COMMISSIONERS OF RIDGELY
OCTOBER 5, 2026
TOWN MEETING

The Commissioners of Ridgely met on the above date at 6:00 pm in the Ridgely Town Hall. The following were in attendance: President John Hurley, Commissioner Chad Leister, Commissioner Brad Sears, Director of Operations David Crist, Clerk-Treasurer Stephanie Berkey, Zoning Administrator Melissa Leonard, Financial Assistant Gerald Sutton, Corporal Tracy Ferguson, Nancy Sears, David Tribbett, Jr., Rick & Cathy Schwab, Michael Mann, Tate Kamsch, Michelle Revert, Al Witkofsky, Cara Avery, Anna Mansfield, Ken George.

The meeting was called to order at 6:00 p.m. The invocation was delivered by Ken George of Ridgely Church of the Brethren, followed by the Pledge of Allegiance. Mr. George also shared information on the church's monthly community meal and offered prayers for the family of Denton Chief of Police, George Bacorn.

The September 2026 Town Meeting minutes were approved unanimously.

CLERK TREASURER
The Commissioners considered the monthly bill list and approved payment by unanimous vote. The Treasurer's Report was then presented, showing balances of $380,043.11 in the general fund, $3,605.23 in the sewer fund, $12,816.74 in the water fund, and $9,574.94 in ARPA funds.

DIRECTOR OF OPERATIONS
David, Director of Operations, reported that the town recently hosted a site visit with the Maryland Department of the Environment for the sewer line replacement grant. Maryland Department of the Environment staff supported the town's proposed Phase One work, and the request for proposals and environmental impact study are now being prepared for Phase One only. He advised that the work is now being advanced in phases because combining all phases would slow the process further, and he estimated that the environmental review, grant agreement, and request for proposals process will likely extend into the beginning of the new year. He also reported that Phase One focuses on sewer line and manhole replacement and relining, with later phases addressing the new pump station and then the old pump station; most of the work is expected in alleyways, which should reduce road cuts and repaving needs.

• Public works vehicle lettering remained on order and was expected within one to two weeks, after which the vehicles would be detailed and lettered.

• Tree trimming work that can be performed safely without overhead line conflicts began that day; larger removals are planned for November.

• Residents were reminded to place leaf piles where crews can reach them and to avoid parking on them; leaf pickup will occur as weather permits, but wet leaves cannot be collected.

ZONING ADMIN/ASST CLERK

The Assistant Clerk-Treasurer reported that Ridgely Elementary School had invited the town to participate in its Move and Groove fundraiser. The event, originally planned for November 6, had been rescheduled to Wednesday, November 11, beginning at approximately 9:00 a.m., with students participating in activity blocks throughout the day. Commissioners expressed general interest in representing the town, but no final attendance schedule was set during the meeting.

The Assistant Clerk-Treasurer presented SolarAPP+, explaining that the State of Maryland is requiring municipalities to provide an online solar permitting application and tracking process by January. The system discussed was for residential solar permits only and would be grant-funded, with no direct cost to the town; the vendor's administrative fee would be charged directly to the permit applicant. The Commissioners agreed that using a third-party system was preferable to establishing an in-house system for the limited number of applications the town receives. The Commissioners approved participation in SolarAPP+ by unanimous vote.

CAROLINE COUNTY SHERIFF'S OFFICE

Corporal Ferguson of the Caroline County Sheriff's Office presented activity statistics for September 1 through September 30. He reported 480 hours worked, 214 calls for service, eight reports taken, 45 traffic stops, 65 violations, and one arrest. Additional enforcement and service activity during the month included alarms, an assault, assistance to the Maryland State Police and another police department, civil process attempts, a DUI case, bike and foot patrols, radar assignments, theft investigations, a traffic accident, trespassing calls, welfare checks, disturbance calls, property checks, and follow-up investigations.

FINANCIAL ASSISTANT

The Financial Assistant reported that the town audit was in process and that the second phase was scheduled to begin the following day. He noted that the audit completion timeline was running somewhat later than the prior year and estimated that the work would take several weeks to complete for Fiscal Year 2026.

ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT COMMITTEE

Dave Tribbett, Jr. reported on the September 17 meeting of the Economic Development Committee. He stated that the committee had continued discussing ways to improve public notice to travelers passing through town and had secured permission from Hiron Patel, owner of Foster's and

Connolley's, to place signs for major town events on the property at no charge. He also reported that committee members had divided up lists of prior donors and were assisting with fundraising outreach for Winterfest. In addition, the committee toured the Ridgely Diner and was advised that, despite some recent hurdles, the owners remained committed to opening by the end of October.

