

2011 REPORT OF MUNICIPAL AFFAIRS

The Charter of the Town of Chestertown states “the Mayor, during the first quarter of each calendar year, shall report to the Council the condition of municipal affairs and make such recommendations as he (she) deems proper for the public good and welfare of the town.” Herein is said report.

FINANCIAL. The audit for the Town of Chestertown for FY 2011 was presented and accepted in December 2011. For the 17th year in a row, the Town received an unqualified audit indicating financial excellence. This year’s audit was completed by Mayer Hoffman McCann, P.C. of Easton, Maryland.

The audit showed the Town to be in excellent financial condition with total net assets in all departments of \$15,517,078. This represents a increase of \$133,320 over last year’s net assets. The Town maintains a general fund surplus of over \$1,100,000 (as of July 2011) to combat the ever decreasing funding historically provided by State and County governments.

During this year the Town held the tax rate to \$.37, despite the State assessors dropping Town assessments by over \$55,000,000 in this year alone. The Town also retained the reduction in the Homestead Property Tax Credit percentage of 5%. This credit actually limits the increase in a homeowner’s property tax bill to 5% in any given year, no matter how much their assessment has increased.

STAFFING. The Town has 36 permanent positions for full-time employees in four different departments. These are Office (06), Street (9), Utilities (8) and Police (13). There are also 4 part-time employees, with one in the Police Department, and 3 staffers at the Visitor’s Center. All departments are staffed and operating well.

ACTIVITIES AND ACHEIVEMENTS IN 2011:

- ❖ 2011 brought more cutbacks in State Highway User and local income tax funds. Nevertheless, the Town has kept all services in tact and maintains an excellent financial position by limiting or deferring unnecessary capital expenditures and debt wherever possible. Grants are sought in place of Town funding for parks and improvements to infrastructure.
- ❖ 2011 also brought a hurricane and an earthquake. The Town was fortunate that there was minimal loses encountered with both events. Our street crew did a great job of moving and removing the fallen tree limbs and trees from Hurricane Irene, which was done for the public with no fee. Federal Emergency Management Agency funding for the overtime costs of Hurricane Irene are expected to be received in 2012. Earthquake damage was mainly confined to the chimneys of some of our most historic properties, such as the Customs House, Christ Methodist Church and the Hynson-Ringgold house.
- ❖ The new zoning ordinance was presented to the Council by the Planning Commission on May 23, 2011. The Council and the Planning Commission held a joint public hearing on August 17 and the ordinance adopting the new zoning was read into the record on November 7. Its passage pends.
- ❖ The Town took over curbside recycling when County budget cuts forced the County to terminate their program. The Town has now grown the program from approximately 700 households to about 1200.

- ❖ Last year, Delaware Valley Development Company completed the complete rebuilding of the 41 unit Calvert Heights housing project. Their experience in affordable housing led the Town to initiate discussions with their company about ways in which to improve and possibly privatize the High Steps and Satterfield Court projects that the Town owns and manages on Cannon Street. They have presented a plan of combined ownership, through programs with the Maryland Community Development Administration and the Department of Energy.
- ❖ The Chestertown Trail project nears reality after years of government red tape. In 2011 the Town received the approval of the State and Federal agencies for the construction contract and SAFETEA-LU funding of phases 1 and 2 of the Trail. The MTA fully removed all the rails and ties from every section of rail in Town. We were allowed to use the remaining engineering funds for construction activities and are hopeful that another biking program will help us with the necessary funding. The Town bid out the construction project and the low bidder on the project was David A. Bramble, Inc. of Chestertown with a bid of \$359,248.00.
- ❖ We regained our local access channel thanks to the efforts of Atlantic Broadband and our videographer James Egan. We now have our meetings on channel 76. Our Constant Contact program, Facebook and Website at Chestertown.com complete our electronic mission to inform the public.
- ❖ The fate of the SFC John H. Newnam National Guard Armory was decided by the Council in 2011, but it was not without drama and suspense. Washington College, the institution that in 2007 started all the interest in the reuse of the Armory, renewed their formal request for the property. This time, their goals were more concrete, with a planned waterfront campus on the nearby former Crop Production Services and Alger Oil properties. The environmental cleanup of these properties has already begun and once accomplished, will greatly enhance the health of the Chester River and the waterfront. After offers and counter-offers were made, an agreement was finally reached in December. The agreement has the Town ceding their interest in the Armory to the College with the College committing to restore the building, clean up the site, invest in the property, create jobs, use green building techniques, allow public access to and use of the facility and commit support to other important Town initiatives.
- ❖ In 2011 we opened Requests for Proposals for consultants to guide the Town and the Planning Commission regarding the Stepne Farm infill development. This important tract of land, if developed, should be done so with the maximum input from the town. After interviews were held, the consultant chosen was the team of Alex Castro and the firm of Ayers Saint Gross. As of this date, the contract has not been signed for the project.
- ❖ The Visitors Center was open 360 days last year and had over 14,800 visitors. This is a small increase over last year's figures but well above the lowest year on record of 2007. We all hope that this is an indicator of an improving economy. May was the most active month with 2074 visitors, followed by July and October with 1700 visitors each.
- ❖ The DCA and Town worked together to install and activate the new iSigns in the heart of the downtown. It was an immediate hit with the public, getting constant use. The DCA has been incredibly active with other important programs, including cruise ship visits in the summer, a substantial Christmas enhancement of the Downtown (that included pine garlands on our Christmas lights and beautiful Christmas trees at every corner), parades and First Fridays to name a few. Nancy McGuire has done a wonderful job of directing these programs.

