

**Open Work Session**  
**Poplar Hill Substance Use Treatment Program**  
**February 5, 2019**

Mr. Cannon said he thinks the public needs to know there is a serious problem with the dysfunctional set of circumstances whereby they have quite a few very significant issues which they have invited the Executive Branch to discuss with them tonight with some serious deadlines, as has been noted. He said the Capital Improvement Program and Budget is one of the largest Bills Council is involved with as far as citizen funding, and it is very important it be vetted properly with the Legislative and Executive Branch. He said they are now looking at the Poplar Hill Substance Use Treatment Program, and the Executive Branch is choosing to stonewall the County Council on this matter as well, which, again, he thinks is extremely serious to the public to see an open discussion, especially on this project. He said everyone is concerned about substance abuse and seeing resolution to it, but, in the same sense, they are very concerned about the location of this treatment facility and what exactly it involves. He said they have read in the paper that it is a million-dollar commitment from the State, but there is no one in Wicomico County, outside of maybe the Executive Branch, who truly understands what is happening at Poplar Hill, so he thinks it is a travesty for the Executive Branch not to show up. He said, to him, it is just as if they are stomping their feet, and thumping their chests that they are not going to show up for the Capital Improvement Program, the Poplar Hill Substance Use Treatment Program, or any other event Council wants to do today, and all of this is simply because of the fact that there was a request to put an item on the Agenda tonight for which Council did not have time to add to the Agenda, which is Council's prerogative, and they politely relayed that information to the Executive Branch. Mr. Holloway added, the request came in quite a bit late, to which Mr. Cannon responded, the request came in pretty much one business day before they were going to have their meeting. Mr. Dodd concurred with Mr. Cannon's sentiments. Mr. Cannon said he just thinks it is a travesty for the citizens of Wicomico County to be subjected to this dysfunctional relationship that currently exists with the County Executive, and he does not find this the fault of the County Council whatsoever, but he thinks it reflects badly on Wicomico County as a whole when they have to have these discussions due to these types of circumstances.

Mr. Holloway asked if they can talk about Poplar Hill as a Council, to which Mr. Cannon responded, sure. Mr. Holloway said Council requested the County Executive's Office be at a meeting last month to fill them in, and they said there was no information to give Council, but then they read about it in the newspaper, so there was information to be passed out at some point in time. He said it was not passed out to Council, and he has started getting questions from constituents about what is going there and how it is going to be handled, and he has quite a few questions. He said he has to correct Mr. Cannon who stated it was \$1 million dollars, but it was stated back in June or July that it is going to be almost \$10 million dollars. Mr. Dodd asked how much the renovation is going to be, to which Mr. Holloway responded, there were different numbers thrown around from \$8-10 million. He said one of his questions is in reference to the State wanting the County to sign a lease, and will the county be signing a lease before guaranteed funding is coming in? He said he knows they said, supposedly, this is not supposed to cost the taxpayers of Wicomico County any money, and that is what they have been told, but he does not know whether that is true or not. He said, apparently, it is not supposed to cost the County anything, but it was revealed it will be costing the County administrative time, and they all know that administrative time can be quite costly. He then asked Mr. Paul Wilber, County Attorney, to come to the table, and asked how much of a role Council will play in this, to which Mr. Wilber responded, certainly, for a lease of more than a year, Council has to pass it. Mr. Holloway asked how much of a role Council would have in accepting grants, and distribution of the funding, to which Mr. Wilber responded,

if it is a grant to Wicomico County, typically, that is accepted through the budget process. Mr. Holloway asked if they would have to approve it, to which Mr. Wilber responded, he would think so. Mr. Holloway asked Mr. Wilber if he thinks so, or if he is sure, to which Mr. Wilber responded, he can check to be sure. Mr. McCain said Council had to approve the Pirate's Wharf grants, to which Mrs. Hurley responded, the difference between that is that grant was not included in the annual budget. She clarified, if a grant is in the annual budget, then it is approved through the budget process, but, if it is not in the budget, then they approve it by Resolution separately. Mr. Kilmer said, to tie this into their last subject of the Capital Improvement Plan (CIP), this is a capital project at Poplar Hill that is not in the CIP, so, if the two join together, it would be nice to have some clarity on that. He clarified, the five-year CIP has nothing for Poplar Hill that he saw in his review, but maybe he missed it because it is a big document. He then asked how that meshes with these plans, and said it would have been nice to have that answer. He clarified, he does not expect Mr. Wilber to answer that because he knows the law, and not the capital budget.

