

CITY OF SALISBURY  
WORK SESSION  
APRIL 1, 2024

Public Officials Present

Council President D'Shawn M. Doughty  
Vice President Angela M. Blake  
Councilmember Sharon C. Dashiell

Mayor Randolph J. Taylor  
Councilmember Michele Gregory

Public Officials Absent

Councilmember April R. Jackson

In Attendance

Deputy City Administrator John Tull, EMS Assistant Chief Chris Truitt, Deputy Chief Chris O'Barsky, Deputy Director Field Operations Sam Ireland, Media Specialist Jordan Ray, City Attorney Heather Konyar, City Clerk Kim Nichols and members of the public.

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On April 1, 2024 the Salisbury City Council convened at 4:30 p.m. in Work Session in Council Chambers of the Government Office Building. The following is a synopsis of the items discussed.

**Wicomico Mentoring Project presentation**

Mr. James Hesen, Pupil Personnel Worker with Wicomico County Public Schools joined Council to discuss the Wicomico Mentoring Project. After providing some of the history of the mentoring project, he discussed the mission and vision to bring mentors into the schools to work with the students in need of additional support that may not have the support or hot meals at home.

Mr. Hesen shared that Wicomico County Public Schools had 16,400 students, 3,000 staff members and only 128 mentees. He said they were growing the program as much as they could but were servicing less than 1% of the student population. They aspired having a mentor for all 16,400 students but really wanted those students who needed and families who wanted mentors for their children to have them. Mentors only needed to spend about one hour out of the week. He said that mentored students with behavioral issues or problems with their grades showed improvements with a mentor. Mentoring also provided socialization and the building of a sense of community.

He discussed the training involved in becoming a mentor, school choice, expanding the numbers of mentees, etc. and said they were looking for additional mentors and mentees.

Ms. Blake discussed the mentoring the City was involved in several years ago through Amanda Pollack. Mayor Taylor inquired as to where the greatest need was and Mr.

Hesen responded Wi Middle, Salisbury Middle and Bennett Middle. Mayor Taylor asked about providing mentors through the City’s community centers as a gathering spot. Mr. Hesen said they operated within the schools independent of community centers and Big Brothers/Big Sisters.

Ms. Dashiell asked for a general idea of what it would be like during that hour and if there was a format to give direction. Mr. Hesen explained the mentor package that was provided which included card games, games, Uno, board games, coloring, and educational games.

**Budget amendment to appropriate additional funds required for Field Operations**

Deputy Director of Field Operations (FOps) Sam Ireland explained the department sold used equipment through an online auction and netted over \$40,000. He reported they used Gov Deals and took pieces of equipment that had no more lifespan but could still be used in other municipalities occasionally and in the private sector. He requested those funds to be transferred into the various accounts listed in the ordinance.

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

**Acceptance of Grant from Maryland Department of Health for Cancer Testing Supplies**

Deputy Fire Chief Chris O’Barsky and EMS Assistant Chief Chris Truitt joined Council. Mr. O’Barsky discussed the Fire Department’s robust cancer reduction program. The request was to accept grant funds recently awarded from the Maryland Department of Health’s Maryland Professional and Volunteer Firefighter Innovative Cancer Screening Technologies Grant to the Salisbury Fire Department for \$22,009. These funds required no match and must be used by June 30, 2024 to purchase the cancer testing supplies for professional and volunteer firefighters. The department began testing its members for cancer in 2023 and intended to make it an annual part of their medical physical process.

President Doughty asked how many tests this amount would provide, if it was still voluntary, and how often were they planning to test. Deputy Chief O’Barsky said it would provide 140 tests, was still voluntary and they planned to test on a yearly basis.

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

**Accepting EMS Supplemental Payment Program (ESPP) funds**

Deputy Fire Chief Chris O’Barsky reported that Mr. Truitt worked very hard last year to get the supplemental money from additional Medicaid money through EMS transports. The Fire Department was just recently advised that from that money the City was shorted \$113,732.25. They requested the funds to be used for their overtime account since they were using it to run the fourth run medic unit to help with their call volume.

They also had FMLA, sick issues, and people on vacation. Mr. O'Barsky thought it should get them to the end of this fiscal year.

Mr. Truitt said they applied for the next calendar year and were waiting to hear how much it was going to be.

