

**Open Work Session**  
**Water and Sewer Master Plan Update**  
**December 17, 2019**

Mr. Dallas Baker, Director of Public Works, and Mr. Peter Bozick of George, Miles, and Buhr Engineering (GMB) came before Council. Mr. Baker said, back in FY19, they placed an item in the Public Works' budget for a water and sewer master plan with the lofty goal of providing water and sewer service to everyone in the County who does not currently have it. He said they had \$300,000 budgeted for that, and it got awarded through an open bid to GMB, so since last year they have been working on developing that plan. He said currently they are still in their factfinding process, and have been discussing with all of the various municipalities within the County, especially those that provide water and sewer already, what their capacities are and what their intended growth areas are, and comparing the towns' growth areas to the County's comprehensive plan for growth areas. He said they have been discussing with them, if they were to extend, whether they would have to annex, or would they have urban service districts. He said they have also been meeting with other agencies that have water and sewer service, they have met with Sussex County, and they have had a small discussion with Maryland Environmental Service (MES). He said, for future meetings, they are planning on meeting with Worcester and Somerset Counties as well, all with the goal of discussing lessons learned from the folks who have set these districts up before, what some of the problems they encountered were, what some of the challenges they faced were, and what some of the successes they saw were. He said then they will put that all together in a plan that GMB has elaborated on very well with the thought of providing a safe, reliable water and sewer service to the County that protects the environment, and protects the pocketbook. Mr. Dodd asked whose pocketbook, to which Mr. Baker responded, the County's pocketbook, the citizens' pocketbook, and everybody's pocketbook.

Mr. Baker said they have had some preliminary discussions with the Maryland Department of Planning, and they want to meet with them, but they also still need to meet with the Maryland Department of Environment, so, again, they still are in the very early stages of factfinding and figuring out where all of these pieces identify. He said they are looking throughout the County at the various clustered areas of population of places they would focus on first for providing sewer, so they are not just going out in the middle of a cornfield where there are only three houses, but they will look at where people are grouped, and what makes sense, such as places that are not able to extend, what places might need a package plant, and also places to address infill because there are a lot of areas in the County that one would think are in the City. He said a good example are the houses behind Pohanka along Route 13. He said those are all County houses that do not have water and sewer. He said the City's existing water and sewer system might make more sense to extend to those, but then there is also the list of challenges that have to be overcome with getting those places into the City, priority funding areas, and those types of situations that all come into play. He said it is a complex moving picture, and the more they have been delving into it, the more complex they are being made aware it is. He clarified, not that it is beyond being able to come up with a solution, but it is just they have to figure out how all the parts play in. Mr. Dodd said the area Mr. Baker is talking about behind Pohanka is in a pocket, and it would not make sense to do a package plant for those houses, but there are areas way out in the County where they will have to consider something different, to which Mr. Baker responded, exactly. He said they are finding that there are places within the County's comprehensive plan that were designated as town transition areas, and when the comp plan was developed, someone designated the areas the towns and businesses would expand in if they want town service. He said, talking with the towns, they truly had no plans to go in that direction, but they might have had a plan to go in a different direction, so they are

trying to make sure that what they recommend corresponds with the comp plan, and corresponds with the water and sewer plan. Mr. Dodd said he was going to ask that question about the town transition areas. He then asked, what if the town does not want to extend water and sewer to those areas, to which Mr. Baker responded, that would probably be part of the recommendations that come out of this. Mr. Bozick added, they are discovering some of those, and then they see growth happening in areas that are not listed as town transition areas. He said the sidebar that it comes down to is that they are looking at the total amount of water supply they need to service these areas, and wastewater disposal for these areas. He said it is important for them to kind of get in the ballpark because the next important aspect of it in a systemic way is talking to the State and finding out where they are going to dispose of the treated wastewater. He said they can clean the wastewater, but they have to have a game plan in terms of where it discharges, whether it is going to be a land application system with an indirect discharge, or whether it is going to be a direct discharge and affect the Nanticoke watershed, the Wicomico watershed, and the Pocomoke watershed. He said, with and the number of residents they are projecting for growth in the County into the future, where it might go within the municipalities and the remaining areas, and where the discharges will be, planning will help them dictate a package plan in terms of size and location, and whether it makes sense to combine two rural villages that are not too far away because they might only have discharge ability at one of the rural villages and not the other.

