

COUNTY COMMISSIONERS OF CAROLINE COUNTY
Preston Volunteer Fire Company Hall, 3860 Choptank Road, Preston, Maryland

MINUTES
March 13, 2018

Present: President, Larry C. Porter; Wilbur Levensgood Jr., Vice President; Daniel J. Franklin, Member; County Administrator, Ken Decker; and Jennifer Farina, Administrative Coordinator

Invocation by Reverend Buddy Dunn; **Pledge of Allegiance.** The agenda was accepted as presented.

FY2019 BUDGET HEARING

The first Fiscal Year 2018-2019 public hearing to receive testimony regarding the Caroline County Government budget requests **convened** at 6:00 p.m.

President Larry Porter introduced the Commissioners and staff and stated that the purpose of this hearing is to receive testimony related to budget requests received for Fiscal Year 2019. He stated that the notice of public hearing was published in the Star Democrat newspaper and on the County website.

The following is a summary of testimony received:

Justin Reibly, Fraternal Order of Police Lodge 118: Mr. Reibly stated that he is currently the president of the Fraternal Order of the Police (FOP) and he is testifying on their behalf, to present the Commissioners with a market value longevity pay request for all deputies currently employed by the Caroline County Sheriff's Office (CCSO). Mr. Reibly stated that step increases were frozen for employees of the CCSO for the past 11 years, apart from receiving cost of living increase that were given to all Caroline County employees. He stated that the proposed pay request for the deputies would cost \$251,915.00. He went on to state that several deputies including himself are seeking employment elsewhere due to leadership issues and pay. Mr. Reibly emphasized that he grew up in Caroline County and enjoys working in the county and would like to continue, however he cannot support his family without a salary increase. He stated that many officers have left CCSO due to pay and staffing, and he fears the services provided to ensure public safety will decrease over time if a change isn't made. Mr. Reibly stated that pay increases are an issue that needs to be addressed in the CCSO in order to maintain the public safety services that Caroline County receives. He thanked the Commissioners and stated that he understood Caroline County is not an economically strong County, and they have less funds to support raises, however he believes public safety should be the utmost importance, and he feels the longevity increase is the only way to ensure the CCSO is staffed with qualified officers.

Thomas Hurly, FOP Lodge 27, President: Mr. Hurly stated that he is the president of the FOP in Dorchester County. He stated that he is testify on behalf of the CCSO and their request for a longevity pay increase. He stated that the County needs to understand that they will lose qualified officers if changes are not made. He stated that with poorly trained officers that have not spent their lives in Caroline County could cause more issues for the County and potential lawsuits down the road, if careless mistakes are made. He emphasized that the most important factors for a good sheriff's office is recruitment, retention, and retirement. Mr. Hurly stated that Caroline County needs to support their local law enforcement now before it is too late.

Susan Runnels, Local Management Board: Ms. Runnels stated that she is testify on behave of the Caroline County Local Management Board. She stated that a majority of the LMB's funds are given by the State of Maryland through grant programs, however each year the amount is decreased due to State

cuts. She expressed the need to increase her original budget increase to the County, in the amount of \$3,000. She stated that the additional funds requested would pay for the yearly audit for the LMB.

Don Reed, Employee Advisory Board: Mr. Reed stated that he is representing the Caroline County Employee Advisory Board. He stated that the EAB understand the County has faced many challenges over the past year, and they thank the Commissioners and employees for all their support.

Cara Calloway, Caroline County Department of Social Services: Ms. Calloway stated that she is testify on behave of the FOP's request for pay increases. She stated that she has been employed by the Department of Social Services for the past 13 years, and the current deputies and staff at the CCSO have been extremely helpful and supportive, when dealing with cases for Social Services. She stated that the CCSO is active and response to emergency at all hours and she fears if the county losses several of these deputies, valuable services and response time will be lost.

E.J. Rouvet, County Resident: Mr. Rouvet stated that he is testifying in support of the CCSO. He stated that officers put their lives on the line daily to protect the citizens of Caroline County, and the importance of keeping qualified and trained officers in the department is crucial. He stated that the cost of hiring new deputies and paying for them to graduate the academy would cost more overall, than giving the raises that are requested to keep highly qualified deputies. Mr. Rouvet stated that he understands money does not flow easily through Caroline County, however he hopes that the Commissioners and the Sheriff understand the importance of staffing their team and county.

