

TCTA Presentation to Council, 6 May 2008

President Foster, members of the Council, I am Owen Wormser, President of the Talbot County Taxpayers Association. On behalf of our ever-growing membership, it is my pleasure to provide our Association's input to your deliberations surrounding the County's proposed FY 2009 budget.

As you already know from our letter to each of you, we have spent considerable time in review and analysis of this budget and hope our input will be well received.

My purpose this afternoon is to further underscore the seriousness we associate with regard to our two major concerns we conveyed in our letter and its attachment that set forth our lesser but important budget concerns.

The Directors of the Talbot County Taxpayers Association representing their membership commend the County Council and County Manager for several significant accomplishments during preparation of the proposed FY 2009 budget and during execution of the FY 2008 budget. We are particularly supportive of our Board of Education's continued endorsement, support, and encouragement for advanced technology initiatives in our schools. We believe our young people leaving TCPS will have benefited greatly from their exposure to, training in, and use of emerging technologies such as advanced laptop computers.

We are concerned revenues projected for FY 2009 and beyond may well be considerably less than earlier projections, especially revenues derived from county income taxes, recordation taxes, transfer taxes, and development impact fees. This potential

impact on both Operating and Capital expenditures will require skilled and careful fiscal management to weather the economic storm expected to intensify over the coming years.

Our review of the proposed FY 2009 budget produced two areas of major concern:

- The Board of Education's (BoE) request for FY 2009 funding is excessive in our opinion. In a era when we are witnessing a slow but steady decline in overall Talbot County student population according to the Maryland Department of Education's county-by-county analysis through CY 2007 and our BoE's projection of below 4400 students for the coming school year, we ask County Council to consider most carefully the need for a 9.5% increase in the BoE's budget for FY 2009 over FY

2008. We encourage the Council to scrutinize thoroughly, each proposed expenditure in the BoE's budget to ensure there is proper justification. Though we strongly support an annual increase in classroom teacher's salaries and other classroom teacher benefits, we are not supportive of the continued increase in the non-academic employee ratio to classroom teacher. It appears to us TCPS is becoming top heavy with Administration and non-classroom-specific employees at a time when overall student population is on the decline.

- Our second area of major concern is the capital expenditure of \$6,000,000 for a multi-sport facility to be built at the Talbot Community Center (TCCC). Our

Association opposes this expenditure for the following reasons:

1. There has not been a Statement of Need or a requirements study made available to the public according to our research. Thus, there is no known documented need upon which to base such a significant expenditure of taxpayer dollars on a facility we believe is extraneous to Talbot County needs at this time due to many other priorities competing for scarce resources. To wit: Public Safety, roads and grounds, classroom teacher's salaries, vocational training, to name but a few.
2. Though Department of Parks & Recreation intends to provide scheduled transportation to and from this new facility, from after school until late

evening, we do not concur with an expenditure of taxpayer dollars for such an enterprise when capital investment in vehicles, transportation insurance, fuel, maintenance, and personnel costs are all experiencing exponential cost increases.

3. Though we are aware of some limited discussions between the Easton YMCA and our County staff about the planned expansion of indoor sport facilities at the “Y”, there has not been an adequate exploration of alternatives for the multi-sport facility planned for the Community Center. Some argue the “Y” could change leadership and close the door on use of their facility. If this is a widely held view, the question should then arise as to what are the legitimate alternatives and to what

extent have these been explored and reported to the public with the end result being selection of the Community Center site? We are not aware of any such efforts.

Though there are a number of lesser issues about which we are prepared to discuss, Council's time constraint for presentations negates our doing so at this time. However, we are more than willing to have such discussions at another time convenient to the Council. In closing, the Association's Directors wish to thank Mr. John Lehner, County Finance Officer, for his time, effort, and responsiveness in helping us understand the complexities and competing demands within the County's FY 2009 proposed budget.