



**BOARD OF COUNTY COMMISSIONERS
OF WASHINGTON COUNTY, MARYLAND**

County Administration Building
100 West Washington Street, Room 226
Hagerstown, Maryland 21740-4834
Telephone (Voice/TTY) 240-313-2200
FAX: 240-313-2201

John F. Barr, *President*
Terry L. Baker, *Vice-President*
Kristin B. Aleshire
James F. Kercheval
William J. Wivell

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

CONTACT: NORMAN BASSETT
240-313-2077

**NEWS
RELEASE**

Review of Actions Taken in the Washington County
Board of County Commissioners Meeting
Tuesday, February 12, 2008

THE BOARD ATTENDED DEDICATION CEREMONIES FOR THE
TECHNICAL INNOVATION CENTER AT HAGERSTOWN COMMUNITY
COLLEGE DURING THE MORNING

COMMISSIONERS' REPORTS AND COMMENTS

Commissioner Terry Baker discussed federal funding for a rail to trail project near Hancock. Williamsport Transition Night gives rising middle-school students a look at High School Programs and Baker represented Technical High School at that event, last week. The Commissioner attended a School Board candidate forum hosted by Citizens to protect Washington County.

Commissioner Jim Kercheval thanked Julie Pippel, Greg Murray and County Health Officer Earl Stoner for their work in attracting a portion of the \$6.5 million available in Maryland for assistance to homeowners using septic systems that want to upgrade to the new more efficient systems. The City 2+2 meeting last week discussed the Hotel-Motel tax proposal, the excise tax, and animal control issues. Kercheval said he asked for feedback from the City on revenue sharing. A tour of the Frederick County Senior Center last week was enlightening, the Commissioner said. The Maryland Association of Counties (MACo) legislative committee meeting last week heard the state Secretary of Budget and Taxation talk about O'Malley Administration initiatives and budget issues. MACo and the Maryland Municipal League are discussing revenue stream issues involving transfer taxes, Kercheval said. The meeting with the Local Delegation last week in Annapolis discussed excise taxes, the Gaming Law, and permits for special events. Kercheval addressed a University of Maryland Class at the Hagerstown Center on the interaction between the County Commissioners and Board of Education.

Commissioner Kristin Aleshire reported on attending a meeting of the Teen Pregnancy Coalition last week. A meeting with Health Officer Earl Stoner discussed clinical services that the Health Department had provided for pregnancy prevention. The Delegation decision not to put the local Gaming Bill recommendation forward was surprising, Aleshire said. The Hancock Volunteer Fire and Rescue awards event was

well-attended, Aleshire said. The Historic District Commission meeting last week discussed a property at the Airport that the FAA has requested be demolished. Efforts are underway to preserve that structure by the HDC, Aleshire said. The Smithsburg Mayor and Council expressed appreciation for efforts by the County on traffic control in the local school zone at last week's meeting. Aleshire gained a better understanding of the redistricting issue by attending a meeting on February 5th at Boonsboro Middle School, he said.

Commissioners' President John Barr reported on attending the Hancock Fire/Rescue company awards event, and commented on the number of younger members of those companies. The University System of Maryland Advisory Committee heard that admissions are up and the facility is being used for day and night classes at last week's meeting, Barr said. 40 students from a number of trades participated in the Association of Builders and Contractors local chapter's Construction Skills Olympics last week, Barr said.

OTHER BUSINESS

Appointments to Boards and Commissions: County Clerk Joni Bittner told the Board that the joint rezoning hearing with the Planning Commission scheduled for March has been cancelled and that the next joint meeting would take place in May.

Staff Comments: Planning Director Mike Thompson requested approval of the process for Rezoning Public Hearings. Thompson requested a change from Quarterly to Semi-Annual meetings, which would allow additional time for advertising the meetings and receiving input from the public. The hearings would be scheduled in January and July of each year. The Commissioners reached consensus to move ahead with that plan.

