



*Calvert County Courthouse, Prince Frederick, MD*

*photo by R. Safer*

***Report to the Citizens of Calvert County, MD***

***on***

**Transparency of County Governance**

***A Study by the***

***League of Women Voters of Calvert County, MD***

**October 2014**



***Address:*** League of Women Voters of Calvert County, MD  
PO Box 1510, Prince Frederick, MD 20678

***Phone:*** 410-586-2176 (*voice mail*)

***Website:*** <http://leagueofwomenscalvertcounty.wildapricot.org/>

# Letter from LWVCC Co-President and LWVCC Observer Team Chair



October 2014

Dear Policymakers and Citizens,

This League of Women Voters of Calvert County (LWVCC) report assesses the effectiveness of the Calvert County government in engaging its citizens in important county decisions. The study was undertaken as part of the League's mission to foster greater citizen participation in government and greater understanding of county government operations and decision-making.

The League's report on "*Transparency of County Governance*" explores three case studies including:

1. The Board of County Commissioners' determination to support the expansion of the liquid natural gas (LNG) plant at Cove Point in Lusby, Maryland,
2. The disposition of the Calvert Middle School building and plans to develop the surrounding property,
3. The annual process to draft and adopt the county's operating budget and Capital Improvement Plan.

The study is based on the U.S. League of Women Voters' Representative Government position. It advocates an open government system that is accountable, responsive, and promotes the values and processes of representative government.

This is the third study conducted and released by the League of Women Voters during the past nine years. The other recent studies were "*The Greening of Calvert County*" (October 2008) and "*Services for Children, Youth, and Families in Calvert County, MD*" (September 2005).

We hope that this study will be the beginning of a dialogue between the citizens of Calvert County and their government officials. To this end we are prepared to participate in this important and necessary discussion.

We thank the Transparency Study Committee for all of their work. The Committee is listed on the inside back cover of this report.

Sincerely,

*Annette J. Funn*  
Co-President, Calvert County LWV

*Sharron Bickel*  
LWV Observer Team Chair

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## ***Key Statements of Positions from the League of Women Voters – United States Regarding:***

- **Citizen Rights**
- **The Citizen’s Right to Know/Citizen Participation**

**Statement of Position, as announced by the National Board, LWV, June 1984:**

***“The League of Women Voters of the United States believes that democratic government depends upon informed and active participation at all levels of government. The League further believes that governmental bodies must protect the citizen’s right to know by giving adequate notice of proposed actions, holding open meetings and making public records accessible.”***

### **The League’s History on These Issues**

The League has long worked for the citizen’s right to know and for broad citizen participation in government. League support for open meetings was first made explicit in the 1972 (League) Congress position; in 1973, Leagues were empowered to apply that position at the state and local levels. In 1974, the Convention added to League Principles the requisite that “government bodies protect the citizen’s right to know by giving adequate notice of proposed actions, holding open meetings and making public records accessible,” and decided that Leagues could act on the Principles – with the necessary safeguards of member understanding and support. The League supported the 1976 Government in the Sunshine law to enhance citizens’ access to information.

The League of Women Voters Education Fund (LWVEF) has engaged in a number of efforts to assist in this area. In 2005, the League launched “Openness in Government: Looking For Sunshine,” a project to broaden public awareness about the issues involved in, and the threats related to, accountability and transparency in government. The League developed educational materials about federal, state, and local laws concerning citizen access, the extent and types of threats to these laws that have occurred in recent years, and data on the increasing levels of information being put off-limits since 9-11. The project was continued in 2006, under the name “Observing Your Government in Action: Protecting Your Right to Know.”

Additional projects were initiated in the following years. One focused on public document audits, providing financial support to Leagues in 11 states and a toolkit, “Surveying Public Documents: Protecting Your Right to Know.” In 2010, work started on an online resource called “Sunshine 2.0,” which will provide criteria for assessing the transparency of local government websites and other online technologies.

