

CITY OF SALISBURY
WORK SESSION
OCTOBER 4, 2021

Public Officials Present

Council President John “Jack” R. Heath Mayor Jacob R. Day
Council Vice-President Muir Boda Councilwoman Michele Gregory
Councilwoman April Jackson

Public Officials Absent

Councilwoman Angela Blake

In Attendance

Housing & Community Development Department (HCDD) Director Ron Strickler, Fire Chief John Tull, Nate Sansom, Special Assistant to the Mayor, City Attorney Michael Sullivan, City Clerk Kimberly Nichols, and members of the Public.

On October 4, 2021 the Salisbury City Council convened in a hybrid Work Session (in person and on Zoom Conferencing Video) at 4:30 p.m. in Council Chambers. President Heath called for a moment of silent meditation in memory of the recent passing of North Beach Councilwoman Jane Hagen and Wicomico County Code Administrator – Town of Hebron Town Commissioners President Rick Dwyer.

Non-conforming Use Zoning Exemption program

HCDD Director Ron Strickler reported that a great deal of work was done since the first discussed with Council in January 2021. Initially, through HCDD’s rental registration, opportunities were identified where improvements to communities not allowed to get rental licenses could be made. In the program, blight and vacant properties could be eliminated and the current housing shortage addressed by opening up needed properties.

Mr. Strickler discussed the Code amendment which received favorable recommendation from the Planning Commission on September 16, 2021. The program would be approved for one calendar year. The objectives were to increase property value, provide tax revenue, support neighborhood stability, housing, and added revenues for the City. The City would have decreased calls for service directly related to vacant properties, and less blight and City-absorbed maintenance expenses. The two eligibility requirements for the program were: 1) any vacant property that lost its non-conforming use by being vacant for one year, and 2) any property that lost its non-conforming use in the last five years. The application must be received within twelve months of the passage of the legislation and could be extended after twelve months by Council. Property owners would have to be in good standing with the City. The application process would go through HCDD and Department of Infrastructure and Development (DID). Calls for service would be limited to three calls per unit. One unit’s license being revoked would not negatively impact the other units on the property. Three exterior code violations would be allowed per year subject to inspections. There would be a \$500 application fee and an increase in the

annual fee of the landlord license registration and rental unit registration from \$120 to \$240. If the property sat vacant for twelve months it would lose its non-conforming use, and would keep the property owner encouraged to maintain the property.

Mr. Boda supported the program and asked how many properties would be impacted. Mr. Strickler said they identified about twenty properties, but there were probably more.

President Heath asked who would track calls for service and asked for an update on the program in six months. Tracking would be between HCDD and the Police Department.

Ms. Jackson asked when the program would begin; Mr. Strickler said in a month. He restated that once the legislation passed the property owner would have a year to apply. Once approved, the owner would have twelve months to finish the renovation. Once they received the occupancy permit and had tenants it could not sit vacant for more than twelve months. It would still require it to be vacant for more than twelve months in order to lose the non-conforming use.

Mayor Day said that there was a crisis and everything the City could do for safe and affordable housing needed to be done. A vacant home was a further blighting influence than a home designed originally as a single-family home and cut up into three or four.

Council reached unanimous consensus to advance the legislation to legislative agenda.

Budget Amendment for Safe Station program

Fire Chief John Tull explained the budget amendment and MOU between the Wicomico County Health Department and the Fire Department. The Health Department received funding from Mid-Shore Behavioral Health for a Safe Station Program providing 24 hour services for treatment and recovery resources. The Fire Department partnered with the Health Department to provide non-emergent medical checks to all individuals that enter the Safe Station. The Department would invoice the Health Department quarterly for \$2500. The funds would be used to purchase additional medical supplies and equipment.

Council reached unanimous consensus to advance the legislation to legislative agenda.

Ordinance approving a tax credit for Habitat for Humanity

Nate Sansom, Special Assistant to the Mayor, joined Council to discuss the tax credit to assist Habitat for Humanity in rehabilitating and constructing new homes in the City. It would be valid for up to five years as long as the property was under development by Habitat. Habitat's average for constructing or renovating properties has been 2.8 years, and they would only use about three years of the credit for each property they developed.

The impact to the City would be just over \$1,500 per year in lost tax revenue from Real Property tax for the 11 eligible properties. Mr. Sansom explained this was done in other counties including Anne Arundel, Caroline, St. Mary's, etc. Municipalities were also eligible to create the tax credit to make housing more affordable throughout the City.