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

### **Mitchell Landing Closing Documents discussion**

President Doughty asked Vice President Blake to lead the discussion due to his recusal from this item. Ms. Blake stated there was a letter sent to the Mayor and Council from attorney John Custis regarding the April 3<sup>rd</sup> deadline. Mr. Custis was Green Street's lawyer regarding a start date and commitment on the City's part to start this project.

Mayor Taylor said this project fell into disrepair under the City's watch. We entered into an agreement in 2021 with Green Street Housing. He said when he became Mayor he dug into it and realized that perhaps what was discussed at Council and what was ultimately agreed to in the LDA were two different things. He raised the issue and it took about three or four weeks to figure out where the confusion was. He said they then had a Closed Session discussion on the topic and Council gave him permission to try and renegotiate with the buyer but he needed to inspect the property and talk with the state first. He said he met with attorney Robin Cockey last week who agreed to officiate a conversation on the City's behalf with attorney John Custis and either of the principals of Green Street to work this out. Mr. Cockey was still trying to set the meeting up.

Ms. Blake said that when they talked he had until March 15<sup>th</sup> because they needed to move on this. The Council already voted on it and the funding was approved. The LDA was an actual contract. She said her understanding was that Mr. Cockey was confused. She said the Council gave Mr. Taylor in Closed Session an opportunity within a two-week period to negotiate with Green Street regarding the money for the property. Because the LDA was already written as a contract it was a done deal. Council already approved it and she added they would use the administrative act and move forward with it and tell Mr. Custis to go ahead because the Council had approved it. The City Attorney (CBM) would send a letter to Mr. Custis saying we were moving ahead with that project.

Mayor Taylor said he understood they presented their tax credits at this point and they had not even been awarded yet. He said he just spoke with Mr. Cockey last Thursday so if there was any clarification problems he did not call him. He asked City Attorney Heather Konyar if she heard anything to the contrary. Ms. Konyar said she had been out of the country, but did debrief with Mr. Cockey. They discussed they believed that all of the voting required to send this to settlement has already happened. However, if Mayor and Council wished to arrange a meeting with Mr. Custis, there would be no problem with that. But if Council wanted to change course and not go to settlement, then that would require new legislative action and new voting. In that case, they recommended Council hold a Closed Session to receive counsel's advice before making that decision.

Mayor Taylor stated his position was never that they did not have an agreement but that what was presented by administration at that time and what Council believed to be the case were two different things. There were meaningful differences between what was agreed to and what was actually signed in the LDA. He added that he was just looking out for the taxpayer's asset and wouldn't make a big deal out of this except for the fact that it was meaningful and substantial (about a million dollars). He added that the City should have a conversation with the buyer to help him understand the misunderstanding. He didn't even have his tax credits at this point.

Ms. Blake stated the Council gave Mayor Taylor a window of opportunity, and the window was closed. They already voted on this and were going to invoke the administrative act. Our legal counsel could write a letter to Mr. Custis letting him know it was a "go" with the project. Being on the Council prior with Ms. Gregory, it was difficult that the Mayor would know what the Council understood or did not understand. She said Council went through the process and clearly understood what the contract and LDA meant. Council reached consensus to move forward with the contract and LDA as Ms. Blake explained. President Doughty did not participate in the consensus.

Mayor Taylor said he knew that Council already voted on this and did not require reaching consensus again. He said he proved in the Closed Session that there was an oversight with the documentation and how it was presented. He said he was trying to do his best to recover what he believed to be a modicum of what was fair for the asset being sold. It was a misunderstanding and we proved it back in the Closed Session, and that was why Council gave him permission to go back and renegotiate. That meeting would still occur independent of what the Council thought.

The following comments were received from two members of the public:

- Was very familiar with this project and during COVID Habitat advanced rental assistance to residents in that property and many units were condemned while the City had control and was managing the property. She was also aware of the low-income housing tax credits that would be used to help redevelop this property. This would be the last property that would be able to take advantage of the tax credits because of our most recent census. The timing of the rehab of this project was very important so the developer could take advantage of the tax credits which keep the property available for low income families that need subsidized housing. Speaker said she was very upset that there was a chance that this project could be delayed because of the shortage of affordable housing in the City of Salisbury. She applauded the Council for moving this forward and so that families could get housed in subsidized and affordable units.
- Speaker said the City did not do a great job in stewardship and was disappointed in the disregard for the building. Time was of the essence in more ways than one.

Mayor Taylor said his intention was to absolutely bring Mitchell Landing back online, but we were basically giving the property away. The impression of the Council was that

they were getting \$1.3 million, which, in his opinion, was just a confusion. He said he was pro affordable housing.

