

**COUNTY COMMISSIONERS OF CAROLINE COUNTY**  
109 Market Street, Room 106, Denton, Maryland

**Minutes**  
**August 3, 2021**

Present: President Larry C. Porter; Vice President Daniel J. Franklin; Commissioner Wilbur Levensgood, Jr.

The meeting convened at 9:00 AM.

**Public Comment:** No public comment

**COVID-19 Response Update:** Robin Cahall, Health Officer, Caroline County Health Department – Ms. Cahall stated that there is a surge of new COVID-19 cases within the community. She explained that while the positivity rate in cases increased, the vaccination rate is continuing to trend at a low level. Ms. Cahall further explained that Caroline County was categorized at a Moderate Transmission Level. With guidance from the State Department of Health, Ms. Cahall recommended that those who are not vaccinated wear a mask indoors, where social distancing can't be maintained. In addition, she recommended that the public be mindful of hotspots, such as Sussex County, Delaware. Ms. Cahall reminded the public that vaccines are widely available throughout the community. Ms. Cahall reported that there was one case confirmed of the Delta Variant in Caroline County.

Commissioner Levensgood asked Ms. Cahall how the Commissioners could help, regarding the spread of COVID? Ms. Cahall reiterated the need for the public to get vaccinated and continue to push information to the public of vaccination sites and availability. Commissioner Levensgood then followed up with a question regarding the status of booster vaccinations. Ms. Cahall informed the Commissioners that boosters are being discussed for high-risk individuals (55-65+).

Commissioner Franklin inquired on the status of full FDA approval for the vaccinations. Ms. Cahall stated that Pfizer has applied for full FDA approval and that there is a possibility that Moderna will follow. Commissioner Porter expressed his concern and confusion on the odds of getting the COVID-19 virus and its variants for those who have been fully vaccinated. Commissioner Porter also stressed that many people in the community have stated that they do not feel comfortable getting the vaccine and that it's a personal choice. Ms. Cahall responded that people must be responsible for their own health and that the severity of illness is diminished even if you get the virus while being fully vaccinated. Thus, reducing the chances of death and/or hospitalizations. Commissioner Porter continued to express his concern that the government told the public to get vaccinated in the beginning so things could start going back to normal, and now we are telling people that they have to re-mask, even while being fully vaccinated.

He continued to express that people will not take to the idea of regressing back to a mask mandate. Commissioner Franklin seconded Commissioner Porter by concluding that going "backwards" is not the answer. Ms. Cahall stated that she respects the Commissioners concerns

and doesn't recommend a mask mandate unless it can be scientifically backed. Commissioner Levensgood inquired about the status of vaccines for those under the age of 12. Ms. Cahall stated she believes all manufacturers except J&J are looking into a vaccine for 12 and under. She also stressed that vaccines are the most effective public health tool at this time.

Debbie Bowden, Director, Caroline County Economic Development was joined by Cassandra Vanhooser, Director, Talbot County Economic Development and Tourism, Dan McDermott, Executive Director, Upper Shore Workforce Investment Board, Scott Warner, Executive Director, Mid Shore Regional Council, Erin Silva, GISP – Project Manager, Eastern Shore Regional GIS Cooperative, Salisbury University, and Dr. Michael Scott, Dean of Henson School of Science and Technology, Salisbury University. Ms. Bowden presented a PowerPoint presentation that explained the following: The Eastern Shore Economic Recovery Project is one year through its two-year project life. The project purpose is to develop tools for economic development offices and their partners to use in preparation for and implementation of plans and programs to further economic recovery. On March 9, 2021, the Commissioners signed an MOU with the project partners: Talbot and Dorchester counties economic development offices, the Mid Shore Regional Council, the Tri-County Council of the Lower Eastern Shore, and Salisbury University's Eastern Shore Regional GIS Cooperative (ESRGC). Ms. Bowden stated that Caroline County will receive \$60,000 from the grant that funded this project in FY 2022, in which Economic Development will do outreach and education to the business community on an on-going basis and collect specific County data and intel to gauge economic recovery through the COVID19 pandemic and in case of any other emergencies. Commissioner Porter stated that he would like to digest the information and revisit this later.