- ❖ The WiFi program for the Downtown public parks, a cooperative venture with the Town and Main Street Historic Chestertown is nearing completion. The project got a real boost with the arrival of the ARRA trunk fiber optic cable that stretches from Cecil County to Talbot. The WiFi should be activated in early 2012 and will initially cover Fountain Park and Memorial Park on and adjacent areas.
- ❖ The Farmer's Market and Artisan's Market in the Fountain Park continue to fill the Park with a special vitality on Saturday mornings. Our thanks to both market managers for their efforts.
- ❖ The Chestertown Port Study Group presented their final recommendations at a joint public hearing with the Town Council on February 24, 2011. Port Study Chairman Matthew Tobriner did a great job of explaining all the options in this hearing and everyone left it with a complete understanding of what the future might hold. All stakeholders were invited and participated. Matthew Tobriner, Don Cantor, Ray Tarrach did a fantastic job of masterminding the Port Study and the Town submitted an offer on the Marina of \$1,995,000 in the fall. The offer was based on the appraisal done for the Town, minus \$75,000 for any needed environmental cleanup of a specific area designated in the phase 2 environmental study done by Earth Data, Inc.
- ❖ The Town was awarded an EmPOWERing Clean Community Grant of \$28,000 by the State of Maryland's Energy Efficiency and Conservation Block Grant program to implement cost-effective energy efficiency measures and renewable energy systems on government facilities. These funds will be used to retrofit the Town Hall for energy efficiency and thereby promote public awareness of energy techniques.
- ❖ The Town received a \$139,000 grant from the Maryland Department of Natural Resources for the Community Parks and Playgrounds program to fund the Remembrance Park project on Horsey Lane. We also received a \$2,000 commitment from the Chestertown Garden Club of part of the proceeds from the Spring of 2011 Maryland House and Garden Multi-County Pilgrimage.
- ❖ In the November 1 Town election, 4th ward councilman Marty Stetson ran unopposed. In the 2nd ward, incumbent Gibson Anthony had two opponents and was defeated by Linda Kuiper for the seat.
- ❖ Jane Jewell headed the Music in the Park program and produced a fantastic summer of Music in the Park concerts. Our thanks go out to her for the donation of her time.
- ❖ The new MVA mobile unit continues to be a success, parking in the downtown two days a month.
- ❖ Chestertown passed a plastic bag ban on April 4, 2011, which will go into effect on January 19, 2012. Banned are the T shirt bags that are made of cheap plastic and become airborne in the environment.
- ❖ Two long term employees retired this year and we will miss them. Chief Rob Edler retired as Chief of the Police Department having served as an officer, Captain and Chief since July 1987. Lucille Robinson retired as the Utilities Clerk after 18 years of service.
- ❖ Fireworks were not totally in the budget, but thanks to generous donations a wonderful display was held on July 4. Our thanks go out to all donors, as well as the shooter/donors Richard Proctor and Joe Nasatka.
- ❖ We made some recreational headway this year by paving both of the trails at the Wilmer Park and the Rolling Road park. The Rolling Road trail is new and is 3/5 of a mile long. The Wilmer Park trail was repaved and elevated to stay dry. It is 1/5 of a mile long. Speaking of recreation, the

Chestertown Recreation Commission was revived and is chaired by Bill Arrowood. The Commission will look into short and long term recreational opportunities and programs.

GOALS FOR 2012

In addition to some of the ongoing topics discussed above, here are some other important goals of the Town:

- Make our way through this recession, keeping taxes steady or lowering them if possible, keeping services at the same level, while helping all those we can through these continuing difficult economic times
- Pass the new zoning ordinance and begin reviewing the comprehensive plan
- Encourage and expand recycling and all other greening efforts, increase public awareness of the need and advantages of these efforts
- Hire a new Chief of Police
- Resolve the issue of the Quaker Neck sewer line with the Kent County Commissioners
- Construct the Chestertown Trail
- Construct the Remembrance Park on Horsey Lane
- Continue to try to have a dialogue with our Queen Anne's County neighbors to control the effects of growth on our Town and the proposed Chestertown parkway.
- Plan, design and bid out a solar facility at the Chestertown Waste Water Treatment Plant
- Hold fireworks with some help from local donors
- Find and develop recreational activities for all ages in Chestertown
- Place the Armory in the hands of the College for their planned adaptive reuse
- Work with businesses and industry in Chestertown to improve our economy and job opportunities