• The next Economic Development Committee meeting was announced for October 15 at 3:30 p.m.

• The Commissioners also noted an opening on the committee and encouraged interested residents to apply through the town website and town Facebook page.

HISTORICAL SOCIETY

The Historical Society reported that planning was underway for the 2026 Christmas Ball, with the final theme and ticket price to be decided after the society's upcoming vote. The society also reported that the Hannah Henry Circle, led by President Rodney Dobson, had been invited to visit a historical school site in Queen Anne's County related to African American history, with the visit intended to provide ideas for future programming and funding support for the Hannah Henry Circle. Additional discussion covered use of matching paint for work at the telephone exchange before Halloween activities, the pending historic information sign for the back deck area, and coordination needed to retrieve and install previously donated railroad crossing signs.

• The Historical Society noted that Halloween activity at the site again involves participation from the Caroline County Historical Society, the Hannah Henry Circle, and the town.

• The train station was reported to be closed for the season, but tours remain available by request if arrangements are made with the society.

• The next Historical Society meeting was announced for Thursday at the train station.

OLD BUSINESS

Under old business, the Commissioners received an update on the data center ordinance review. Staff reported that most of the preliminary work that could be completed internally had been done and that Commissioner Porter had been assisting by obtaining documentation and firsthand information from Frederick County, where a large data center project has already been built. The matter is scheduled to go before the Planning Commission on October 28 at 6:00 p.m. for further discussion. During related discussion prompted by a public question, the Commissioners stated that no data center applications had been received, that data centers are not a permitted use under the current zoning code, and that the 12-month moratorium adopted on August 3 remains in effect while an appropriate ordinance is developed.

The Commissioners received a Tech Park status update and were advised that the matter remains in a waiting phase. The town has already supplied the requested information to Caroline County, which owns the property even though it is annexed into Ridgely. At this stage, the next steps rest with the county.

The Commissioners received an update on the proposed solar battery ordinance. Staff reported that substantial research had been completed and that preliminary discussions had taken place with Patrick, the town attorney. Before forwarding the matter, staff plan to consult with the Fire Marshal and then present the information to the Planning Commission at its October 28 meeting.

The Commissioners reviewed a draft amendment addressing untagged vehicles. Discussion focused on the cure period and on how to handle repeated violations. After considering shorter timeframes, the Commissioners agreed that a 30-day cure period would be more reasonable given repair, inspection, and financial realities for residents. They also discussed whether third and subsequent offenses within a 12-month period should be reassessed after a year and whether additional legal remedies, including liens, might be available. The draft had not yet been sent to Patrick, the town attorney, and the Commissioners directed that the draft be revised to reflect the 30-day cure period and then forwarded for legal review.

NEW BUSINESS

The Commissioners considered a resident complaint regarding speeding on Maryland Avenue near Third Street. Staff noted that the current stop sign pattern leaves a relatively long stretch on Maryland Avenue without a stop on that approach and that similar speeding concerns had been raised previously. The Director of Operations advised that installing the necessary signage would be straightforward, but staff would first confirm the town's posting requirements for changing the traffic pattern.

The Commissioners received a report on the annual Meet the Towns event sponsored by the Caroline County Chamber of Commerce and held at Greater Impact Church near Greensboro. The event was described as an opportunity to speak with prospective business owners and market Ridgely's opportunities. The town's presentation highlighted ongoing activity at the Tech Park, Hanover Foods, and available commercial properties in town, including the pharmacy and the former electronics store, and real estate agents had been contacted in advance to make them aware of those vacancies.

PUBLIC COMMENT

Michelle Raber, Democratic candidate for Maryland District 36 Delegate, introduced herself and stated that she is visiting municipalities across the district to hear local concerns and oppose one-size-fits-all legislation from Annapolis.

Al Witkowski of Central Avenue spoke about speeding, crosswalk violations, early-morning dump truck traffic, landfill-related truck traffic, and safety concerns for children waiting for school buses; he also referenced a recent near-miss in a crosswalk witnessed by a commissioner. In response, Corporal Ferguson of the Caroline County Sheriff's Office stated that he would have deputies monitor the area and would also speak with the Maryland Department of Transportation regarding truck enforcement and inspection activity. Another commenter cautioned the town to proceed carefully with any untagged vehicle enforcement affecting private property, raised concerns about selective enforcement and civil liability, and urged the town to consider neighborly assistance to residents in need rather than relying primarily on fines.

The meeting was adjourned at 6:43 PM.

Respectfully submitted,
Stephanie L. Berkey, CMC
Clerk-Treasurer