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TALBOT COUNTY, MARYLAND

COUNTY COUNCIL MEETING (continued public hearing)

May 5, 2023, 7:04 p.m.

Easton Elementary School, Easton, Maryland

COUNCIL MEMBERS:

Chuck Callahan, President

Dave Stepp

Keasha Haythe

Pete Leshner

REPORTED BY: David Corbin, RPR

<p style="text-align: right;">Page 2</p> <p>1 TRANSCRIPT OF PROCEEDINGS</p> <p>2 MR. CALLAHAN: Okay. If we can get</p> <p>3 started. Okay. Just want to welcome</p> <p>4 everybody. Appreciate everybody being here.</p> <p>5 This is an important night for all of us.</p> <p>6 We'll go ahead and call the meeting to order.</p> <p>7 And Madam Secretary, would you mind going ahead</p> <p>8 and reading Bill 1529 for us, please.</p> <p>9 SECRETARY: Bill number 1529, an act to</p> <p>10 establish the 2023/2024 annual budget and</p> <p>11 appropriation ordinance.</p> <p>12 MR. CALLAHAN: Okay. Thank you.</p> <p>13 Mr. Stamp, do you want to take over from here.</p> <p>14 MR. STAMP: Okay. It's a continuation of</p> <p>15 the hearing, public hearing, from this</p> <p>16 afternoon. Council, I would like to take just</p> <p>17 a moment to say a few things. One, I would</p> <p>18 like to thank all the organizations, agencies</p> <p>19 and departments who spent a lot of time putting</p> <p>20 together the budget forecast so that they can</p> <p>21 continue to do the good work that they do</p>	<p style="text-align: right;">Page 4</p> <p>1 education, economic stability, and the</p> <p>2 environment as well as infrastructure. It</p> <p>3 addresses the escalating costs associated with</p> <p>4 state mandated funding requirements, such as</p> <p>5 with education, required board and minimum wage</p> <p>6 increase. And finally it maintains a healthy</p> <p>7 fund balance with economic uncertainties in</p> <p>8 light of inflationary pressures, supply line</p> <p>9 challenges, and cost fluctuations to include</p> <p>10 the required to rainy day fund for</p> <p>11 unanticipated events. I want to share just a</p> <p>12 couple of key initiatives in this year's budget.</p> <p>13 We are -- you are providing funding for a new</p> <p>14 North County EMS station and personnel which</p> <p>15 will improve response time and ultimately</p> <p>16 patient outcome. It contains funding for the</p> <p>17 replacement of a computer-aided dispatch</p> <p>18 software system for the 911 center which will</p> <p>19 enhance the accuracy of information and</p> <p>20 ultimately the rapid delivery of law</p> <p>21 enforcement and emergency services. It</p>
<p style="text-align: right;">Page 3</p> <p>1 throughout the County. I would like to thank</p> <p>2 Martha Sparks, Kaitlin, the assistant finance</p> <p>3 director, Jessica Morris. They put in</p> <p>4 countless hours. And I would like to thank</p> <p>5 you, Council, for rolling up your sleeves and</p> <p>6 working with staff to come up with what I</p> <p>7 believe is a solid budget that maintains the</p> <p>8 conservative approach that we have successfully</p> <p>9 used in the past. I want to share just some</p> <p>10 thoughts as far as the budget strategy. This</p> <p>11 budget includes a strong focus on public safety</p> <p>12 and education and utilizes the traditional and</p> <p>13 successful practice of conservative budgeting</p> <p>14 and estimating revenues and expenditures. It</p> <p>15 reflects a significant investment in our</p> <p>16 employees, who are the backbone of our service</p> <p>17 delivery and what has become a highly</p> <p>18 competitive workforce environment. It</p> <p>19 prioritizes funding for capital improvement</p> <p>20 projects, it addresses our community resiliency</p> <p>21 pillars, which are public safety and health,</p>	<p style="text-align: right;">Page 5</p> <p>1 contains funding increases for our volunteer</p> <p>2 fire department to address operational costs</p> <p>3 and support training, personnel retention and</p> <p>4 recruitment. It provides significant funding</p> <p>5 increases to the Board of Education, that</p> <p>6 includes state mandated funding for schools,</p> <p>7 along with additional requests for social</p> <p>8 workers and capital funds for the Chapel</p> <p>9 District Elementary school and White Marsh</p> <p>10 school. It provides funding for infrastructure</p> <p>11 for roadway enhancements, culvert replacements,</p> <p>12 and the extension of sewer service in an effort</p> <p>13 to remove dependence on septic systems. Again,</p> <p>14 it's -- it's staff's honor to work with you to</p> <p>15 put what we believe is a good proposed budget</p> <p>16 for FY24. And at this point I'll hand it over</p> <p>17 to our finance director, Martha Sparks.</p> <p>18 MR. CALLAHAN: Thank you, Mr. Stamp.</p> <p>19 MS. SPARKS: Good evening. Staff is</p> <p>20 presenting to Council a balanced general fund</p> <p>21 budget of \$128,849,000 for the 2024 fiscal</p>