### **Update on Carroll Street and Eastern Shore Drive**

Deputy City Administrator informed Council that the design plan was done for Carroll Street. Council would receive a presentation in the next Council Work Session because it was associated with the Safe Streets For All Grant Funding that the City received. The budget ordinance and all the documentation was sent to legal for review and hopefully the presentation of accepting the grant money from the Federal Highway Administration and the Maryland Department of Transportation to see the Carroll Street project to completion would be on the next Work Session. Mr. Tull said one of the holdups was if we cut part of the pavement out where the grass was going to be in the medians, because of the winter we couldn't plant grass. It was all about timing. Administration would be making a presentation once we received the grant documents back from legal.

Ms. Dashiell asked if the grant funds designated how they should be spent. She said she thought there was not a street in Salisbury that was more dangerous than what was done to Carroll Street and asked if the grant money could be designated to alter some of the problems. As was suggested in Vision Zero, if something was not working, it should be evaluated in terms of how it could be made safer for cars, pedestrians and bikers.

Mr. Tull said part of the funding was specific to the Carroll Street project. Other funding could address other bikeways and other changes but the funding for Safe Streets For All was earmarked specifically for the Carroll Street project. Council would have an opportunity to see the plan and what Carroll Street would look like at the Work Session.

Ms. Blake asked if there was a re-design in that before or was it the same design, and Mr. Tull said there was some re-design done to the original project with widening some of the lanes, pedestrian crosswalks, and the medians. President Doughty said Council looked forward to the presentation and hearing the public's thoughts on the re-design. He shared that Eastern Shore Drive was still in the design planning phase and there was no movement on the project because of no funding associated with it at this time.

Ms. Dashiell said that when the feasibility study was done on Eastern Shore Drive and Carroll Street there were some very good suggestions as far as pedestrian crossing, biking and particularly stop signs and traffic lights which she said she thought was a good start, even if Eastern Shore Drive was on hold. Mr. Tull said that some of the crosswalks and pedestrian crossings were earmarked for Eastern Shore Drive. Mayor Taylor said the street was very wide and it would be helpful.

One member of the public provided the following comments:

- Agreed with Ms. Dashiell that Carroll Street did not work very well. It did not work well for vehicles or bikes because it was completely disconnected. It did not connect very well to the Downtown Pedestrian Bridge, it stopped halfway down

the length of Carroll Street, and the future design would extend with a crossing across Route 13 to eventually get as far as Snow Hill Road. Salisbury bike lanes have not bridged across a State Highway road, and that would be a first for us. A lot of the reason why bike lanes were not widely used in the City was because we did not have the connectivity. This project would give us that connectivity.

### **TIF Policy**

President Doughty said that Council had asked for a draft policy by the end of the week after the last Work Session. Last week he emailed Administration and copied the Mayor and did not hear a response, so would like an update.

Mayor Taylor said that the goal was to get it to the next Work Session on April 15<sup>th</sup> and would provide a draft to review before that Work Session. President Doughty stated that Council had inquired about the TIF policy and did not receive a response, and added that Council would like a fluid conversation to have their questions and concerns addressed. He added that he sent emails through the proper chain of command to the City Administrator and copied the Mayor. He did not think any of his emails were answered in the last month and asked for a response in the future to keep communications open.

### **Letter from TidalHealth**

President Doughty confirmed that Council received the document and Ms. Blake confirmed it was in the agenda packet. He stated they would have the public review it.

The following comments were received from two members of the public on the TIF Policy:

- Concerned about borrowing money and funding projects for hopeful financial benefit. Don't rush this because we need to pay attention to our financial status, bond ratings, ability to borrow, and ability to pay our bills. Give due diligence on the Horizon report that has to be reviewed soon, to slowing down the TIF and whatever else is in the pipeline for financial gain or benefits for any sort of developments or programs. Be kind to one another in this process, listen and do not shut each other off and put each other down. Read, research and talk to other communities where they have had TIFs and understand the people who developed our TIF programs will also be the ones who will benefit from those programs. Don't rush into something so quick because it looked like a good idea and think with the end in mind.
- Speaker was learning more about the TIF and understood there would be about 200 or so single-family homes and town homes built on the old Salisbury Mall property. Ryan Homes, under another LLC, were the developer. She said if 200 units were sold, the City would receive about \$2,000 a year in property tax. That was about \$400,000 from those new units which we desperately needed. All types of housing was needed, not just affordable. There would be affordable town homes in the \$200,000 range and single-family homes in the \$300,00 range. She

did not know what the property tax was on the property currently but thought it was less than \$400,000 per year. She understood that the TIF was going to offset the common areas of the subdivision which seemed reasonable that there would be grassy areas to benefit the neighborhood. She was not for delays in the development and urged Administration to move quickly to create this TIF policy and be transparent so that the public could understand it and get more housing.

