

WORK SESSION – August 1, 2023

Mayor T. Martinez called this Work Session of the Mayor and City Council to order at 4:01 p.m., on Tuesday, August 1, 2023 in the Council Chamber at City Hall.

Participating with the Mayor were Councilmembers K. B. Aleshire, R. E. Bruchey, II, T. Burnett, S. McIntire, and M. J. Schindler, City Administrator Scott A. Nicewarner, and City Clerk D. K. Spickler.

Porch Fest Open Container Exemption Request

Ashley Roush, Community Liaison, Brittany Arizmendi, Community Engagement Officer, and Deb Kepler, Historic Heights Neighborhoods 1<sup>st</sup> Group, were present to discuss the Historic Heights N1st Annual Porchfest.

Porchfest will be held on Saturday, September 23, 2023 on S. Prospect Street in Hagerstown, Maryland. As part of the event, the organizers are requesting an Open Container Law Exemption for the serving of alcoholic beverages.

Ms. Kepler stated this year's event will include more than 30 musicians/bands who will provide free music. Food trucks will be available and a beer garden is planned. Prospect Street will be closed during the event from W. Washington Street to City Park Circle.

Porchfest is being sponsored by Music Instrument Collection, a new program that collects and refurbishes used instruments for Washington County schools students. Attendees are encouraged to bring their old violins, guitars, or brass instruments to the event to donate to the program.

Ms. Kepler thanked the City of Hagerstown for providing a sponsorship grant to help with the event. She asked if parking could be provided on the north bound side of Walnut Street. Councilmember Bruchey pointed out parking is permitted on that side already. Ms. Kepler indicated they are also looking for golf carts to shuttle people from parking areas to the event. Mr. Nicewarner will have Eric Deike, Director of Public Works, reach out to Ms. Kepler regarding the carts.

Councilmember McIntire thinks this is a great event.

Mayor Martinez stated Georgia Boy wants to volunteer for kids activities and include a writing event.

It was the general consensus to include approval of the open container exemption/application permit on the August 22, 2023 Regular Session agenda.

Urban Tree Grant Program: Acceptance of Grant

Jim Bender, City Engineer, was present to discuss acceptance of the Urban Tree Grant Program.

During the 2021 Legislative Session, the Maryland General Assembly passed the Tree Solutions Now Act of 2021. That Act allocated funds to attempt to meet the goal of planting 5 million trees in Maryland by 2031. A portion of those funds (\$ 9 million in the current fiscal year) were allocated to the Chesapeake Bay Trust (the Trust), who would serve as the administrator of grants to accomplish tree planting in urban areas. The Trust published a Request for Proposals for interested parties to apply for these tree planting funds; the City submitted a grant application and was selected as one of the award recipients. The purpose of this discussion is to explain the proposed use of these grant funds and to ask for the Council's formal acceptance of the grant. The Trust's grant award was for \$ 60,000, which the City proposed to match with \$ 18,170 from the Stormwater Fund.

For more than two decades, the City has had an ongoing program to plant trees along streets and other locations in the public parks, and to increase the overall canopy coverage. Unfortunately, as some of the larger residential, commercial, and industrial developments have been completed, the City has lost a significant number of trees (e.g. Currwood Development along Howell Road). The City has used funds collected through the Forest Conservation program to do some planting to make up for these losses, but it is becoming more and more difficult to find suitable planting areas. Staff sees this Urban Tree grant as a tool to help increase canopy coverage.

With the City's NPDES MS4 stormwater permit, planting trees can qualify as a means to meet the restoration requirement. Each tree planted reduces the number of acres of impervious area that the City must treat. In the budget for the Stormwater Fund, a minimum of \$ 25,000 has been set aside annually to plant trees to help meet the permit requirements. Staff intends to use a portion of that money to serve as the local match to the Trust's grant.

Staff recommends that the Council accept the grant. With the Council's approval, staff also plan to apply for a similar grant in 2024.

It was the general consensus of the Mayor and City Council to accept the grant and to apply for a similar grant in 2024.

Advanced Metering Infrastructure

Nathan Fridinger, Deputy Director of Electric Operations, Jason Bachtell, Electrical Engineering Manager, Cole Stevenson, Eaton, and Steve Ends, WESCO, were present to discuss funding for Advanced Metering Infrastructure.