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<p>1 year. This budget continues the County's 2 conservative budgeting practices. These budget 3 practices have served the County well and have 4 placed us in a healthy financial position. 5 Some of the items in the fiscal year 2024 6 budget include revenues that are two percent 7 over FY23 property tax revenues in accordance 8 with our charter, an additional one cent 9 increase to the property tax rate as authorized 10 by the voters of Talbot County in November 2020 11 to support public safety expenditures, a 4.8 12 cent education supplement to support Talbot 13 County public school's budget initiatives. 14 Funding Talbot County schools, \$286,000 over 15 the counties mandated adjusted local share for 16 a total of 50.9 million, an increase of 17 4.1 million from FY23. An additional 900,000 18 has been allocated for school renovations 19 within capital improvement projects. 20 1.1 million for capital outlay on purchases of 21 vehicles and equipment. 6.68 million In</p>	<p>1 its revenues and this strategy has been 2 successful in producing strong reserves. Our 3 proposed property tax rate of .7434 for County 4 owned properties includes property tax revenues 5 that are two percent over FY23 revenues in 6 accordance with our charter, with those prior 7 year revenue levels having been certified by 8 the State Department of Assessments and 9 Taxation. An additional one cent increase in 10 the property tax rate as authorized by the 11 voters of Talbot County in November 2020, a 4.8 12 cent educational supplement to support Talbot 13 County public schools budget. The County's 14 property tax rate will increase 6.14 cents over 15 the FY23 rate, which amounts to a 9 percent 16 increase. 3.48 percent, or 2.34 cents of the 17 increase, as part of the County real property 18 tax rate. The remaining 5.52 percent increase 19 is attributable to the education supplement 20 used to pay for the increased funding to our 21 schools. The County tax bill for a home with a</p>
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<p>1 transfers to capital projects. Four percent 2 cost of living adjustment and one step for 3 County employees. Sixteen additional positions 4 were added that focus -- and there is a focus 5 on public safety. Sorry about that. In our 6 FY24 budget we have projected a 13.19 7 increase -- percentage increase in property tax 8 revenues, all within the requirements of our 9 charter. A 9.14 percentage increase in income 10 tax revenues. Increases in other local taxes 11 and our Governmental revenues and transfers 12 bring us to an overall increase in revenues of 13 14.42 percent. Talbot County receives the 14 majority of its revenues from property and 15 income taxes. Together they make up 68.2 16 percent of the County's revenues, with 44.1 17 percent coming from property taxes. 18 Recordation and transfer taxes are the next 19 largest group of County revenues contributing 20 approximately 9.3 percent. The County has 21 historically made conservative projection of</p>	<p>1 property assessment of 300,000 will increase 2 from \$2,046 to 2,230, a \$184 increase, \$144, 3 which is attributable to the education 4 supplement. And we have provided a sample of 5 what this homeowners tax bill would look like. 6 To provide context with the rest of the State 7 of Maryland, in FY23 our County property tax 8 rate of 68 cents was the lowest in the 23 9 counties and Baltimore City. Fitch Rating 10 Agency noted this in their bond rating when 11 they said the County's property tax rate 12 remains one of the lowest of any County in the 13 State. And to add perspective to this property 14 tax increase, other counties will also be 15 experiencing the challenges of the increased 16 funding requirements from Maryland's Blueprint. 17 In comparison to other counties, Talbot County 18 currently has the second lowest income tax rate 19 at 2.4 percent. Fitch Ratings best describes 20 Talbot County's income tax revenues when it 21 said, "income taxes are a higher percentage of</p>

