

The Wicomico County Council met in Legislative Session on Tuesday, January 17, 2023 at 10:00 a.m. in Council Chambers, Government Office Building, Salisbury, Maryland.

In attendance: John T. Cannon, President; Shane Baker, Vice President; Joe Holloway, Josh Hastings, Shanie P. Shields, James Winn, and Jeff Merritt.

Present: Lynn Sande, Executive Office Associate; Julie Giordano, County Executive; and Andrew C. Mitchell Jr., Council Attorney.

On motion by Ms. Shields and seconded by Mr. Winn, the Consent Agenda consisting of the following items was unanimously approved:

- Legislative Minutes from January 3, 2023
- Open Work Session Minutes from December 20, 2022 – Discussion with Talkie Communications on Broadband
- Open Work Session Minutes from January 3, 2023 – Special Meeting-Motion to go into Closed Session

A proclamation was presented in recognition of National Human Trafficking Prevention Month.

Resolution No. 02-2023 – To Authorize the Continuation of an Appeal of a Circuit Court Order in Civil Case No. C-22-CV-22-000095 and Civil Case No. C-22-CV-22-000229 involving two retired Wicomico County Deputies.

On motion by Mr. Baker and seconded by Mr. Merritt, Resolution No. 02-2023 was opened for discussion.

There being no discussion, on motion by Mr. Baker, seconded by Mr. Winn, and unanimously approved, Resolution No. 02-2023 was postponed until the next meeting on February 7, 2023.

Mr. Cannon said the reason for the postponement is to allow their attorneys time to finalize what they have told them is very close to a settlement agreement, which he thinks is a great thing for the deputies and the County as a whole.

Public Comments:

Mr. Bruce Abresch came to the podium and said he is here concerning the County's issue concerning the liquor dispensary. He said he has owned a liquor store in this County for 25 years. He said there are three privately-owned liquor stores in this County along with the three dispensaries, and hearing the background in the newspapers, he is just not exactly sure where the County is going and what they are going to do about this. He said his license requires him to own a restaurant, his license requires him to be contiguous to his restaurant, and his license requires him to be a certain square footage to the restaurant, so, therefore, he wants to find out exactly how the County's issue about the dispensary is going to affect his license and the other two persons who own licenses and have operated private liquor stores in this County. He said currently he has been told that he represents roughly a little over 50 percent of all of the sales that the County makes in their wholesale department, so he is a pretty big customer for the County at this point in time. He said he just does not know exactly and wanted to find out exactly what is going to happen. He said they are saying there are going to be ten new licenses, so is that ten new licenses in addition to the three existing plus the three County dispensaries, so that is 16 for the County, or is it the ten including his and the other two individual licenses? He said that is the

concern he brings forth. He said he does not really know, so he just wants to ask those types of questions.

Ms. Shields asked where his establishment is, to which Mr. Abresch responded, it is Buster's Wine and Spirits.

Mr. Cannon thanked Mr. Abresch and said the Council will keep this in mind when they have their Work Session.

Mr. Tom Knorr came to the podium and said he is from Southern Boys Concepts, which has Sobo's, the Red Roost, Boonies, Evo, and Bull Lips. He said he just wants to speak his piece because they have been talking about this for years and he thinks it has taken them awhile to get together collectively to address this. He said he appreciates them actually looking into it a little further, but they have a competition problem here, number one, he thinks. He said for years they did not have a problem because Worcester County and Somerset County were run the same way, but now they are able to buy direct, so he is actually paying at least 15 percent more after the discount on every bottle of liquor they buy than the counties right next to them that buy right from the distributor. He said, therefore, they have to absorb all of that cost in order to compete, which does not make sense because, if they charge \$8 for a drink and those in other counties charge \$8 for a drink, the others are going to make more money because they are paying 15 percent less. He said he just wants to make sure everyone understands that. He said, therefore, in order for them to compete, they have to keep it at the same price in order to keep people in town.

Mr. Knorr said he thinks everyone here is aware of the growth of Berlin. He said people would move there, and they need to charge in order to make margin, so if he has to charge \$10 just to maintain that same margin, who is to say someone would not just move down to Berlin, which they are seeing a lot of these more pro-business things going on down there. He said, obviously, they are exploding, and Wicomico is not. He said he just thinks that they need a little bit of parity right there, so that is one of the issues. He said, just from a fair standpoint, he appreciates the jobs and everything they have, and he believes they would be absorbed into the new licenses. He said, actually, he is one of the holders of one of the private licenses, in fact, but he just thinks, from a competition standpoint, it is not fair. He said he thinks there are probably some other points of view from the on-premise side restaurants that probably want to be heard as well, but that is his piece on that.