Mr. Boda asked if water and sewer credits would be issued at that time. Mayor Day said there would not be a water and sewer bill. He also asked if the County would partner on the credit, and Ms. Hilligoss said that they were waiting on the City to act first.

Mayor Day said the legislation required Habitat to provide an annual report to the City, which was not intended to be cumbersome, but to provide information on the properties included. There would be additional legislation presented soon to impact Salisbury Neighborhood Housing Service which had to be managed differently due to limitations in State enabling legislation. This legislation, based on the State enabling legislation, enabled the City to do this for Habitat, and Council would be updated on the impact.

Council reached unanimous consensus to advance the legislation to legislative agenda.

Public Comments

Two members of the public discussed the following topics:

Director for Habitat for Humanity shared impact of the legislation, as listed in the attachment entitled, “Economic Impact of New Home Construction” which she passed out to Council.

Habitat for Humanity associate Michael Lankford shared the remarks noted in the attached letter. (Both attachments are attached and included as part of the minutes.)

Administration Comments

Mayor Day said there would be more legislation introduced and thanked Council.

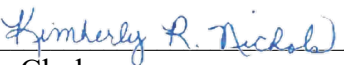
Mr. Boda thanked Mayor Day for introducing the “Here is Home” package.

Ms. Jackson knew people in these situations, and the information was a lot to absorb. She asked Code Enforcement Officers to ensure everyone was living safely and said Salisbury should not have twenty blighted / vacant houses where people could be living.

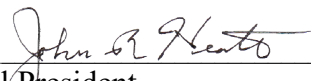
Ms. Gregory thanked Mr. Lankford for the eloquent speech. The legislation would set the bar for all cities across the state for years to come. She saw larger cities than Salisbury with the ability to do similar as this, but instead criminalized homelessness.

President Heath reminded the skeptics of the “Here is Home” package, “there but for the grace of God go I.” He said it was the right thing to do, and was why he ran for Council.

With no further business to discuss, the Work Session was adjourned at 5:14 p.m.



City Clerk



Council President

Economic Impact of New Home Construction

Client: Habitat for Humanity of Wicomico County

One Time Economic Impact of Each New House (in 2020 Dollars): **\$236,973**

Labor Income Generated by Each House During Construction/Renovation (in 2020 Dollars): **\$74,356**

Local Tax Revenues Generated by Each House During Construction/Renovation (in 2020 Dollars): **\$3,017**

Lifetime Economic Impact of Each New House (in 2020 Dollars): **\$1,780,938**

Lifetime Labor Income Generated by Each House (in 2020 Dollars): **\$1,228,360**

Lifetime Local Tax Revenues Generated by Each House (in 2020 Dollars): **\$157,493**

Number of Jobs Supported over the Lifetime of Each House: **39**

NOTE: Lifetime impacts are calculated over 30 years and tax rate increases are assumed to average 2% per year.

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Habitat for Humanity of Wicomico County, Inc.

Covid-19 Emergency Rental Assistance Recap
August 1, 2020 to present

FY2021

FY21	Households served	Individuals served	FY21		To Date Expended
			Households served	To date individuals	
CDBG Cares Act (FY21)			55	161	\$ 144,735.55
CRF-7 Rental Assistance (FY21)			29	83	\$ 103,000.00
ERAP			82	213	\$ 453,403.41
Total FY21			166	457	\$ 701,138.96

FY2022

ERAP - Grant start date: June 1, 2021; expires Dec 31, 2022.

