

CROFTON CIVIC ASSOCIATION
BOARD and GENERAL MEMBERSHIP ZOOM MEETING
January 18, 2022- 7:30PM

Present:

Board Members: Martin Simon, Anna O’Kelly, Brian Riley, Renee Speer, Daria DeLizio, Charles See, Robert Kendall and Hal Sheldon.

Staff: Larry Schweinsburg, Chief Earl Fox, Tara Gottschalck

Larry Schweinsburg opened the meeting with the Pledge of Allegiance.

Announcements by the President:

Martin announced that this meeting is being recorded for the purpose of assisting the Secretary in producing the meeting minutes. If anyone attending does not wish to be recorded they may leave the meeting at this time.

On January 25 from 6 PM to 9 PM, the County Executive will host a Virtual Budget Town Hall. Participants may sign up on the County website.

On January 26 beginning at 6 PM the Crofton Kiwanis will hold a fundraiser at Ledo’s Pizza in Crofton.

On March 26 from 11AM to 2 PM the CCA and Crofton Kiwanis will host a Cherry Blossom Festival around Crofton Parkway. There will be a live band, a face painter, and food trucks stationed around the length of Crofton Parkway. Jim Harvey will provide additional details.

On April 9 at 12 PM the CCA will host the annual Easter Egg Hunt on the grounds of Crofton Elementary School. A rain date is scheduled for April 16.

On May 14 at 10 AM the CCA will host its annual Armed Forces and First Responders Parade. The Parade route begins at Crofton Woods Elementary School.

On June 5 the CCA Summer Concert Series will begin.

On June 11 Crofton Kiwanis will host a 5/10 K run. Participants may register at Crofton Country Club at 6:30 AM.

The CCA Board of Directors Elections will take place at the General Membership Meeting in May. An Election Committee of five to nine people is needed by February 7. Anyone interested in volunteering may contact Crofton Town Hall. Martin asked Board members to reach out to people in their Districts to participate.

Guest Speaker:

Martin introduced the guest speaker, Stuart Pittman, County Executive, who provided an update on County projects.

Mr. Pittman reported that over the last few days Covid cases are going down in the County. Hospitals are still operating under their crisis standards of care. There were 39 Covid deaths this week in our County. Most of the deaths were of unvaccinated individuals. Mr. Pittman asked people to encourage others to get vaccinated. The extension of mask mandates issued by him as an Executive Order has expired, and was voted on by the County Council which required five votes to implement. Only 4 of 7 voted for the extension. Since it did not pass through the legislative process, the County Health Officer used his authority to extend the mask mandate through the end of January. There is a temporary restraining order request and we should hear tomorrow if that has been granted. Mr. Pittman is confident that the mask mandate will remain in place throughout the month.

Mr. Pittman encouraged people to attend the Budget Town Hall for District 7 on January 25. There have been items included in the budget based on suggestions from past Budget Town Halls such as parks and community centers. He asked residents to please participate.

Mr. Pittman commented on the Public Safety Budget, citing a report in the Baltimore Sun, which stated that Anne Arundel County has one of the largest increases in police department funding in the country since 2018, at 31%. As a result violent crimes are down 11% in 2021 compared to the previous year. The hiring of public safety officers has increased due to upgraded technology and salary increases for both the police and fire departments.

Teacher contracts with County Public Schools have been completed and are now on the scale that they should be on. Earlier step increases are now funded.

The GDP Plan 2040 is completed, and regional planning groups have begun to meet. The Crofton region is not in the first round. Transit-oriented development is in progress. Some pockets of development include the structured parking for the Odenton MARC Station, a park and the creation of a town center.

Mr. Pittman commented on his dislike of more development along Route 3. He has threatened a moratorium on development through the Office of Law twice. This was not successful. It is the State that owns the highway therefore the County cannot legally order a moratorium on development. The solution involves negotiating and incentivizing the State Highway Administration with \$22 million dollars to improve traffic issues.