President Doughty stated Council wanted a week to review the policy and addressed a comment made at the last meeting that the City Manager from Cambridge left his job because of TIF. He stated that was not the sole reason why he left and it was not because he thought TIF was bad. There were other reasons related to funding the specific project.

Mayor Taylor said that was why the City was developing a TIF Policy, to put a collar around what developers could use for both the use of the funds but also how it was repaid. Relative to the common areas, that was not really the purpose of a TIF. TIF was for common use to the community that was being born as a part of the development. He gave an example of Aydelotte Farm. They put in the Collector Road that was common to the community but not specific to the development. He said, relative to what President Doughty said about Cambridge, they could be abused and in some cases load them up in an inappropriate way to make it advantageous to the developer.

### **Council / Mayoral Recognition- Certificates and Awards**

President Doughty stated that Council, through the Clerks Office, would be taking over some of the Public special recognitions and awards. He asked if Council wanted to present certificates, awards, and proclamations. Ms. Gregory thought that people should receive what they requested and meeting those requests was part of Council's job. She shared recently someone requested a proclamation but they received a certificate from Administration. Ms. Dashiell asked for definitions so that they were clear when a request was made. President Doughty said there were four types (Certificates of Recognition, Certificates of Appreciation, Proclamations and Citations) that the public could request.

Council reached unanimous consensus to issue all four types of documents. A request form would be on the Council webpage and requests should be done a month in advance.

### **Administration / Council Comments**

Mayor Taylor said he became the Mayor to help the City of Salisbury. He was busy before and was still busy, and was trying to do his best. He brought a lot of qualities to the table with his banking and real estate background. He said he was not a political person and was trying to do his best by the City taxpayers. If one took a position different from his, that was alright, but do it peacefully and agreeably. He was not mad, hoped no one was made at him, and said he wanted to be cooperative as the Mayor.

Ms. Dashiell congratulated Habitat because they were going to dedicate a home on April 5<sup>th</sup> at 11:00 a.m. She congratulated Lila with the Salisbury Police Department. She and

Deputy Chief Drewer worked diligently to get flag football which started on April 27<sup>th</sup> and was a free event.

Ms. Gregory said she went to her very first Zoo Commission meeting. They discussed a lot of exciting events coming up. She asked that as the weather warmed up and people took their children to the Zoo again to please be patient as there were a lot of improvement projects going on for the next few years. This was for the better for the animals and the public. She looked forward to seeing the updated and expanded exhibits. She attended the amazing Célèbrez la Femme event on Saturday and was happy to see so many women showing up and doing the work in the community. It was nice to see women patting each other on the back because a lot of the work was thankless.


Ms. Blake asked everyone healthy enough to donate blood and plasma and become an organ donor.

President Doughty said he had the pleasure of attending the Downtown Business Alliance Spring Fest this past weekend and it was a beautiful event. He hoped everyone had a nice Easter holiday and hoped we got some better weather. He said some us were new here and we wore pretty big hats. When a presentation date was promised he expected the information to be provided. Whatever he did was for the greater good for Salisbury and wanted to continue moving forward. Council was not trying to fast track anything but he wanted to ensure they did it in a way that was responsible, and communication was a large part. He said he did not know how many emails, texts and calls he made but had to physically go downtown to get answers for some things. It should not happen that way. He could be called or emailed any time and wanted keep his communication lines open. When he worked with jurisdictions across the Bridge and in other states and saw how they treated developers in the affordable realm, he was disappointed they were not treated the same way in his own backyard. Show the people you want to do it. Let's stop the bickering back and forth and figure out how we're going to do it, and get there.

Mayor Taylor said if anything he did on behalf of the City gave Council a message other than he cared about housing and the quality of it, they were wrong. He did not mean to huff and apologized. He said his door and phone were always open and he could be called anytime. He told President Doughty they would begin meeting regularly.

### **Adjournment / Convene in Special Meeting**

With no further business to discuss, the Work Session was adjourned at 5:44 p.m. and President Doughty immediately called the Special Meeting to order.

  
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City Clerk

  
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Council President