

From the Desk of the President

May 2019

Spring certainly has sprung, bees are buzzing, birds are nesting, and the Talbot County Council is busy working through deliberations on the FY2020 County budget. The Council introduced Bill 1410, which is the 2019-2020 Annual Budget and Appropriation Ordinance, on April 16<sup>th</sup>. As introduced, the budget comes in at \$91,913,000, which is \$125,750 less than the FY2019 budget.

Among the highlights of the 2019-2020 budget are: a 1 step and 1% cost of living adjustment (COLA) increase for all full-time employees and salary scale adjustments for Sheriff Deputies and Correctional Officers to address recruitment and retention issues. This budget, as did previous budgets, allocates 50% of the County's revenues to education; including debt service and non-recurring expenses, the total education budget amounts to \$45,814,964. In order to meet the Board of Education's funding requests, the Council will increase the Educational Supplement by \$1,345,500, which correlates into an increase of 1.8 cents in the real property tax rate. Even with this increase in the property tax rate to .6322 cents, Talbot County remains the lowest property tax county in the State. The Council is also planning to bring back a part-time Housing Coordinator position, which was cut several years ago due to severe revenue shortfalls. This position will be helpful in assisting County residents with securing funding for home repairs and improvement, as well as working with the Council's Housing Commission, to address affordable housing issues in the County.

With the arrival of good weather and the golfing seasons, Hog Neck Golf Course has announced the opening of Eagle's Cafe @ Hog Neck Golf Course – Talbot County's newest restaurant hotspot for breakfast and lunch. The cafe is open to the public when the sun is shining following the schedule of the golf course. Eagle's Cafe is operated by Hambleton House LLC, Alice and Jordan Lloyd's community culinary company most notably recognized for The Bartlett Pear Inn.

Doug Devenyns, Director of the Talbot County Department of Corrections, will be retiring in June 2019 after over 29 years in the correctional services field. Doug has been with Talbot County for 10 years (he served with St. Mary's County for 7 years and Wicomico County for 12 years). Doug was selected for the job due to his innovative approach to corrections. Some of the highlights of his tenure have included: *establishing the Inmate Re-entry Program*, providing inmates being released from incarceration with the resources and support needed to get a solid foothold in the community without the need to resort to criminal activity to survive; *a Memorandum of Understanding with the Maryland Department of Public Safety and Correctional Services* to return certain inmates being released from prison to the Talbot County Detention Center for the last several months of their sentence in an effort to successfully transition them from incarceration back to the community; *conducting urinalysis on all persons committed and processed into the Department of Corrections* to determine the presence of illicit drugs; and *the first Central Booking facility in Talbot County*, minimizing law enforcement officers' downtime when they make arrests. We all send our sincere gratitude to Director Devenyns and we all wish him well in his retirement.

We all have heard about the opioid epidemic that has crippled many communities and broken families across the state. Working with the Talbot County Health Department, the Department of Corrections has received two grants that provide the core of our substance use disorder treatment programs. The Substance Abuse Treatment Outcomes Partnership (STOP) grant provides funding for a full-time, 40

hour per week, substance use disorder treatment counselor on site who is able to conduct both individual and group counseling sessions. The Screening, Brief Intervention and Referral to Treatment (SBIRT) grant provides training and funding for an initial assessment of all persons brought to the Detention Center for substance use disorders and for those with positive results, a referral to treatment either in the detention center or in the community.

The Council recently approved Easton Airport Manager, Micah Risher's request to apply for the grant application to seek reimbursement from the FAA and MAA for the land acquisition services and purchase, as well as the environmental analyses from the Maryland Department of the Environment, in association with the Talbot County Business Center (formerly the Black and Decker Building) property. The total amount of the project is \$6,171,900. The application will be forwarded to both the FAA and MAA as well as a letter to the Maryland State Clearinghouse for Intergovernmental Review. Once the FAA or MAA funding is received by the Airport Manager, the Easton Airport will take over ownership of the Business Center and all rent by the tenants will be paid to the Easton Airport instead of to the Talbot County General Fund.

The extension of Broadband in the County is a major part of the Council's comprehensive plan. For many people purchasing a home in the County the accessibility of a quality broadband network is crucial part of their decision to settle on the home. The Talbot County Council realizes the importance of Broadband and the role it plays in the housing and commercial markets. Recently, the Council partnered with Easton Utilities Commission (EUC) to extend internet service to approximately 40 homes in the community of Lloyd's Crest. This endeavor between the County and EUC was a pilot program. The County's contribution helped to get customers' average bill reduced sufficiently and allowed EUC to make the connection of these homes feasible in their business plan. Next quarter, we will hear more about the results of a Rural e-Connectivity Pilot (ReConnect) Program grant application to USDA applied for by the County, EUC, and the State of Maryland's Office of Rural Broadband to remedy insufficient access to broadband in the County.

Another pleasing business opportunity is happening in the village of Cordova, where the American Salmon Company has purchased the former Allen Harim poultry plant. The company is planning to convert the plant into a salmon growing and processing company. Once the business is fully operational, the plan calls for the hiring of up to 150 employees over time. As this type of processing facility is currently not permissible in the village of Cordova, the Council will have to work with the Planning Officer and the Planning Commission to create language for this business opportunity. To that end, the County has issued a Request for Proposal for consulting services to develop a village master plan for the unincorporated village of Cordova. The selected consultant will work with stakeholder groups and agencies, through a consensus-based process, to build solutions to identified village challenges to include infrastructure needs and suitable redevelopment options, while maintaining and enhancing the existing village character. The Council expects to award this bid in early June.

The Council said good-bye to a true servant of the people, Michael Sullivan, who served the County for many years as a member of the Talbot County Planning Commission. During his tenure on the Planning Commission, he put in countless hours reviewing land use regulations and development projects. He was instrumental in the Comprehensive Plan update in 2016 and the Zoning Ordinance update (Next Step 190) adopted in 2018. Mike was always committed to preserving Talbot's rich rural character and

promoting our high quality of life. Mike passed away in Oxford on February 28<sup>th</sup>, surrounded by his wife, family, and friends. A successful mortgage banker, Mike sold his business in 2003 and moved to the Eastern Shore. Mike was eager to assist wherever and whenever he could. He was a strong supporter of the Avalon Foundation, giving of his time and talents in their capital remodeling campaign. The Council and citizens will truly miss Mike's commitment and his spirit of giving.

The Council continues to be grateful for community volunteerism and the role it plays in shaping our County's quality of life.

Corey Pack, Talbot County Council President