Mr. Pittman commented on the need for infrastructure for the Village Green. Water lines are necessary for fire suppression, etc. The small businesses there do not have the funds to support this. Therefore the County has created a Small Business Infrastructure Improvement Program to assist with this.

Mr. Pittman commented on the community's purchase of the front property, and how the County is trying to assist in the deferment of the \$16 thousand dollars in property taxes that

community is now responsible for. James Kitchin is working with Maryland Department of Assessments and Taxation (SDAT), who will work with the Maryland Environmental Trust to maintain the area as open space so that taxes could be deferred. Martin commented on ideas proposed by community members at a meeting recently. There are issues with access to the property. The first priority is the deferment of taxes. He looks forward to hearing the parameters regarding what is allowed with this property. He thanked James Kitchin for all his work on this project.

Chuck asked the County Executive about status of the redistricting of Crofton from District 7 to District 4. Mr. Pittman stated he is not involved in this issue, however, does not get the sense that the majority is in favor of this proposal and that things will remain as they are.

Renee thanked Mr. Pittman for encouraging small business with the grant and the support of the coffee shop to open at Village Green.

Susan James asked if there are any changes planned for the area of Route 450 and Route 424. Mr. Pittman responded that there are none planned and commented further that there was previous controversy over the land use application at the shopping center and whether it should be classified as a village center or not. He stated further that the GDP says that no rezoning is allowed to occur until there is a regional plan.

Karen Nelson thanked Mr. Pittman for attending the meeting and spending time in Crofton and for his assistance in the purchase of the front property.

Pat Huecker commented on development in the area. Next week the Forks of the Patuxent will attend Board of Appeals hearings in person regarding the Halle Landfill. This ongoing issue over many years is a back and forth of who is allowed to do what at what time. The Forks of the Patuxent has spent many years and large sums of money on this issue.

Pat commented on the traffic study for the SHEETZ gas station. The property owners claim they have an agreement from 1991 which states that no traffic study is required. Pat pointed out that was a long time ago with a different developer and a different development plan. The office of Planning and Zoning is saying that a traffic study is required. A Board of Appeals hearing is scheduled for March.

Pat asked Mr. Pittman about the re-design of the intersection at Johns Hopkins Road and Route 3. She asked why it was changed, who requested the change, how it was changed, and who funded the change. Mr. Pittman stated he did not know. James Kitchin said he will find out.

Mr. Pittman commented that the Board of Appeals is made up of representatives from each District who are appointed by the Councilperson of that District. They make land use decisions. There are also the administrative hearings where decisions are made. Administrative Hearing Officers hear the opinion of Office of Planning and Zoning, but do not necessarily follow it. The County Executive is not allowed to speak to the Administrative Hearing Officer about on-going investigations. Mr. Pittman stated that he does not believe that land use variances should be political. He agrees that there is an on-going issue regarding the decision of how far back to go regarding traffic studies. Pat commented that these decisions go around from the Hearing

Officer, to the Court of Appeals, to the Circuit Court and around again. The process is very inefficient and badly misused.

Approval of Minutes:

Martin announced that the minutes of the December 13 Board meeting need approval. A motion was made by Brian to approve the minutes. Chuck seconded the motion. The minutes were unanimously approved.

FY 23 Budget Presentations:

Martin announced that the budget was included in the December Advocate that was sent to residents by mail. For those who have not seen it, the budget can be accessed from our website.

Renee Speer presented the FY 23 budgets for the Tax District and for the CCA. Renee announced that interested residents may participate in the budget planning meetings which will begin in the fall.

Susan James thanked Crofton volunteers and reminded staff that they are accountable. She was surprised at the cost of the Public Safety budget. She commented further that she does not see the Police. She questions the expenditures in this budget. Martin commented that this FY 23 Budget has already been approved by the CCA Board of Directors. The budget meetings are held in early fall, and resident participation is encouraged.