**Discussion of the Town of Denton Amendment Request:** Leslie Grunden, Assistant Director of Planning and Codes, presented information that the Town of Denton proposed a map amendment to the Comprehensive Water and Sewer Plan (CWSP) to update the Town of Denton's water and sewer map service timing categories from W-4/S-4 (connection in 3-6 years) to W-3/S-3 (priority for connection) for a portion of Sharp Road in the Town of Denton. All three Commissioner's okayed the public hearing to be scheduled.

**Choptank Community Health ARPA Discussion:** Sara Rich, CEO and Lucie Hughes, Director of Communications, for Choptank Community Health System informed the Commissioners that the Health Department and Choptank Community Health are going to be partnering together to have a vaccination clinic at the Caroline County Annual Summer Fest. The current Choptank Community Health System branch located in Federalsburg is looking to replace the facility to create more room to serve patients, and to attract more providers to serve the community. They asked the Commissioners for their support in funding this project by allocating \$850,000.00. In 2019, the current location served 5100 patients; 78 were veterans. Ms. Rich stated that they have currently outgrown their current facility. With the expansion, they hope to grow their dental residency program, add a drive-up service and increase capacity for service. Ms. Rich stated that residents in Federalsburg and Caroline County deserve the best access to care. The new building will be modeled after the location in Denton, encompassing 18,000-20,000 square feet. They want to expand medical rooms and add a new provider and add a behavioral health therapist. Choptank Community Health System purchased the land on Hammond Drive in Federalsburg. Their hope is to occupy the new space by Spring of 2024.

Commissioner Levensgood stated that Choptank Community Health System has been an ally for the past several years and did an excellent job with COVID. Commissioner Franklin seconded Commissioner Levensgood. Commissioner Porter stated that he is looking forward to the ribbon cutting.

**10:10am Recessed for a 5-minute break**

**Discussion of Broadband Expansion:** Tim McGaha, Vice President, Technical Services and Valerie Connelly, Vice President, Choptank Electric Cooperative presented their P3 (Public-Private Partnership Presentation. Mr. McGaha stated that from their 2020 FCC Map they identified that there are 2,773 underserved locations; 95% of which are in the Choptank Service Area. In addition, Choptank awarded State Broadband Grants to cover 930 of the 2,773 underserved locations. This leaves roughly 1,800 locations that require funding. Choptank Electric Cooperative (Choptank Fiber) requested \$3,500,000 for a continued Broadband Buildout. These funds would cover the cost of laying the fiber that would pass roughly 1,300 locations. However, they anticipate a 50% subscription rate. Choptank is working with Caroline County to leverage additional state funds to cover the remaining underserved locations throughout Caroline County.

Commissioner Levensgood asked if Choptank had the equipment and supplies needed to begin this project. Mr. McGaha stated they did. Choptank is aiming for a project completion of 2 years. Commissioner Franklin asked if Choptank is receiving funding from any other Counties. Mr. McGaha stated that they are looking into the possibility. Commissioner Franklin asked why Choptank is not implementing this simultaneously throughout the entire county? Mr. McGaha stated that the locations provided through the map were most cost effective to begin the project. Commissioner Franklin stated that the current providers that are currently serving those areas are going to lose revenue and possibly close down services in the areas not projected in this current project map. Thus, leaving a gap of coverage.

Mr. McGaha stated that the areas highlighted on the map are only state funds, not the requested funding from the County. If the county provided the requested funds, they would be able to cover more areas not currently projected on the map. Commissioner Franklin continued to explain that if the current service providers are put out of business due to this project, those who are not currently in the path of this project will lose their coverage and create an emergency situation. Commissioner Franklin followed up with the question of how long it will take for the project completion. Mr. McGaha restated that it would take about 2 years from allocation of funds. Commissioner Franklin asked Mr. McGaha and Ms. Connelly how much more funding is needed to do you the entire county? Ms. Connelly stated that Choptank will need to do the calculations to provide an accurate estimate. Commissioner Levensgood asked if a loss of service were to occur, could Choptank provide a “microwave service”. Ms. Connelly stated they could not provide that service.