Mr. Cannon said he is glad they chose GMB because they do really good work. He said he knows Mr. McCain and Mr. Holloway can tell them that, when they approved the Village Down River, they did it with the fact the County would be allowed to take over that facility, and also a requirement that the unit be expandable. He said, at that time, they really thought one solution to this might be to have numerous stand-alone facilities throughout the County and create a network like that, but then the recession hit. He said, with that thought process in mind as to what they initiated there, his question is whether that is really a viable solution today. He then asked about the report from 2008 for a Countywide wastewater treatment system, to which Mr. Bozick responded, they did one in 2014 or 2015 as an example for what they call the eastside corridor. Mr. Cannon said, in that report he thinks the final resolution was that the only option might be annexation as the first and best option. He then asked how Mr. Bozick thinks the dynamics have changed now where there may be other options, and does the Village Down River type of strategy come into play, to which Mr. Bozick responded, there are a couple of things rolled up into that, and he could go on and on, but he does not think this is the forum to get into all the details of that. He said a concise answer is, conceptually, package plants throughout is kind of what they call in the field distributed wastewater treatment, versus something that is big and regional. He said a community can use distributed wastewater treatment facilities with package plants as a viable solution where it makes sense, and it is enhanced by the technologies available to them today that were not available before in terms of the internet and remote access, and things they can do. Mr. McCain asked if the State is a big fan of that, and whether the State prefers regional-natured packages as opposed to smaller, to which Mr. Bozick responded, they will find out when they talk to the State, but that is a good point. He said, when they talk to the State, they really want it to be more of a holistic discussion. He said, in addition to water and sewer, they still have the Chesapeake Bay issues and the total maximum daily load (TMDL) issues, and they still have stormwater pollution that happens. He said, hopefully, in an ideal situation with the County taking the lead on this, and with support from some of the municipalities, and then going to the State, maybe they can come up with a more holistic solution that addresses MS4, TMDLs and other things. He said they will let Council know from a technology point of view whether a regional system versus isolated package plants or a disturbed system is best. He said the technology part is the easy part to come back to Council on. He said it is integrating it into the management and the cost.

Mr. Holloway said he guesses they learned the Village Down River was kind of a lesson, to which Mr. Bozick responded, it needed to happen, and they cannot stop development everywhere. Mr. Holloway said they learned things they do not want to do, and do not want to get involved with in the future, and things to look out for. He then asked if there has ever been any discussion with independent wastewater folks, such as Tidewater, to which Mr. Bozick responded, it is definitely on the radar. Mr. Holloway asked about identifying the areas that need it most. He said they know the eastside corridor needs it, so he supposes that is why they did the study there, to which Mr. Bozick responded, that was one of the higher priority areas, and it could kind of serve as a model or prototype for other corridors because they kind of go out into different directions outside of town. He said, whether they go east or west, there are corridors and pockets that need to be addressed. Mr. Baker added, one other thing they are looking at with this study is they are not trying to say they will jump and do everybody all at once, but they are looking for a list of a couple small projects to pick as priorities, and start them off as pilot projects, do one of them, see what their lessons learned are, and then go back. He clarified, they are not going to propose everything all at once, but will do this such that they can take their time, start small, do a small expansion, do a small plant, and then go back and look at doing it at another location and asking what they would do differently and what they could do better. Mr. Holloway asked if the funding source will be County, State, or Federal, to which Mr. Bozick responded, all of the above. He said USDA Rural Development is a big player for rural infrastructure. He said it is part of the mission for USDA Rural Development, and was used for the Morris Mill system, and is definitely ideally suited for places like this. He said it also has an economic component where they have low-income citizens, so they can get higher percentage grants. He explained, generally, their maximum grant is 75 percent, and where they have the lowest incomes they can get up to a 75 percent grant. He said the State of Maryland has different programs, such as the Bay Restoration Fund, which is pretty big right now with the State, and that is morphed now to be more appropriate for Wicomico County where five to ten years ago it was not. He said the Bay Restoration Fund at the start was only for the large treatment plants, but, by and large, they have upgraded all of those plants, so now they are using that money for the smaller treatment plants and some of the stormwater management pollution issues. He said the money is used, and protecting the pocketbook is used, but they have to be holistic in terms of somebody having to pay somewhere. He said, when they talked this morning about Habitat for Humanity, they may spend \$30 million dollars to put sewer systems in a certain area, and they may get 500 houses or 1,000 houses, but, chances are, the property values in Wicomico County are going to go up by more than \$50 million dollars, so that is a big nut, but, if they see that value return into the properties, which in turn reflects in property taxes, it creates a win-win. Mr. Dodd said the users will also have a part in paying something with the user fee, to which Mr. Bozick responded, absolutely. He said another overarching principle is that growth pays for growth, so they are not really violating the spirit of Wicomico County Planning and Zoning or where growth is, and they are not helping facilitate growth for one area over another.