Grant spend down

ERAP	week	Households served	Individuals served	To date HHs	To date Individuals	Expended	To Date Expended	Expended in FY22	Grant spend down
June	1	9	21	9	21	\$ 63,894.20	\$ 63,894.20	\$	2,027,000.00
June	2	20	60	29	81	\$ 117,617.51	\$ 181,511.71	\$	1,963,105.80
June	3	20	41	49	122	\$ 116,367.28	\$ 297,878.99	\$	1,845,488.29
June	4	19	65	68	187	\$ 93,597.46	\$ 391,476.45	\$	1,729,121.01
June	5	14	26	82	213	\$ 61,926.96	\$ 453,403.41	\$	1,635,523.55
July	1	14	40	96	253	\$ 78,526.72	\$ 531,930.13	\$ 78,526.72	\$ 1,573,596.59
July	2	17	40	113	293	\$ 88,194.11	\$ 620,124.24	\$ 166,720.83	\$ 1,495,069.87
July	3	23	55	136	348	\$ 95,461.36	\$ 715,585.60	\$ 262,182.19	\$ 1,406,875.76
July	4	31	71	167	419	\$ 129,917.40	\$ 845,503.00	\$ 392,099.59	\$ 1,311,414.40
August	1	20	56	187	475	\$ 101,082.38	\$ 946,585.38	\$ 493,181.97	\$ 1,181,497.00
August	2	19	56	206	531	\$ 103,987.46	\$ 1,050,572.84	\$ 597,169.43	\$ 1,080,414.62
August	3	27	71	233	602	\$ 112,351.30	\$ 1,162,924.14	\$ 709,520.73	\$ 976,427.16
August	3	20	48	253	650	\$ 96,890.03	\$ 1,259,814.17	\$ 806,410.76	\$ 864,075.86
August	4	11	29	264	679	\$ 42,749.90	\$ 1,302,564.07	\$ 849,160.66	\$ 767,185.83
August	5	20	55	284	734	\$ 68,909.85	\$ 1,371,473.92	\$ 918,070.51	\$ 724,435.93
September	1	23	55	307	789	\$ 88,701.52	\$ 1,460,175.44	\$ 1,006,772.03	\$ 655,526.08
September	2	18	42	325	831	\$ 80,479.39	\$ 1,540,654.83	\$ 1,087,251.42	\$ 566,824.56
September	3	22	53	347	884	\$ 83,790.30	\$ 1,624,445.13	\$ 1,171,041.72	\$ 486,345.17
September	4	24	71	371	955	\$ 90,014.28	\$ 1,714,459.41	\$ 1,261,056.00	\$ 402,554.87
September	5	26	60	397	1015	\$ 98,936.54	\$ 1,813,395.95	\$ 1,359,992.54	\$ 312,540.59

Total Covid Emergency Rental Assistance	To date HHs	To date Individuals	To Date Expended
To Date	481	1259	\$ 2,411,534.91

If using this data, please provide credit to Analysis by Molly Hillgoss, MBA, September 1, 2020

Analysis of Evictions in Maryland

Rank by Population	County	Population	Median Income	% of Population evicted	Annualized Evictions - based on 6 months of data (Sept 2019-Feb 2020)	Avg Monthly evictions	Sept 2019	Oct 2019	Nov 2019	Dec 2019	Jan 2020	Feb 2020	March 2020
1	Montgomery Co	1,050,688	99,604	0.076%	802	67	95	65	74	38	71	58	38
2	Prince George's Co	909,327	78,680	0.407%	3,702	309	411	337	278	116	452	257	130
3	Baltimore County	827,370	72,305	0.665%	5,502	459	494	550	359	302	591	455	120
4	Baltimore city/co	593,490	46,604	1.091%	6,476	540	466	567	384	380	702	739	340
5	Anne Arundel Co	579,234	95,297	0.182%	1,056	88	66	83	101	68	118	92	12
6	Howard County	325,090	119,386	0.144%	470	39	39	42	37	25	58	33	12
7	Frederick County	259,547	89,541	0.032%	82	7	12	13	3	2	11	0	0
8	Harford County	255,441	83,595	0.228%	582	49	62	50	42	33	57	47	22
9	Carroll County	168,447	89,595	0.090%	152	13	16	15	22	6	8	9	0
10	Charles County	163,257	93,947	0.163%	266	22	12	23	26	8	43	21	17
11	Washington Count	151,049	54,643	0.526%	794	66	71	60	61	59	75	71	23
12	St. Mary's County	113,510	80,049	0.074%	84	7	6	7	8	0	11	10	6
13	Wicomico County	103,609	50,015	0.429%	444	37	30	40	41	31	45	35	25
14	Cecil County	102,855	70,504	0.257%	264	22	28	41	16	17	15	15	6
15	Calvert County	92,525	97,188	0.050%	46	4	3	9	0	0	11	0	0
16	Allegany County	70,416	44,708	0.230%	162	14	17	11	13	8	22	10	6
17	Worcester County	52,276	53,509	0.103%	54	5	2	8	3	2	5	7	5
18	Queen Anne's Co	50,381	79,966	0.064%	32	3	5	2	2	2	4	1	0
19	Talbot County	37,181	62,264	0.054%	20	2	2	4	0	2	1	1	0
20	Caroline County	33,406	49,616	0.054%	18	2	0	0	2	0	1	6	2
21	Dorchester Coun	31,929	44,491	0.476%	152	13	9	20	18	4	18	7	10
22	Garrett County	29,014	46,710	0.083%	24	2	3	3	3	1	2	0	1
23	Somerset County	25,616	38,546	0.476%	122	10	11	18	7	6	9	10	1
24	Kent County	19,422	54,210	0.144%	28	2	2	1	1	1	3	4	0
					21,334	1,778	1862	1969	1501	1114	2334	1887	776

United States Census Bureau. B01001 SEX BY AGE, 2018 American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates. U.S. Census Bureau, American Community Survey Office. Web. 19 December 2019. <http://www.census.gov/>.

