Hughesville woman, 21, dies in multi-vehicle crash Thursday
Police believe speed, alcohol were a factor in La Plata accident

By JAMIE ANFENSON-COMEAU jamie@somdnews.com

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 the victims told Charles County residents Sunday.

“The problem of actual slavery and human trafficking is here in Southern Maryland, in Maryland and in the United States,” said Charlotte Vass, a volunteer with the nonprofit Women At Risk International, a Michigan-based organization that supports survivors and works to raise awareness and aid the victims of human trafficking, here in Southern Maryland and elsewhere, during a meeting Sunday at the La Plata Holiday Inn.

The hotline reported 7,621 cases of human trafficking in 2016, 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.

Public excluded from discussion of purchase, state says
Murphy says open meetings violation is ‘an opportunity to do better’

Rises recommended for county commissioners
Stipend increases for other positions also suggested

By PAUL LAGASSE paullagasse@somdnews.com

The county’s plan to re-open the La Plata branch facility with a building of a similar size is a temporary solution designed to ensure the project has a place in the county’s budget projection, though a new facility will likely require at least some outside funding, county commissioners told residents at Tuesday’s (Dec. 5) 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 the Library.

The county’s plan to re-open the La Plata library branch facility with a building of a similar size is a temporary solution designed to ensure the project has a place in the county’s budget projection, though a new facility will likely require at least some outside funding, county commissioners told residents at Tuesday’s (Dec. 5) meeting.

The death of a woman is identified as Taylor Anne Halbich, according to a Maryland State Police release. She was transported to the University of Maryland Charles Regional Medical Center, where she succumbed to her injuries. She was driving a 2013 Hyundai Elantra.

The driver of the vehicle that was struck by the Hyundai is identified as FATAL.

Small library a ‘placeholder’ in budget, La Plata residents told
County likely to revisit capital projects in next fiscal year

The Charles County Board of Commissioners failed on two occasions to adequately discuss actions taken in close sessions regarding the purchase of the new Washington Farcy site as a recreational facility for the county’s Women’s History Month celebration.

The current salary of $35,000 a year for the commissioners’ president is $58,000 a year for the commissioners’ vice president and $55,000 a year for the commissioners’ secretary. The current salary for the commissioners’ president is $50,000 a year. Each of the four district commissioners earns $48,000 annually.

In 2017, the comptroller recommended that the salaries be increased to $39,249 and $34,380, respectively in the fiscal year beginning in mid-2018, with annual increases of 2 percent through the 2022 fiscal year, to $42,561, $37,187, respectively.

Of the 11 Maryland counties governed by a board of county commissioners, Charles County’s commissioners salaries are the highest.
Planners recommend Potomac Square rezoning

By CHARLEY WRIGHT | charley@somdnews.com

The La Plata Planning Commission recommended rezoning of a portion of Potomac Square property owned by Maxfield P. Fland II for a development that includes 22 townhouse units.

The plan for the 3.5-acre plot has been under scrutiny for the past month, as residents 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 initially planned a development from e Rural Residential (RR) to multiple-family residential, or R3, a designation that would allow the commission to move forward with regard to town resources.

The public hearing came after a recommendation from the commission to hold a public comment prior to the meeting, the county approved the recommendation with a vote of six to two in favor of the project. As Chairwoman Debra Firestone clarified during the public hearing, in November, and reiterated during a brief overview of the rezoning, which unanimously approved the request for five housing types. This type would probably include nine units in the new zoning and the accompanying mix of housing types. This type would probably include nine units in the new zoning and the accompanying mix of housing types.

The town council requested a zoning change for the development that includes 22 townhouse units. The zoning change was approved, and the commission was asked to review and comment on the rezoning request.

The county had originally anticipated the town council would begin hearing the issue around April. Planning and growth management director Steve Caflisch explained that the delays were due to ongoing efforts to negotiate a purchase agreement with the property owners.

At the conclusion of the meeting, the town council recommended that the rezoning should be approved, and the commission to hold a public hearing on the rezoning request. The rezoning request was approved, and the commission was asked to review and comment on the rezoning request.

The plan for the 3,500-square-foot library was simply a "marker" in the budget, Murphy said. "We need to start somewhere," Murphy said. "It's never been a question about what we need to do, it's a question about how we can do it. Following the motion to introduce the rezoning, the attendees applauded.