

**Open Work Session
New Public Safety Building
December 15, 2020**

Sheriff Mike Lewis, Mr. Pate Matthews, General Services Supervisor, and Captain Tod Richardson came before Council. Sheriff Lewis said the last time they were here trying to identify a funding source for the Public Safety Building they were actually asked if they could go back and try to eliminate a portion or portions of the building from the project, to include their large fleet and evidence bay area. He said they have had much discussion about that, and realized that the garage, which houses a mezzanine with the generators and the power structure for the entire complex, is pretty much the nucleus of the whole complex, and is very much a part of everything, not to mention that is where the armory will be housed. He said they do not want an armory in the Public Safety Building because of the explosives, so it is going to be housed separately back in the garage area, and that is also going to be the area where the crime scene processing will be done on all vehicles that are brought into the Wicomico County Sheriff's Office.

Sheriff Lewis said, on Friday in a meeting with State's Attorney Dykes in front of two Senators, she talked about the enormous amount of pending felony cases here in Wicomico County, even during this COVID-19 pandemic, and she attributed the bulk of that to the work being done by the men and women of the Wicomico County Sheriff's Office, specifically the Community Action Team, which was formed to combat the opioid crisis here in the County. He said they are busier now than they have ever been, and he thinks everybody knows they have outgrown their current building, which is 13,000 square feet. He said the proposed building is approximately 48,000 square feet, 58,000 square feet if they include the garage. He said they have done everything they possibly could to cut costs, and he thinks they have collectively come to the conclusion that they cannot build a Public Safety Complex in the 21st century without a garage. He said imagine building a brand-new Public Safety Complex without a garage or a building to house the power center for the building itself, not to mention the vehicles that are required to be under roof. He said a quarter master and fleet manager working at the Sheriff's Office have to have a shop.

Mr. Davis asked, when Sheriff Lewis said the power source of the building, what does he mean, to which Sheriff Lewis responded, the generators for the Public Safety Complex itself are going to be inside the mezzanine area of the shop. Mr. Davis asked if within the building itself they are going to put that in the garage, to which Sheriff Lewis responded, yes. Mr. Davis asked if it has been designed like that, to which Mr. Matthews responded, the generator itself will not be in the garage. He explained, the generator will be outside, but all of the switchgear for the generator will be on the mezzanine, along with the air handlers, the main power distribution center, and some plumbing. He clarified, the generator will be outside, but all the switchgear is planned to be in the mezzanine. He said it will be out of the way, but they can still get to it to service it. He said, without the mezzanine area they would have to come up with some appendage just to house the physical plan of the facility – the air handlers, the switchgear, and some of the plumbing installation. He said, by cutting the garage off, they would actually have to add on to the building to add space for the equipment that would have been in the garage.

Sheriff Lewis said a letter was sent and dated on November 15, 2020, and was forwarded to each member of Council that covers in great detail the depth they have gone to try to cut costs in this project. He said it has been a very concerted effort on behalf of everybody seated at the table, as well as Manns Woodward Studios, to create a building that will facilitate law enforcement operational effectiveness in this County. He said he has prepared a lengthy list of things they now have primary investigative

responsibility over here in this County that they did not have when he took over 14 years ago, and he does not want to go through the whole list, but he wants to highlight a few of those.

Sheriff Lewis said, when he was elected 14 years ago, the Wicomico County Sheriff's Office did not conduct any accident investigations in the County, they were handled by the Maryland State Police or Salisbury City Police. He said, shortly following his election, he sent a letter to the Maryland State Police Commander in Salisbury indicating that the Wicomico County Sheriff's Office would assume primary investigative responsibility of all secondary road accidents in the County, and they do that. Mr. McCain asked why they did that. He said this is not necessarily relevant to what they are discussing, to which Sheriff Lewis responded, that is a great question, and he is so glad Mr. McCain asked. He explained, under the previous Administration there was a lot of pressure by the Maryland State Police for the Sheriff's Office to assume that role, and for years his predecessor said that was not what they were going to do as it was the job of the Maryland State Police. He said, as soon as he was elected, he was asked by the Maryland State Police Commander if he would consider doing that, and he told them he would consider doing that if they would put another investigator in the Child Advocacy Center from the Maryland State Police here in Salisbury. He said he also thought it would be nice to have Deputies being viewed in a greater role of helping and assisting people at the scene of accidents, and he wanted them to be more well-rounded, not just criminal investigators, but good accident investigators as well because they did not traditionally take a role in any type of accident investigation. He said he thought it was only fair that, if they wanted to be viewed as a full-service law enforcement agency, they would also assume the role as accident investigators, reconstruction investigators, and traffic homicide investigators. He said they got their feet wet by assuming the role of traffic investigators and working wrecks, and they now have a full-service traffic homicide investigation unit complete with total stations, and they get called upon by people all over the region to assist in traffic homicide investigations. He said they previously had to rely on the State Police to bring a homicide investigator in from across the State just to investigate their most serious and fatal motor vehicle collisions, but they now do that themselves, and are called upon because of their level of expertise in doing that. He said they now have a number of advanced accident investigators and traffic homicide investigators here in Wicomico County.