The League has served as a cosponsor of the annual “Sunshine Week” since 2006, taking part in kickoff events in Washington, DC. “Sunshine Week” sponsors a nationwide live webcast to stimulate public discussion about why open government is important to everyone and why it is under challenge today. State and Local Leagues are encouraged to participate.

# I. Background

## A. Reasons for the Study

A core value of the League of Women Voters is to foster greater citizen participation in government and a greater citizen understanding of how their government operates and makes decisions.

The League of Women Voters of Calvert County (LWV-CC) decided four years ago to form an observer corps, a team of members with the goal of attending every Board of County Commissioners (BOCC) meeting that is open to the public. In this way observer team members became much better informed about how our local government operates, including what information is given to the public and when that information is made available.

**What is the meaning of transparency when applied to the operations of government bodies?**

**Transparency – A situation in which business and financial activities are done in an open way without secrets so that people can trust that decisions are fair and honest.**

*Cambridge Business Dictionary*

Members of the observer corps and other League members and citizens recommended in mid-2013 that the LWV-CC conduct a more intensive study of three specific recent county government decisions that had evoked major citizen response, both in support and disagreement, and report its findings on the transparency of each government decision to the citizens of Calvert County in 2014.

## B. Methodologies Used

Members chose three representative case studies: one was a county effort to encourage business growth, one a county property disposition, and one a regular, annual governmental process or procedure. All three case studies involved actions of two different Boards of County Commissioners – the current Board (*acting from 2011-2014*) and the previous Board (*acting from 2007-2010*).

We examined agendas, minutes, and other available documents of the Board of County Commissioners over the past half decade to evaluate their timeliness, availability, and completeness of information. We also examined associated public records and public news articles.

### **The chosen case studies are:**

- The BOCC's determination to support the expansion of the liquefied natural gas (LNG) plant at Cove Point to allow export of LNG,
- The disposition of the Calvert Middle School building and plans to develop the surrounding property, and
- The annual process to draft and adopt the county's operating budget and capital improvement plan.

***(Appendixes A, B, and C provide the details of each case study.)***

The standards guiding our examination of the materials and our assessments of transparency are simple and can be found in the following sources:

- The Maryland “Open Meetings” Act (See text boxes on pages 7-9 and Appendix D)
- County policies, procedures, and rules such as:
  - The Calvert County Comprehensive Plan (See text box on this page, at right)
  - Procedures and rules for making county decisions described in Calvert County’s annual operating budget and capital improvement plan
- The League of Women Voters of the United States positions on the “citizen’s right to know” (See pages 4 and 5)
- Legal Codes of Calvert County, Maryland

Based on these standards, we asked the following questions:

- Is adequate, reasonable advance notice given of public meetings or hearings?
  - In writing and/or electronically
  - Does the notice include the agenda and the date, time and place of the session, and all relevant documentation;
  - And, if appropriate, do notices include a statement that a part or all of a meeting may be conducted in closed session.
- Is there opportunity to observe decision-making and/or be adequately informed in a timely manner of decisions made by the BOCC?
- Does the Board of County Commissioners follow the standards and provisions of the Maryland Open Meetings Act for both its open and closed sessions as summarized below, excerpted in text boxes on pages 7-9, and in Appendix D?

**Standards Regarding Closed (Executive) Sessions of the BOCC:**

- The BOCC can decide to hold a closed meeting (called “Executive Session” in Calvert County) in the several cases outlined in the Maryland Open Meetings Act (see Appendix D). Reasons to hold a meeting in executive session include discussions of incentives offered to foster a business expansion or supporting a new business coming into the county; when negotiating to buy real property for public use; and when obtaining legal advice from counsel; and when deciding and discussing personnel matters. **However, this Act also includes wording in Section 10-508 (c) that “The exceptions”...“shall be strictly construed in favor of open meetings of public bodies.”** (See boxed text on lower left side of page 7.)
- The BOCC can keep such discussions and decisions from the public and stay within the Maryland Open Meetings Act. They must, however, make records of all closed meetings and