Mr. Davis said it has been said the County will not be responsible for the funding, but, if they look back, it says they are looking for people to run it, and those people are going to be under contract. He said the contract is going to be through the County, so the County is going to be the funding source.

Mr. Dodd said he was asked if there was a want ad on the County website for the Poplar Hill Facility. He then asked if anyone is aware of that because he did not check. Mr. McCain asked if he means an RFP, to which Mr. Dodd responded, it sounded like they were saying there was a position requested, not an RFP, unless that was the contract. Mr. Taylor said there is an RFQ, which is a request for qualifications, for a firm to design, operate, and maintain the facility. Mr. Davis asked who is paying for that, to which Mr. Taylor responded, it is an RFQ by the County, so the idea is the County would pay for at least some of those services. He clarified, the source of funds could come from grants, which is a different matter, but the payer, he thinks, would be the County. Mr. Dodd said he thinks that is what the concern was, especially after they were told this would not cost the County taxpayers anything. Mr. Kilmer said maybe the thought, in theory, is it would be contracted out to a group that might be able to manage it, but, from what he understands, and he could be wrong because it cannot be clarified, there has not been any talk with some of the private organizations that run these facilities, so, again, Council does not know what is going on. He said Council gets asked questions, and he wants to have an open mind about this because it is in his part of the County in District 2. He clarified, he recognizes the need for treatment, and he thinks all of Council recognizes the need to deal with the opioid epidemic, but it would be nice to have a collaborative working arrangement where the private providers, the Executive Branch, the Council, and the community all work together, but instead, no one is being talked to, and they are reading in the newspaper about this. He said Council gets questions, and they have to say they do not know, but then they have a Work Session, and they do not get any answers, which is outrageous.

Mr. Holloway said, at the Legislative Breakfast, Council was told this project would only include people from Wicomico County and the Lower Shore, a regional operation, the State was going to pay for it, and the County was going to administrate it. He said, apparently, there was a meeting a couple of weeks ago in Annapolis with a gentleman in charge of the opioid epidemic process who was asked whether the County would be able to limit who went to it since the State was funding it, and he said he did not think that would be legal. He said, being it is going to be State funded, anybody from the State would be able to attend this rehab facility, and he thinks that is one of the biggest concerns. He said he has talked to some local law enforcement officers, and he has talked to some citizens, and there is some hesitation. He said he thinks everybody knows, as Mr. Kilmer said, that they have an opioid problem, and Mr. Culver stepped out and had some meetings with the community, which is a good thing, and they said there needs to be more treatment facilities available. He said what he is hearing from the citizens in

Wicomico County is that bringing people in from the other side of the State, or the other side of the Bay is going to be detrimental. He said, as far as meetings, they have never really had any Public Hearings with the people who live on the west side to see if there are concerns about locating the facility there.