Mr. McCain said he appreciates that answer, and they have a great team, but he does not want to get off their subject, which is the Public Safety Building. He said their Charter says that the role of the Sheriff's Office is to protect the Courts of Wicomico County, and then it has a period, so it just kind of ends there, but they certainly have morphed into criminal investigators, traffic investigators, etc. He clarified, he is sure the State Police is glad to relinquish those duties, to which Sheriff Lewis responded, honestly, he would like to say the Wicomico County Sheriff's Office has taken the lead across the State in doing all of this, but the truth of the matter is that Sheriff's Offices across the State have had to step up to the plate and take a much greater role in traditional law enforcement than they ever had. He said, when he came on the job as a Trooper in 1984, the Maryland State Police had 1,740 Troopers across the entire State, and today they have less than 1,300 Troopers protecting and controlling the entire State. He said the State Police cannot keep up, and the State Police will tell them that they cannot keep up. He said, in fact, for several years the State Police have been entertaining going strictly to highway patrol because they cannot keep up. He clarified, that is not saying they will because they have a fantastic role, and they have a great collaborative relationship with the Troopers here in this County, and he would miss that if they were to go strictly to highway patrol. He said they cannot keep up, so they have had to step up to the plate and take a much greater role in criminal and traffic enforcement here in this County.

Mr. Cannon said he remembers when Sheriff Lewis and Ernie Leatherbury came before the Council and announced the process that was going to take place within the next year, probably in 2009, to which Sheriff Lewis responded, it was at least 11 or 12 years ago. Mr. Cannon said, even at that point in time, Mr. Leatherbury specifically said they were doing this all across the State of Maryland, and Wicomico was just simply one of many. Sheriff Lewis said the State Police, particularly a lot of Troopers, do not want to be pushed out of their role and be highway patrol, but there are many who do. He said they have a very important role to fulfill in this County, and they are struggling to do it, but they gladly do it, and it is very important to recognize that they certainly have a much larger area of responsibility in this County than they ever have had in terms of criminal and traffic enforcement in Wicomico County.

Mr. Dodd said Mr. McCain brought up a good point about the Charter, so maybe they need to massage the Charter to make corrections as to what the Sheriff's Department's job description and duties are, to which Sheriff Lewis responded, it is no different than the DUI program. He explained, historically, if any police officer in this County arrested someone for DUI, they would have had to take the individual to the Maryland State Police Barrack to blow into the intoximeter, but now they have their own intoximeter program at the Wicomico County Sheriff's Office for the first time ever, so they process their own DUI suspects at the Wicomico County Sheriff's Office. He said they have to send these individuals to intoximeter school to learn how to operate these very sensitive instruments, but they have that.

Sheriff Lewis said, as Council knows, the MRAP they currently have at the Wicomico County Sheriff's Office is required by the 1033 program to be housed at a sealed location. He said it cannot be vulnerable to the public, they cannot walk by to view it, and it cannot be out for exhibition purposes, it has to be concealed. He said they kept it for the first several years at the Maryland State Police hangar in Salisbury until Mr. Matthews became the General Services Supervisor and they were able to get some additional space at the Wicomico County Sheriff's Office where they could house the MRAP because they wanted to have it there. He said getting it in and out takes a little bit of work, but they can do it.

Mr. Cannon said he appreciates the fact that Sheriff Lewis and Manns Woodward took the time to prepare this letter of explanation because he also was questioning the necessity of the garage, and he thinks they addressed that very well. He said he thinks they also addressed the issue of escalating costs. He said he thinks there is something he may have overlooked when Crosby came here two years ago. He explained, at that time, they gave Council a really escalated price of what this was going to cost, and Council said that is never going to work, but here again they have gone through a second firm who has said this is the reality of what this will cost, and he is okay with it. He said the last thing they want to do is start hedging as far as public safety is concerned when they are talking about a building of this importance, and any particular areas they might try to micromanage this could cost a lot in the endgame, so he is okay with it. He said he has looked at it, he has vetted it, and he appreciates Sheriff Lewis taking the time to be so thorough, to which Sheriff Lewis responded, he appreciates that.

Sheriff Lewis said he would be redundant if he repeated a number of things that have already been addressed in the letter from Manns Woodward. He said, as Mr. Cannon said, he thinks they have done an awesome job explaining why it is so important that the garage be part of the Public Safety Complex.

Mr. Cannon said Council has heard from Acting County Executive Psota and Finance Director Pam Oland, and they recognize what they are up against, but he thinks they carefully vetted the numbers, and he really appreciates the work they did that they shared with Council this morning. He said he thinks they feel comfortable moving forward with this project, so he thinks they are good with that.

Sheriff Lewis said Council does not know how much their support means to them, and he is so extremely proud of the great work the men and women of the Wicomico County Sheriff's Office do in this County, and he is thrilled to death to be put into a position that he is trusted to lead the Sheriff's Office because they have a first-class operation here. He said he is so proud of the men and women who do a great job.