Jeremy Goldman, County Administrator, stated they should go back to the board and rethink without deleting what has already been asked. Mr. McGaha reminded the Commissioners it

would still take time to implement the updated coverage to the underserved as materials and labor take time. Commissioner Levengood and Commissioner Porter stated that Choptank provides a fair price for the cost of fiber per foot compared to their competitors.

**Consent Agenda: (The following items were unanimously approved by the Commissioners**

- Supplementary Compensation Agreement – Caroline County Health Officer
- Resolution #2021-017- Amendment to Caroline County Personnel Rules and Regulations - Class Specification for Caroline County Department of Public Works and Department of Emergency Services
- Agreement for the purchase and sale of real property – Federalsburg Historical Society, Inc.
- Agreement for the purchase and sale of real property – His Hope Ministries, Inc.
- Critical Area Grant Request Form FY2022 – Maryland Department of Natural Resources – Chesapeake and Atlantic Coastal Bays Critical Area Protection Program

**County Administrator’s Report & Open Discussion Period:**

- The County Administrator had nothing to report

**Public Comment:**

No public comment was given.

**Adjournment: 11:06am**

Commissioner Porter made a motion to adjourn.

Commissioner Franklin seconded.

Meeting adjourned

Work Session began at 11:15am

**FY2022 ARPA Workshop:** The County Department Heads discussed their requests for ARPA funding.

The \$1,000,000: Detention Center Upgrades – All three Commissioners tentatively agreed to this amount for the purposes of this initial work session.

\$1,400,000: Replacement Ambulances – Commissioner Porter and Franklin agreed to \$1,200,000 and Commissioner Levengood agreed to \$1,000,000 for the purposes of this initial work session.

\$600,000: Economic Development Enhancement – All three Commissioners tentatively agreed to this amount for the purposes of this initial work session.

\$850,000: Choptank Health Federalsburg Health Center Project - All three Commissioners tentatively agreed to this amount for the purposes of this initial work session.

\$3,500,000: Choptank & Comcast Broadband Assistance - All three Commissioners tentatively agreed to this amount for the purposes of this initial work session.

\$150,000: Regional North County Water & Sewer - All three Commissioners tentatively held to any funding for the purposes of this initial work session.

\$125,000: GIS System Upgrade w/ Interface for Public Access - All three Commissioners tentatively held to any ARPA funding for the purposes of this initial work session.

\$75,000: Camera System & Hardware Upgrades for Meeting Rooms - All three Commissioners tentatively held to any ARPA funding for the purposes of this initial work session.

**FY2022 Surplus Funding Workshop:** County Department Heads discussed their requests for surplus budget funding.

\$387,900: Humane Society Improvements – Commissioner Porter and Commissioner Franklin tentatively agreed to the amount of \$300,000 for the purposes of this initial work session.

\$700,000: Recreation & Parks – Park Funding - All three Commissioners tentatively held to any funding for the purposes of this initial work session.

\$60,000: Health Department – Public Health Accreditation - All three Commissioners tentatively agreed to this amount for the purposes of this initial work session.

\$470,000: Finance Office – Investment into AG Preservation Fund & Pay Off Jail Sewer Loan - All three Commissioners tentatively agreed to the amount of \$320,000 for the purposes of this initial work session.

\$1,000,000: Public Works – Repair & Upgrade of High Impact Roadways - All three Commissioners tentatively agreed to this amount for the purposes of this initial work session.

\$500,000: Department of Emergency Services – 60 X 100 Building @ Double Hills Location - All three Commissioners tentatively held to any funding for the purposes of this initial work session.

\$167,500: Information and Technology – Replacement of Servers, UPS and Wireless Access Points - All three Commissioners tentatively agreed to this amount for the purposes of this initial work session.

\$430,000 – General – Modification of Meeting Rooms at HAPS & Holiday CHEER - All three Commissioners tentatively agreed to the amount of \$280,000 for the purposes of this initial work session.

There being no further discussion the meeting adjourned at 12:30am.



Kaleigh Leager  
Executive Assistant to The County Commissioners