Mr. Kilmer clarified, none of this is directed at Mr. Wilber. He then asked if Mr. Wilber looked into the legal issue regarding the State providing the money for it. He clarified, Council has been told this will be for Lower Shore folks, and the needs in the community here. He then asked if it can be limited under State Law, or, because it is a State facility, is it wide open, to which Mr. Wilber responded, he has not looked at that issue, but what he does know about this project is it is in the formative stages, and there is not a lot of concrete information to bring to Council. Mr. Holloway said there is a lot more information than Council is being told. He said he has been talking to some people who run treatment facilities, and the word is out about a lot of things that this is supposed to be, and some say it is laughable because it is not going to work where it is at as it is not set up right as far as the formula for how treatment is done in other areas, and this is more like a detention type center. He said he brought up a few months ago about using the Detention Center because there are 200 and some empty beds out there, but he was told then that it was not the right atmosphere because it is a detention center, but now they are going to another detention center, or something that is set up like a detention center. He said he also asked somebody who is in the rehab business about the co-ed situation, and that really brought some smiles to everybody's face. He explained, when they try to have a coed situation at a rehab facility, especially in the rural area that this is, that was an interesting part of the conversation. He said it seems as though the State really wants this, he has been told the Governor wants it, and he has talked to some of their Legislators, and they really want it. He said, if they look at this, the State wants it, and their Legislators want it, but the State owns the facility, so why not ask the State to just take it and run it. He asked why the County has to get involved in this, other than knowing it is needed, and supporting the idea of the project. He said maybe they should contact their Legislators to let them know the State should do this if they are going to do it at that location. Mr. Dodd said that is the same thing he was thinking. Mr. Cannon said that might be a situation of being careful what you wish for, to which Mr. Holloway responded, he is not happy that it is going there with the fact they are going to be bringing people from other areas to Wicomico County because that is not what they are looking for. He said there were suggestions made about other facilities in Wicomico County at the Legislative Breakfast, and, apparently, that did not work out. Mr. Dodd asked why it has to be Wicomico County. Mr. Holloway said the other matter of the fact is, if they are going to use that facility, the State owns it, and the Health Department is run by the State.

Mr. Kilmer said he does not think he has as strong of feelings as some of the other Councilmembers, but he is looking for answers, and he thinks a lot of people would like some answers on this. He said the public is hearing about this, and the public has questions. He said, for him, it is just a disappointment that they cannot get some of those answers in a public forum, and have a nice, civil discussion about this, and instead they have to sit here and express frustration over things that could have shed some light on this, and move forward in a productive way. He clarified, he is speaking purely for himself here, but it is exceptionally disappointing that they have to have this discussion from this side of the table.


Mr. McCain said, just to sum things up, he thinks the main point is everyone needs more information. He said Council cannot make decisions, but the public does not know the gist of this, and, at the same time, he does not think the County knows either because it is early on, as Mr. Wilber said. He said the main point to communicate to the Executive's Office is that everyone needs and is looking for information.


Mr. Dodd said something that has been bothering him is the cost. He said he read in an article that it is \$8 million, but it is going to end up costing millions. He asked, if the State is going to invest this money


and asking the County to sign a lease agreement, what happens if the State bails out next year and there are patients there, to which Mr. Davis responded, the County will foot the bill just the same as with the Shorebirds stadium where the State has not funded the money for that, and they have not even received the money for it. Mr. Holloway said the County cannot seem to even keep the Nursing Home afloat with the right kind of direction, and now they want to take on another facility like that.

Mr. Taylor asked if it would make any sense to advise the State of Council's general view on this, or perhaps have Mr. Shue come down and discuss it, to which Mr. McCain said he thinks it is too early. He suggested waiting until after the next meeting to see if they can get information. Mr. Cannon said Council really does not have enough information to even state an educated position on this because they are working in a vacuum, but he appreciates that suggestion. Mr. Holloway said the question is, as he asked Mr. Wilber, what role the Council will play. He then asked if it will be somehow locked in to where they have to do something with a lease being signed with an agreement that they have to do something. He asked Mr. Wilber if that could happen, to which Mr. Wilber responded, he thinks any lease would be for longer than a year, so it would have to come through Council. Mr. Holloway said he thinks there have been leases signed in the County for less than a year at some point in time just to get things done, and he thinks that has happened at the Airport a time or so, he believes. Mr. Wilber said he does not think the State would entertain Poplar Hill for a less than year basis, to which Mrs. Hurley responded, Mr. Strausburg mentioned at the Legislative Breakfast that it would be a 20-year lease. There was no further discussion.

  
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John T. Cannon, President

  
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Larry W. Dodd, Vice President, District 3


  
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Ernest F. Davis, District 1

  
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Marc Kilmer, District 2

  
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Josh Hastings, District 4

  
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Joe Holloway, District 5

  
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William R. McCain, At-Large

  
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Laura Hurley, Council Administrator