Frank Covey, County Resident: Mr. Covey stated that he is attending the public hearing to support the FOP. He stated that in the past three years he has been the victim of crimes that occurred in Caroline County, and by working with deputies located at the CCSO he had great support and service provided to him. He stated that he fears more crimes will be committed or left unsolved if many of the qualified officers accept jobs with different agencies.

Donald Nagel, Caroline County FOP 118: Mr. Nagel stated that he is the Chief of Police for the Town of Federalsburg, and emphasized that the CCSO has helped and supported the Town of Federalsburg with many cases in the past, and he hopes to continue that strong relationship. He stated that the town police departments throughout the county are suffering just as much as the CCSO and he understand that the budget process is hard and unforgiving, however he feels the Commissioners and County Administrator need to make public safety a priority and make a change before it is too late.

Harley Speir, Caroline County Recreation and Parks Advisory Board: Mr. Speir stated that he is representing the Recreation and Parks Advisory Board, which continues to promote the Department and advise the Department and Commissioners on policy, planning and community programs that are created by Recreation and Parks. He stated that he is very proud of the Advisory Board, and the hard work they continue to provide to the community through partnerships and outreach.

Dalton Mann, Caroline County Recreation and Parks Advisory Board: Mr. Mann stated that he thanks the Commissioners and County staff for their continued hard work on the budget process each year. He stated that he is testifying to support the Caroline County Recreation and Parks Advisory Board. He stated that Caroline County provides many important afterschool services, family friendly events, and informationally session that give back to the community.

Betty Steele, County Resident: Ms. Steele stated that she is here on behalf of the FOP. She stated that without good officers the County would have more crimes committed. She stated that she if scared to see what will happen to the County if the long-time officers that have been with the CCSO for 10-15 years

leave. She stated that these men and women wake up every day to protect the citizen of Caroline County daily and they deserve respect and proper compensation.

Milton Nagel, Assistant Superintendent, Caroline County Public Schools: Mr. Nagel stated that he would like to thank the Commissioners for their continued support each year to the Board of Education. He stated that he and his staff fully recognize the budget struggle each year to support outside and internal agencies. He stated that the Maintenance of Effort for the Board of Education has increased due to an increase in enrollment. He thanked the Commissioners again for their full support and bold decision made to raise Caroline County income tax, to support the project of developing a new elementary school in the Town of Greensboro.

Milton Nagel, Chesapeake College Board of Trustee, Mr. Nagel stated that he is here to thank the Commissioners for their support of Chesapeake College. He stated that he is excited for the new chapter that Chesapeake College is about to enter, and he thanks Caroline County for continuing to support the local community college.

R.J. Helmer, Caroline County FOP 118: Mr. Helmer stated that he is currently the Vice President of the FOP, and he is testifying in support of the pay increase that have been proposed by the lodge. He stated that he was an officer for Dorchester County for many years and he left due to the inability to support his family on the salary and the fact that the office became a revolving door for deputies with no retention. He stated that he came to the CCSO with the full intent on retiring with the agency, however he is now forced to look for a job with another agency. Mr. Helmer stated that when he came to CCSO five years ago they had an outstanding reputation and they were also labeled as one of the hardest agency to get into. He stated that as he stands here today, they are one of the easiest office to get hired by because they don't pay sufficiently to compete for the most experienced candidates. Mr. Helmer stated that he respects the Commissioners and he fully understand that balancing a budget is not an easy process, however he would like the Commissioners to understand the importance of retaining the current deputies that work for the CCSO, who continue to provide services to their community daily.

Gannon Lyons, Caroline County FOP 118: Mr. Lyons stated that he is a current deputy at the CCSO, however he has been accepted and will probably leave to work for a different agency. Mr. Lyons stated the he currently works and lives in Caroline County and he does not plan on moving outside of the County, however he can no longer afford to support his family and work for the County. He stated the CCSO lacks many things at this time, but retention is the top issue and when he looks to the future of the CCSO, it does not look like things are going to improve. Mr. Lyons ended by emphasizing the he enjoys living and working in Caroline County, and he is upset that he feels he must seek employment elsewhere.