The Public Service Commission (PSC) requires all electric utilities in the State of Maryland to perform statistical testing of the electric meter inventory on an annual basis. This requirement monitors the accuracy and failure rate of meters by type. As the failure rate of each meter type increases, the test sample population increases until utilities are required to replace all, replace a defined series, or test all of that specific type. On the HLD system, there are 1,765 meters selected for replacement with 1,072 meters in a tightened group and anticipated to be included for replacement in a few years. With 17,715 active meters on the system, this equates to 16% of the total meter population. This statistic along with other metrics led staff to explore Advanced Metering Infrastructure options for total meter replacement, as mentioned in the Operational Action Plan during the October 12, 2022 Regular Session.

There are 13,619 electromechanical meters installed, 76.9% of the total population, requiring manually performed processes. Advanced Metering Infrastructure, or AMI, will benefit the operations of the Electric, Customer Service, and Billing operations in the following ways:

1. With real-time meter reads, any abnormal usage identified during a bill run process can be verified, final readings to close an account can be captured without a site visit, and customer inquiries regarding misread meters and high usage can be addressed with a single phone call.
2. Automatic disconnection and reconnection of certain meter types can assist restoration efforts while customers make payments and set up new accounts.
3. Real-time voltage detection will provide information to after-hours responders and improve emergency restoration efforts during a large outage event with linked data to HLD's Geographic Information System (GIS).
4. Power quality monitoring will assist with monitoring and identifying conductors and equipment that may be reaching rated capacity, providing data to HLD Engineering for system improvements, prevention of outages, and improvement in the quality of electric service.
5. Limiting the frequency and exposure of staff to unsafe meter locations for reading and maintenance activities.

After reviewing the information submitted by various vendors in RFI packets detailing the variety of AMI technology options available, the results of much research, consideration, and referral calls led HLD staff to develop an RFP for a meter independent, mesh network system on the 900 MHz spectrum, backhauled with data collectors that will interconnect to the HLD's existing fiber optic communications infrastructure.

Of the three respondents able to meet these specifications, staff selected to collaborate with Eaton and Wesco based on available software functionality and support, data

retention and design redundancy, available contracted installation service, and long-term cost. Eaton would be the equipment provider and Wesco the installer.

The total evaluated cost for this collaboration is as follows:

1. Total Cost as proposed	\$ 4,278,163
2. Estimated costs for 60-month project	\$ 4,686,973
3. Estimated 20-year cost of ownership	\$ 4,946,973

If approved, the project would begin in September, 2023 and be completed by November, 2028, dependent on fund availability.

In some instances, through the total replacement process, it is anticipated that faulty and degraded customer owned facilities will be discovered that require repair or replacement (meter socket, service entrance cables, etc.). Community Development staff has been made aware and is planning to allocate funding in the FY25 Action Plan to assist qualified homeowners in need of repairs.

Staff recommends approval of funding in an amount not to exceed \$ 4,750,000.00, to include any contingencies, for an Advanced Metering Infrastructure total electric meter replacement project with Eaton and Wesco selected as the approved providers. Funding for this project may be allocated through fiscal year 2029. The average annual expense of \$ 950,000 may fluctuate based on the volume of meters replaced, but will not exceed \$ 1,500,000.

Mr. Stevenson stated the City of Hagerstown uses many Eaton products currently. They also do work for EVs (electric vehicles). The new meter will be in place for at least 20 years. These remote read meters are able to communicate with each other and other gateways. This is done so there are multiple points of data transmission. Electronic meters eliminate estimated readings, provide real time notification of outages, provide a history of usage and voltage for every meter, and allow for cut offs without someone physically going to the meter.

Councilmember Aleshire asked how often staff go to the meter location currently. Mr. Fridinger stated meters are physically read every month. Estimated readings are only utilized under extreme circumstances.

Councilmember Aleshire asked how often meter readers encounter degradation of the coating of the line at the house. Mr. Bachtell stated this is typically the customer's responsibility and readers don't usually look for this situation.

The City is responsible for the line to the point of connection to the house service. The meter, meter box, line from the connection, etc. is the customer's responsibility.

Mr. Stevenson stated a failing connection will create heat and over time these meters will register this. Councilmember Aleshire clarified the customer could be notified of a

problem. Mr. Bachtell stated the customer would be notified when City staff is aware of the problem. Councilmember Aleshire confirmed the customer would then need to contact an electrician for the repair. Mr. Bachtell stated that is correct and Light staff have discussed funding assistance for some customers with Community Development staff.

Councilmember Aleshire asked if multiple customers in a neighborhood have issues to be repaired will they each be required to secure an electrician or will the City suggest a contractor to make all the repairs. He recommended using one or two electricians. Mr. Bachtell stated they have discussed this and are considering providing a list of licensed electricians in Hagerstown. Staff would then work with the selected contractor.