Ms. James commented further asking why there are Crofton Police cars parked that do not move for five days. She commented that \$11,360 budgeted for insurance for five cars was excessive. She complained that there was no response to the vehicle break-ins on Good Hope Drive, and asked for specifics on what the Crofton Police do to justify the Public Safety budget. Chief Fox responded that the crime statistics in the Crofton triangle are significantly lower than those in the rest of Crofton (outside the Triangle) because of the Police Department. Ms. James asked why the Crofton Police do not work evenings and weekends, and noted that it is always County officers that respond at those times. The Chief explained that Crofton officers do work on evenings and weekends. Ms. James asked why the budget for gas is so high and also asked if the police cars driven outside of the Triangle. The Chief responded that the budget reflects the increase of gas prices. The money that is not spent goes back into the budget. He commented further that police cars are not taken home by officers, and that they will leave the Triangle for purposes such as County Police assistance, court dates, and training. Ms. James asked for statistics on arrests. The Chief referred her to the website. Ms. James complained that those statistics are four years out of date. The Chief corrected her explaining that they are up to date through August 2021, and the updates are in progress. Ms. James commented that the expenditures are not worth it and suggested that a private security company be hired to replace the Police Department.

Martin thanked Ms. James for her comments. He explained that the residents value the Crofton Police Department. He agrees that there have been some issues with visibility, and that this Board is attempting to affect change. He pointed out the disadvantages of being down one officer. He commented further that it is not his impression that the disbanding of the CPD and hiring a private security firm is what the community wants. The Chief will provide those statistics and noted that the FY24 budget will be proposed and reviewed in the fall.

In closing, Renee commented that a replacement Comptroller will be hired soon.

Committee Reports:

Covenant Review Committee - Anna-

Anna had nothing to report.

Public Safety Committee – Brian-

Brian reported that he is monitoring the introduction of the new Police Reform bill and thanked James Kitchin for his assistance. The Public Safety Committee is monitoring the establishment of the Police Accountability Board (PAB) in Anne Arundel County. The County held a meeting about this last week. The State law requires that each county set up a Police Accountability Board to administer charging committees and trial boards to adjudicate complaints of police misconduct submitted by the public. The County Executive's Office will have to propose legislation to the County Council. The Public Safety Committee is monitoring this closely to see how it may affect the Crofton Police Department. Martin will distribute the presentation from the meeting to Board members.

Planning & Zoning – Chuck -

Chuck thanked Pat Heucker and Marsha Perry (not present) for all their help in keeping him updated on issues in the community. Chuck thanked James Kitchin for the County Newsletter. His updates on the Village Green infrastructure, the proposed SHEETZ gas station on Route 3, and the Millersville Road at Route 3 hearing for rezoning have already been commented on. Pat stated that the dates for the Halle Landfill hearings are next week, January 25, 26, and 27 from 5 PM to 8 PM, and will be held at County Council offices in the Arundel Center. If the hearing continues, there are three additional dates the following week. This is a 30 year old issue, and the landfill is over 100 acres. This is a huge issue that will impact Route 3 traffic on a highly significant level. The community has been fighting this for years, and there is a Go Fund Me site for the Forks of the Patuxent Association. Chuck can forward the link to anyone interested in donating. Martin asked if the meetings are live-streamed. Pat says they are not on-line.

James Kitchin feels that the Forks of the Patuxent are in good standing. The County cannot help since the matter goes through the Board of Appeals. He commented further on the SHEETZ issue and noted that since it is not a variance request, the County can endorse and argue in favor of requiring the traffic study.

Recreation Committee – Daria-

Daria had nothing to report.

Education Committee – Hal –

Hal thanked his new volunteer on the Education Committee, Joanne Olexy. Hal reported that Crofton Woods Elementary PTA will have one large fundraiser. The Principal is out for surgery, and has been replaced by her husband temporarily, who is a former principal. Due to Covid surges the chorus and band recitals have been postponed until February. They are asking for donations of masks and tissues. Parent volunteers are restricted in schools because of Covid, however, some schools are taking registrations now.

