

## La Plata wrestling sweeps to open season



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## J.C. Parks earns second Oceans Guardians banner

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## Hughesville woman, 21, dies in multi-vehicle crash Thursday

Police believe speed, alcohol were a factor in La Plata accident

By JESSI STICKEL

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A three-vehicle collision claimed a 21-year-old Hughesville woman's life in La Plata early Thursday.

On Dec. 7 at approximately 2:30 a.m., the Bel Alton Volunteer Fire Department, Maryland State Police and Charles County Sheriff's Office responded to the intersection between Route 6 and Bel Alton Newtown Road for a report of an accident.

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## Small library a 'placeholder' in budget, La Plata residents told

County likely to revisit capital projects in next fiscal year

By PAUL LAGASSE

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The county's plan to replace the La Plata library branch facility with a building of similar size is a temporary solution designed to ensure the project has a place in the county's budget projections, though a larger facility will likely require at least some outside funding, county commissioners

told residents at Tuesday's town hall meeting.

Questions about the new library dominated the meeting, which took place at the Charles County Government building in La Plata. Attendance was high due in large part to a social media campaign by

See **LIBRARY**

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## Public excluded from discussion of purchase, state says

Murphy says open meetings violation is an 'opportunity to do better'

By PAUL LAGASSE

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The Charles County Board of Commissioners failed on two occasions to adequately disclose actions taken in closed sessions regarding the purchase of a Waldorf property for use as a recreational center, the state's Open Meetings Act Compliance Board ruled late last week.

"The County Board's failure to make adequate disclosures before and after those sessions meant that members of the public had little information about what the County Board would discuss behind closed doors and no information on why the County Board

See **COMPLIANCE**

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SUBMITTED PHOTO

Republican Women of Charles County attendees listen to Charlotte Vass as she speaks about Women at Risk International, a nonprofit organization that aids the victims of human trafficking in the U.S. and abroad, during a meeting Sunday at the La Plata Holiday Inn.

## Republican Women raise awareness of human trafficking

Group hosted event to help fund nonprofit's work

By JAMIE ANFENSON-COMEAU

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The nightmare of human trafficking and slavery is not just something that happens in other countries, but is happening here in Southern Maryland and elsewhere in the United States, a representative of an organization that supports survivors told Charles

County residents Sunday.

"The problem of sexual slavery and human trafficking is here in Southern Maryland, in Maryland in the United States," said Charlotte Vass, a volunteer with the nonprofit Women At Risk International, a Michigan-based

nonprofit that seeks to

aid the victims of human trafficking. "It's not just a problem 'over there'; it's right here."

The Republican Women of Charles County hosted an event Sunday at the Holiday Inn in La Plata to help raise awareness and funds to support women and children who have survived human trafficking and slavery.

"Human trafficking has been called a fate worse than death," said RWCC President Bernadette Smith. "Victims are held prisoner and often starved, raped, beaten, shamed and forced into drug use. The RWCC fully supports Women at Risk and all they do help

these women and children who have endured so much suffering."

The National Human Trafficking Resource Center Hotline reported 7,621 cases of human trafficking in the U.S. in 2016, 77 percent of which involved sex trafficking. The hotline reported 4,460 cases for the first half of 2017.

Vass said the Washington Metropolitan Area has all of the major ingredients for human trafficking, including a large interstate highway, an international airport, bus stops and train stations

See **TRAFFICKING**

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## Raises recommended for county commissioners

Stipend increases for other positions also suggested

By PAUL LAGASSE

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The Charles County Board of Commissioners could see its first pay raise in nearly a decade if the state legislature accepts the recommendations of a commission tasked with reviewing the compensation of select county positions.

The 2017 Compensation Commission presented its recom-

mendations for commissioner salaries as well as stipends for orphans' court judges and the county's four citizen boards and commissions on Tuesday.

The current salary for the commissioners' president is \$58,000 a year. Each of the four district commissioners currently earns \$48,000 annually.

The commission is recommending that

the salaries be increased to \$59,160 and \$48,960 respectively in the fiscal year beginning in mid-2018, with annual increases of 2 percent through the 2022 fiscal year, to \$62,781 and \$51,957 respectively.

Of the 13 Maryland counties governed by a board of county commissioners, Charles County's commissioner salaries are the highest.

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# Planners recommend Potomac Square rezoning

By CHARLIE WRIGHT  
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The La Plata Planning Commission on Tuesday approved recommendations for several projects, including a rezoning of a Potomac Square property owned by Mallards Pond LLC.

The plan for the 3.82-acre plot has been under scrutiny for the past month, as representatives from Mallards Pond have gone through two public hearings as they work through the annexation process. The project is located between Scroggins Street and Chesapeake Street and would include 22 townhouse units. The group requested a zoning change from rural-residential (RR) to multiple-family residential, or R3, a higher-density classification that would be beneficial to the project

with regards to town resources.

After reviewing public comment prior to the meeting, the commission unanimously approved the recommendation of a zoning change without discussion. As Chairwoman Debra Posey clarified during the public hearing in November, and reiterated during a brief overview of the situation on Tuesday, the commission's only task is to advise the town council on the zoning, not the potential annexation. The ruling from the commission is that "should the property be annexed in, R3 zoning would be appropriate," Posey said.

Whether the property is annexed by the town remains up to the council, but a positive recommendation from the commission marks a step forward for

the Mallards Pond developers. Next up will be a decision on the annexation from the council following its review of the public comments, which are due today.

