

Talbot County Taxpayers Association (TCTA) Reply to Mr Wendowski
By Owen Wormser, President, TCTA
Guest Comment

Though TCTA has no interest in a running debate with Easton's government officials, we can not let Mr Wendowski's Tuesday, 17 March, Guest Comment stand. Mr Wendowski's opinion regarding TCTA's intent appears to have missed our point due either a lack of understanding as to our intent or outright opposition to any further opening of the budget processes to the public beyond what he apparently deems appropriate at present. If the latter is the case, then one must question his reasoning "why". TCTA membership that resides in Easton (35%), the other four incorporated municipalities in Talbot, and county-wide want open, transparent government. Consistent with TCTA's mission, we intend to pursue this matter to its logical conclusion: securing openness and accountability.

What became very obvious to us during our review of the rationale for recent borrowing of \$9.95M is the fact the Mayor is not required to develop budgets and expend resources in a manner fully transparent and accountable to Easton's citizens. The Town Charter provides for the Mayor to operate in this fashion. We advocate citizens considering a change to the Town's Charter so the Mayor will perform budget and expenditure processes with as much public visibility and transparency, consistent with good public policy, as feasible prior to introducing a budget to the Town Council. Equally important in our opinion is ensuring that any possible expenditures arising during budget execution, but not already approved in existing appropriations, are given the same treatment

TCTA's objective is to ensure all citizens have transparency into their government's budget decisions and can hold their elected officials accountable for how their hard-earned money is or will be spent. Mr Wendowski apparently holds the view that government must act as though it is a private sector business; and, therefore, by this premise, must hold its "cards close to the chest".

He is either very confused about whose dollars are being decided or he opposes public knowledge at the outset. When it comes to tax dollars, governments have a direct and obligatory responsibility to be open and transparent. Yes, we agree much government budget work must be done in executive session; however, there must be milestones in the process wherein the public can be exposed to what are the actual planning parameters and resulting expenditure estimates. The best local example is the budget process used by the Talbot County Council. Though forms of governance are quite different because the County Council functions as both "Executive" and "Legislative" branches of government, the Council makes every effort to involve the public from the first departmental/agency annual budget presentations, to final public consideration and comment. This is not the process in Easton and we believe it should be. This is our rationale for proposing an amendment to the Town of Easton Charter – to open the budget process for public review at each, appropriate formative step, until final approval by the Town Council.