



TALBOT COUNTY PROPERTY TAX REFERENDUM COMMITTEE

215 Bay St. Easton, MD 21601

MINUTES

October 21, 2019 4:00 p.m.

Present – Angela Lane, Corey Pack, Laura Price, Joe Gamble, Clay Stamp, Kelly Griffith, Susan Delean-Botkin, Earl Chance, Brad Miller, Ronald Johnson, Henry Leonard, Bill Boos, Ron Engle, Pamela Clay

I. Welcome and Introductions – County Council President, Corey Pack, welcomed the committee and gave a review of the previous property tax referendum. County funding in his opinion is heading in the wrong direction. The County needs to generate more revenue to fund future capital projects and increasing operating expenses. Education and public safety are the main priorities of the County. The purpose of this committee is to help the Council draft a question for the November 3, 2020 election that, if passed, will allow them to increase tax revenues.

II. Open Meetings Act Briefing:

County Attorney, Anthony Kupersmith, began the meeting with a discussion on the Open Meetings Act. Mr. Kupersmith noted that this committee is providing an advisory function to the County Council. There must be advanced notice of the meetings and the public is welcome to attend. Correspondence as well as documents produced by this committee are subject to the Public Information Act. Upon motion by Sheriff Gamble, seconded by Mr. Leonard, the committee unanimously approved Kelly Griffith, Susan Delean-Botkin, Bill Boos and Laura Price as designated Open Meetings Act trained members.

III. Background:

Ms. Lane briefed the committee on a history of the tax cap in Talbot County. She stated the current cap limits the increase of property tax revenue to the lesser of the Consumer Price Index or 2%. The current cap has been in place since July 1, 1997. Ms. Lane then reviewed handouts on the following topics:

- Prior attempts to revise Property Tax Cap
- Tax rate and CPI-U history
- 2018 Ballot Question
- PowerPoint on Tax Caps
- County Financial Data
- Future Debt Service of County

IV. County Council Goals for Committee:

Mr. Pack stated that there are two goals for this committee. The first is creating the language for the 2020 ballot question. The second is to educate the taxpayers on the benefits that come with an increase to the tax cap.

V. Key Dates:

Ms. Lane reviewed a handout with key dates provided to committee members. Early March would be when the workgroup makes proposed recommendations to the County. Late April would be the latest for final recommendations. She stressed that May 26, 2020, would be the day that Council would need to vote on a Numbered Resolution with the proposed ballot question. That would give them enough time to vote

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on the proposed ballot question, submit the question to the Election Board and inform the public. Election Day is November 3, 2020.

VI. Other Discussion Items:

The subject of the Kirwan Commission was brought up to the committee. It was decided that the focus of this committee should not be on impacts of the Kirwan Commission. The purpose of this committee is to focus on other needs of the County, not the potential increases in education expenses related to the recommendation of the Kirwan Commission.

Committee members began discussing why the last question failed. The two main arguments of why the question failed were that taxpayers did not understand where funds from the increase were going and that the question was too complicated for voters to understand. The question was raised if the modification could be a Public Safety Tax. This will have to be reviewed by the Office of Law. Another possible suggestion was to use some funds raised by the modification to set up an “Equipment Fund” to purchase firefighting equipment in the County. There was a discussion about the need to make any modification to the tax cap “personal” for the citizens – how will this benefit me. Ms. Lane requested that the group discuss these issues with their neighbors, family, and co-workers to discuss at the next meeting.

Angela Lane asked how the committee would like to address public comments for the meetings. Clay Stamp motioned to allow public comments at the end of each meeting and to limit each participant to two minutes. Kelly Griffith seconded the motion and the motion was unanimously approved. Mr. Pack opened the room to public comments.

VII. Public Comments

John Ford from the Town of Easton opened public comments stating that he felt there was a compelling case to raise taxes the last time, but we may need to put less on the ballot to try to get anything we can passed. Susie Hayward from Mid Shore Board of Realtors felt that it was important that the public know where the tax dollars are going. We should have community information meetings. She also offered to pull voting records so that we can focus on communities that voted against the question on the last ballot.

VIII. Next Steps:

The next meeting is scheduled for Tuesday, November 19, 2019, at 4 p.m. at 215 Bay Street, Easton, MD 21601 in Conference Room 1. The main objective of the next meeting will be to brainstorm as many feasible ideas as possible.

Upon motion by Sheriff Gamble, seconded by Ms. Delean-Botkin, the Committee voted to end the meeting at 5:40 p.m.