The Stagecoach Crossing development also received a desirable ruling from the commission, which unanimously approved the request for R-5 zoning and the accompanying mix of housing types. This 267-acre property has already been annexed into the town, and the developers are now seeking to secure financing and navigate the design review process.

Town staff recently completed a comprehensive zoning code update and reached out to the developers most affected by potential code changes. Stagecoach is one of the larger developments

subject to code revisions, so staff discussed the alterations with the group and gave it the opportunity to review and comment on them. Attorney Sue Greer, Ed Carroll of Soltesz engineering and John Driggs, the principal investor in the project, went before the Commission to request R-5 zoning instead of the proposed R-21 designation.

Stagecoach will be the primary beneficiary of an \$11 million low-interest loan given to the Town of La Plata by the U.S. Department of Agriculture's Office of Rural Development to extend water and sewer service. In order to repay the government funds, the group will need approval from the town council for a special tax district. The zoning change as well as a combination of housing

types that would be 60 percent single family, 30 percent town homes and 10 percent large duplexes would assist in this requirement.

"In order for the special taxing district to be viable, then we need a certain amount of density," Greer said.

There was debate among the commission, specifically from Councilman Matthew Simpson, about the legitimacy of the tax district and the group's ability to fund the project without town involvement, but the members eventually agreed that aspect is the council's concern.

"As a planning commission, it is our role to determine zoning, not to determine special tax districts," Posey said. "That is a role of the town council. They could refuse to do the special tax district, and even with the zoning as it is recommended, you are what you are."

**Twitter:** @CharlieIndyNews

## LIBRARY

From  
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the Charles County Public Library encouraging people to turn out to voice their support for a larger library.

The county's capital improvement program provides a five-year budget projection for infrastructure projects.

The current CIP, which covers fiscal years 2018 to 2022, proposes to replace the current library, which was built in 1967, with a new 13,000-square-foot facility. The existing building is 12,889 square feet.

La Plata residents have expressed concerns that the existing library lacked adequate program space and meeting rooms, and a new library of the same size would not correct those shortcomings.

"I think it's important to note that what's currently in the capital improvement project budget as it relates to the library at 13,000 square feet is really a placeholder in our [CIP] budget," said Commissioner Ken Robinson (D). "I don't think any of us here realistically think that we are going to replace the current library with a library of the same size."

"I think that the Waldorf West library is a good template on what the replacement of the La Plata library should look like," Robinson added.

Robinson said that the county is only just beginning to get into the "nuts and bolts" of determining the costs of a larger facility.

"I would say that we're in the embryonic stage of replacing the library in La Plata, but I believe that within the next three or four months, as we get into the fiscal year 2019 budget, it will move much higher in the priority list," he said.

County administrator Michael Mallinoff said the estimated cost of a 13,000-square-foot replacement library is just over \$4 million, while the total cost of a larger library would be \$10.1 million.

Mallinoff explained that project budgets in the CIP are determined by estimat-

ing the county's ability to pay off the debt incurred in financing those projects based on growth projections of the county's tax base.

By hewing closely to those projections, Mallinoff said, the county has been able to maintain its AAA bond ratings, which in turn allows it to borrow money for capital projects at lower interest rates.

"Part of the issue we're going to have in the upcoming year, and it's something the commissioners deal with every year, is how to pick and choose which projects they fund," Mallinoff said.

Acting as emcee, Mallinoff read the questions and comments about the library submitted by county residents.

Of the more than 20 questions that addressed the library issue, several common themes emerged. Residents were concerned about the lack of modern amenities such as sufficient computer terminals, space for children's programming, and meeting rooms for community events.

In addition to funds from the county, the commissioners said they would be investigating other sources of funding including state grants and the proceeds from the sale of the 1.5-acre site where the current library is located.

Only two questions addressed topics unrelated to the library.

Derrick Terry of Waldorf asked the commissioners about the new \$7 million animal shelter being proposed to replace the Tri-County Animal Shelter. Commissioners' President Peter F. Murphy (D) responded that the county had fully intended to stick with the existing shelter until both Calvert and St. Mary's counties decided to build their own. At that point, he said, the county had the choice of renovating a facility that was inconveniently located, or using roughly the same amount of money to build a modern facility that was more centrally located for the county.

Diana O'Connell asked about delays in completing the extension of Old McDaniel Road in St. Charles to

provide access to the Piney Grove neighborhood. The county had originally anticipated that construction would begin three years ago. Planning and growth management director Steve Kau-Ziegler explained that the delays were due to ongoing efforts to negotiate rights of way with individual property owners.

At the conclusion of the

town hall, the commissioners reiterated that the concerns expressed by La Plata residents about the new library would be given their due consideration.

"It may not seem that you have been heard, but you have been heard," Commissioner Debra Davis (D) said. "Thank you all for being participants. It really helps."

"There isn't anybody that

sits up here on the Board of County Commissioners that doesn't agree with all the comments that were made here tonight about the value of libraries, [and] what they bring to this county," Murphy said, noting that last year the county funded the creation of a mobile library to help meet the needs of residents.

The plan for the 13,000-square-foot library was simply a "marker" in the CIP, Murphy said.

"We needed to start somewhere," Murphy said. "It's never been a question about where we may end up, it's been a question about where do we get started."

Following the motion to end the town hall meeting, the attendees applauded.

**Twitter:** @PaulIndyNews

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