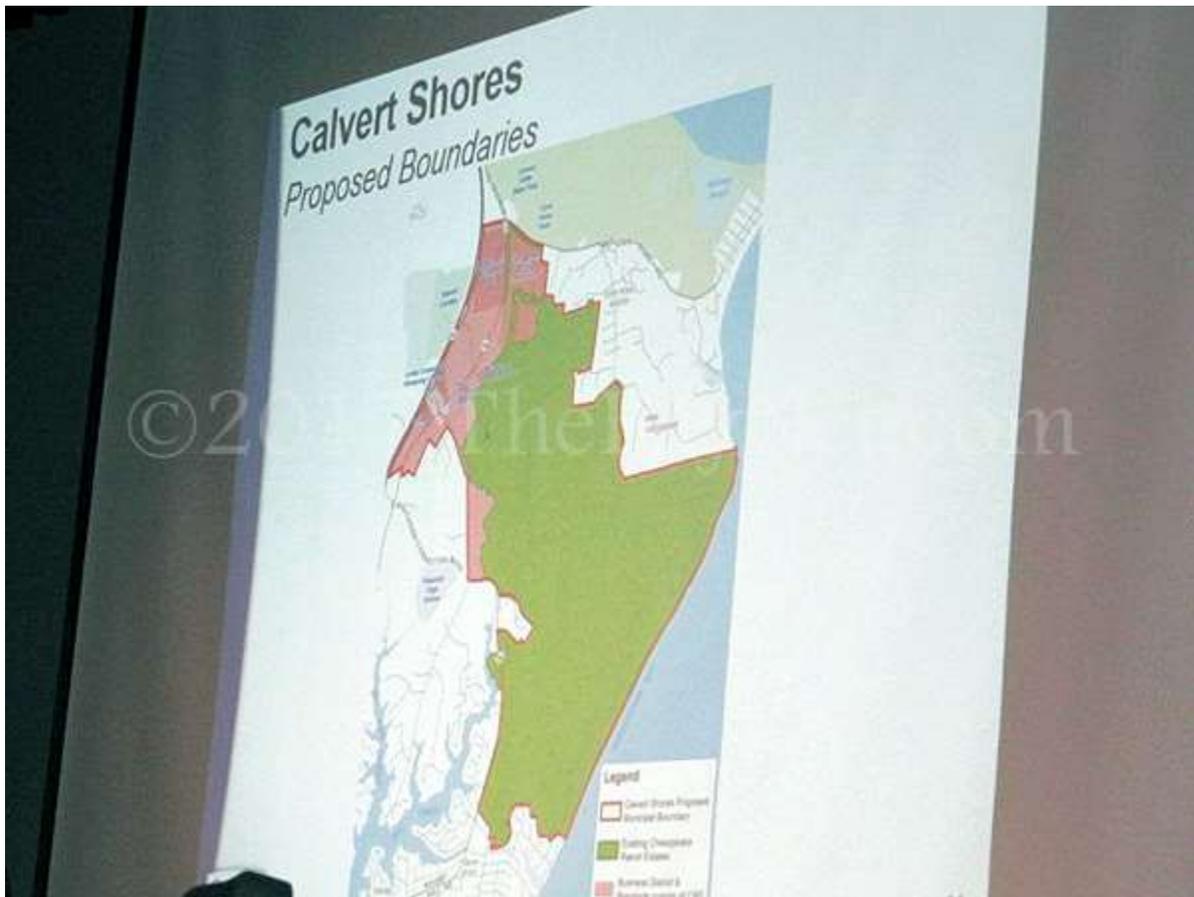


# County staff recommends denial of Calvert Shores vote

- Calvert County
- 07/29/2017
- By Marty Madden



Lusby, MD - A few weeks after a well-attended public hearing, the Calvert County Commissioners may be ready to make a decision on a request for a referendum regarding plans to create the jurisdiction's third municipality. The proposed Calvert Shores Municipality has been added to the board's Tuesday, Aug. 1 agenda. Calvert Shores is a proposal from residents of Chesapeake Ranch Estates (CRE) to incorporate the bayside subdivision and the Lusby Town Center as a town. Last year the Calvert County Commissioners rejected a request to have the proposal on the election ballot. On July 11, the board held a public hearing at Patuxent High School to receive input after a petition was submitted to request the proposed referendum be reconsidered.

According to a memo to the commissioners from Department of Communications and Media Relations Director Linda Vassallo, county government staff is recommending denial

of the request. In the memo, county government staff cites minimal public feedback, “and the fact that residents and businesses currently located outside of CRE proper would see a tax increase.”

In presenting its rationale, county government staff stated the following.

“If one assumes that the Property Owners Association of Chesapeake Ranch Estates [POACRE] does not eliminate the roads fee and the special tax district (STD), residents will pay, on average, about \$435 more.”

“All residents and businesses within the proposed area to incorporate will see an increase in taxes (net 0.281 cents).”

“Funds that are going directly to roads will now be used to fund another layer of government. The added level of government will cost more.”

“At the conclusion of the public comment period and including speakers from the public hearing, 43 individuals were for incorporation and 21 were against, for a total of 64 individuals submitting comments. Per the Calvert County Election Board, there are approximately 6,758 registered voters within the proposed municipality border. The total number of individuals weighing in during the public comment period comprised less than 1 percent of the total impacted population. The 1 percent does not include the total number of businesses impacted. There are approximately 75 known businesses within the proposed municipality boundary.”

Other concerns raised by Calvert County Government Staff include the liability the proposed municipality would be burdened with, quality of services and CRE’s lack of public infrastructure, specifically a sewage system.

Vassallo’s memo noted that if the commissioners deny the referendum request no further action by the board is required. Should the commissioners decide to move forward with the referendum, they would need to direct staff to draft a resolution.

“We’ve read the county’s report, it’s mostly a rehash,” said Shores of Calvert Committee Chair Cathy Zumbrun, who told TheBayNet.com she was disappointed county government staff didn’t consider new information the committee submitted.

Zumbrun indicated that she and other committee members take umbrage at county government staff’s contention that the public showed minimal interest in the municipality proposal. “We don’t consider 150 people at a hearing minimal,” she said, further noting the applause supporters drew and the fact that over 2,000 people signed a petition supporting the referendum.

As far as where the movement to create a municipality goes should the commissioners reject the referendum request, one option might be to wait and hope the 2018 election brings change. “There are people running [for commissioner] who say they support it,” Zumbrun stated. She added that there might also be legal action taken by POACRE to recoup such levies as stormwater management fees that have not come back to CRE.

As for redrawing the boundaries to not include the business district, Zumbrun indicated businesses within the parameters would be paying a minimal tax if the municipality has currently proposed was approved. She also noted that businesses within the county’s

existing municipalities of North Beach and Chesapeake Beach don't seem to be deterred by the municipal tax levies.

Commissioner Mike Hart [R - District 1] has recused himself from the Calvert Shores referendum issue since his liquor store is located within the Lusby Town Center Business District.

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