***Town Government Report***

By Rande Davis

**Commissioners Focus on Current Projects and Incentives for Business Growth**

The agenda of the July 1 town commissioners’ meeting in Poolesville had two primary topics for consideration. The first was a draft proposal of an incentive program to be offered to new business owners who choose to locate in the town or to existing businesses that upgrade to specific criteria. The second was a review of all the projects currently underway or scheduled in the near future.

As part of the town’s economic development initiative, they are creating a marketing package of information that is designed to attract new businesses to help fill some of the empty storefronts in town. As part of that package, an incentive agreement to new or existing businesses is being drafted with the objective to improve economic conditions in the town. The current draft identifies a qualifying business as one that is making an investment in buildings and fixed assets, increases the town’s full time employment prospects, helps to revitalize the commercial zone, adds to the town’s tax base, and/or fills a specific need in the commerce of the town.

Examples of the incentives being considered for new businesses could be the abatement of corporate personal property tax on a schedule that would be one hundred percent the first year, and fifty percent the second. As an example, should a business owner choose to open a grocery store in an existing space, the incentive could be as much as $3,900 the first year and $1,500 the second.

For an existing business that chooses to build new construction, the town might provide an impact fee waiver that would not exceed one year’s estimated tax revenue. Another possibility is for a current business that seeks expansion or façade improvements that meet the Master Plan criteria the town could offer an abatement, grant, or loan equal to two years of corporate personal property taxes.

They will be discussing the incentive program at future meetings before finalizing a vote. The current draft of the proposal is available at monocleonline.com.

**Busy Hands Make Happy Hearts**

If that slogan is true, town employees must be real happy campers. The fifteen-page power point presentation reviewed the current project schedule for this summer. Beyond the standard day-to-day activities that include responding to emergency situations such as broken water lines and resident questions, they continue to deal with problems resulting from the FIOS installation as well as monitoring Washington Gas line modifications and Potomac Edison power feeds in Westerly. They hope to complete the sidewalk on West Willard Road that will provide pedestrians a safe area to walk from Fisher Avenue to Westerly Road. The town is blocked by red tape from the county that is requiring the town remove telephone poles before installing new sidewalks. The town has requested a variance as the cost to remove the telephone poles would be too high, up to an additional $80,000. The town’s plan provides a safe sidewalk so pedestrians do not have to walk in the road but leaves the poles in place.

New crossroads are scheduled soon, and the town hopes to have a memorandum of understanding with the county this summer for the new pedestrian crosswalks. They are designed to be slightly raised and made from a material that has a lifespan of nearly twenty years.

The three largest projects starting this summer are the replacement at the Water and Wastewater Treatment plant of its sewage belt press, relining and cleanout of sewer lines in the Westerly Subdivision, and also relining of the sewer lines under Fisher Avenue.

The new wayfinder street signage project continues. Wayfinder signs help guide visitors to destination sites in town such as schools, ball fields, parks, pool, museums, etc. They are of a uniform dark green and white design.

Along with all these projects, the town will still continue working on issues on the proposed solar array, new LED street lighting, a new park restroom at Elgin Park, and supervising the new home subdivisions of Stony Springs, with nearly all lots sold, and Brightwell Crossing which is entering into Phase II of development this summer.