

Open Work Session

County Council Interviews with Republican Central Committee Nominees for District 2 Seat

July 2, 2019

Mrs. Nicole Acle came before Council. Mr. Cannon said they will ask her some questions, but she can preface that with an overview of who she is, and why she has applied for the position.

Mrs. Acle said she is originally from Pittsburg, Pennsylvania, and she and her husband relocated to the Eastern Shore approximately 18 years ago, and they have three children enrolled in the public school system. She said she and her husband are both small business owners here in Wicomico County, and she has a calling to serve the community, and is involved in several service organizations on the local and State level. She said, locally, she serves on Salisbury's Promise Committee, she is a volunteer with the Salisbury Youth Advisory Council, and she is also on the Habitat for Humanity Executive Board. She said she has been volunteering with them for six years, and, in the past two years, she has been the vice president. She said, on the State level, she serves on the Maryland Coalition of Gifted and Talented Educators and Parents, and she has recently been appointed by Governor Hogan to the Department of Disabilities Assistive Technology Program.

Mr. Hastings thanked Mrs. Acle for being there, and said they have put together a bunch of questions, but they are not in any particular order, so they will go through them. He then asked how she would bring a more diverse, unique perspective to this Body, to which Mrs. Acle responded, this seems to be a very cohesive Council that works well together. She said, as a mother and as a small business owner, she would hope to contribute the learning experiences she has had over the time living in Wicomico County.

Mr. Dodd asked what Council can do to be more meaningful to the broader public, and what are Mrs. Acle's top priorities as a Councilmember, to which Mrs. Acle responded, her top priorities would first be education, offering quality education in a safe environment for children to learn, teachers to teach, and parents to become involved, which she thinks is key. She said her second initiative would be economic growth of this County, which is very important for the long-term of what they see in the future of Wicomico County, and, lastly, the environment. She said, currently in her District, failing sewage is a problem throughout, as well as the amount of rainfall, and maintaining the health of the river.

Mr. McCain asked how she has shown herself to be an independent, nonpartisan, fact-based decision maker and leader within their community, to which Mrs. Acle responded, she thinks she has on two levels. She clarified, within the County serving on the Board for Habitat for Humanity they accept applicants and they need to make a decision based on if the applicants are ready to receive a hand-up, not a hand out. She said it is completely fact based with a credit report, references, and interviews with the family, so she thinks that has been a very much fact-based decision. She said, with the Governor's appointment, she receives similar information making decisions on what County will be allotted the money for assistive technology by simply looking at their numbers, their need, and their population.

Mr. Davis asked what Mrs. Acle's permanent address is, to which Mrs. Acle responded, it is in District 2. Mr. Cannon said maybe they will skip that questions because not everybody wants to publically announce their full address. Mr. McCain said maybe the better question is whether she lives in the District, to which Mrs. Acle responded, she does. She said she lives in the first home she and her husband purchased here 18 years ago.

Mr. Holloway asked what her position is on zoning versus property rights, to which Mrs. Acle responded, she thinks that is something she would need to look more into and gather more information on before really making a decision. Mr. Cannon clarified, they are asking this question because a lot of times Council is involved in zoning, and the biggest challenge is when they may think they are doing a good thing for one purpose, but they could be compromising the values of people's properties on the other. He said, again, sometimes zoning is thought of as to protect peoples' property rights, and the person on one side may say they are protecting their property rights, but the person next door might say they are compromising theirs. He clarified the question, and asked how she thinks she would evaluate that, to which Mrs. Acle responded, she thinks she would really have to look at all aspects of that, such as what it is being zoned for, and whether it is commercial or residential, and how the surrounding area is zoned.

Mr. Cannon said Mrs. Acle talked about education as one of her priorities. He then asked where she sees pre-k coming into play because that has been a new initiative from the Superintendent, and he was interested in what her perspective is on pre-k, to which Mrs. Acle responded, she thinks, looking at the history of the Maryland State Department of Education, it has almost come full circle. She said they kind of circle this through every 20 years with having vouchers for daycares. She said she would like to see a little bit more regulation and structure with pre-k. She said she thinks that Dr. Hanlin has a great vision, and a great plan for it, and she supports what she has in the future.

