

WASHINGTON COUNTY PRE-LEGISLATIVE FORUM

Members of the Mayor and City Council met with members of the Washington County Delegation at 11:00 a.m. on Wednesday, November 6, 2019, at Hagerstown Community College, Career Programs Building, 11400 Robinwood Drive, Hagerstown, Maryland.

The following people were in attendance: Mayor R. E. Bruchey, II, Councilmembers K. Aleshire, A. Heffernan, E. Keller, S. McIntire, City Administrator Scott Nicewarner, City Clerk D. K. Spickler, Nancy Hausrath, Director of Utilities, Jill Thompson, Director of Community and Economic Development, Fire Chief Steve Lohr, and Don Francis, Director of Human Resources, Senator Andrew Serafini, Senator George Edwards, Delegate William Wivell, Delegate Neil Parrott, Delegate Paul Corderman, and Delegate Mike McKay.

The following topics were discussed with the Delegation:

1. Mayor Bruchey would like to reinstate the prisoner release program that had been successful several years ago. He has discussed this with Delegate Corderman. The intention of the program is to release prisoners at the end of their sentence to their home communities.
2. Councilmember Heffernan asked if there are additional sources of State revenue to assist the City of Hagerstown in increasing salaries of police officers in order to remain competitive. Delegate Corderman has discussed ideas for retention funding with Police Chief Kifer.
3. Councilmember Keller is alarmed that fire services are not a priority for the State, as a recent grant request was not awarded. She stated a fire tax is needed to help fund fire services.
4. Councilmember Aleshire stated it would be helpful, at the State level, if action requiring lending institutions to take ownership/responsibility of foreclosed properties is enacted. The City and County have to work together to remove liens from properties to get them back to private ownership.

Delegate Wivell asked what fees and fines are added to the tax bill. Councilmember Aleshire noted examples of back taxes and abatements. People do not want to purchase these properties at a tax sale because of the additional fees.

Councilmember Aleshire stated assistance is needed for fire services. He estimates it would cost \$ 175 million for the County to take over the volunteer system and deal with aging equipment and fewer volunteers. Many stations

aren't staffed 24/7. A 2 cent tax rate increase County wide would provide enough funding to cover this cost.

Councilmember Aleshire noted the City's Medium Range Growth Area verses the County's Urban Growth Area is a conundrum. The MDE states municipalities are responsible for water and sewer service. The MDP states the County controls growth. Most of the growth occurs in the municipal service area.

Councilmember Aleshire is concerned about the proliferation of non-profit organizations in Hagerstown with a social services related demand. Many of these non-profits provide services for substance abuse. If this is viewed as a medically related issue, then government entities should be able to direct and demand it be treated as such and not allow just any non-profit to open a treatment house. There is no State oversight on this matter.

5. Scott Nicewarner, City Administrator, thanked the Delegation for their efforts of full restoration of the Highway User Revenue.

He asked for assistance legislation allowing municipalities to have more flexibility on how 5g cell antennas are regulated.

In order to improve neighborhoods within municipalities, flexibility to eradicate vacant and/or blighted properties is needed. State funding would also be helpful.

Mr. Nicewarner thanked the Delegation for their support for broadband expansion in western Maryland. City staff is willing to testify on any legislation to help make broadband affordable for citizens.

6. Mayor Bruchey noted the City intended to use State Aid funds as the local match for the Safe Routes To Schools project on Haven Road. The State previously indicated these funds could be used in that manner. Now, that decision has been reversed. He wondered if an inquiry from the legislators would be helpful to allow the City to use the State Aid funds. The General Fund revenue could then be used for economic development projects.

Mayor Bruchey believes more clarification is needed for the Good Samaritan law. He does not believe the law was intended to cover the person using illegal drugs. He applauds the efforts of Washington Goes Purple. It is disconcerting to hear from Community Rescue Service of repeatedly assisting the same patients. He does not believe the opioid addiction crisis is getting better.

7. Councilmember Keller has an opposite opinion of the Good Samaritan Law and how it assists in the fight against addiction. Before any changes are

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HAGERSTOWN, MARYLAND

considered, she urged Delegation members talk to Earl Stone, Department of Social Services, and Vicki Sterling, Washington County Health Department, to discuss how the law does help.

Delegate Corderman stated the increase in non-profit organizations in Hagerstown does not help with redevelopment of the core. He suggested looking at zoning law to regulate location of these services.

Mayor Bruchey indicated the City attempted to do this several years ago and were threatened with a law suit because it would be considered spot zoning.

Senator Edwards thanked Mr. Nicewarner for his comments about broadband service. The Federal government has provided assistance to Allegheny County.

Mr. Nicewarner stated a group is being formed in Washington County to discuss options with Antietam Cable. He understands the service providers have to apply for the federal assistance.

This Work Session was adjourned at 11:24 a.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Original signed by D. K. Spickler

Donna K. Spickler
City Clerk

Approved: December 17, 2019