

**PUBLIC HEARING
CHESTER RIVER BRIDGE TASK FORCE**

January 21, 2015

A public hearing was held today at 9:00 a.m. in the County Commissioners' Hearing Room, County Government Center, 400 High Street, Chestertown, MD, for the purpose of discussing the plans of the State Highway Administration to close the draw span of the bridge over the Chester River connecting Queen Anne's County, at Kingstown, Maryland to Kent County, at Chestertown, Maryland. The plan calls for a complete closing of the bridge to highway traffic for three to four weeks. The public hearing will consider numerous issues, including health, public safety response times, and service interferences, and will consider a proposal to permanently close the draw-bridge function of the bridge thereby converting the bridge to a vehicular traffic only operation.

Kent County Commissioners Ronald Fithian and William Short were in attendance as well as voting Task Force Members, Mark Anderson, Queen Anne's County Commissioner, Margo Bailey, Foster Beach, Jack Brosius, Chris Cerino, Mayor of Chestertown, Wayne Darrell, Director, Emergency Services, Paul Hanley and Joe Holt, Chief of Staff, Washington College. Also in attendance were non-voting Task Force Members; and Gregg Todd, County Administrator, Queen Anne's County; and Greg Holsey, District Engineer, Greg Roby, Deputy Director, Structure Inspection and Remedial Engineer and Mark Glass, Division Chief, all representing Maryland State Highway Administration (SHA).

Commissioner Short read the public notice into the record. Commissioner Short stated the public hearing is necessary to meet the requirements of the United States Coast Guard if the the elimination of the drawbridge is further explored. Notifications were mailed on December 29, 2014, to 800 property owners whose property abuts the Chester River. Notices were published in the Kent County News and the Record Observer, and posted on the Kent County website.

Commissioner Fithian stated that the elimination of the drawbridge is not a worthwhile option and should not be further explored.

Queen Anne's County Commissioner Anderson, Ms. Bailey, Mr. Beach, Mayor Cerino, Mr. Darrell, Mr. Hanley, and Mr. Holt discussed numerous concerns. Members of the Task Force emphasized challenges relating to the overall painting project and the closure of the bridge to vehicular traffic. All members agreed that the most critical challenges are directly related to emergency services and public safety response times, and anticipated emergency personnel staffing shortages. Mr. Hosley and Mr. Roby answered many questions specific the project, and its current status. Mr. Roby confirmed that the SHA has removed the Chester River painting project from the 2015 calendar. The decision was made in part to allow the additional communication with the community and more time to prepare for the closure.

Commissioner Fithian suggested that the next meeting focus on solutions of how Kent and Queen Anne's counties will work together to minimize the effects of the closure of the Chester River bridge.

Public Hearing Minutes Chester River Bridge Task Force

January 21, 2015

Page 2 of 2

Commissioner Short invited comments from the audience. Eight individuals signed the testimony log; three individuals declined to comment as their questions were addressed during the course of the hearing. Kristin McMenamin, Emergency Planner, Office of Emergency Services (OES) emphasized the importance of an incident action plan, hurricane preparedness, and an emergency operations plan that addresses traffic control, bad weather and includes emergency contacts. Ms. McMenamin offered the use of the County's social media as a way to share SHA information. Fred Sheriff spoke in opposition of a fixed span bridge, and suggested that funding should be a priority to get the job done right. Roy Kirby Jr., Chairman Emeritus, Roy Kirby & Sons, Inc., proposed an alternative method of bridge repair that would close one lane of traffic, and eliminate full closure of the bridge. David Balliett representing the Pear Tree Point Civic Association, Earl Lewin, Jimmy Judge, and Emmitt Duke all spoke in opposition of the permanent closure of the drawbridge function. Robert Striper suggested that a ferry service be considered to transport people across the river.

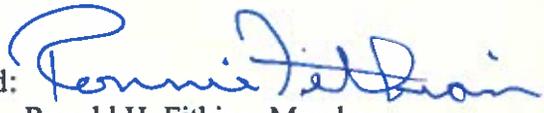
Commissioner Fithian stated that the County is open to any suggestions, and recommended that Mr. Kirby meet with the Mr. Beach, Mr. Hosley, Mr. Roby, and Mr. Glass to further discuss the proposed alternative method.

Commissioner Short stated that a notification will be sent when the next meeting date is selected. The hearing was taped for reference and the Task Force adjourned the public hearing at 10:23 a.m.

Respectfully submitted,



Sondra M. Blackiston, Clerk

Approved: 
Ronald H. Fithian, Member
The County Commissioners
Of Kent County, Maryland

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