

April 8, 2021

The regular meeting of the County Commissioners of Allegany County was held in the Commissioners' Meeting Room, Allegany Room 100, 701 Kelly Road, Cumberland, at 5:00 p.m. on the above date. The following were present: Commissioner Jacob C. Shade; Commissioner Creade V. Brodie, Jr.; Commissioner David J. Caporale; County Administrator Jason M. Bennett; and County Attorney T. Lee Beeman, Jr. The following business was transacted:

The Pledge of Allegiance was recited by those present.

MOTION

There were no additions or deletions to the Agenda.

MOTION

Upon Motion by Commissioner Brodie, seconded by Commissioner Caporale, and Motion carried, the Commissioners approved the Minutes of the March 25, 2021, public business meeting.

PRESENTATION

Item 1 – Child Abuse Awareness Month – Chrissy Ujcic, Education & Outreach Coordinator, Janes Place, Inc., Allegany County Child Advocacy Center. Ms. Tracie Wilson, Child Protective Services Supervisor from the Allegany County Department of Social Services, attended the meeting in place of Chrissy Ujcic, who had been scheduled to speak. Commissioner Shade called forward Ms. Wilson, who discussed the importance of child abuse awareness, in particular during this past year with the Covid-19 situation. She thanked the Commissioners for their support. Following Ms. Wilson's remarks, Commissioner Shade read and presented Ms. Wilson with an official Proclamation that April 2021 is Child Abuse Awareness Month in Allegany County. A round of applause followed.

Item 2 – Fair Housing Month 53rd Anniversary Proclamation – David K. Nedved, Economic & Community Development Representative, thanked the Commissioners for again celebrating Fair Housing month, an annual event, and acknowledged the County Commissioners' show of support for fair housing in Allegany County by their adoption of a Fair Housing and Opportunity Plan, which was renewed in September 2019. Mr. Nedved pointed out that the Plan will be renewed again in September 2022 and briefly discussed some details of the Plan.

At the conclusion of Mr. Nedved's remarks, Commissioner Shade read and presented him with an official Proclamation of April 2021 as Fair Housing Month in Allegany County.

PUBLIC HEARING

Item 3 – Road Closing Petition – Allegany County LaVale Library – The road closing petition is for a portion of an unnamed, unimproved alley in the Woodland Addition to the City of Cumberland, Election District, 29, Allegany County, Maryland. The alley was opened on February 11, 2021 – Daniel S. DeWitt, PE, County Engineer, reminded the Commissioners that they approved the opening (with intent to close) of this road at public meeting in February. He explained that this road closing petition is related to the ongoing construction project at the LaVale Library involving renovations and additions to the library building on National Highway. Mr. DeWitt reported that to date, he has received no public comments regarding this proposed road closing, which is an unimproved alley not subject to vehicular traffic and not otherwise improved.

Mr. DeWitt asked County Attorney Lee Beeman if anything further needed to be done to move forward with the official road closing. Attorney Beeman told him no, that this evening was the opportunity for public comment; and that, if no public comment was received, the Commissioners could take action on the Road Closing Petition because this was a Legislative Day.

Commissioner Shade officially opened the Public Hearing and asked if there were any public comment on the Road Closing Petition. No comments were received and the hearing was closed.

Upon Motion made by Commissioner Caporale, and seconded by Commissioner Brodie, the Board of County Commissioners approved the Petition to Close a portion of an unnamed, unimproved alley in the Woodland Addition to the City of Cumberland, Election District 29, Allegany County.

ACTION AGENDA

Item 4 – Personnel Action – Allegany County Administrator Appointment – Board of County Commissioners to approve the appointment of Jason M. Bennett, CPA, as County Administrator of Allegany County, Maryland – Jacob C. Shade, President, remarked that Jason Bennett has served admirably as Interim County Administrator since May 2020, and pointed out that he began serving in this capacity at the peak of the Covid situation. Commissioner Shade said that Mr. Bennett has almost 20 years of experience in Allegany County Government, most recently as Allegany

County's Director of Finance, and that he holds a CPA. Commissioner Shade added that Mr. Bennett has been a key figure at Allegany County Government for many years and that he knows Mr. Bennett has Allegany County's best interests at heart. He commented that he could not think of any person more deserving and more professional to serve as Allegany County Administrator on a permanent basis.

Commissioner Shade explained that for the time being, Mr. Bennett will continue to do double-duty as County Administrator and County Director of Finance, and pointed out that this has saved the County money over the past year.