Joe Riley, Ad Interim State's Attorney, Caroline County State's Attorney's Office: Mr. Riley stated that he has presented the Commissioners with a flat budget this year and he has saved overall from the past budgets presented by the State's Attorney's Office. Mr. Riley went on to express his support towards the FOP and the CCSO. He stated that since he has worked in the State's Attorney's Office, the CCSO has been helpful, respectful and professional when it came time to work on cases. He stated that he hopes the Commissioners do what they can to retain the great men and women that work for the CCSO.

Biddy Trice, Caroline County 4-H Park Board: Mr. Trice thanked the Commissioners for their support and financial help regarding the upkeep of the 4-H Park. He stated that he had originally submitted a request to purchase a tractor however, he feels he can make that purchase at a much lower cost than originally presented.

Amy Kreiner, Caroline County Chamber of Commerce: Ms. Kreiner thanked the Commissioners for their continued support to the Chamber. She stated that half of their budget is paid by membership dues,

and the other half comes from event fees and fundraisers. She stated that the County has supported the Chamber each year, and she hopes they will continue to for the upcoming fiscal year. Mr. Kreiner also stated that as a wife of a first responder, she fully supports the CCSO and thanks everyone who puts on a uniform each morning to go to work.

Jake Rideout, Caroline County FOP 118: Mr. Rideout stated that he moved to Caroline County with his wife to start a family. He stated that he came to the CCSO with the full intent to retire with the agency, however after looking at what he earns now and that of an officer who has been with the agency for 25 years, he sees no way he could support his family on that salary. Mr. Rideout stated that he is seeking employment with the Maryland State Police. Mr. Rideout explained that he believes cops are underpaid everywhere, however it's become an extreme issue for Caroline County and changes need to be made. He stated that he could not stress enough to the Commissioners that all the best officers that have been with the CCSO for 5-10 years are going to leave.

Keith Johnson, Caroline County FOP 118: Mr. Johnson stated that he is a trooper with the Maryland State Police and he looks forward to working with some of the very talented and caring officers that may leave CCSO and come to MSP. He stated that he currently makes more than the Sheriff of Caroline County, however, he understands there is no comparison to the resources of the State and Caroline County. Mr. Johnson explained that the CCSO has quality officers, and it will be a sad day when the County loses them because they couldn't pay enough.

Dr. Patty Saelens, Superintendent, Caroline County Public Schools: Dr. Saelens stated that she thanks the County for their continued support to the Board of Education. Ms. Saelens also stated that she and the Board of an Education fully support the deputies in Caroline County who work well with the students. She stated that the deputies continue to hold a valuable relationship with the way they care for the students of Caroline County daily.

Jamie Darling, Resident: Mr. Darling stated that he is attending this meeting to state his full support for the CCSO and FOP. He explained that he is raising his family in Caroline County but he feels he will need to relocate if the CCSO loses all of their top deputies. Mr. Darling went on to state that he worked with the CCSO on a robbery that occurred at his home, and he emphasized how professional and helpful they were to his family during that time.

Steve Stouffer, County Resident: Mr. Stouffer stated that he left the CCSO over 16 years ago due to the same issue of lack of pay and retention. He stated that the response received from the County at that time was to leave if you wanted better pay. He stated that the opportunities and community involvement was not the same when he left the CCSO. Mr. Stouffer stated that he strongly hopes the Commissioners and Sheriff can work together to retain the officers looking to relocate. He stated that losing an officer who knows Caroline County and replacing them with an outsider is not the answer.

John Bartlett, County Resident: Mr. Bartlett stated that he is a retired Prince George's County deputy, however he lives in Caroline County. He stated that although there is no comparison to the wealth of PG County and Caroline County, the officers still deserve to be compensated properly as well as respected by their leader. Mr. Bartlett stated that the Caroline County Sheriff would be receiving a raise from the State level, which he believes is deserved, however the deputies he works with are the backbone to the office and should not continue to be overlooked.