United States Census Bureau. Annual Estimates of the Resident Population: April 1, 2010 to July 1, 2019. U.S. Census Bureau, Population Division. Web. May 2020. <http://www.census.gov/>.

Data collected from: <https://www.mdcourts.gov/district/about/stats>. The statistics include landlord-tenant cases.

Thank you for allowing me to speak today.

Narrative is how we create meaning in our lives as well as navigate the world. Storytelling is essential to what it means to be human. Sometimes stories we tell help and sometimes they make our lives more difficult; narrative can become a gateway or a barrier to true understanding.

In the spirit of this insight, I would like to share a summary of recent experiences while working at Habitat for Humanity Wicomico County. I work on the Emergency Rental Assistance Program and until recently, the CDBG CV-1-12 Emergency Motel/Hotel Project. Both of these are grant-funded programs which assist low-income people affected by the pandemic approved by the governor of Maryland. Everyone I have come across in the last year and a half, personally and professionally, have endured hardship in one manner or another due to COVID-19, however, when one becomes at risk of losing their housing, or does in fact lose stable housing, their lives become a struggle no one, in the most prosperous nation in history, ought to endure. These programs have put me in direct contact with hundreds of individuals in our community who have lost, or are close to losing, their housing. Working on the hotel funding, which is for people currently homeless referred to our agency by another organization (such as a shelter which is full), I have encountered mothers, children, displaced youth, veterans, and working class people, barely getting by before the pandemic, who now face a struggle for survival ~~daily~~. Some of these people have had to quarantine due to exposure to COVID-19 and do not get paid time off at their place of employment, some have had a reduction in hours at their workplace, and some have been laid off from a job they held for years prior. None of these effects are their responsibility, yet they bear the consequences.

Some of these families have to live in a hotel room for a week or two and have to arrange a temporary bus stop from the hotel for their children with the Board of Education. When you face homelessness, it often is accompanied by feelings of shame or guilt. Can you imagine the accompanying feeling when you call your child's school to arrange transportation under the pretense of currently living at a hotel, but knowing you must divulge this personal information to a stranger because you know the bearing an education has for your child's future? Can you imagine going to a homeless shelter because the weather is growing colder, and you can no longer endure the elements, only to hear there is no room for you, when you risked your very life in service to this nation at one time? Can you imagine leaving work today, not to go home, but to a hotel, not for a vacation, but because there is nowhere else to go, and knowing with each passing day, you come closer to a checkout date that is the end of access to showering facilities while knowing you must continue to go to work? Can you imagine looking for housing in a city where rent is often between \$1000-\$1600, when the average income for a resident of Salisbury is \$21,000 a year, which means half of your income or more must go to housing, leaving you with \$10,000 to pay water, electric, car payment, car insurance, gas, and food? Most of these mothers must work two or even three jobs, when they have a family member or friend who is able to watch their children, just to barely get by; instead of making memories and imparting important life lessons to their children, they are spending every moment full of worry and yet still striving to provide the essentials to their children. And then they lose their housing.

These are not theoretical scenarios, but realities people are facing. These people are not vagrants and undesirables. They are those who attend your church and community organizations; they play sports and perform arts with your children; they are your neighbors. They are valuable members of this community whom you already know and love. We must continue to rally to their aid; it is our civic duty. As human beings, who traverse life with

narratives, we must be careful to watch which narratives are assisting us to grow more tender in our responses, and which are causing us to turn a blind eye to hard realities. It may be hard to face some of these realities, but it is even harder to live them, and this must embolden us to be strong for those in need within our communities; and our response ought to be to grow more compassionate. To ask ourselves: how can I help?

I would like to thank you all for allowing me to speak on behalf of those struggling in our city, Habitat for Humanity for their hard work and service, and the City of Salisbury for providing hope in a dire time of need within our community. Thank you.