Before the Commissioners took action on Mr. Bennett's appointment, Commissioner Shade asked Mr. Bennett if he would like to say anything. Mr. Bennett thanked the Commissioners for the opportunity and remarked that it has been a pleasure to work here over the years. He acknowledged that this last year has been challenging, but that it has been an honor to work with the Commissioners, County Attorney Beeman, and the County's department heads and staff.

Commissioner Brodie told Mr. Bennett that he is not only a very good worker and dedicated County employee, but also a very good person. Commissioner Caporale said that Mr. Bennett has had the Commissioners' full faith and confidence going forward and that he is glad that Mr. Bennett is here.

Commissioner Brodie moved that the Board of County Commissioners approve the appointment of Jason M. Bennett, CPA, as County Administrator of Allegany County, Maryland. Commissioner Caporale seconded the Motion. Motion carried to appoint Jason M. Bennett, CPA, as County Administrator of Allegany County, Maryland. Commissioner Shade offered congratulations, and Mr. Bennett again thanked the Commissioners. There was a round of applause.

Item 5 – Maryland Department of Commerce Covid RELIEF Grant Authorizations – Board of County Commissioners to authorize the President of the County Commissioners to sign the grant agreements with the Maryland Department of Commerce Relief Act of 2021 to allow Allegany County to distribute grant funds to the following: restaurants and caterers in the amount of \$251,597.99, online sales and telework assistance in the amount of \$5,718.14, and lodging and accommodations in the amount of \$114,362.72 – Jacob C. Shade, President, briefly commented on the funds that have been going out to assist local businesses, in a total amount of \$2.5 million and then explained that this grant is for additional monies. Commissioner Shade read the following amounts into the record: restaurants and caterers, \$251,597; online sales and telework assistance, \$5,700; and industries in the lodging or accommodations area, \$114,362. He said that the State continues to step up and give the County money to turn around and put back in the pockets of businesses as fast as they can.

Upon Motion by Commissioner Caporale, seconded by Commissioner Brodie, and duly carried, the Board of County Commissioners authorized the President of the County Commissioners to sign the grant agreements with the Maryland Department of Commerce Relief Act of 2021 to allow Allegany County to distribute grant funds to the following: restaurants and caterers in the amount of \$251,597.99, online sales and telework assistance in the amount of \$5,718.14, and lodging and accommodations in the amount of \$114,362.72.

CONSENT AGENDA

As recommended by the County Administrator

Upon Motion by Commissioner Brodie, seconded by Commissioner Caporale, and Motion carried, the Board of County Commissioners adopted the Consent Agenda as recommended by the County Administrator, with Commissioner Shade abstaining from voting on Item 6 – Business Attraction Services Contract Renewal.

Item 6 – Business Attraction Services Contract Renewal – Board of County Commissioners approved the renewal of the contract with Greenwill Consulting Group, Annapolis, Maryland, for Business Attraction Services in the amount of \$125,000 per year and authorized the County Administrator to execute the contract for a three-year term.

Item 7 – Fiscal Year 2020 Part II CARES Operating Assistance Grant Agreements – Board of County Commissioners authorized the County Administrator to sign the Fiscal Year 2020 Part II CARES Operating Assistance Grant Agreements to provide up to \$1,638,778 in Federal funds and become part of Allegany County Transit's budget.

Item 8 – Declaration of Surplus Vehicles – Board of County Commissioners declared the following vehicles as surplus and sold by public auction: 2001Jeep Cherokee VIN: 1J4FF48S21L514786, 2006 Hyundai Santa Fe VIN: KM8SC73D36U037564, 2007 Dodge Caliber VIN: 1B3HE78K07D315002, 2003 Honda Accord VIN: 1HGCM826X3A003991, 2005 Acura TSX VIN: JH4CL96985C011122, 2005 Ford Explorer VIN: 1FMZU73E75UA98984, 2001 Chevy Malibu

VIN: 1G1NE52J416272116, 1998 Jeep Grand Cherokee VIN: 1J4GZ58S3WC145347, 2004 Pontiac Vibe VIN: 5Y2SM64844Z460313, 2007 Dodge Van VIN: 2D4GP44L17R343960, 2007 Mercury Mountaineer VIN: 4M2EU48867UJ03206, Green 4-wheeler VIN: NA, 2013 7x18 ft. Black Trailer VIN: 4YMCH1824DV046230, 2003 Lincoln Town Car VIN: 1LNHM82W83Y700471, 2006 BMW VIN: WBANF73516CU20214, 2004 Chevrolet Sedan VIN: 1G1JC52F947254581, 2005 Honda Accord VIN: 1HGCM826X5A007512, and a 2010 Lincoln MKS VIN:1LNHI9ER6AG614755.