<p style="text-align: right;">Page 10</p> <p>1 revenues. That is true for most Maryland 2 counties. This is partially due to the very 3 low tax environment compared with the rest of 4 the state, which provides incentive for a small 5 number of high income earners with second homes 6 to declare their income in the County. Talbot 7 County's income tax revenues are volatile and 8 difficult to predict due to the small 9 percentage of high wage earners that claim 10 Talbot County as their home." Our FY24 budget 11 represents a moderate increase in these 12 projections at 31 million. In FY21 and FY22 13 Talbot County experienced its highest levels of 14 recordation and transfer tax revenues, and in 15 FY23 these revenues have moved to normal levels 16 and our FY24 budget projections for these tax 17 revenues have slightly increased but are still 18 following our conservative budgeting 19 methodology. Overall, education expenditures 20 for Talbot County represent 43.7 percent of its 21 budget and Talbot County schools represents</p>	<p style="text-align: right;">Page 12</p> <p>1 budget. 1.1 million in capital outlay requests 2 are included in this budget. The original 3 capital outlay request from the departments 4 total 3.5 million but we rolled up our sleeves 5 and our County Manager met with our department 6 heads and we -- this number was actually 7 reduced through a combination of cuts to the 8 requests and the determination that some of 9 these purchases could be made with FY23 budget 10 appropriations through our fourth quarter 11 transfer process. Also included in this budget 12 is 6.8 million for transfers for capital 13 improvement projects. Personnel actions that 14 were taken in this budget are a 4 percent cost 15 of living adjustment and one step for 16 employees. Additional positions were added to 17 increase governmental services but with an 18 emphasis on public safety. Also included in 19 the increase and operating expenses is the debt 20 service for our public safety building and new 21 health department, which is 1.9 million, or</p>
<p style="text-align: right;">Page 11</p> <p>1 42.1 percent of those FY24 expenditures. The 2 difference between the two is our funding of 3 Chesapeake College. Mandatory funding of 4 Maryland Blueprint for schools saw a 5 4.8 million increase over last year. In 6 addition to the mandated funding, Talbot County 7 has included an additional \$286,000 for three 8 social workers. By moving the increase in 9 school funding to the educational supplement, 10 the County is providing a more structurally 11 balanced budget. 900,000 has also been 12 included for capital project requests for 13 school renovations of Chapel Elementary. 14 Included as part of the Sheriff's budget within 15 the County is the cost of three rescors 16 officers, or SRO's as we call them. And the 17 health department's request for additional 18 funding for school nurses has also been 19 included in the FY24 budget. Public safety 20 accounts for 23.8 percent of the budget with 21 general government at 12.8 percent of the</p>	<p style="text-align: right;">Page 13</p> <p>1 3.37 percent of the increase in operating 2 expenses. And our fund balance at the end of 3 June 30, 2022 was 68.3 million with 14.9 4 designated as rainy day reserves. These 5 reserves give the County less exposure to the 6 risks associated with revenue and expenditure 7 volatility, particularly in times like 8 inflation or recession. Or we are currently 9 experiencing elevated levels of inflation and 10 those increases have also been included in this 11 budget. The strong fund balance is a result of 12 the County's conservative budgeting methods, 13 and those conservative budgeting methods were 14 the guidance for staff in the formulation of 15 the budget that we have before you. In closing 16 I would like to highlight the recent bond 17 ratings of Talbot County. In September of 2022 18 we were rated by Moody's Investor Service and 19 Fitch Ratings as part of our process to go out 20 for a bond issuance for a new public safety 21 building and new health department. These</p>

