

2013 REPORT OF MUNICIPAL AFFAIRS

The Charter of the Town of Chestertown states “the Mayor, during the first quarter of each calendar year, shall report to the Council the condition of municipal affairs and make such recommendations as he (she) deems proper for the public good and welfare of the town.” Herein is said report.

FINANCIAL. The audit for the Town of Chestertown for FY 2013 was presented and accepted in November 2013. For the 19th year in a row, the Town received an unqualified audit indicating financial excellence. This year’s audit was completed by Lindsey & Associates, LLC of Towson, Maryland. They are new, having won the audit services in an April bid opening.

The annual audit showed the Town to be in extremely strong financial condition with total net assets over liabilities in all departments of \$18,017,621. This represents a increase of \$1,615,459 over last year’s net assets due mainly to the inclusion of the Coventry Farms infrastructure into the fixed assets.

The Town maintains a general fund surplus of over \$ 1,212,000 which provides the needed financial security for the Town when funds historically provided by State and County governments have been dramatically reduced or have disappeared. During this year the Town held the tax rate to \$.37 for yet another year. The Town retained the reduction in the Homestead Property Tax Credit percentage of 5%. This credit actually limits the increase in a homeowner’s property tax bill to 5% in any given year, no matter how much their assessment has increased.

STAFFING. The Town has 40 permanent positions for full-time employees in four different departments. These are Office (06), Street (11), Utilities (8) and Police (15). There are also 4 part-time employees, with one in the Police Department, and 3 staffers at the Visitor’s Center. All departments are fully staffed and operating well.

PERSONNEL AND HUMAN RESOURCES. A Classification and Compensation Study was adopted on January 22, 2013. The study was completed by Hendricks & Associates, a firm with experience and familiarity with Maryland towns and cities. The study was put into use in the FY 2014 budget process and can be used for hiring purposes and advancements. It is designed to be updated or amended periodically under contract.

ACTIVITIES AND ACHIEVEMENTS IN 2013:

- ❖ The recession of the past few years continued to moderate in 2013. State funds that reached record lows in the past made comebacks in the past two years. Highway User funds were increased and local income taxes continued to recover. Real estate assessments have stabilized or increased slightly. Meanwhile the Town has maintained an excellent and stable financial position while aggressively pursuing capital grants whenever possible for parks, infrastructure enhancements, new properties, and other major capital projects.
- ❖ One such grant opportunity that presented itself in 2013 was Maryland Bikeways funding for Phase III of the Chestertown Trail project. This Phase has been designed and with plans ready to go, as soon as the Bikeways programs releases the funds. This release is expected in early 2014 and work should be able to start soon after. The Town making sure that all the permits required from the State

and Army Corps of Engineers to start have been acquired. In March, the Council renamed the rail trail as the Gilchrest Community Trail.

- ❖ A second example is the Rolling Road Park, which has been greatly enhanced using a \$144,000 grant from the Maryland Department of Natural Resources Community Parks and Playgrounds Program. The grant funded the grading and seeding of the park, a parking lot, a one kilometer walking trail, and a spacious dog park. An opportunity for tree planting availed itself in the fall with a Middle Chester Trust Fund grant of \$32,140, which paid for the planting of 180 trees around the perimeter of the walking trail and dog park. On October 21, 2013 the Town formally named the park the Margo Bailey Community Park honoring the Mayor of the past 20 years.
- ❖ The Town sought and received another Community Parks and Playgrounds Program grant of \$155,000 for the Gateway Park Project at the intersection of Flatland Road and High Street Extended. This former truck storage area is a diamond in the rough and once it was cleaned up its natural beauty began to show through. There is a stream running on one side and mature trees and wetlands surrounding the site. Activities in the grant included grading, pathways, landscaping, parking, a basketball court, a stream appreciation observation platform and park benches. The park will connect with Phase III of the Gilchrest Community Trail and if funds and permits allow, a footbridge will cross the stream from east to west. In December the Council honored 32 year Council member Mabel Mumford by naming this park the Mabel Mumford Gateway Park.
- ❖ A third Community Parks and Playgrounds Program grant of \$174,380 was sought by the Town in August with an application request for the Washington Park Recreation Area. The plan for the Park was initiated by the revived Recreation Commission and the project will include grading, excavation, landscaping, pathways and parking, a play area, pavilion, park furniture, a community basketball court, lighting and engineering.
- ❖ As part of its effort to address the Chesapeake Bay TMDL, a Bay-wide effort to decrease stormwater runoff and improve water quality, the Town is using Middle Chester Trust Fund grants to construct a Stormwater Step Pool Conveyance in the valley between LaMotte and Washington College properties, near the intersection of Morgnec Road and Washington Avenue. The half million dollar project, which consists of three stone ponds and landscaping, will treat runoff from the northeast side of Washington Avenue which converges at the site and drains into Radcliffe Creek. The project has been designed and permitted and will be completed by the summer of 2014.
- ❖ The Town received one of only two NEA Our Town grants in the State, consisting of \$25,000 matched by \$25,000 from the Town for a Public Arts Master Plan for the Chester River Waterfront, from the foot of High Street to Radcliffe Creek. A consultant will be hired to facilitate three public charettes with the goals of improving connectivity and integrating public art along the waterfront. The project will culminate with a public art installation by a nationally known artist.
- ❖ Both Washington College and Heron Point approached the Town this year with requests that the Town be the conduit for large refinancing and capital improvement bond issues. The Council agreed to both requests since the overall health of these two important institutions is crucial to our community and because the issuance of these bonds has no impact on the financial status of the Town. Both bond issues were successfully accomplished this summer.
- ❖ Washington College also partnered with the Town on the creation of the Chestertown Waterfront Task Force. This public-private task force was set up with four individuals selected by the College