Item 9 – Declaration of Surplus Property – Board of County Commissioners authorized the Department of Public Works to declare a Mahindra Agricultural Tractor as surplus and dispose of in accordance with county policy.

Constituents – In order of sign-up sheet

Commissioner Shade acknowledged that there were five people signed up to speak this evening. He asked if there was anyone else who arrived late and did not sign up who wished to speak. Commissioner Shade then asked that anyone speaking at this meeting state their name and address and try to limit their comments to five minutes.

Ms. Tifani Fisher spoke first and introduced herself as President of the local NAACP. Ms. Fisher voiced her concerns regarding a recent eviction in Allegany County involving the Sheriff's Office. She talked about the process of filing a complaint against the Sheriff's Office and her concerns with that process. She thanked the Commissioners for their time.

County Attorney Lee Beeman reported on the status of the complaints filed. He said that after speaking with Sheriff Robertson, it was his understanding that the Sheriff's Office received the Use of Force Complaints earlier in the day and are following internal procedures to conduct a review of the incident and to make any recommendations beyond that.

Ms. Tiffany Brown, 630 Lincoln Street, Cumberland, introduced herself as the Community Engagement and Outreach Chair for the NAACP, Allegany County branch. Ms. Brown also talked about her concerns with the recent eviction, the Sheriff's Office, and the complaint procedure. She made some suggestions on how she thought the process could be improved. She thanked the Commissioners and said it was a pleasure to meet them.

Ms. Heidi Gardner, 510 Rose Hill Avenue, Cumberland, read a prepared statement about her concerns regarding power and abuse of power. She thanked the Commissioners for their time.

Ms. Tawni Arthur introduced herself as the Youth Engagement Committee Chair for the local NAACP, talked about the young people, aged 16, 14, and 2 years, who were present at the recent eviction that has been a topic of discussion this evening. She read from a prepared statement, voicing her concerns for these children and any other children who witnessed the event via video recording.

Mr. Evan West thanked the Commissioners for the opportunity to speak at this meeting. He provided his views and concerns regarding marginalization, power dynamic, and power mechanism. Mr. West also discussed the importance of transparency and accountability.

After concluding his remarks, Mr. West told the Commissioners that he really appreciated that their process for hearing (the public) has obviously improved over the years.

A round of applause followed each of the speakers.

Commissioner Jake Shade explained that after the incident occurred, the Sheriff began a review, as usually happens in such situations. He added that there will be an investigation due to the complaint lodged. He asked County Attorney Beeman if he had anything to add.

County Attorney Lee Beeman confirmed what Commissioner Shade just said, and added that the Sheriff's procedures call for various review processes, depending on the level of force that was used; whether a firearm was used; whether a deadly weapon was used; whether what they consider to be an intermediate weapon, like pepper spray or mace, was deployed; and what type of injury was sustained. Those details dictate the type of review that is utilized by the Sheriff's Department, and that's set forth in their Standard Operating Procedures. Attorney Beeman explained that he did not have it in front of him, but pointed out that at this point, with the complaint having been lodged, that would trigger transition from a review to an investigation.

Mr. West asked if information about the investigation would be publicly available. It was discussed that Attorney Beeman would talk about that with Tifani Fisher after the meeting and get a public information request form to her.

Commissioner Shade thanked everyone who spoke at this evening's meeting.

County Administrator Jason Bennett had no further comments to make at this evening's meeting.

County Attorney Lee Beeman congratulated Mr. Bennett on his official appointment as Allegany County Administrator, telling him that he looked forward to continuing to work with him.

Attorney Beeman also acknowledged the good work done for the community by Jane's Place and the Child Abuse Advocacy Center.

Commissioners' statements, comments, recognition –

Commissioner David Caporale thanked everyone present for attending this evening's meeting.

Commissioner Creade Brodie also congratulated Mr. Bennett on his appointment as County Administrator and also said that he was glad to see everyone who attended this meeting.

Commissioner Jacob Shade announced that the second round of budget hearings were held today. He expressed his appreciation for the Board of Education during the budget process.

Commissioner Shade also provided an update on the Covid-19 vaccine in Allegany County, reporting that as of today, 20,000 vaccines have been administered in the County.

Reminders/Upcoming Meetings –

Next Public Work Session – Thursday, April 15, 2021, 3:30 p.m.

Next Public Business Meeting – Thursday, April 22, 2021, 5:00 p.m.

ADJOURNMENT:

There being no further business to come to the attention of the Board, the meeting was adjourned at 5:55 p.m.

Jacob C. Shade, President

True Copy
Attest:

Cynthia A. Young
Recording Secretary