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<p>1 ratings serve as a measure of the financial 2 health of the County and how well it navigates 3 the budget process. These ratings serve as 4 Talbot County's budgeting and fiscal management 5 report card. Financially the County is very 6 strong and the management team is generally 7 conservative in its budgeting. Moody 8 recognizes our credit strengths as low, long 9 term liabilities with manageable long term 10 capital plan and a very strong reserve 11 position. Yes, and that's the important. They 12 also upgraded our bond rating to a AA-1, which 13 is very hard to accomplish. Fitch's assessment 14 of the County's financial resilience as being 15 in the highest categories based on the combined 16 strength of its fund balance position, it's 17 ample expenditure flexibility and its strong 18 ability to adjust revenues through policy 19 action to counter balance it's historically 20 volatile revenues. The County typically 21 increases its property tax levy by the full</p>	<p>1 and staff. My name is Doctor Sharon Pepukayi, 2 proud Superintendent and alum of Talbot County 3 public schools. I would like to begin by 4 thanking you for your collaborative and 5 transparent communication during this budget 6 process as well as your continued support of 7 our identified capital projects. In assuming 8 this role I learned quite early that half of 9 your budget goes to the school system. I do 10 not take that for granted and want you to know 11 we are and will continually to be fiscally 12 prudent while also advocating for the necessary 13 programs, people and resources needed for our 14 4200 students. We have strong partnerships 15 with community organizations and grants which 16 help fund over 80 positions outside of our 17 budget request to you. All of the 18 aforementioned makes it possible to add to our 19 list of highlights, including but not limited 20 to having high graduation rates, continuing our 21 full day Pre-K, expanding our grow our own</p>
Page 15	Page 17
<p>1 amount allowed annually under the County 2 charter. Both the property and the income tax 3 rates remain the lowest in the State. And 4 Fitch affirmed our bond ratings of AAA. 5 MR. STAMP: So, Council, that completes 6 staff's presentation for you this evening. 7 Thank you. 8 MR. CALLAHAN: Okay. Thank you. Great 9 job, Ms. Sparks for sure. Okay. Let's go 10 ahead and move on to -- let's go ahead and open 11 the public hearing on Bill Number 1529, an act 12 to establish the 23/24 annual budget and 13 appropriation ordinance. Okay. So at this 14 point what we will do is go ahead and open the 15 public hearing for comments. If you want to 16 come on up and state your name and your 17 address, you're welcome to come on up. So 18 don't all run up here at once. We got the head 19 one coming. There we go. There we go. 20 MS. PEPUKAYI: Good evening President 21 Callahan, Council Members, County Manager Stamp</p>	<p>1 program, having teachers becoming nationally 2 board certified, and increasing the number of 3 students taking AP courses. Through the 4 Blueprint for Maryland's Future the State has 5 made a historic bold and necessary commitment 6 to investing in each and every student. Our 7 fiscal year 24 budget includes the sustaining 8 and expanding a myriad of initiatives under the 9 Blueprint, such as free dual enrollment at 10 Chesapeake College, inclusive of tuition and 11 textbooks, support pathways for students not 12 yet college and career ready, and career 13 counseling for all middle and high school 14 students. We know this transformative 15 Blueprint plan comes with a hefty price tag in 16 the form of a mandated increase in our 17 appropriation, which is 4.8 million. We also 18 recognize that you are very mindful of that 19 impact on the citizens of Talbot County. 20 However, we do have some needs that are not 21 covered by the Blueprint funding and therefore</p>

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1 appreciate the additional funding for our vital
 2 safety and security needs, which as you
 3 mentioned SRO's in the Sheriff's budget, and
 4 addressing our students physical and mental
 5 health needs through the support of our nurses
 6 and social workers. The appropriation put
 7 forth in the budget bill for TCPS is
 8 1.1 million below our request to the County.
 9 We have identified some ways in which we might
 10 mitigate that difference. We request the
 11 Council to consider funding the salary increase
 12 which we have negotiated with our support staff
 13 union of a step and 4 percent COLA, which is
 14 721,000. Our support staff assists our
 15 teachers in classrooms, transport our students
 16 to and from schools, and keep our schools
 17 running smoothly in tip-top shape. Without
 18 these staff we simply couldn't provide the
 19 conducive and stellar learning environment for
 20 our students. We will honor this agreement
 21 with support staff but request the Council's