Crofton Middle reported 22 Covid cases last week. Crofton High reported 28 cases. Teachers have been told to prepare for virtual learning, though neither has yet reached the 5% threshold. Sports clubs and the musicals are continuing as planned. The Crofton planning fair has been moved to virtual.

Operations and Maintenance Committee – Rob-

Rob reported that the Maintenance Committee met with residents regarding ideas for the front property. There were many great ideas presented such as walking paths, community gardens, and compost education. The challenges of the site were discussed.

Rob reported there is an upcoming meeting this week with the designer for the front entrance. He is aiming for a spring planting.

Rob has been working on the park equipment fact sheet for the bond initiative. He reported he heard back from the County regarding the American Rescue Plan (ARP) funding request form for playground improvement. The County is working on a broader approach due to the large number of requests. James Kitchin commented on this saying the County is exploring ways to create and administer grant money for County park improvement. The planning is in its early stages. ARP distributes federal stimulus funds for Covid response. Generally these are for things such as vaccines, contact tracing, etc. These funds are also used for things that promote health and wellness such as park and infrastructure improvements. Martin thanked Rob for working on the bond initiative.

Finance Committee – Renee-

Renee did not have anything additional to report.

Greater Crofton Council- Jim-

Jim was not present, but James Kitchin commented that the next meeting of the GCC is February 8 at 7 PM. The GCC will have County and State representatives attend to speak about the Memorandum of Understanding regarding the \$22 million the State has received from the County for Route 3 improvements from the St. Stephens Church Road section going north to Route 97.

Renee asked James if there is anything being done about the noise level from Route 3 in our area. James responded that one early bill that was passed by the County Council for new residential developments will have noise requirements. If the noise reaches a certain decibel level, the development will require sound barriers. Renee commented further that the recent development on Route 3 South has increased the noise level. Martin commented that the planting of additional trees along the front property will help with this.

Police Chief Report – Chief Fox –

The Chief reported that the CPD was approved for a grant of \$51,000 from Office of Crime Control and Prevention to be used for body cameras. This grant issues payments quarterly over a period of one year. Payment must be sent and then approved. Once approved the payments are then reimbursed. The Chief reported that the payment plan has been coordinated, and the Department should receive the first check soon.

The Chief reported that the background investigation is in progress for the new police officer candidate. Assuming that is completed successfully and we hire the candidate, after the completion of training the new officer could start his duties as early as April or May.

The Chief encouraged any residents who may be interested in participating on the Police Accountability Board (PAB) to contact him. He will forward your information to Darryl Hagner who is involved in this process at Anne Arundel County Police Headquarters. There is a July deadline for the PAB to become operational.

Martin elaborated on the upfront payments for the purchase of the body cameras. Even though the Police Department has been approved for the grant, the money must be paid initially by the CPD with reimbursement to follow. We must order the equipment soon to be compliant with grant regulations. We are not spending more money, but are borrowing from existing funds. The first installment of \$15,617 is due in April, with subsequent payments due in July and October. The total cost of the equipment is \$46,849. The grant total is \$51,000. Chief Fox noted that any surplus funds will be retained by the State. Martin reminded everyone that this is a State mandated program that requires all police departments to comply. The CPD was unable to rely on County resources for this. Officer Hafer did a lot of the legwork for this grant. Renee and Larry will assist on the loan portion.

James Kitchin commented further regarding the PAB. A draft bill needs to go before the County Council, but that has not happened as yet. The bill should go before the Council in February. The draft will contain a requirement for a 30-day public posting period for the positions on the PAB. Applicants for the Board will ultimately be confirmed by the County Council. There will be an application platform set up in the March-April timeframe. This will be a public process.

James asked the Chief about the requirements and processes of the body cameras. The Chief responded that the Crofton Police Department will adhere to County rules and regulations. Once implemented, this information will be posted to our website.