and four selected by the Town Council. Their mission was to study Chestertown from the Foot of High Street to Radcliffe Creek and along the Rails-to-Trails network. They were to solicit input from the community and "to gauge the feasibility of securing State and Federal grants and philanthropic gifts to realize any options they might propose." The period of time for the study was to have been approximately six months, however, the Task Force soon realized that their mission would require much more time. Their final presentation awaits the completion of drawings of the concepts by Ayers, Saint, Gross. However, the Town commends the individuals involved for their tireless efforts and comprehensive approach.

- ❖ The new Recreation Commission wasted no time in providing fun things for people of all ages to do in Town. Especially successful were a Bocce League at the Wilmer Park and a series of outdoor movies shown around the community. Congratulations to the Recreation Commission for a great start.
- ❖ This year the Town office began the digitization of old Town records. Within a few months, decades of minutes of the Town Council, the Planning Commission, Historic Commission, ordinances, election records, zoning applications had been preserved and are now accessible on the cloud.
- ❖ The State Highway Administration began all the utilities construction work related to the 20/291 roundabout. With this completed, the next step will begin in 2014 with the construction of the roadway. Also in 2013, the State Highway Administration responded to the Town's concerns about pedestrian and cyclist safety on Flatland Road (MD514) by commissioning a pedestrian study of the costs and methods for adding bike and pedestrian ways.
- ❖ Solar power was explored by the Town in 2013 with the advertising of an RFP for a 1.2 mw photovoltaic array at the Chestertown Wastewater Treatment Plant. Eleven bids were received and the process called for a selection of finalists to move toward a contract through negotiation. The lowest bid was for \$2,409,540 while the highest was \$3,464,102 and most bidders have asked to remain in consideration for selection. This is a fast changing industry and final selection will have to take into consideration the cost of borrowing, the cost of solar photo voltaic panels, the availability of SREC credits, the cooperation of the utility and the latest decisions of the Maryland Public Service Commission. The complexity of the rules on meter aggregation and metering itself often confuses the consumer on the issue of energy costs. In all cases, understanding the process is crucial to success.
- ❖ A Police Station Study Committee was appointed by the Council to study the possibilities surrounding the creation of a new Police Station in Chestertown. They held their first meeting in December and plan six meetings in the next three months.
- ❖ Elections were held this year for the First and Third Ward seats and for the office of Mayor. Margo G. Bailey, Chestertown's Mayor for the past twenty years, decided not to run again and a record seven individuals filed for the office. In the November election, candidate Chris Cerino won the office of Mayor in a clear majority. In the Third Ward, Mabel Mumford was defeated after thirty-two years in office by Sam Shoge. Finally, in the First Ward Liz Gross defeated Jim Gatto who had completed one term and spent many years on the Town's Planning Commission as a member and as Chairman.
- ❖ Because Town elections are not held in Presidential and Gubernatorial years which could place Town candidates on the ballots prepared for Federal, State and County elections, the Town must hold its own elections. For that task, the Town has a Chestertown Board of Election Supervisors

and also enlists the assistance of the Kent County Board of Supervisors of Elections and the State Elections Office. It is a complex operation, involving advertising, candidacy filing deadlines, voting machines, and election workers. Jen Mulligan coordinated the election with experience and efficiency and our thanks go out to the Town and County Boards of Supervisors for their invaluable work.