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1 help with the 721,000 so that we can fund other
 2 budget line items that are not funded by the
 3 Blueprint, such as health insurance increases
 4 and our OPED liability. I look forward to
 5 ending our school year just as strong as we
 6 started by transforming and performing through
 7 leading and learning together as a district
 8 community. I have no doubt that our continued
 9 partnership will continue to thrive as we focus
 10 on the common commitment of educating our
 11 Talbot County public school students. So I
 12 would be remiss also if I didn't recognize it
 13 is a team effort, and I have with me here in
 14 the audience our district leadership, our board
 15 president, and our TPA president and other
 16 members here of staff. So I just want to
 17 publicly thank them for their support in our
 18 budget process and what we have done so far
 19 this school year.
 20 MR. CALLAHAN: Thank you. Thanks a lot.
 21 Appreciate it. Stay on this side. Anybody

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1 else like to come on up. From this side.
 2 Debbie, you know I'm going to say something.
 3 You know that. All right. Come on down. Tell
 4 you we got the school built. Come on. Okay.
 5 I'll switch on over here to this side. Anybody
 6 on my right side, come on up. Yes, sir, come
 7 on up.
 8 MR. FORLONEY: Thank you all. My name is
 9 Robert Forloney, I'm the vice president with
 10 Talbot County Free Library. I would like to
 11 thank you all again for inviting us to come and
 12 thank you for the opportunity for
 13 participating. For the County Council as well
 14 as for the staff, we are greatly appreciative
 15 of all the efforts that you've given us over
 16 the past few years and in particular for this
 17 fiscal year. One of things that we have been
 18 working on is the extension and expansion of
 19 the St. Michael's branch. As you well know
 20 this is something we used in a variety of
 21 different ways from community members, the

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1 staff, and also really thinking about the
 2 relationship in terms of education efforts and
 3 as a community meeting room for wildlife, for
 4 cultural organization. So we want to thank you
 5 in particular for that. And also thank you for
 6 the extension of the COLA to our staff as well.
 7 As you know during the pandemic our staff
 8 worked extremely hard as frontline
 9 representatives doing everything they possibly
 10 could to continue providing services for the
 11 community members despite the fact we were
 12 going through Covid during that time. And
 13 through that effort we were able to show an
 14 extension of opportunities and services
 15 provided across the board. So not just through
 16 the expansion of St. Michael's which oversees
 17 the work we do in the whole Bay Hundred area
 18 but also throughout the County itself. Again,
 19 on behalf of the Talbot County Free Library, I
 20 would like to thank you. Our director is here,
 21 Dana Newman, and also our coordinator for

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1 volunteer services and outreach assignment,
 2 another board member as well, Becky Amaral.
 3 Thank you very much.
 4 MR. CALLAHAN: Thank you. Okay. Anybody
 5 on my right-hand side here like to come on up,
 6 say a few words. Okay. Anybody. Okay. All
 7 right. Then so that's it. Anybody else want
 8 to say anything, Council. Any comments. Okay.
 9 Mr. Leshner.
 10 MR. LESHER: I'll add -- I'll add my
 11 thanks to the County staff for the work that
 12 has gone into the budget to bring us this far,
 13 for the sharp pencils that you've exercised in
 14 pairing down departmental budgets, for working
 15 with us on -- that will allow us to continue to
 16 operate this County in a -- frankly a pretty
 17 lean fashion. This Council has recognized that
 18 we need to -- in this competitive environment
 19 it is tough to hire, it is tough to retain.
 20 And so we have -- we have really put an effort
 21 in this year's budget into -- into incentives,

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1 salaries, and benefits to make sure that we can
 2 attract and retain a talented workforce. And
 3 that goes for -- that goes for all the
 4 departments and the agencies that we -- that we
 5 the support here. There has been pretty
 6 significant work here. We are meeting that
 7 obligation to the Blueprint, and as the
 8 Superintendent pointed out, going a bit above.
 9 We did hear your requests and we will certainly
 10 be deliberating on that. I'm proud the way
 11 this Council has taken the bold moves to ensure
 12 that we can attract and retain this workforce
 13 in our departments and agencies. And I'm proud
 14 of both the transparent manner in which we have
 15 deliberated and gathered this information and
 16 the -- and the respectful way in which that has
 17 all been done. I look forward to continuing to
 18 work with this Council as we move this budget
 19 forward and thanks to all who have gotten us to
 20 this point.
 21 MR. CALLAHAN: Thank you, Mr. Leshner.