Mr. Justin Schaub came to the podium and said he represents Brew River and wants to echo Mr. Knorr's comments about the competition with the other counties, but he would also like to add that, for them, with the rapidly rising wage increases that are coming down the pipe nationally and in Maryland, the rising costs of every input to their business, being able to buy direct from their distributors to save 10 to 15 percent depending on the size of the bottle they are buying gives them a buffer to try to absorb some of these expenses to try to be able to pay these wages that their employees deserve and that are mandated by the State. He said, as they have the new minimum wage coming up that increases every year, they cannot leave some of their longstanding team members at a lower wage, they have to increase them too, and they deserve it, and they are happy to do it, it is just that this is another piece of the puzzle that would just kind of help them absorb some of those costs. He said the costs are rising and it is really a tough environment. He said their food costs are rising, and anyone who has been to the grocery store can see that. He said their beer costs are rising, and everything is rising, and having to pay that extra 15 percent on the Eastern Shore in the only County that does that is a detriment to their

business and definitely stifles their reinvestment into their property at least, and he is speaking for himself. He said they are huge supporters of being able to buy directly from the distributor. He said he does not understand how the Bill is actually written, but maybe they will have a choice of buying from the County or the distributor, and they are in support of that as it is just great for them to have the opportunity with the way they operate their business to be able to buy direct from their distributor to save that money and reinvest it into their business, as that is the goal here, and pay their employees and all the other things that come along with it.

Mr. Wes Hanna came to the podium and said he is also with Brew River echoing the guys' thoughts, but wanted to add, with how big their establishment is, they are taking three or four trips, and it is just not efficient to have their guys go back and forth with truckloads. He said they have a location in Delaware where they have Harpoon Hanna's and he sees the benefits of a tax-free state and the margins they make on their drinks there, and he sees both sides of the spectrum. He said it is a detriment to their business and the margins, and trying to compete and survive in this economy.

Council Comments:

Ms. Shields said she wants to make it public that on January 31 she has to have open heart surgery, and she will not be here for two of the meetings, but she is hoping she will be at the third meeting so everyone can hear what she has to say, but it is a very serious thing and she is going across the Bridge. She said, before she leaves, she is going to do a fact sheet of some of the things to communicate with the District and other people of things she has done since she has been on the Council. She said she enjoys what she does, as she has said before that she is project oriented, and she believes in being fair, and District 1 that she represents is very important to her because some things were lacking that she saw that needed to be done, especially playgrounds and affordable recreation for the children who live there. She said, when she is able to have her phone in her hands, she will be communicating with the people, but she believes in being transparent and she does not want anyone to think when they do not see her that she does not care because she will be thinking about them. She said she cannot get her blood pressure up, but she will be worried that she cannot be here to express and explain what she thinks and what she disagrees or agrees with. She said, again, it has been a pleasure so far and she is enjoying it, and when she comes back, her phone is 24 hours a day because she is up all night. She said, if someone calls her at 1:00 in the morning, she will return their call at 1:30 a.m.

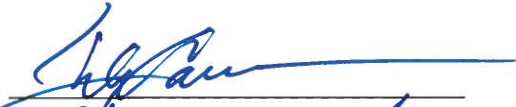
Ms. Shields said the gentlemen here have helped her with some of her disabilities, and they have been very respectful to her, and she thinks they are going to be a good Council. She said Mr. Winn especially has been a big help and is like a son to her, and he brought her stuff in today because she could not get a handicapped parking space. She said she is just happy to be here with the Council.

Mr. Cannon wished Ms. Shields good luck.

Council President Comments:

There were none.

There being no further business, on motion by Mr. Hastings, seconded by Mr. Merritt, and unanimously approved, the Legislative Session was adjourned at 10:20 a.m. to go into Open Work Sessions.



John T. Cannon, President, At-Large



Shane Baker, Vice President, District 3



James Winn, At-Large

Shanie P. Shields, District 1



Jeff Merritt, District 2

Josh Hastings, District 4



Joe Holloway, District 5



Laura Hurley, Council Administrator