Brown wondered how much repair needs to be done and how much will it cost to bring it into compliance. He stated that when a building is brought into compliance that it gets costly. He asked if the building is on a historical registry and if it is, it would get more attention of grant monies. He summarized saying that if the property was in such bad shape, that the best thing to do was to tear the building down and sell the property. Town Manager Pollitt added that if we do decide to part with the property, that it will need to be surveyed and part of the pump station cut out and doesn’t know how that would impact the surround property.

\* Town resident Mr. Lee doesn’t recall the building being on the historical registry, but the property has been discussed in historic references by the local community. He agrees that whatever is done with the property, that it holds value of its historical nature.

Councilmember Walsh would like to see a historical walkway with storyboards about the history of the area.

\*Town resident John stated that he doesn’t believe that the town should be holding surplus property and incurring the cost to keep them. He also stated that the Willow Street property is a prime piece of real estate that could be generating tax revenue.

\*Town business owner stated that Capitalism has a long history of bulldozing our history. She mentioned other properties that have been torn down and erased town history.

* 1. **Petitt Street property**

Mayor Pruitt asked Town Manager Pollitt to give an introduction to the Petitt Street property. Mr. Pollitt states that the property is already is the process of declared surplus and being acquired. He stated that Attorney Coates has shared with him that was an oversight or misunderstanding when the town was given the property. There should have been two lots on the deed and there is currently only one. Mr. Pollitt said that Town Attorney Howarth has been working with Attorney Coates to resolve the issue.

Attorney Howarth explained that the properties they have been working on is 209 A & B Petitt Street. Mrs. Howarth said that the potential buyer thought that the property included 209 and 211 Petitt Street because of the SDAT for the town list the properties together. The town was only given the deed to 209 Petitt Street. The Town attorney is working on correcting the deed paperwork so that the 211 Petitt property can be run through the surplus property process. The process is a holding pattern until the current owner can be contacted.

* 1. **Market Street properties**

Mayor Pruitt asks to move to the Market Street properties. Town Manager Pollitt explains that the town own three adjacent properties on Market Street. The first lot was donated to the town by the Scarborough family with the understanding the town would eventually put a police station there. Since then, the town has acquired the two adjacent properties, on through a tax sale and one through an outright purchase. Mr. Pollitt stated that a conversation has been started about the plans for the property if the town decides not to move forward with raising the funds and putting a police station on the property. Mr. Pollitt mentioned the obligation to the Scarborough family even though there is nothing in the contract or deed mentions connecting the obligation.

Mr. Pollitt has spoken with Danny Scarborough who didn’t have strong feeling about it, but Danny’s mother expressed if the town was not going to put a police station there, that the family should have the property back. Mr. Pollitt expressed that he wasn’t sure if it could be given back because legally it belongs to the people of Snow Hill. Mr. Pollitt said that if the town does decide to part with the property it would go out for public bid.

Mayor Pruitt stated that there were options for the property. He said that we could hold on to the property but didn’t see the town able to find the money to build a police station anytime soon with facing problems with the water and sewer infrastructure. Mr. Pruitt said that the property could be put on hold, but still continue progress on the other two adjoining properties.

Mayor Pruitt opens the floor for public comment.

\*Town resident asks if the mayor cares about the west side of town and follows with asking if he cares enough to build a police station there. She voiced her feelings that the obligation to build the police station should be held. She also shared stories of guns and crime on the west side of town. Mayor Pruitt stated that he understood her concerns, but was unsure when the millions of dollars would be raised to build a police station. Mr. Pruitt expressed that the town could hold on to the property, but the town needs to be fiscally responsible. Mr. Pruitt also suggested catching the west side up with the east side by getting others investing in the empty lots in the area.

\*Councilmember Walsh expressed that the town needs to be invested in the west side of Snow Hill. Mrs. Walsh addressed finding money for the project by cutting further investment into Byrd Park which the river continues to flood. Mrs. Walsh stated that she suggests holding on to the property.

\*Town resident, Mr. Lee expressed his feelings about the lack of progress on the west side of town. He asked the Mayor and Town Council members for a plan of action and set a timeline.

\*Town resident, Mr. Brown expressed the need for the people of the community to take action. He said the people of the community have to make the area interesting to attract investment.

\*Town business owner, Mrs. Nolte added that zoning plays a big part in building communities. She added that it leads to socio-economic segregation. She invited interested parties to Sustainable Communities meetings, Planning Commission, join Main Street, talk about design and smart growth and focus based zoning.

Mayor Pruitt tables line item #3 Dr. Hogan Pesaniello’s proposal to the next meeting due to time conflict with the Community Forum on Cannabis. Asks for a five minute break.

**BREAK at 6:34pm**

1. **Community Forum on Cannabis: Mayor calls to reconvene meeting at 6:41pm.**

Mayor Pruitt introduces the Community Forum on Cannabis. He explains the town is currently under a moratorium that was passed several weeks ago and no quick decisions will be made. Mr. Pruitt asks Town Manager Pollitt to set up the discussion.

Town Manager Pollitt introduces the discussion about cannabis coming to our area. He expresses that town is seeking input from the citizens before any ordinances are written or location is chosen. Mr. Pollitt goes on to say that there will be a second meeting with a panel of professional that can provide information and answer more questions about how cannabis will be impacting our community. Mr. Pollitt opens up floor for public comment.

Mayor asks those that sign up to come to the podium to speak.

**Public comments and concerns:**

* Speaker suggests start with medical cannabis and maybe expanding to recreational. She expressed the need to have at least 2000 sq ft to meet the space needs for both.
* Speaker suggests beginning medical first, then recreational. He suggests the town council to visit other established dispensaries. He also mentioned that parking and waiting space is needed. The speaker questioned what the taxes were going to benefit in the town.
* Speaker expressed concerns because the tax benefit to the town is minimal. The speaker also thought that the moratorium time period is too brief to come to any decision.
* Speaker is totally opposed to cannabis consumption in town.
* Speaker spoke about concern for mental health and the impact on children/youth. The speaker voiced concern about the impact on family income. They also spoke about the lack of regulation. They asked to extend the moratorium to more research can be done.
* Chief McGee shared that the biggest concern coming from the highway patrol is crashes and the ability to test someone that is under the influence of marijuana. Maryland is a consent state, but a court order is still needed to draw blood to test for marijuana. Chief McGee shared that crime rates have remained neutral and have not had many calls for it.
* Speaker shared sales tax information in other states. They suggested looking into creating a municipal tax would help support revenue.
* Councilmember Walsh shared that for Snow Hill that she is pro-responsible business and responsible growth. Mrs. Walsh shares that she does have concerns for the impact on mental health.
* Speaker voices that cannabis is already here in the community and we should see how our town can benefit. They shared that we should look into how we can support this local business and future business growth.

1. **Adjournment**

Councilmember Simpson made a motion to adjourn. Seconded by Councilmember Walsh and passed unanimously. The time was 7:06pm.

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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