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1 Good. I want to add to that. Doctor Pepukayi,
 2 it was a pleasure working with you this year
 3 getting to know you, and I think you're
 4 wonderful for Talbot County and taking over as
 5 Superintendent. So congratulations on that. I
 6 really, really enjoy working with you so far.
 7 And Sara, you know, I really appreciate all
 8 you've done for us and working with Martha,
 9 because, you know, three or four months
 10 together, you know, doing a lot of work. So
 11 really appreciate your efforts and all the
 12 meetings we've had together. You've done such
 13 a great job. And I want to thank staff too for
 14 all you've done for us. You know, we have got
 15 the sort of easy part, you got the hard part
 16 setting it up that's for sure. There is a lot
 17 of stuff there and you get us straight and we
 18 really appreciate it. And I want to throw also
 19 a thanks to the board members, you know. You
 20 guys have been great. You haven't attacked us
 21 yet, so that's good. But I think it just

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1 shows, like Mr. Leshner said, that we can all
 2 sort of collaborate together and work together
 3 on this. So I really appreciate it and we'll
 4 definitely take a look at what you're asking
 5 for that's for sure. I appreciate it. Being
 6 that said -- sorry.
 7 MR. STAMP: So once you close this
 8 evening's public hearing the Council will be
 9 meeting on May 16th for a work session for the
 10 final budget deliberation and then it's
 11 scheduled at this point that Council would
 12 consider voting on the bill on May 23rd.
 13 MR. CALLAHAN: That's good. That's good.
 14 I'm sorry, did you say we were keeping it open
 15 as far as comments and stuff --
 16 MR. STAMP: Yes, comments are due Friday,
 17 the 5th.
 18 MR. CALLAHAN: Did we say that?
 19 MR. STAMP: Yes.
 20 MR. CALLAHAN: You did, okay.
 21 MR. LESHER: If we can be explicit about

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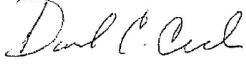
1 that. Written comments will be accepted by the
 2 County Council until Friday May 5th at noon.
 3 E-mailed comments can be sent to
 4 publiccomments@TalbotCountyMD.gov.
 5 MR. CALLAHAN: Okay.
 6 MR. LESHER: Mr. Callahan, I think it's
 7 just up to you to then close the public
 8 hearing.
 9 MR. CALLAHAN: Okay. All right. So if
 10 nothing else said, do I have a motion.
 11 MR. STEPP: So moved.
 12 MR. LESHER: Second.
 13 MR. CALLAHAN: Okay. I got a motion and
 14 second to close the public hearing. Madam
 15 Secretary, call the vote, please.
 16 SECRETARY: Mr. Callahan.
 17 MR. CALLAHAN: Aye.
 18 SECRETARY: Mr. Stepp.
 19 MR. STEPP: Aye.
 20 SECRETARY: Mr. Leshner.
 21 MR. LESHER: Aye.

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1 SECRETARY: Ms. Haythe.
 2 MS. HAYTHE: Aye.
 3 MR. CALLAHAN: Thanks a lot. Appreciate
 4 it.
 5 (Public hearing concluded at 7:32 p.m.)
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1 STATE OF MARYLAND
 2 I, David Corbin, a Notary Public in and
 3 for the State of Maryland, do hereby certify
 4 that the within named, TALBOT COUNTY COUNCIL
 5 HEARING, personally appeared before me at the
 6 time and place herein set according to law.
 7 I further certify that the hearing was
 8 recorded stenographically by me and then
 9 transcribed from my stenographic notes to the
 10 within printed matter by means of
 11 computer-assisted transcription in a true and
 12 accurate manner.
 13 I further certify that the stipulations
 14 contained herein were entered into by counsel
 15 in my presence.
 16 I further certify that I am not of counsel
 17 to any of the parties, not an employee of
 18 counsel, nor related to any of the parties, nor
 19 in any way interested in the outcome of this
 20 action.
 21 AS WITNESS my hand and Notarial Seal this
 9th day of May, 2023, at Centerville, Maryland.



David C. Corbin
Notary Public

18
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 20 My commission expires November 13, 2023
 21

[1 - annually]

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