Debby Bennett, Executive Director, Caroline County Public Library: Ms. Bennett thanked the Commissioners for their continued support of the local libraries in Caroline County, as well as the Imagination Library program, which allows every child under age five in the County to receive free books. Ms. Bennet also stated that she would like to extend her support to all the deputies and the Sheriff

of the CCSO. She stated that the library opens its doors to all citizens of Caroline County, and the CCSO allow citizens to feel safe while in their vicinity.

Jason Plugge, County Resident: Mr. Plugge stated that he is a Caroline County resident as well as a former police officer. He stated that he attended the public hearing to listen to the deputies and to support the FOP's request for a longevity pay increase. He stated that it is clear the deputies that spoke tonight care about Caroline County and don't want to leave their job, however they feel they may have to. He stated that it is clear they are turning to the Commissioners to ask for help to allow them to stay. He went on to state that the experience that is currently in the CCSO is what helps small town office like the Federalsburg police, which turn to the CCSO for help often.

Randy Bounds, Sheriff, Caroline County Sheriff's Office: Sheriff Bounds stated that he thanks everyone for attending and showing their support. He also thanked the Commissioners for all their hard work on finalizing the project for the new CCSO building due to the deplorable conditions the deputies and staff had been working in for many years. Sheriff Bounds thanked the Commissioners for looking at the longevity pay increase that Mr. Reibly and the FOP worked on. Sheriff Bounds stated that Mr. Reibly is an eleven-year corporal who is currently working on a 5-year corporal pay. He thanked the Commissioners for the overall employee salary increase which will be given to CCSO employees and will represent and one step pay increase for the deputies.

Bryan Peris, Caroline County FOP 118: Mr. Peris stated that he has been with the CCSO for over eleven years and enjoys working and living in Caroline County, however he too is seeking employment with another agency. He stated that he doesn't want to leave, however he doesn't see improvements in salary coming and feels there is no other option-s.

Justin Kohler, Caroline County FOP 118 Mr. Kohler stated that he is a recent hire of the CCSO who came from Ann Arundel County. He stated that he is upset to hear that so many outstanding deputies are seeking positions elsewhere, and he explained that it will be extremely difficult to work without them and he would be grateful for any help or support the County could give, in order to keep the officers at the CCSO.

John Hurly, Ridgely Town Commissioner: Mr. Hurly stated that he is representing the Volunteer Fireman's Association. He stated that the VFA is currently requesting a 3.5% increase to their budget. He also stated the he hopes the County supports the FOP and CCSO in any way they can.

Jonathan Newell, Judge, Circuit Court: Judge Newell stated that he presented the commissioners with a budget under flat with a \$50,000 savings from the prior year. Judge Newell went on to state that he fully supports the local law enforcement officers of Caroline County, and although he understands it's not easy, he hopes the County will be able to support them in their efforts to stay employed in the CCSO. He stated that the citizens of Caroline County rely on the help and support that is provided by the CCSO, and the County cannot afford to lose that safety.

Ricco Gestole, Caroline County FOP 118: Mr. Gestole stated that he is a long-time officer of the CCSO and he has no intention of leaving, however, he will be deeply upset if his friends and fellow officers leave. He stated that he loves his job and the people he works with, and he hopes things can change to keep them here, in Caroline County.

Milton Nagel, Assistant Superintendent, Caroline County Board of Education: Mr. Nagel stated that he would like to personally thank all of the School Resources Officers (SROs) who protect the youth of Caroline County daily. He stated that the students and staff all trust and respect the SRO's and the quality relationship the Board of Education has with the Sheriff's Office is unmatched.

President Porter asked if there was anyone else from the audience that would like to speak. He then stated that he would allow this time to seek comments from his fellow commissioners.

Commissioner Levengood stated that each year the budget becomes harder to balance. He stated that he the Caroline County Sheriff's Office is not the only department that is hurting for pay increases, experiencing turnover, or short staffed.