Mr. Cannon said he recognizes what Mr. Baker is saying about taking small bites in a regional approach within the County, but what will the incentive be to the homeowners who do not want to get involved in a monthly payment plan? He said, right now, most of the time they are just going to let it keep going until it totally fails and they are desperate, but the County cannot install these things unless they have 100 people who want it at the same time. He then asked where that incentive is, to which Mr. Baker responded, when people's systems fail, they are going to have to connect in, and a lot of places have systems that are already failing. He said the Health Department has maps, as he understands it, of areas where septic systems are already failing, so when they go in and install some of these pilot projects, they will install them in the areas having failing septic so they will have to connect into it. He said then it is the County's job to try to find some of the finances, as Mr. Bozick spoke about, such that they are not trying to hit someone who is on a fixed income with a \$500 a month water and sewer bill because that is

just not viable for the County, or for anybody, but that is the major incentive for folks to connect into it because then they would not have to abandon their house if their lot size is so small and cannot add another septic, but then they would also get that reliability of water and sewer. He said a few years ago when they had all those droughts and people's wells were going dry, they were having to sink new wells, so this would take that out of the equation so people have reliable water and sewer for the existing homeowners. He said it also becomes an economic draw to bring businesses in where they would not have to try to put in a separate fire suppression system because the County would be able to provide the water they need for sprinklers and stuff like that.

Mr. Holloway asked, in doing this master plan, when they talk about businesses, are they incorporating that into where businesses could be built, or are they just doing it in business areas? He said they have said businesses will come if they have water and sewer, but, if they are just doing it in a residential area, no business is going to be there anyway, to which Mr. Baker responded, it is in populated clusters. He said he suspects that most businesses do not try to locate someplace so far away in the middle of a corn field, but they want to be close to the existing facilities and the existing infrastructure to support whatever widget they are building. He said, typically, they would see industrial parks or something like that, so they are focusing their pilot locations on areas that have existing population clusters. Mrs. Aclé asked if Mr. Baker means developments, such as Nithsdale and West Nithsdale, to which Mr. Baker responded, towns such as Parsonsburg and Mardela, but they are not just going out and sticking this somewhere in the middle between Powellville and Willards where there is nobody.