Mr. McCain said he agrees 100 percent with the comment Sheriff Lewis just made that they have a first-class operation they are very proud of. He said, getting back to the building, the last time they met, one of the questions had to do with the front and side façade. He said everything Council has been given here is just about the garage, but they talked about several things. He clarified, the garage was one of the items some people brought up, but there were questions about the façade and the amount of glass. He said, because of the hardening of the building, that is obviously a significant cost, but their response was that it lets light in. He said the irony of that is, on the title page of the presentation, they showed what they called the modern-day law enforcement office for the 21st century with a photo of what it is supposed to look like, but it did not look like this building, it was probably two-thirds brick and had glass on the upper levels to let light in. He said the façade for this building is totally different, but that was their modern-day building. He said one of the questions brought up was whether that was an area where some dollars can be saved. He said he is struggling with the fact that there were concerns, but, since they met, they are still at the exact same number. He said there has to be somewhere they are able to find something to cut, but the fact is they just came back with the exact same number when the County has other projects out there. He said Council just received the CIP, and Wor-Wic has a whole building that was just taken right off the CIP because of where the County stands right now.

Mr. Matthews said he understands Mr. McCain's question, but they have worked with these guys from day one to keep the price down, and that has been the driving factor in every meeting they have had. He said the hardened structure goes up to a certain height, and then it turns back to regular glass, and their philosophy is the glass will provide energy savings during certain periods of the day, and also provides a friendlier work environment to have natural light. He said those are the considerations the architects see that others do not really think about, which is how people can be comfortable in this building for eight to twelve hours a day, so a lot of that was the driving force in the design of the façade. He said, yes, it is pretty, it is a modern building, but if they did away with some of the hardened structure of the glass and replaced it with block, he does not think they would have enough money difference to even consider it relevant, to be honest. Sheriff Lewis added, they have had that conversation, not just with the engineers, but with Mr. Matthews as well, and Mr. Matthews brings so much to the table. He said Mr. Matthews' knowledge and input at these meetings has been invaluable for them, and he is so right – they have concluded, and Mr. Matthews has agreed, that they can go with the blocks, but it is going to make minimal difference in the cost, and they gave them every reason in the world with why they should stick with the glass. He said, as Mr. Matthews said, their dispatchers are working twelve-hour shifts, so they wanted to make sure they had natural sunlight coming in. He said they can imagine being behind four walls with no natural sunlight for twelve hours at a time, and this is minimal cost, and they are only talking about bullet resistant glass up to a certain level, and then it is all-natural glass.

Mr. Dodd said he remembers the previous presentation when the architect showed the façade and said he did not want it to look like an everyday police department, so they designed it differently. He said now Sheriff Lewis said the cost is not that much of a difference anyway. He said he is just concerned about safety, and thinks someone brought up about the glass being bullet proof, but he just wants to


make sure because that is a safety issue, to which Mr. Matthews responded, it is bullet resistant to a certain height, and above that the line of fire is irrelevant to anybody who would be in the building.

Mrs. Acle asked what the difference is between a Sheriff's Office and a Public Safety Building, to which Sheriff Lewis responded, as Mrs. Acle well knows, the Sheriff's Office is the Office of the Public. He said it is an Elected Sheriff's Office that belongs to Wicomico County, and he just occupies it for four years at a time as an Elected Official as opposed to a police department, and he assumes that is what Mrs. Acle is talking about. He said, when they first started looking at building a new Sheriff's Office and Public Safety Complex, they realized that, in order to financially do this, they would have to do it in phases, phase one being the Wicomico County Sheriff's Office, and phase two being the Emergency Management System. He clarified, it is the Office of the Sheriff, and it is the Office of every citizen in Wicomico County, he is just fortunate enough to occupy the position. He said they are extremely busy. He said, as a lot of people know, the Office of the Sheriff has exclusive jurisdiction over evictions, exclusive jurisdiction over all sex offender registry here in the County, and there are many things that are unique to the Office of the Sheriff, so it is different than a police department, and it is headed up by an Elected Official as opposed to an appointed official. Mrs. Acle said she has had citizens ask her why they are giving the Sheriff a new Office, and she thinks Sheriff Lewis gave a very good explanation for citizens to understand the difference between just his Office and a Public Safety Building. There was no further discussion.

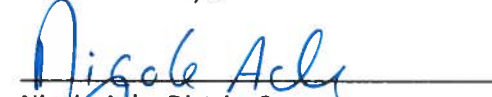

Larry W. Dodd, President, District 3


Joe Holloway, Vice President, District 5

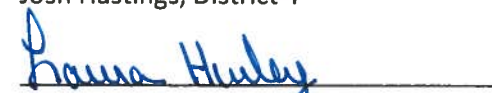

John T. Cannon, At-Large


William R. McCain, At-Large


Ernest F. Davis, District


Nicole Acle, District 2

Josh Hastings, District 4


Laura Hurley, Council Administrator