Mr. Hastings asked Mrs. Acle to explain the difference between the Executive and Legislative branches of Government, and to articulate the roles. He said, as an organization, they used to not have a County Executive, but now they do, and they are still trying to figure out their roles. He again asked her to articulate on that, to which Mrs. Acle responded, she thought she had it figured out up until two days ago. She said her previous perception was that the County Executive would oversee the day to day operations whereas the County Council was the checks and balances for that. She said she has some questions around the decision with moving forward for the bond and legal counsel around that. She said she was under the impression it was a very specific type of legal counsel, and not a general counsel, so up until about two days ago she thought she had it figured out too. She said it sounds as though the current Council is working cohesively together to make that clear. Mr. Dodd said they went to an Executive form of Government in 2006, but it is confusing to a lot of people.

Mr. Dodd asked why Mrs. Acle wants to be on the County Council, and if she has an agenda she would like to share, to which Mrs. Acle responded, she has always felt with her children they were fortunate to have parents who could advocate for them, and with her business being able to advocate for other females in the industry. She said, when you have a privilege, you need to do something with that privilege or it is wasted, and she feels like she could contribute some diversity and a different point of view in bringing a voice to those who do not have one.

Mr. Holloway asked what Mrs. Acle's opinion is of the revenue cap, to which Mrs. Acle responded, it was put into place almost 20 years ago, and, without really looking at specific numbers, it seems that is a gauge on how to raise taxes within reason.

Mr. Holloway said Mrs. Acle would be representing a District, and District Council people have a little bit of a different role than at-large Council people. He then asked if she can list three of the most pressing issues in her District, to which Mrs. Acle responded, she would say the first would be education. She said her family is probably one of the last to have their children in public education. She said most have pulled out and gone to private schools, and that saddens her because she is a strong believer in public education. She said she thinks Dr. Hanlin has a good plan moving forward, and she wants to support

that, but she thinks they need to reengage those parents. Mr. Holloway asked if there are any other issues she can think of that are taking place in District 2 that are a concern with the citizens, to which Mrs. Acle responded, she thinks the most recent issue with not having the funding to build the school. She said that was a topic at the last homeowners association meeting she went to, and the failing septic systems that is pretty prevalent in her district, and, from what she read when looking over the Strategic Plan for the County, that is something that is already on alert.

Mr. Holloway asked Mrs. Acle to list the Wicomico County schools in her district, to which Mrs. Acle responded, Westside Intermediate and Primary, and, if they are in the Magnet Program, North Salisbury, but if not, Pemberton. Mr. Holloway clarified, he is talking about schools that are physically in her District, to which Mrs. Acle responded, Salisbury Middle, Bennett High, and Mardela.

Mr. Hastings said Mrs. Acle owns two businesses, is active on multiple Boards, and active with her family. He then asked if she has the time commitment to serve. He said he assumes yes since she put her name in. He then asked if there is anything she would like to elaborate on as far as her ability to do this job if chosen, to which Mrs. Acle responded, she is fortunate that all of her businesses have been very successful in the County, and she really does not oversee the day to day operations. She said she checks in monthly for strategic planning, profit and loss, and accountability checks, but she has a very good management team.

Mr. Dodd said District 2 is a large district geographically, and Mr. Kilmer was quite busy, and it seemed like he received more phone calls than the other Councilmembers. He then asked if Mrs. Acle knows what the Councilmembers do other than meeting twice a month on PAC 14, to which Mrs. Acle responded, yes. She said she looked through the bylaws, the Strategic Plan, and the involvement the County Council has on different Boards and Commissions. Mr. Dodd said they also attend a lot of community functions and events, such as Mr. Hastings mentioned earlier the 4th of July event in Allen, and Mr. Holloway mentioned the event in Willards. He said some of the Councilmembers go to just about everything they can, so he was just wondering if she had the time to be that busy with her District, to which Mrs. Acle responded, she has to say that she is pretty involved with volunteer service just with Habitat, and, as the former President of Salisbury Middle School's PTA, she still attends PTA meetings, which she thinks is a good way to hear the needs of her District. Mr. Dodd then asked, if she is the one chosen, would she give up any of those other commitments, to which Mrs. Acle responded, no. She said she does not see there being any conflict of interest in those, and she feels like she can manage her time well. Mr. Dodd said he just wanted her to know that she would be quite busy if she was chosen, to which Mrs. Acle responded, that is okay because she is used to it.