Mr. Holloway said years ago when Pittsville had to have water and sewer, the folks in town were required to hook up. He then asked what the difference is between that and going to the eastside corridor like Mr. Cannon just mentioned where maybe they do not want to hook up, to which Mr. Bozick responded, what was going on back in the 1970s and 1980s was in some ways no different than what it is today where there were failing septic systems in all the towns. He said the State of Maryland and EPA put the push to solve pollution problems, they provided funding, they convinced a lot of the towns, and at the time they had grant funds for 87.5 percent of the cost of those systems. He said Willards, Hebron, and Pittsville came under it, Sharptown already had a system, and Fruitland had just started their system, but it related to failing septic tanks and pollution. He said that system has kind of evolved today, but it is still out there, and the County is in a position of being the Government of first resort, and what happened before was the pressure was put on the towns because they were the Government of first resort. He said there were failing septic systems within that jurisdiction, and the towns knew they could not do it unless the State helped them, so the State put a lot of heavy-handed pressure on those towns to do it, and the County is kind of going to be in that situation. He clarified, they already are because they are the Government of first resort, so, if they have a pollution problem or a hotspot and have potential contaminated water, the Federal and State Government will come to the County to try to solve that problem. He said a master plan will look at 50 to 100 years out, and gives the County a roadmap of what the solutions are going to be when the time comes, when it is right, and when the pocketbook has to be there. He said Mr. Miles famously said "Until you figure out a way to put everybody in the Town of Hebron in jail, they are not doing it." He said what is really good about this master plan for the County is they will have a sense of where water and sewer needs to be for the next 50 to 100 years, to which Mr. Baker added, and have tools in the toolbox to know how to get it there, potential ways to fund it, and what those costs will be. Mr. Bozick said they are also going to break out a very large percentage of the County that, in the comp plan, is referred to as priority preservation areas, which they have a lot of. He said they want to have an understanding in this master plan that those areas will always be on septic tanks or an on-site system. He said they are going to have meetings with the Health Department and look at the Health Department regulations, and look at the groundwater protection plan, and kind of

make it clear that those lots are going to have to be a couple of acres in size and cannot be small lots, so somehow, hopefully, between the Health Department and the homeowners they can solve their issues, and the County will not have to be drug into all of these rural areas. Mr. McCain said they are already in that situation for the most part with the larger sized lots. Mr. Bozick said it is the half acre to one acre lots that are kind of on the fence right now. Mr. Dodd said there is one on Old Ocean City Road near City limits where the entire backyard has a mound system, to which Mr. Bozick responded, this is very important and needs to be done because it is not just public health issues, but there are environmental degradation issues, and really the ultimate goal is that this whole County has first class water and sewer utilities. He said they think about it as a utility because it is necessary for life, and everybody has to have it, just like their power company, phone service, broadband, internet, water, and sewer utilities. He said, hopefully, this master plan will put the County on the path to have the latest, first class, state of the art water and sewer from a technology point of view first. He said then it will be an important dialogue in terms of the management structure, and where the County has partnerships with other municipalities, and how they decide to manage it themselves because, ultimately, they see a County facility being built somewhere. He said they will look at whether it will just be an extension of the engineering department of the County, or will it be the whole idea of an authority of some sort that is a quasi-governmental entity with people on that Board who do nothing but water and sewer, or do they privatize the whole thing. He said that is the whole management structure effect, and then there are the pocketbook issues of where the funding comes from. He said they are always trying to get the overlap with the best technical solution, the best management, and the best financial, and then look for that sweet spot where all three overlap because that is their win-win-win situation, and it is all on the table right now.

Mr. Hastings said a couple of years ago he went to an event put on by Urban Land Institute, and they were, basically, predicting the future slums and what it would look like. He said most folks around here have heard him say this before, but it was not that long ago growing up that most of them understood the inner cities as being an area of concentrated poverty, so they are, basically, forecasting what that would look like. He said it is the Deer Harbor and Sleepy Hollow type neighborhoods where individuals are going to move in cheaply, and they are not going to want to be far away from the resources. He said, personally, he is concerned for multiple reasons, but until they get those kinds of areas hooked up to water and sewer and provide high quality water and sewer, they could have a real problem on their hands in the future. He said he thinks their best asset going forward would be to be able to say they have a very high level of water and sewer. He said, on a brief side note, he has been reading more and more on environmental health. He said they have the issue where they have very different soils here on the Lower Shore, and a lot of it is sandy, so anything that goes into the ground goes straight down and into the water individually. He said there are a lot of individuals consuming prescription medications, and that does not just magically go away and stay in the human body, but it goes through the human. He said there are individuals in rural areas being prescribed prescription drugs for issues, such as depression, or other kinds of things, and it is just literally going into the neighbor's water, to which Mr. Dodd added, not to mention the ones that are being dumped into the toilets. Mr. Hastings said they have made progress there, but, bringing that back, right now their wastewater treatment plants do not take out those chemicals, so he wants to make sure they have a few systems, and not a lot of systems that they need to upgrade all at once, and to do so in a way that makes sure their communities like these do not become what Urban Land Institute and others have predicted they could be.

