



## TALBOT COUNTY PROPERTY TAX REFERENDUM COMMITTEE

215 Bay St. Easton, MD 21601 **MINUTES**

January 23, 2020

Present – Bill Boos, Pamela Clay, Susan Delean-Botkin, Ron Engle, Joe Gamble, Kelly Griffith, Ronald Johnson, Brad Miller, Corey Pack, Laura Price, Clay Stamp, Philip Starkey, Angela Lane, and Anthony Kupersmith

- I. Welcome and Introductions – Committee members introduced themselves and welcomed Philip Starkey to the Committee as the representative of the Talbot County Fire and Rescue Association.
- II. Approval of Minutes: A motion was made by Joe Gamble and seconded by Susan Delean-Botkin to approve the minutes of December 11, 2019. All committee members voted to approve the minutes, except for Laura Price, who was not present on December 11 and therefore abstained.
- III. Comments from County Staff: Angela Lane advised the group of suggestions concerning the Tax cap from County Department Heads at recent meeting.

Among the suggestions:

- Have an open Message/Letter to Talbot County citizens supporting the ballot question signed by all 5 County Council members.
  - Have community meetings/Educational sessions to explain the question and the need for a modification to the existing tax cap.
  - Have volunteers at polling places to explain the ballot questions.
  - Develop a “Brand”.
  - Have a simple catch phrase – “Vote Yes for XXXXX” or “Yes means XXXX”.
- IV. Committee Discussion of Specific Items to be implemented with Tax Cap modification – there was a lengthy discussion on various Public Safety expenses that could be funded with additional revenues generated by a modification of the Tax Cap.

The discussion included:

- If specific expenses are identified as a reason to modify the tax cap then public officials would have to be accountable for spending the funds in those specific areas.
- Consensus of group was that the additional funds raised by modifying the tax cap would be used for Public Safety – but not for any absolute specific expense. Identify how the increased funding for Public Safety will help all County citizens, i.e. reduced response time for a Paramedic/EMT team to arrive for a medical emergency or a Sheriff’s Deputy to arrive for a safety issue. Ultimately, increased funding for Public Safety will save the County money by reducing turnover among younger, newly trained staff, i.e. it costs the County \$97,482 for the first year of a deputy (this includes the cost of the academy) – this is lost – plus the value of the experience that they have

gained- when a deputy leaves Talbot County. Talbot County loses several deputies every year.

- The specific Public Safety needs identified by County staff would necessitate a 5.2 cent (8.2%) increase to the County Real Property Tax Rate. Some needs/services could be phased in over time so a more reasonable tax modification could be proposed.
- Once the Committee knows what proposed modification the County Council is placing on the ballot, the education campaign needs to determine the dollar impact to a property owner. The impact needs to be expressed in a monthly amount and tied to an everyday purchase, i.e. a \$5.00 increase equates to 1 Starbucks or Rise Up coffee.
- The education campaign should identify the potential impact to property owners in the County and in the municipalities. Educational message needs to identify positive impact to Town residents as well as County residents.
- Everyone advocating for the ballot question should deliver the same message when discussing or promoting the ballot question.

V. Committee Discussion Tax Cap modification – there was a lengthy discussion on various ways to modify the Tax Cap.

The discussion included:

- A possible carve out for an Emergency Services Tax, but the County would need authorization from the State for any new tax.
- Another option discussed was to leave the current property tax cap language alone and propose a ballot question that would create a Public Safety tax for a specific amount that would be the same each year but would not part of the County's Real Property Tax Rate. After some discussion, it was decided that this might also need authorization from the State to implement – even if the voters approved.
- The Committee discussed proposing that the County Council have 2 ballot questions. One question would deal with the modification to the tax cap. The second question would deal with changing the language in the County Charter concerning how the tax rate is calculated. The committee felt that separating the 2 items would be less confusing to voters.

The final consensus was that the Committee would recommend that the Tax Cap be modified and that the County Council place 2 questions on the Ballot – one to modify the cap and one to address the calculation of the tax rate.

VI. Ballot Question Language- Copies of prior Ballot questions were handed out to the Committee members. Committee members are to send suggestions for potential ballot questions/language to Angela Lane to be discussed at the next meeting.

Upon motion by Susan Delean-Botkin, seconded by Brad Miller, the Committee voted to end the meeting at 5:30 p.m.