From Comprehensive Plan – Calvert County  
Adopted 2004; Amended  
and Readopted October 2010

**Effective Government**

“If it is effective, government represents the will of an informed public. For the public to be ‘informed’, several actions must take place. First, someone, typically the government and/or the press, must monitor trends pertaining to the County, region, and state. That information would include crime, education, land use, revenues, expenditures, etc. Second, someone must relay that information to the citizens. Finally, the citizens must have suitable avenues to receive that information, be able to evaluate it, and communicate their reactions to the government.”

Page 102 of Comprehensive Plan – Calvert County, Adopted 2004; Amended and Readopted October 2010

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**“The Comprehensive Plan is the official policy document for the County.”**

Page iii of Comprehensive Plan – Calvert County, Adopted 2004; Amended and Readopted October 2010

hold all relevant documents related to their closed meetings safely for a year (*unless a court orders specified records handed over and made public*). **The BOCC can also release any records from any closed session at any time they choose to do so by majority vote.**

- At the next open session of the BOCC a record of the previous executive session must be entered into the official minutes and must include the date and time of the closed meeting, a list of all persons present during each topic of discussion, a record of all votes taken, and a general list again of the topics of discussion matching the reasons the executive session was called.
- A complete video and sound recording of any BOCC meeting can be used in place of written minutes. However, the minutes of closed sessions must meet the following requirements:
  - ◆ Was there a vote in public session to hold a closed meeting?
  - ◆ By the time of the next open meeting, were the required records from the closed meeting reported and entered into the minutes of that open meeting? Do they reflect a citation of the subsection authority from the Maryland Open Meetings Act for closing the session, a listing of the topics of discussion, persons present, and each action taken during the closed session?
  - ◆ Were proper minutes of the closed meeting, as described just above, approved by the BOCC and made public at their next open meeting?

#### **Standards Regarding BOTH Open and Closed Meetings**

- Are public records of all meetings accessible and how easily can they be accessed? (*See Appendix D*)
- Is there adequate and timely opportunity for citizens to express their ideas, choices, priorities and participate in democratic decision making?
- Are documents related to the BOCC agenda also available to the public in a timely manner?

#### ***The Maryland Open Meetings Act* Section 10-508 (c). Closed meetings.**

“The exceptions in subsection (a) of this section shall be strictly construed in favor of open meetings of public bodies.”

#### ***The Maryland Open Meetings Act* 10-501. Public policy.**

- “(a) It is essential to the maintenance of a democratic society that, except in special and appropriate circumstances:
- (1) public business be performed in an open and public manner; and
  - (2) citizens be allowed to observe:
    - (i) the performance of public officials; and
    - (ii) the deliberations and decisions that the making of public policy involves.
- (b) (1) The ability of the public, its representatives, and the media to attend, report on, and broadcast meetings of public bodies and to witness the phases of the deliberation, policy formation, and decision making of public bodies ensures the accountability of government to the citizens of the State.
- (2) The conduct of public business in open meetings increases the faith of the public in government and enhances the effectiveness of the public in fulfilling its role in a democratic society.

## II. Major Findings

### A. General Major Findings – From All Three Case Studies

#### 1. Closed Meetings

In all three cases we studied, we found that the last two elected Boards of County Commissioners violated the spirit of the Maryland Open Meetings Act (see boxed information on pages 7-9 and Appendix D) and its own adopted policies as defined in the county's Comprehensive Plan (see boxed text on page 6). They did so by withholding information from the public for weeks, months and sometimes years after they made important decisions – by using the exceptions allowed for closed or “executive” meetings. And we cannot find approved minutes, abbreviated as necessary, for some of the important closed meetings of the Board of County Commissioners in all three of the cases we studied: regarding the LNG plant, the Middle School property, and the preparation of the draft budget by county staff and commissioners.