Mr. McCain said, getting back to Mr. Hastings' comment, the future is the present, and these issues are already here to a large degree. He then asked what the timeframe is, to which Mr. Bozick responded, it started out being a year, but where they are now in terms of the meetings they have had with the towns, they have not really talked to the State yet to get a handle on the disposal locations, so they are

probably going to extend that for perhaps another four to six months. He said there are about 11 million gallons of wastewater treated by wastewater treatment plants right now, and ultimately, they are going to predict another 10 million gallons of wastewater being produced per day that is going to need to be treated and discharged. He said, generally, the County uses 20 million gallons a day of wastewater out of the ground for water supply, and 13 million of that per day goes to agriculture, 11 to 12 million goes to residential and commercial, and the difference goes to commercial use and businesses. Mr. Baker said that 20 million is roughly half of it being treated by existing systems, so the other 10 million is what they have to find a way to address. Mr. Bozick said there are 35,000 residents in the County, about 17,000 residents connected to sewer plants, and about 17,000 are on septic systems. He said, as the County grows and develops, it will eventually approach 50,000, and they are talking 50 to 100 years from now, but it will be there. He said some of those will stay on septic tanks, but another 10 to 15,000 are going to need to be connected to sewer plants, and they are going to need a discharge and an outfall.

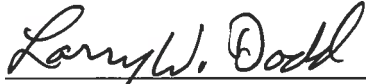
Mr. Cannon said it has always been the highest priority of this Council, and he thinks the previous Council, to try to resolve this. He then asked if Mr. Baker has a timeframe to when would be a good time to meet with Council again where he would have something substantial without wasting his time, to which Mr. Baker responded, it would be better to take a shot at that after they finish their meetings with Worcester, Somerset, MDE, and MDP, and the holidays are coming up. Mr. Cannon clarified, he is talking months from now, to which Mr. Baker responded, he does not know. Mr. Bozick said he thinks it will take two to three months for the meetings with the State, and then they can see how that evolves.

Mr. Holloway asked if the top priority is identifying the location that first needs this, and finding the funding, to which Mr. Bozick responded, they will want to have a practical outcome they can implement, and they are not going to do it all at one time. Mr. Baker clarified, he wants to stress that he wants this plan to answer how, not where they are going first, or why are they going to a particular location, but it will just be a simple engineering document showing how they do this. He said the debate about "where" goes above his paygrade, but they can look at where their top three projects are, how they are going to fund them, and how they are going to manage the system. He said those are the questions they need to answer, and there is not one top priority for this. Mr. Holloway said he thought where the project was going to be would kind of control how much it is going to cost, to which Mr. Baker responded, it is an interesting puzzle. He said he equates it to those puzzles that have one square missing and you move stuff around to get the puzzle figured out. He said that is what this is right now where they are sitting there moving the pieces around, they have a blank square, and they are trying to answer the question of where they go, where it is going to cost the least, what technology they use, whether they expand an existing system, or put in a package plant. He said there is a lot of information still to answer.

Mr. Dodd thanked Mr. Baker and Mr. Bozick for giving Council an update on the water and sewer master plan. He said he hopes they can get together and have more updates because this is important, and, to him, it is a high priority in this County, and he thinks it is to a lot of citizens as well. He thanked them for their work, and said he thinks they are going to need more time. There was no further discussion.

*Signatures on next page*

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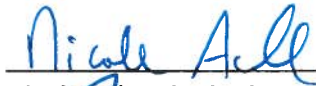
Larry W. Dodd, President, District 3



John T. Cannon, Vice President, At-Large



Ernest F. Davis, District 1



Nicole Azle, District 2



Josh Hastings, District 4



Joe Holloway, District 5



William R. McCain, At-Large



Laura Hurley, Council Administrator