Special Projects Director Gary Rohrer requested the Board accept a credit of \$45,741.80 relating to 6 items in the Courthouse Renovation Project that came in below budget amounts. The measure was approved by unanimous vote.

UPDATE OF COMPREHENSIVE PLAN AMENDMENTS FOR PRIORITY PRESERVATION AREAS

Jill Baker, Senior Planner; and Eric Seifarth Land Preservation Administrator brought this Update of Comprehensive Plan Amendments to include Priority Preservation Areas before the Board for informational purposes. Washington County must amend its Comprehensive Plan to designate Priority Preservation Areas (PPA's) by July 1, 2008. It is required in order to comply with the Agricultural Stewardship Act of 2006 and to retain the additional 42% agricultural transfer tax funding from MALPP that the County now receives for having a "certified" preservation program. The intent of PPA's is to further target the spending of preservation funds. During the 2006 session of the Maryland General Assembly, several new bills were passed regarding land use planning in the State of Maryland. One of those bills, known as the Agricultural Stewardship Act of 2006 (aka House Bill 2), required County's that have certified land preservation programs to evaluate and designate Priority Preservation Areas where preservation funding could be efficiently directed. Washington County currently uses a priority ranking system to evaluate and prioritize lands where preservation funds should be spent. The criteria currently used in the priority ranking system already implement the majority of the criteria that are to be evaluated for the Priority Preservation Areas. Criteria being evaluated by Staff to delineate preliminary PPA boundaries include: soil classifications, proximity to existing easements, parcel size and assessment, and development activity. As a result of the current ranking system, the County has already begun to build large areas of agricultural and forested

lands that are permanently protected. Three main areas have arisen from previous preservation efforts including an area to the northeast of Clear Spring, an area north of Smithsburg, and a larger area to the southeast of Hagerstown around Downssville that expands into the Rural Legacy Area around Antietam Battlefield. The focus of the Priority Preservation Areas will be to build upon these already existing areas. Failure to meet the requirements of the Agricultural Stewardship Act of 2006 via amendments to the Comprehensive Plan will result in the disqualification of Washington County to continue to compete for certification funds from the Maryland Agricultural Land Preservation Foundation. The base level (33%) MALPP funds, Rural Legacy, Project Open Space, and other preservation program funds will continue regardless of establishment of PPA's however the additional 42% certification funds provided through MALPP would not be available to the County should PPA's not be established. In addition, if new sources of revenue are found for MALPF or if the governor budgets extra money for preservation programs, the funds will only be available to County's that comply with the Agricultural Stewardship Act of 2006. In an average year, the additional 42% certification funds would equal about \$400,000 of funding. In an exceptional year such as 2006, the 42% certification funds could total over \$1,000,000 of funding funneled through the 60/40 match mechanism with MALPP. The measure was presented for informational purposes.

INITIAL CAPITAL IMPROVEMENT BUDGET PRIMER

Budget and Finance Director Debra Murray brought this initial look at the Capital Improvement Project (CIP) budget process before the Board. Submission of CIP projects must include all annual operating costs so that the full budgetary impact to the organization can be accurately evaluated. On the capital side, an enhanced priority ranking system, which allows for detailed prioritization of all projects submitted based on overall necessity and public impact, and allows for proper allocation of resources to critical projects, has been instituted. General priority categories include: Essential-- Projects needed to comply with a court order or legislative mandate, and/or projects that are critical to the health, safety, and general welfare; Desirable-- Projects important to the general welfare of the community, operating or maintenance of a physical facility, and are not critical relative to CIP objectives; Acceptable-- Projects that provide a public operational improvement and or projects not critical or important in relation to the County financial capabilities, needs, or other program requirements; Deferrable-- Projects that conflict with the master plan and or for which there are serious need, cost, justification, or timing questions related to the project itself; and Hold-- Projects that will not be started until the completion of a study, submission of additional data, or on hold indefinitely. Murray told the Board that requests from all agencies including the Board of Education over the 6-year 2009-2014 period totals some \$800 million. CIP budget reviews by department will begin in next week's meeting.

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