Town Manager's Report – Larry-

Larry reported that DPW has been working on tree trimming and removal after the recent storm damage. Larry has given them a very long list of trees that need to be removed. The preventative work completed behind the Village Green and Regime 5 last summer and fall helped keep CCA damage and costs low. The light posts that were damaged on Crawford Boulevard have been reported to BGE. Areas that still require clean up include the median at Crofton Parkway and Crawford Boulevard, Harcourt Avenue and Regents Park Road. A sinkhole has formed in the curb lawn at Crofton Parkway and Duke of Kent Drive behind the storm drain. Larry will contact DPW tomorrow regarding these issues. Larry asked residents to please report any storm damage or areas of concern to Town Hall.

Larry reported that he has requested estimates from two security companies regarding security upgrades at Town Hall. Larry will meet the second vendor.

Larry thanked Martin and Renee for stepping in during Susan's absence.

Karen Nelson asked who is responsible for the road clean up, specifically on Regents Park Road. Larry responded that those trees are all the responsibility of the County. They are aware that additional cleanup is needed.

Martin introduced a special guest, Shawn Livingston, a candidate for County Council District 7. Shawn grew up in North Calvert County, and lived in Annapolis for ten years. Mr. Livingston is now a resident of Edgewater. He has two children and his wife is a healthcare worker at AAMC. He wishes to make the area a better and safer place. He also wants to pursue policies that are representative of the residents, not the politicians or special interest groups. He is very interested in what has been happening in Crofton and what is important to our residents. Shawn provided his contact information: Shawnfor7.com. Martin invited Shawn to attend the monthly CCA Board meetings.

Citizen Questions or Comments:

Marcia Richard asked a question about the Cherry Blossom Festival on behalf of Jane McClanahan, who was not present. Jane would like to know why the festival is not being used as a fundraiser for cherry trees. Martin could not answer; however he will get in touch with Jim Harvey to follow up with Jane.

Karen Nelson commented that she is satisfied with the Public Safety budget, and feels safe. She did express her concern over the recent car break-ins. She suggested that the CPD could communicate more, such as posting statistics online. She asked if there could be more public communication, for example, a follow up announcement on the car break-ins. She is also concerned about vehicles parking on public roads facing the wrong way. The Chief responded that he has followed up with Scott on this issue. He will patrol specific areas and issue warnings. Most people do not realize there is a law prohibiting such parking, and most people have been compliant once they are warned. Regarding communication, there is a breakdown between County Police and the CPD, because it is the County who handles the follow-up investigations. For example, it was actually Prince George's County Police who investigated the car break-ins. The Chief stated that while they cannot comment on investigations that are on-going, the Police Department does issue announcements on the Listserv and encouraged residents who are not already on the list to sign up for this service.

Susan James remarked that it was not the CPD who responded to the recent rash of car break-ins, it was the County, so why are residents paying for a police force? What are they doing that costs \$800,000 per year? She does not see the return on this investment. The Chief responded that there are four officers that work staggered schedules covering 13,000 residents. Since the Department is currently down one officer, there is no officer from the Department to cover the shift after 1:30 AM. Ms. James responded that the police should "work when the criminals work." The Chief pointed out that crimes can happen at any time of day, and that statistically most crimes occur in the afternoon and early evening. She asked if there are records of when the County responds to 911 calls, versus the Crofton Police Department. Ms. James asked how many hours the officers work. The Chief responded that he works four 10-hour shifts. One works five 8-hour shifts, and the remaining two officers work 12-hour shifts.

Ms. James asked for verification of the CPD responding to a 911 calls, stating that it is never Crofton Police who responds. The Chief asked when she last called 911. She responded that it was 13 years ago, and she is not aware who responded.

Martin announced that the meeting must end as we have approached the two hour mark. He suggested that Ms. James follow up with the Chief with any additional questions she may have.

The meeting was adjourned for an Executive Session to discuss personnel matters.

Meeting minutes completed by Tara Gottschalck, Receptionist (January 28, 2022)

LS/EF(tg)

Attachment (1)