Mr. Cannon asked Mrs. Acle if she has anything she would like to add, to which Mrs. Acle responded, she just wants to thank all of them for allowing her to come. She said whether she is chosen or they decide on something else, she appreciates all the conversations, and all the information they were able to provide her about the County Council. She said she has learned so much over the past week where she thought she knew everything, and she appreciates it. Mr. Cannon thanked her for being there, and said she has an impressive resume. He congratulated her on being one of the four chosen, and he believes somewhere in the realm of 20-something turned their names in originally for the Central Committee. He said it was a pleasure having her there, and wished her the best of luck with everything. He said they appreciate her coming even though she is a bit under the weather.

Mr. Cannon said, so everyone is aware, Council will most likely be making a decision on this matter at the July 16, 2019 meeting.

Mr. Austin Whitehead came before Council. Mr. Cannon thanked him for being there, and said they would like to open up with him making a statement introducing himself to Council, and give them a brief overview of who he is.

Mr. Whitehead thanked Council for having him. He said he is a resident of Wicomico County. He said he was born here, and has lived here all of his life in District 2 between Nanticoke Road and Pemberton Drive. He said he went to public school in Wicomico County, and he went to Salisbury Middle School and Bennett High School. He said he graduated early and started Wor-Wic Community College at the age of 15, and then went on to Salisbury University and graduated with his bachelor's in accounting at the age of 20. He said he went on to work for a large CPA firm, one of the four largest firms in the world, in their Baltimore-D.C. offices. He said, while there, he had a great opportunity to work with some Fortune 500 companies, and got a lot of great experience, but decided to come back to the Eastern Shore. He said he came back and got his MBA at the age of 21, bought his first house in Wicomico County at the age of 21, and has since bought multiple properties here. He said he decided to stay even though he had the opportunity to go back and work for a large company and had a great track ahead of him, but he felt a want and need to come back, and a desire to come back. He said he came back and went to work full-time with his father in the real estate business in September 2015, and has been there since working as a realtor as his full-time position. He said he has also since opened up a rental management company, so he is a small business owner in Wicomico County, and employs one employee who he just hired last year, so he has an employee under himself. He said he is 25 now, so is probably the youngest candidate coming forward, but he thinks he brings a lot of good experience to the table being associated with many Boards, as well as in their community. He said he is on the Board of Directors for the Coastal Association of Realtors, he is the Chair of the Government Affairs Committee, and he is also on the Salisbury University Alumni Association Board, as well as their Career Advisory Board. He said he is also involved in the community in civic activities, as well as with his church where he is a greeter and usher at Emanuel Wesleyan Church regularly, as well as other activities that he tries to be a part of. He said, being from an accounting background, financial literacy is something he is very passionate about, so he likes to help out with Junior Achievement as well.

Mr. Cannon said they will ask him a series of questions. He said there are questions each individual Councilmember wants to ask, and there are certain questions that are pretty much the same simply to be fair to both nominees, and he will start with Mr. Hastings.

Mr. Hastings asked Mr. Whitehead how he would bring a more diverse or unique perspective to Council, to which Mr. Whitehead responded, he thinks being young, and from living in a lot of different areas as he has been lucky enough to experience a lot of different areas in his life. He said he has been to Europe, South America, and the Caribbean. He said his dad is an immigrant to the United States, and he has seen a lot of different places, and been all over the world. He said, from living here and living and working in other places, he understands the importance of what Wicomico County has to offer. He said, as a young individual having those experiences at such a young age, and being able to come back and be successful at a young age, he feels he brings a lot to the table to speak to families and individuals who are thinking of coming here, and asking why Wicomico County, and he thinks he can be an advocate for the County.

Mr. Dodd asked what the County Council can do to be more meaningful to the broader public, and what would be Mr. Whitehead's top priorities, to which Mr. Whitehead responded, one thing he thinks the County Council can do would be to position itself and brand itself better. He said Wicomico County is a great place to live, but he does not think they broadcast that or put that out enough. He said, when

people look in the media they just see the negative, but he thinks there is a lot of good they are doing, and he thinks that can be broadcasted. He said that would be something Council can do, and also a priority that everything relates back to. He said, as far his priorities, he is very big on education and the fact that when people come here they look at the school system and decide where they want to be, so making sure they support that to the best of their ability is important, and not just speaking of the public schools, but also the vocational schools. He said, being in the real estate industry, he sees a lack of individuals with skills in plumbing, carpentry, electrical, and other skills that are useful, so making sure that is an option, and people know that, if college is not for them, this is something where there is a need in their County, specifically.