- ❖ During this election season we provided extended public coverage through our local access channel by having our videographer, Mr. James Egan, film the local debates. James put them on cable TV and also found a new way for the Town to display them on You Tube for internet viewing. James continues doing a great job of getting our meetings on air. We also utilize a Constant Contact program, Face book and Website at Chestertown.com to complete our electronic mission to inform the public.
- ❖ The Town's curbside recycling program continues to expand the number of households participating. Recycling of organic and non-organic bulk materials also continues at a high level with the Town pursuing every avenue practically available for reuse or salvage.
- ❖ The Council took a mayor step this year with its two affordable housing projects: Satterfield Court and the High Steps. Both projects are on Cannon Street and both are between 20 and 30 years old. They need to be rehabilitated and to continue their function as affordable family and senior housing. The Town has committed to a partnership with the Delaware Valley Development Company (DVDC, who redeveloped Calvert Heights within the last five years) and the Maryland Department of Housing and Community Development (DHCD) which will achieve the goals above, provide a closing payment to the Town of \$75,000 at closing and an annual payment in lieu of taxes of \$10,000 to the Town. In return, DVDC will restore the projects under the Maryland Rental Partnership Program with DHCD and manage the projects as affordable housing.
- ❖ In February of 2013 the Town purchased the Armory property from the State of Maryland Military Department for \$247,632. This was the remaining Federal debt that the Maryland National Guard had on the site. Two months later, Washington College purchased the property from the Town, as planned, with reimbursing the Town's all of the costs of settlement and earlier costs of environmental Phase 2 studies. The College also donated \$200,000 to the Town under the terms of a previous Memorandum of Understanding concerning the future use of the Armory.
- ❖ The Visitors Center was open 360 days last year and had over 15,000 visitors. May was the most active month with 1903 visitors, followed by 1977 visitors in June and August a close third with 1607 visitors. The numbers in May always reflect the Tea Party and Memorial Day events. Other big events in Chestertown included Down Rigging Weekend, the Fourth of July fireworks on the Chester River, the National Music Festival at Washington College, Music in the Park, the Jazz Festival, Taste of the Town, Colonial Chestertown Day, Santa's arrival and the very popular "First Fridays" program of the Downtown Chestertown Association.
- ❖ The Downtown Chestertown Association's Curb Appeal program continued to beautify the Town and put new energy on the street with their ideas and projects. This year they had students from all the local elementary schools brighten up the wooden benches in the Fountain Park with their painted themes. Planters put life into sidewalks, posts of meters and street lights were painted black and decorative bicycle lock circles were found for the meter posts. At the end of the year, they came up with an exciting trompe l'oeil art project for a High Street to Cannon Street alley which is currently underway. Our thanks go out to all the curb appeal volunteers, and especially to Nancy Butler and to the head of the DCA, Nancy McGuire.

- ❖ The Planning Commission spent many months working on the updated Comprehensive Plan. They have completed their draft document, which will begin the public review process in early 2014. The Commission should be applauded for finishing this document so soon after completing the new Zoning Ordinance, which was passed just last year.
- ❖ The WiFi program for the Downtown public parks was expanded in broadband width to allow for more than just the passive use of park sitters on warm days. When it was discovered that it was being used for credit card transactions at the Farmer's Market and Artisan's Market, it became necessary to upgrade it, which was done as quickly as possible by Carey Callahan.
- ❖ The Farmer's Market and Artisan's Market in the Fountain Park continue to fill the Park with a special vitality on Saturday mornings. Our thanks to both market managers for their successful efforts.
- ❖ I would like to take this final opportunity to express my heartfelt thanks to all the present and past volunteers who have made it possible for me to succeed as a Mayor and for the Town to operate and advance in the way that it has. Volunteers not only give their time and expertise to the Town, they also often face hard decisions that may not be popular with their friends and neighbors. Therefore, a bit of courage and integrity is involved and I thank the volunteers for these attributes as well. You have done a terrific job for our community.

GOALS FOR 2014

- ❖ Keep taxes at the same rate and keep maintain our chartered service responsibilities.
- ❖ Improve our recreation programs, expand activities for all ages in Chestertown, and involve the input of our youth in our decision-making processes.
- ❖ Aggressively pursue funding and completion of the Maryland DNR Waterway Improvement Fund dredging and facility improvement grants for the Chestertown Marina.
- ❖ Work with businesses, industries and institutions to determine and address their concerns and needs and to improve the local economy.
- ❖ Improve cycling and pedestrian connectivity in the community and work towards the completion of the Gilcrest Trail system and the waterfront walkway plan.
- ❖ Encourage and expand recycling and all other greening efforts, increase public awareness of the need and advantages of these efforts, continue to plant trees toward the Town's 40% canopy goal.
- ❖ Pursue grants for the preparation of a Climate Change Adaption Plan as recommended by the Maryland Department of Planning.
- ❖ Resolve the issue of the Quaker Neck sewer line agreement with the County.
- ❖ Begin the public review process of the revised and updated Comprehensive Plan.
- ❖ Hold fireworks on the Chester with some help from local donors and the use of the College property.
- ❖ Continue to pursue the concept of a 1.2 megawatt solar facility at the Chestertown Waste Water Treatment Plant.

- ❖ Continue to monitor the closure of the Hospital oil recovery program to protect the well fields of the Town of Chestertown.
- ❖ Continue participation in the region-wide effort to improve water quality in the Chester River through the Middle Chester Trust Fund and other grant opportunities.
- ❖ Work with Washington College to explore creative ways to bring more students downtown, to our commercial centers, and to generally increase student participation in Town activities
- ❖ Work collaboratively with the Waterfront Revitalization Task Force to effectively present their findings to the public
- ❖ Update the Town's web site so that it is more visually appealing. Increase efforts to market Chestertown as a tourist destination through the use of the web site and other on-line mediums
- ❖ Collaborate with other small towns such as Berlin, Frederick, and Ellicott City, MD on concepts for economic development
- ❖ Work with interested community members to conceive and implement additional winter events that will stimulate economic activity in Chestertown, and specifically in the Historic District