

Joint Kent-Queen Anne's Task Force

August 17, 2015

Members Present: Foster Beach, Wayne Darrell, Ken Fry, Paul Hanley, Commissioner William Short, Shelley Herman, Greg Holsey, Greg Roby, and Mark Glass

Member Absent: Commissioner Mark Anderson, Margo Bailey, Jack Brosius, Mayor Chris Cerino, Commissioner Ronald Fithian, and Joe Holt

Also in attendance: Jen Davis, Assistant Director, Tourism Development, Marty Holden, Director, Environmental Operations, Bob Rager, Community Liaison, State Highway Administration, Bruce Neal, Chief, John Darling, Assistant Chief, Chestertown Fire Company, Allan Schaubert, Chief, Kent and Queen Anne's County Rescue Squad, and Michael Boldosser, Emergency Preparedness Planner, University of Maryland Shore Regional Health

At 9:00 a.m. the meeting convened. Commissioner Short gave opening remarks to the group, introduced Shelley Herman, County Administrator, and shared that Mr. Holsey would lead the meeting.

Mr. Holsey explained that the primary purpose of the meeting is to reach a consensus through the Task Force on pending issues related to painting of the movable span and closure of the Chester River Bridge for maintenance. The State Highway Administration (SHA) wants to come away with a time frame preferable to the community that will minimize the impact to citizens and businesses. Due to temperature and humidity restrictions, the time frame suitable for the project is spring, summer, and fall.

Mr. Holsey displayed graphics that detailed traffic patterns for each detour. There will be four way stops at MD290, MD291, and MD544. Traffic will be monitored daily and the SHA will make adjustments as necessary. Commissioner Short requested that signage be placed further down U.S. Route 301 to prevent frustration of travelers not familiar with the area and members of the Task Force agreed. There will be an extensive amount of outreach including public informational meetings and placement of message signs well in advance of the closure. Mr. Holsey shared there is flexibility in placing additional signage in an effort to notify more motorists.

Mr. Hanley welcomed everyone and thanked the Commissioners for putting their trust in him to canvas the business community. Mr. Hanley especially thanked the SHA staff for graciously listening to community concerns, proving many incorrect in their perceptions of the SHA. Mr. Hanley was tasked with determining a time frame that would be the least detrimental to local businesses during the closure of the Chester River Bridge. Visits included the Kent County Chamber of Commerce Executive Board, the general membership of the Downtown Chestertown Association (DCA), and individual shop owners unable to attend scheduled meetings. Most business owners were not up to speed on the project, despite the information that

has been shared at hearings and reported in the local papers. Many of the conversations involved explaining the basics for questions that were asked in the very beginning of the process. The DCA unanimously chose late July to the beginning of August as preferable time frame. The Chamber received 318 responses to 1,000 invitations sent for the survey and results showed July as the most preferable time to close the Chester River Bridge. Mr. Hanley reported that results of the canvas yielded late July to the beginning of August as the best time frame to close the bridge.

Mr. Hanley read a letter dated April 28, 2015, from Loretta Lodge, Executive Director, Chamber of Commerce, addressed to the County Commissioners of Kent County. The letter detailed the Chamber's concerns, and respectfully encouraged the removal of the ten day incentive limit and the eight week time frame for the four week project. Mr. Holsey acknowledged that the proposed eight week window was not warmly received and is no longer part of the discussion. Now that a four week time frame has been specified the SHA can move forward with the project. Commissioner Short thanked Mr. Hanley for his efforts and outreach to the community and Mr. Holsey for being such a great partner in the process.

Mr. Darrell gave a summary of activities leading up to the closure of the Sassafras River Bridge which is scheduled for September 19th through October 9th, 2015. Mr. Darrell shared that the Office of Emergency Services has met with the emergency response community and developed an Incident Action Plan (IAP) for the closure. There will be a comprehensive review of the IAP and results will be integrated for use during the Chester River Bridge closure

Mr. Beach shared the desire of the continuance of the Task Force to assist in getting the word out. Commissioner Short introduced Ms. Williams, Coordinator, Economic Development and assigned the task of posting information about both closings on the County website. Mr. Holsey shared that Bob Rager, Community Liaison, was in attendance and he would make introductions after the meeting to coordinate information and website links.

Mr. Hanley followed up on the incentive issue raised by the Chamber and requested Mr. Holsey's opinion on the concern. Mr. Holsey shared that the SHA feels that incentives and disincentives are effective tools, experience shows that the project cannot be done in less than ten days. Two bridges had incentives and were not completed early due to various reasons. The SHA has identified maintenance to be completed prior closure that will contribute to the timely completion of the project.

The project will be staffed 24/7. This is the fourth bridge over the past two year period to be painted and lessons learned will be applied to the Chester River Bridge closure.

On motion by Mr. Beach and seconded by Mr. Hanley the minutes from the March 13, 2015, meeting were approved.

On motion by Mr. Beach and seconded by Mr. Hanley the timeline of late July to early August of 2016 was approved.

The meeting adjourned at 9:27 a.m. The Joint Kent-Queen Anne's Task Force agreed to meet again at a later date in the Commissioners' Hearing Room.

Respectfully submitted,



Jamie L. Williams, Coordinator
Economic Development

Approved: 
William A. Short, Member
The County Commissioners
Of Kent County, Maryland