Reports are required of all executive sessions by the Maryland Open Meetings Act and must include, among other things, a list of all persons present, a listing of the topics of discussion for the closed meeting, and a record of each action taken while in the closed session. This report is to be made public and included in the minutes of the BOCC's next open meeting. (See top text box at right.)

This past year there have been major improvements in complying with the requirements of state laws regarding notices of and reporting of the minutes of closed meetings of the BOCC.

#### 2. Information and Decisions from Closed Meetings Are Not Shared with the Public.

Significant reliance on the use of closed meetings creates deficiencies in keeping the public informed of pending decisions that have major and long lasting impacts on the citizens of Calvert County. All three case studies revealed decisions taken behind closed doors that markedly changed the

#### **Maryland Open Meetings Act**

#### **Section 10-509. Minutes**

*(regarding written minutes; or live and archived video or audio streaming)*

...

“(c) (2) If a public body meets in closed session, the minutes for its next open session shall include:

- (i) a statement of the time, place, and purpose of the closed session;
- (ii) a record of the vote of each member as to closing the session;
- (iii) a citation of the authority under this subtitle for closing the session; and
- (iv) a listing of the topics of discussion, persons present, and each action taken during the session.”

#### **Maryland Open Meetings Act**

#### **Section 10-509. Minutes**

*(regarding unsealing of written minutes; or live and archived video or audio streaming)*

...

“(c) (4) The minutes and any tape recording shall be unsealed and open to inspection as follows:

...

- (iii) on request of a person or on the public body's own initiative, if a majority of the members of the public body present and voting vote in favor of unsealing the minutes and any tape recording.

future for all county citizens regarding their safety, the enjoyment of their property, and their future tax burdens. These are the same reasons transparency and opportunity for public participation are so important in a democratic society and **why the results of decisions reached in closed session should be made fully available to the public as soon as possible, once sensitive negotiations are complete.**

**The fact that the reports of these decisions are being withheld indefinitely under the current Open Meetings Act [(Section 10-509 (c) (2) (iv) and Section 10-509 (c) (4) (iii)] violates the spirit of the Act. The Open Meetings Act is intended to shield negotiations only during the period in which they are held, but not after they are concluded and decisions made.**

### **3. Timeliness of Notices for Current Hearings and Agendas Often Inadequate; Access to Documents Often Difficult.**

The county's required communications to its citizens about current hearings and agendas are improving, but they are still difficult to access for the average citizen. Background documents relevant to current hearings and agendas are difficult to find and **often not posted with enough time for the public to become aware of them, read them, and provide fully informed testimony or input.** The county posted a 400-page budget document with only four days to read and study it before the final public hearing. Notice of hearings themselves are often not sufficiently communicated or easy to find on the county's website – although changes are being made. We also found that the agendas use innocuous and uninformative wording for potentially controversial subjects. For example, a Community Planning and Building Work Session with the BOCC was described in the agenda as "Department Projects and Activities Presentation" which fails to inform the public that the presentation included an update on the controversial Middle School and surrounding property.

***Maryland Open Meetings Act***  
**Section 10-501. Public policy**

*(regarding adequacy of time and location notices to the public and accessibility of public meeting locations)*

...

(c) Except in special and appropriate circumstances when meetings of public bodies may be closed under this subtitle, it is the public policy of the State that the public be provided with adequate notice of the time and location of meetings of public bodies, which shall be held in places reasonably accessible to individuals who would like to attend these meetings.

### **4. Encouraging More Widespread Public Participation.**

The county government has several practices that discourage more public involvement in its decision-making. The practice of holding hearings, then immediately closing the record and voting to decide the issue does not provide time for more public input. Many hearings are held during the regular Tuesday morning meeting of the BOCC or during other times of the weekday when most citizens are at work and cannot attend. Some hearings or informational meetings with expected larger crowds are held in non-central locations. Venues such as the Calvert Pines Senior Center, for example, are uncomfortable and become crowded if more than 100 people attend. Persons sitting in the back of the room are not able to see the video screen or to hear speakers because of the poor audio system.