Councilmember Bruchey noted the City may have to develop a grant program for customers who aren't able to afford the needed repairs.

Councilmember Aleshire does not want to have a scenario where the meters are replaced and then a customer says everything was fine until the meter was replaced.

Councilmember McIntire stated she wants the Council to be proactive and informed with this initiative.

Councilmember Bruchey asked if fewer meter readers will be needed when this is implemented. Mr. Fridinger stated there are currently four meter readers. Their positions and duties may change but meter staff will still be needed.

Councilmember Bruchey suggested reviewing this program next week with information about the concerns and a draft program.

Authorization of a Letter Related to the Financial Incentive Agreement for The Holly Project: 72 W. Washington Street

Chris Siemerling, Economic Development Specialist, was present to provide an update of the Holly Project at 72 W. Washington Street, Hagerstown, Maryland and to review the requirements of the Financial Incentive Agreement with Gideon Properties LLC for "the Holly" project.

To date, Gideon has missed several important deadlines of its obligations under the requirements set forth under Paragraph 2.C.1-6 and Paragraph 2.D.3 of their Custom Incentive Agreement. Staff is requesting authorization to send a letter providing an opportunity for Gideon to cure its non-compliance with a set deadline of September 1, 2023.

Councilmember McIntire asked if the developer thinks a deadline of September 1, 2023 is enough time to comply. She does not want the developer to be set up for failure. Mr. Siemerling indicated staff met with Gideon Properties last week. The developer does not think this is enough time, but he is working on providing the contracts. This is not a

simple non-compliance issue and staff wants to set up a timeline to help the developer reach the finish line for the project.

It was the general consensus to authorize staff to send a letter to Gideon Properties as discussed, with the deadline of September 1, 2023.

### **CITY ADMINISTRATOR'S COMMENTS**

*Scott A. Nicewarner, City Administrator* reminded everyone the MDWK Music and Market continues this Wednesday. Day Star will be performing at City Park on Saturday and the Hagerstown Municipal Band will hold a concert at City Park on Sunday. The Ruth Ann Monroe Basketball League continues at Wheaton Park every Sunday until September 3. There is always something fun to do in Hagerstown.

### **MAYOR AND COUNCIL COMMENTS**

*Councilmember S. McIntire* had no additional comments.

*Councilmember R. E. Bruchey, II*, discussed an idea with Captain Langston where police officers would patrol neighborhoods in the early morning hours looking for out of state tags on vehicles. The Maryland Annotated Code requires vehicles to be registered in Maryland within 60 days. Captain Langston indicated manpower for this could be a challenge.

*Councilmember T. Burnett* is glad so many people attended the opening day of the Ruth Ann Monroe Basketball League Tournament at Wheaton Park on Sunday. The park was packed with people. Members of the Monroe and Davis families were there to receive a proclamation from Mayor Martinez. Terry Lynn, artist for the mural, was there talking to people and gathering signatures to include in the mural. She encouraged people to share their stories and experiences of Wheaton Park with Ms. Lynn. She thanked City staff for their assistance with the tournament.

*Councilmember K. B. Aleshire* had no additional comments.

*Councilmember M. J. Schindler* thanked the State Public Defenders Office representatives for coming to Hagerstown last week. They provided a lot of good information about expungement of laws and the new laws for the recreational use of marijuana.

*Mayor T. Martinez* was happy to see so many people at Wheaton Park for opening day of the 60<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the Ruth Ann Monroe Tournament. The kids were enjoying the splash pad. VIP courtside seats are available for \$ 10.00 each. This is a fundraiser for uniforms. The only thing missing from the amazing day was the sound of horseshoes. She attended the Neighborhoods 1<sup>st</sup> Terrace Block Party. It was a good event with a lot of information for the community.

She thanked Brooke Leirman, Maryland State Comptroller, for visiting Hagerstown yesterday. Mayor Martinez, Scott Nicewarner, and Jill Thompson, Director of Community and Economic Development, provided Comptroller Leirman with a lot of information about the Hagerstown Field House.

Mayor Martinez encouraged everyone to attend the National Night Out event at Fairgrounds Park that begins at 6:00 p.m. Councilmember Schindler will be in the dunk tank.

There being no further business to come before the Mayor and City Council, on a motion duly made, seconded and passed, the meeting was adjourned at 4:54 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

*Original signed by D. K. Spickler*

Donna K. Spickler  
City Clerk

Approved: September 26, 2023