Mr. Whitehead said his other priority is financial literacy, and he thinks financial literacy is one of the most overlooked things that is so important to the individual going through it. He said, if it is not being taught in the home, where else they can go to look for that? He said homeownership is also a big thing. He said, being in the real estate industry, Wicomico County has a 65 to 70 percent rental market. He said real estate, statistically, is the number one creator of wealth in the United States, and when they have a County with upwards of 70 percent rentals, they are not doing their part to educate and ask how to get out of this cycle to better families. He said he thinks it is their responsibility as County Council people to make sure they are partnering with the right people to put that out there. He said the last priority of his would be partnerships. He explained, Government cannot do everything on its own, and it needs to partner with both the private sector and nonprofits to be able to better itself, and to be the best it can be, such as partnering with institutions like Salisbury University. He said he thinks the only time people are going to come to Wicomico County is if they are from here, born here, come here for work, or have spent some time here, and spending some time here significantly, such as at Salisbury University for five years or more depending on their degree, is a huge opportunity for the County to embrace these people and say this is a place where they can live. He said he thinks there is a huge opportunity for partnerships where they can grab the people who are here. He said, other than those opportunities, there are not many other chances they get to grab people who could make Wicomico County home.

Mr. McCain asked how he has shown himself to be an independent, nonpartisan, fact-based decision maker and leader within their community, to which Mr. Whitehead responded, he thinks there are a couple of different ways he has done that, and one is just his business in general. He said, being in the real estate market, he deals with all different spectrums of individuals. He said also now owning a rental management company, he does not just work with individuals who can afford housing, but he works with individuals who are in rental situations, and in a situation where they need Government assistance of some kind. He said he works with all different spectrums, and he comes across all different people with his job in particular. He said, also, being on different associations and boards, there are a lot of different viewpoints in the room when sitting down with these individuals, and coming to common ground is the best thing, and what the best decision is for the organization. He said, with the Alumni Association Board furthering the university locally as well as the Career Advisory Board, there are a lot of different opinions that come to the room, and really coming to common ground to find what the best way is for them to go after and achieve their goals.

Mr. Davis asked if Mr. Whitehead is a resident of Wicomico County, to which Mr. Whitehead responded, yes sir. Mr. McCain clarified, is he a resident of District 2, to which Mr. Whitehead responded, yes, he has lived there all of his life.

Mr. Holloway asked what Mr. Whitehead's position is on zoning versus property rights, to which Mr. Whitehead responded, being in the real estate realm, private property rights is a big thing. He said he

understands there are times where they need to look at how individuals are affected by different things. He said, overall, he is a supporter of private property rights, and not infringing on rights, but there are always things Council has to make a decision on going forward.

Mr. Cannon said Mr. Whitehead mentioned education was one of his priorities. He said most recently with the new Superintendent, a big push is on right now for pre-k, so he was interested in knowing what Mr. Whitehead's position is on pre-k, to which Mr. Whitehead responded, that is a good question. He said, as far as where they stand putting money, he thinks the bigger thing he would like to look at is, if going towards anything, he is not somebody to shut down questions, but is the money going to be used properly and efficiently, and how are they using it. He said he thinks there needs to be a set strategy as to what they are going to do with the funds, and they are not just babysitters of children, but that they are putting it in the right direction. He said, if they see money is being appointed, and they are getting more out of their money, then he thinks it can be a good decision, but, at the same time, he thinks the more important thing to do is making sure they have a great strategy prior to, and making sure the money is going to be used efficiently. Mr. Cannon said the Kirwan Commission actually stated a similar position where they felt there was definite need for more funding for education, but they stated very specifically that they felt, if that were going to be the case, they would want to see accountability.

Mr. Hastings said the next question asks to explain the difference between the Executive and Legislative forms of Government, but, if Mr. Whitehead would like, he can articulate on the roles therein, to which Mr. Whitehead responded, the Executive Branch would be running the day to day operations of the County, being responsible for the Departments underneath it, and working with the Directors to make sure every day items are taken care of throughout the County. He said the Legislative Branch is there to create the laws, amend the laws, and also be the checks and balances to ensure the County Charter is being followed. He said also the Legislative Branch is the direct person of contact for their constituents to make sure their needs are being heard and brought up, and that they are being addressed.