*Dominion Cove Point Proposed Liquefaction Project Area  
Image from Dominion brochure posted at county's website:  
[www.co.cal.md.us/DocumentCenter/View/4680](http://www.co.cal.md.us/DocumentCenter/View/4680)*

## **B. Major Findings from the Study of Dominion Cove Point Liquid Natural Gas (LNG) Facility for Export**

1. The way the BOCC has dealt with the Cove Point expansion leaves much to be desired with regard to transparency. The record was searched for 2011, 2012, 2013, and to August 2014, and **not a single vote by the BOCC was recorded in open session to support the Dominion expansion.** In addition, the secret agreement with Dominion dated August 21, 2012 shows that there was no intention of informing the public about the trade-offs made even three months after the Tax Agreement was revealed and signed at the BOCC meeting on November 5, 2013. *(Appendices E, F and G)*
2. Among the decisions that were non-transparent are:
  - a. Zoning amendments that made changes at the joint BOCC and Planning Commission meeting markedly different from those requested by Dominion;
  - b. Exemption of LNG plants from the County building ordinance; and
  - c. The speed of adopting the Pilot and Tax Credit Agreement with Dominion.
3. The joint meeting on October 29, 2013, between the BOCC and Planning Commission to amend the zoning ordinance to assign oversight of technical issues to the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission (FERC) came two years and nine months after the first public comment on Dominion's plans by the BOCC, and provided the first opportunity for large scale input by citizens of Calvert County. While there were many "public hearings" held during regular BOCC meetings every Tuesday morning, these meetings, although fulfilling the letter of the law, are held on four days notice *(with only two being weekdays)* and traditionally have yielded very few if any comments from the public, most of whom are at work. Public hearings often are simply not advertised in a timely manner to allow citizens' input.

4. The BOCC adopted the new Ordinance on Tax Credit provisions and the contract for the “Payment in Lieu of Taxes” (PILOT) tax credit agreement on November 5, 2013 after a speedy public hearing, closing of the record, and approval of both the Ordinance and PILOT agreements, all at the same meeting (*Appendix G*). This must be considered non-transparent. The documents are far too complex to be absorbed on only a few days’ notice and it appears that the speed of the adoption was designed specifically to avoid questions, comments or objections from the public.
5. After the BOCC decided to support the Cove Point expansion on September 25, 2012 (*the actual date undoubtedly was much earlier, but on this date the record indicates that the BOCC authorized its President to testify in favor of the Cove Point expansion before the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission, FERC*) the Commissioners discouraged any input on the part of the citizens of Calvert County. This included ignoring all comments from its citizens, especially those who live in the Cove Point area, and in the end included ignoring their own Environmental Commission that strongly advocated that further input to FERC was necessary in six areas that had been carefully researched and documented.