Commissioner Franklin stated that it is unfortunate the County does not have unlimited revenues in order to support all internal and external requests. He stated that he was elected as County Commissioners to make the best decisions possible for the County, and he understands that it is hard on a lot of agencies when a request cannot be funded. He stated that it is clear the law enforcement officers are unhappy due to a lack of compensation over the years. Commissioner Franklin stated that he understands their frustration as he was a law enforcement officer for the past 16 years and he fully understands it is a difficult job. He stated that the Commissioners would need to sit down and look at the budget some more and do some prioritizing to see what is best for the community as a whole. Commissioner Franklin ended by stating that the Commissioners want to thank everyone that came out to represent their officers and for caring and being involved in the Caroline County budget process.

Commissioner Porter stated that is truly thanks all of the sincere comments and concerns that were raised tonight. He stated that he has never been a law enforcement officer however he understands the issue the CCSO seems to be facing. Commissioner Porter stated that the Commissioners have proposed a compensation increase in the budget that would seek to address the lack of raises during the recession, and increase the salaries of employees who have been with the county between five and fifteen years. He stated that in 2010 the Commissioners made a commitment to public safety and established funds to build a new 9-1-1 Center, due to the terrible conditions they were located in under the Department of Corrections. He went on to state that the Commissioners have continued to make a commitment to public safety by hiring five new deputies and making a commitment to build a brand-new Sheriff's Office. Commissioner Porter expressed that the sentiments by each deputy and community member tonight was not lost and the Commissioners are listening and will work hard to find the money to help address compensation-related turnover occurring in many departments and agencies. The County supports all first responders and he hopes that with the decreasing revenue stream, the Commissioners are able to come up with a solution.

The Commissioners took a brief recess.

ANNUAL MUNICIPAL PROPERTY TAX DIFFERENTIAL MEETING

At 8:00 p.m. the Commissioners convened the annual Municipal Property Tax Differential meeting with representatives from Preston, Ridgely, Denton, Greensboro, and Federalsburg present.

Mr. Decker, County Administrator, opened the discussion and stated that in the State of Maryland, counties are either required to or may grant tax differential rates on property taxes. He stated Caroline is a "may" county and that the County had provided a differential for many years, with the current formula based on police protection. The five smallest towns Hillsboro, Goldsboro, Henderson, Templeville, and Marydel do not receive a differential because it is based on police protection, and they do not provide that service. However, they receive planning and hold harmless grants from the County, and Mr. Decker stated his recommendation was to continue to fund those grants, and to continue to use the current formula as the basis for the differential. He also noted that under the formula, as the Commissioners increase the number of deputies, it raises the County's level of service, which results in a greater differential, or tax break, for town residents. He stated that this current fiscal year the Commissioner

voted to keep the differential the same as FY18, which would allow the tax payers to receive the same funds as the year prior.

The formula proposed the following differential rates for FY2019:

Town	Property Tax Rate Discount	Balancing Payment (Est)
Denton	\$0.08	\$8,444.01
Federalsburg	\$0.11	\$14,779.61
Greensboro	\$0.07	\$23,535.99
Preston	\$0.01	\$3,973.57
Ridgely	\$0.07	\$9,828.20

President Porter called for comments on this year's differential.

Commissioner Casey stated that the Town of Ridgely appreciates all the County and the Commissioners continue to do for the towns. Commissioner Casey stated that the hold harmless amount that the Town of Ridgely received this year in the amount of \$9,828.20 the Town would like to give back to the County.

The Town of Denton stated that they appreciate all the County does and are grateful they receive any funds back.

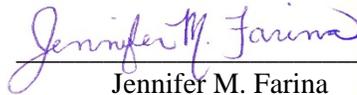
The Commissioners took a brief recess.

REGULAR COMMISSIONERS MEETING

Consent Agenda: the following items were approved by unanimous consent:

- Minutes: Open Sessions of February 13, 2018 and February 27, 2018; Work Session of February 20, 2018
- Employment Contract, Department of Emergency Services, EMT-B (Trice)
- P.O #2018-00000223, and Accompanying Contract, Identity Force, \$86,143.00
- Courthouse Green Joint-Use Agreement with North Carolina Clergy Association for National Day of Prayer Observance
- Reallocation of Capital Funding for Recreation and Parks Capital Budget Projects

In the interest of time, the County Administrator's Report and Commissioners Comments were deferred. The Commissioners unanimously **adjourned** their meeting at 9:15 p.m.



Jennifer M. Farina
Administrative Coordinator