Mr. Dodd asked why Mr. Whitehead wants to be on the County Council, and if he has an agenda he might want to share, to which Mr. Whitehead responded, he does not have a specific agenda coming into this. He said he has always had a desire to do more, be more, and to help more people. He said he has been extremely blessed to have the family he has, and to have the mentors he has had over the years, and it has just been a passion of his to give back. He said one of the greatest things he has done in his life was getting involved in financial literacy, and being an ambassador to PricewaterhouseCoopers, the CPA firm that he worked for, and being an ambassador to the company teaching financial literacy to underprivileged children. He said it gave him the opportunity to travel to Central America to teach underprivileged children financial literacy, and in the State of Maryland as well. He said giving back is just something he has had a passion for. He said he has been so blessed with the people he has had in his life that it is important to him, and is one way he can help pour into others.

Mr. Holloway asked what Mr. Whitehead's opinion is on the revenue cap, to which Mr. Whitehead responded, as far as taxes go, he is not for increasing taxes. He said, from a real estate perspective, every \$50 in increased taxes affects interest rates, and affects the purchasing power by \$10,000. He said \$50 a month at \$600 a year affects the purchasing power by \$10,000, so it affects affordability of homeownership. He said he is not a proponent of increased taxes, and is open to look at other sources of revenue for the County, but, as far as tax increases, that is one thing he would like to stay away from.

Mr. Holloway said District Council people all work throughout the whole County, and they all represent everyone in the County, but most of the time they pay more attention to what is happening in their

District. He then asked what the three pressing issues are in District 2 that Mr. Whitehead sees presently, to which Mr. Whitehead responded, there was some money movement in the Mardela school district, but he thinks that was resolved or looked into more, so is a little bit more of a resolved issue. He said the 300-million-gallon open air container of decomposing sludge, and how that affects individuals around them is a big issue. He said in Mardela they have Barren Creek Road as an issue, and other road flooding down Nanticoke Road right past the country store. He said there was a bridge over a pond that was taken out, rebuilt, and then the next time flooding came through, it was taken out again, and just only recently was refinished. He said those are issues that he would want to look into long-term.

Mr. Holloway asked, being that District 2 is large, can Mr. Whitehead name the fire departments in the district, to which Mr. Whitehead responded, Sharptown and Westside, and they also have a property down Nanticoke in Tyaskin, and Mardela Fire Department.

Mr. Hastings said Mr. Whitehead and Mrs. Acle are both very busy people. He said there are all of these Boards, and Mr. Whitehead is the Director of a lot of different organizations, and even trains and teaches jujitsu, so he has a lot of things he is involved with. He then asked if Mr. Whitehead has time to serve, and whether he knows fully what is involved with serving, to which Mr. Whitehead responded, he thinks people make time for what is important to them, and, honestly, if they talked to his dad, he thinks he is not doing enough, and always tells him he has more in him. He said he knows fully well what is involved in this. He said hiring a full-time employee of his own has opened up his capacity, so he has someone who helps him who has 12 years of experience, and he can help him with the things that can bog him down. He said what he does as a living is get in front of people and talk with people, and find out their issues. He said he is entrusted with the largest purchase of their life, so being readily available is important, and not being bogged down with paperwork and things of that nature. He said every day he strives to become more efficient with his time, and to make himself more available.

Mr. Dodd said Mr. Whitehead knows how busy Council is because he has been coming around at the meetings, and he appreciates anyone who wants to be well informed. He then asked if Mr. Whitehead knows what Mr. Kilmer did in District 2 other than attend meetings, to which Mr. Whitehead responded, he would see Mr. Kilmer at multiple events, such as the Mardela gun bashes, and the Hebron Carnival even though that is in District 1, but at all different events he would be in front of people, be in front of the fire departments, go to the firehouse dinners, go down to the hardware store in Mardela where everybody goes to find out what the business is , and just being in touch with the constituents.


Mr. Cannon said Council appreciates Mr. Whitehead being there, and congratulated him on being one of the four nominees chosen. He said they will make their decision at their Council meeting of July 16. Mr. Whitehead thanked Mr. Cannon, and said he appreciates their time. There was no further discussion.

Signatures on next page


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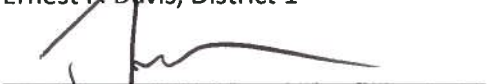
John T. Cannon, President



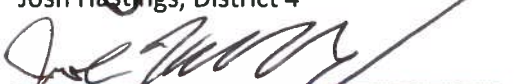
Larry W. Dodd, Vice President, District 3



Ernest F. Davis, District 1



Josh Hastings, District 4



Joe Holloway, District 5



William R. McCain, At-Large



Laura Hurley, Council Administrator