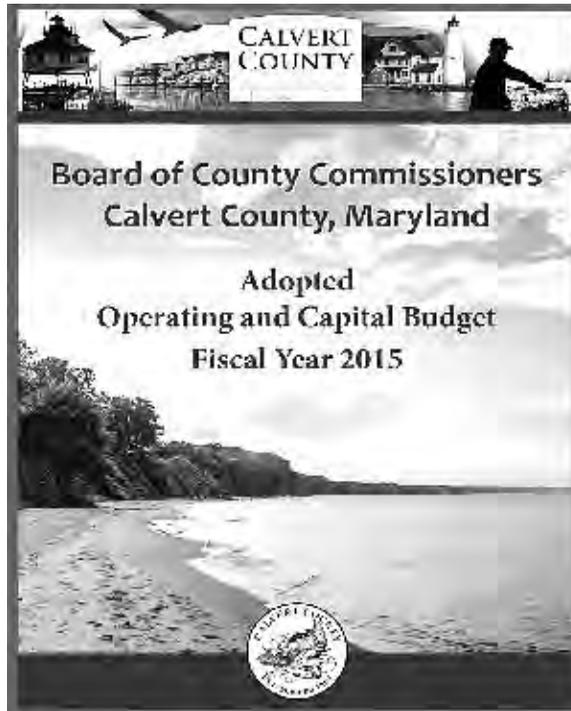


*Calvert Junior-Senior High School was built on Route 2/4 in Prince Frederick in the late 1940s. The buildings were demolished in March 2012. The property remains vacant and BOCC plans for its development remain undetermined or unannounced.  
(photo by R. Poling)*

## **C. Major Findings from the Study Regarding Disposition of the Calvert Middle School Property**

1. During the period June 2010 when the Middle School closed, through March 2013 (when the BOCC approved consulting services to manage the Prince Frederick Town Center charrette), no attempt was made to elicit citizen participation. Suggestions or complaints about the lack of citizen input from proposals, letters, specific recommendations were rejected or ignored. The Board was explicit in saying that it was not interested in the input from citizenry. The Prince Frederick Town Center charrette, however, held in June 2013 to recommend updates to the plan for the New Town area and the Middle School site, was a welcome exercise in public engagement.

2. Important, initial, basic decisions about the development of the Middle School property were made out of sight of the public. The tenets of the original Request for Proposal (RFP), distributed in 2010 –that this county-owned property would be developed commercially excluding use as a community center, county office building or park, and that there would be no long term financial commitment by the county – were never publicly discussed. In a like manner, a provision of the original RFP stated that the Town Center Master Plan could be altered to fit the developers' plans for the site rather than the developers' plans being guided by the Prince Frederick Town Center Master Plan. This ignores the public involvement traditionally solicited to change or modify the Prince Frederick Town Center Master Plan. These basic tenets were presented and voted on without explanation or justification to the public.
3. The report on market factors associated with proposed land uses compiled by Fore Consulting, Inc. and published in 2011, was a valuable contribution to county knowledge and business planning. However, redacted information from the report was withheld from the Calvert County Planning Commission for months, even though the business of the planning Commission would benefit from seeing the report, and the report could have been viewed in Planning Commission executive session.
4. Calvert County is fortunate in that there is a tradition of individual members of the Board of County Commissioners making themselves available to the public. Because of this circumstance, however, Board members sometimes appear to equate accessibility with transparency. In a county with a population of 92,000, while accessibility is important, it does not substitute for regular, informational reports to the general public on decisions and issues of importance or controversy.



*Adopted Operating and Capital Budget for the Fiscal Year 2015 is a 506-page document. It is available at <http://www.co.cal.md.us/DocumentCenter/View/6137>*

## **D. Major Findings of the Study Regarding the Annual Preparation of the Calvert County Operating Budget and Capital Improvement Plan**

1. Examination of the current budget preparation process and those of past years indicates the public will is not well-served. There is no opportunity to influence the budget at the beginning of its preparation each July or in the middle of its preparation when the draft capital improvement plan is first presented to the BOCC for comment in November. Indeed, the first opportunity for formal public comment on the budget for the record is not until March when a completed draft budget is released to the public less than a week prior to its initial public hearing.

A second, final budget hearing for the public is held during May, two weeks before the BOCC will adopt the budget in its final form. We have observed that public comments at this time are far too late to effect changes to the budget and we can find no evidence that comments made at this late date have ever prompted the BOCC or staff to make a significant change or to take different budget actions. We saw no record of significant changes after the final public hearing over the last five budget cycles.

2. The public budget hearings over the past three years have been used by county officials and staff to present the highlights of what the budget contains. This presentation reduces the time for the public to comment and also reduces the number of persons able to comment because the deadline for use of the facility is reached at 9 P.M.

3. During the last four months of the budget-building process, during which the only public hearings are held, it is not possible to take full account of the costs of any new initiative that the public might suggest for the coming year. It is also too late to adopt their suggestions to reduce spending on a project already underway in the county's capital improvement program. Current examples would be continued spending on improvements to the county-owned golf course and unprecedented large amounts of new county spending, via bond funding for the most part, on a new emergency communications system which, in large part, does not meet the county's standards to qualify for bond funding – because it must be usable for at least 15 years or longer in order to qualify for bond funding. The current county communications system is approximately 10 years old and was obsolete years ago and needed replacement some years ago as well. An open hearing on the CIP and the budget produced no answers as to why the county agreed to pay for an exceptionally expensive (\$21,000,000) communications system.
4. Concerning budget documentation, the county's Department of Finance has been recognized by professional associations of finance officers for the very complete and thorough manner the budget is presented and detailed. This award is for the full and complete budget presentation book and is **highly admirable**. The award is not given based on the correctness of the budget decisions and the priorities made within the budget or the timeliness of its availability to the public. The budget document exceeds 400 pages (*and sometimes exceeds 500 pages when viewed on a computer screen*). We judge it is impossible for the county to print significant numbers of the draft budget document for the public but we do not find sufficient hard copies readily available in the public libraries nor did we find a widely available notice in the newspapers of where a budget draft might be read by those without a computer and internet service. The document's size makes it all the more imperative that the entire document be made available online, with several hard copies at the libraries, as soon as possible prior to any public hearings, and we found that this was not being done. Indeed, a complete budget, updated since the March hearing on the draft budget, was not posted on the county website for study until four days before the final public hearing, this year held on May 20.
5. Most persons read and study the budget document only online. However, the county's website is not optimally organized or easy to use, although it is improving. The number of steps needed to navigate to the draft budget document, for example, are complex and difficult. Once found, the time needed to download the budget document has been very lengthy and the host server is sometimes unresponsive and easy to overload if more than a few people are attempting to access large files, such as the county budget, prior to the hearing for it.
6. The county staff's presentation of the budget's highlights at formal public budget hearings cannot and does not substitute for the public having the complete budget document available to study well before any hearing. Most, if not all, persons signing up to speak at public hearings have specific requests to make as the result of being able to read and study the complete document or parts of it in great detail. But we recognize there are others who have general comments to make about spending priorities, such as fully funding education or public recreation, and perhaps do not wish to read the whole document. Current county practices support those members of the public, but not those citizens who want to study the exact wording and amounts in the budget and make informed testimony.

### III. Overall Recommendations from Our Three Case Studies

- A. Any large project proposal that could potentially affect the health or well-being of Calvert County citizens should be subject to the open meeting process. A formal meeting should be held to inform the citizens of Calvert County of the proposed project, allow ample time for comment and leave the record open for comment for ten days or longer.
- B. A definition of what constitutes a “large project” should be adopted and it is suggested that any project of \$500,000 or greater should be included, irrespective of whether it is to be funded by County government or other sources of funding such as from state or federal monies.
- C. The process of holding public hearings followed by an immediate closing of the record and taking a vote to decide an issue that is not an emergency should be re-examined. The timeframe of giving notice of a few work days prior to a single public hearing needs to be expanded. It is recommended that public hearings be announced in the week’s agenda preceding the agenda for the meeting at which the hearing will be held in order to allow citizens sufficient time to study the matter.
- D. Likewise the closing of the record for any decision affecting a “large project” costing more than \$500,000 should be delayed until the following meeting to allow more input from the public.
- E. Most important, it is suggested that transparency could be greatly improved by changing the prevailing default position of “do not disclose to the public unless absolutely required.” Instead, the mindset should be: “Would disclosure inform the citizens of important decisions in a timely manner and allow them the opportunity for input?” While the answer will not always be ‘yes,’ asking the question will lead to increased transparency and ensure that the public’s right to know is considered in the decision.
- F. When public real estate is being decommissioned for county use and the decision has been made not to use it for county business again, but to repurpose it, a town hall meeting or forum should be held. This would give the citizens the opportunity to discuss their concerns and gain information about the property and give county officials a chance to hear the public comments and suggestions for future uses of the property.
- G. For a major development, like one that will utilize the old Calvert Middle School site, the use of a standing Citizens’ Advisory Committee (*not used since 2009*) could be useful to the county staff and BOCC when there is no local city or town center government or civic association to speak for the affected community. This is the current situation in the important Prince Frederick Town Center which lacks a community-wide civic association and has no town authorities because the town is not incorporated.
- H. There should be frequent or regularly scheduled updates to the public on the progress of large projects such as the disposition of the Middle School property, the Armory building next door, and potential large land purchases for parkland or other county uses.
- I. A formal public hearing and period for public comment on the record needs to be held in front of the BOCC and representatives of county commissions and staffs at the beginning of each annual budget-building cycle, in July or August, in order to hear the public’s concerns and priorities for the next fiscal year and their suggestions for new initiatives. This can also be the best time, just after such a public hearing, for county staff and the BOCC to consider changes to planning procedures, and any staff reorganizations and cuts to save money in next year’s budget.

- J. A formal public hearing needs to be held with the presence of the BOCC, Planning Commission and Economic Development Commission, and county department staff representatives before drafting the annual Capital Improvements Plan with its five year projection of projects to be funded.
- K. A formal public hearing should be held to hear concerns of the public when the use of public money from specific funding streams, such as the county's new youth recreation fund which receives annual payments from gambling proceeds, is being considered. A separate hearing is also needed when this fund is used out of the budget cycle for special purposes such as a property purchase, when the amount of purchase exceeds \$250,000 or when the county agrees to pay 20 percent or more of the current assessed value of the property, as assessed by the State of Maryland – which they did in the purchase of land for the new Ward Road park in Dunkirk.
- L. Formal hearings on budget matters by the BOCC, and especially all joint public hearings that include county commissions and staff should be held during evening hours, after 6:30 P.M. at Calvert High School's auditorium which is centrally located in the county and has a stage and good sound and visual aids capabilities and adequate parking. Huntingtown High School is a suitable substitute location only if the auditorium at Calvert High School is not available. These venues are far superior to the Calvert Pines Senior Center.
- M. The county should operate two official websites. One website would be for residents and citizens and contain only information relevant to the operations of our county government and its regular activities. It should have immediate and direct tabs to emergency notices and to notices of all upcoming official hearings, meetings, and links to all agendas and documents relevant to the upcoming agenda, preferably **a week in advance at minimum**. It should take no more than two clicks to reach a destination once on a county website. This official county website should also contain the records, documents and minutes of past official meetings. It should also have a direct tab to official and important current announcements. **This proposed county website should not include announcements of cultural, social and recreational events.** A second county-operated website should contain this information directed both to residents and to prospective visitors and tourists wishing to learn of fun events and activities in Calvert County for their enjoyment and recreation.
- N. In order to meet legal requirements of notice to all residents the county needs to continue to make several copies of documents available as soon as possible at all county library locations. Many county citizens must rely entirely on 'hard-copy' documents because they lack home computers or do not know how to use them well. In concert with this effort to inform all county citizens, the county needs to fund greater public access to computers by expanding the numbers, speed, and capabilities of library system computers and their servers so that all of Calvert's citizens can have an opportunity to access to important county documents in a timely manner.
- O. All official county announcements placed in county 'newspapers of record' to meet statutory requirements should have an easily recognized symbol at the top that identifies the announcement as an official Calvert County legal announcement. The county seal is suggested for this purpose. It can be electronically attached to all official county notices sent to local newspapers and not expand size requirements or expense to the county.
- P. None of these recommendations, except for assistance to the libraries, costs the county significant new funding and most of them cost very little to implement.