

BLUEPOINT HOSPITALITY GROUP LLC

BLUEPOINT DEVELOPMENT LLC

July 20, 2020

Mayor Robert C. Willey
Council President Megan Cook
Council Members Messrs. Abbatiello, Davis Jr., Engle and Silverstein
Town Manager Donald J. Richardson
Town of Easton
PO Box 520
Easton, MD 21601

Via Hand Delivery and Electronic Mail:
Mayor&Council@EastonMD.gov

Re: Washington Street Promenade

Mr. Mayor and Members of the Easton Town Council:

Our last Town Council meeting, which allowed for public comment, seemed to generate lots of conversation. We received many encouraging letters, cards, and notes of support from customers, concerned residents of the town, and responsible representatives of the community. Thank you. We have also since been attacked online; personally, our businesses, and supporters, by mean, uninformed and misguided individuals. We believe these attacks were instigated largely by provocative and disingenuous posts by Town Council President Megan Cook and Len Foxwell; a well-known gadfly and court jester. That Peter Franchot keeps a man so disreputable and underhanded on in any capacity makes it difficult for this Talbot County democrat to imagine Peter's suitability for future leadership here in Maryland. It is however even more unfortunate that Len has manipulated and enabled Megan's far-fetched notions of town government and governance.

I represent Bluepoint Hospitality and Bluepoint Development. Maybe I should qualify what that means. We own all of the buildings on Federal Street between Washington and West Street, the corner of Federal and West Streets towards Bay Street down to the old Harrison's florist, all of the buildings but for Bank of America on the South side of Goldsborough Street all the way around the corner of Harrison Street, a good third of the real estate on the North side of Goldsborough Street, and the lower end of Dover Street between Washington and West Streets – which, by the way, will become a new bookstore, selling new books and magazines with a wonderful children's book section. We also own the Historic Auditorium on the South end of downtown; its restoration already underway; this was to provide a permanent home for Chesapeake Music, the Chamber Music Festival and

the Chesapeake Jazz festival. The theater would have served the community as a home for authors, book signings, film festivals, Washington College lectures, Frederick Douglass Day, children's theater and dance, church events, Blue Star family events, and would have also provided an additional, beautiful resource for town fairs and festivals; Plein Air, Waterfowl and others. We recently acquired the adjacent space which now provides a beautiful gathering place for those who participate in Talbot County democratic activities, voter registration and political dialogue. All of this we subsidized happily – thinking it served the community. With one exception each of the properties we acquired was in some form of physical or financial distress. Many were vacant and on the market for years. What that means is that the buildings we bought downtown often had windows boarded up, no or few tenants, electrical and plumbing dated and in disrepair, roofs falling in, many spaces simply were in an unserviceable state. We bought them as-is, where is, and when no one else would. These buildings have been restored well beyond any notion of financial return and significantly contribute to the beauty of our downtown.

We are over sixty (60) employees **downtown**. We have fifty-two (52) independent contractors working round the clock **downtown** on our many projects: Ronald Covey Masonry, Conner, Inc., R.L. Ewing Contractors, Inc., Fluharty's Electric, Lane Engineering, McHale Landscape, Trice Construction and Warren's Wood Works, to name just a few. We have wonderful tenants that represent a professional workforce **downtown** of ninety (90) individuals.

Let me tell you our approach. We believe a robust downtown is essential for a healthy and vibrant community. Why do I care? Why not just sit at my farm, walk the dogs and pretend that's enough? I care because I love this town. I care because I relocated families here – from Colorado and New York to work in my energy business. I care because I built a home here that I fervently pray keeps my children and someday their children coming back. I care because every member on our team is amazing, works to deliver a quality experience, seeks professional advancement and without exception gives back to our shared community. And I know that community, a community rich in diversity and choice, is the only way to make this a home for everyone.

Initially, we tried to bring businesses downtown – businesses we did not own, businesses we respect. What was the problem? Parking. Parking is a good thing to discuss. Megan Cook's promenade idea was a loss of more than twenty (20) spots right there on Washington Street. Now I am not a parking expert, town planner or traffic consultant. But let's do the math. Let's assume each spot turned six (6) times a day. 6×20 equals 120. Now assume two (2) people per car. Some cars will only have two (2) people, others four (4) and it's just a guess but for this example let's assume two (2). One hundred twenty (120) cars times two (2) people per car is two hundred forty (240). That is a loss of two hundred forty (240) visitors downtown each day. Megan planned to close Washington for two (2) months. Two hundred forty (240) times sixty (60) days equals fourteen thousand four hundred (14,400). That's close to fifteen thousand (15,000) visitors and customers lost to downtown so Megan and Len Foxwell can have a drink INSIDE the Washington Pub, where its air conditioned. I am confident a traffic consultant will come up with better numbers, but we just won't know until we hire one. Still, you get the point.

Talk about the bookstore. We actually offered to invest in the News Center when it became apparent they were leaving. How do you have a great town without a bookstore – without a place for children to find a book that will capture their imagination? First, I went to Tim Boyle at Vintage Books. I said I knew nothing about the book business – “...you know someone...?” He didn’t. We even took out an ad, ran it for weeks in the Star Democrat and the Annapolis paper. Finally, the Easton Economic Development Corporation forwarded the resume of an amazing woman, Martha Thomas, who wanted to run a bookstore and learn the business. So I built a bookstore. Boycott it if you want, cheat your children of the opportunity to love books, to dream, to imagine and to understand things greater than the social hatred Megan Cook and Len Foxwell tried to sell you.

We advertised to advance Easton as a destination. Washingtonian, Garden and Gun, Tidewater Times, Capital Gazette, Chesapeake Chamber Music Festival, My Eastern Shore Wedding, Capitol File, DC Magazine, The Real Deal etc. We didn’t just advertise our places, by the way - we pushed the town, other merchants here, the Art Academy, the Maritime Museum, even the Inn at Perry Cabin in St Michaels. We advertised Easton and Talbot County. Some of you prefer Rise Up Coffee to Weathergage. I think that’s great and I think both are great. Some people prefer Hershey’s ice cream and the multitude of flavors Hershey has. Super. We have a far more limited selection of ice creams with ingredients sourced from local farms made with local hands and heart. And so we are a bit more expensive. BUT isn’t that good – to have a wide range of choice whether it’s fancy or dressed down, formal or sporty, expensive or inexpensive – isn’t it great having the widest range of choice in such a small town? Personally, I think it is fantastic, and a provides a reason for everyone to come to town; locals, tourists, special occasion visitors, everyone.

You may think we are expensive because our places are so darn beautiful and we actually put real effort into creating a unique experience for our guests, but we are more than fair and competitively priced. Our goal has always been – and it works – to bring people from the Oxford corridor, St. Michael’s Road, Annapolis, Baltimore, DC, Philly and New York – we hope to bring people from wherever we can because once they are here, they will visit other shops in town, galleries in town, the Art Academy, and who knows; they might even love it here so much they’ll visit Chuck Mangold, Cliff Meredith, Alicia Dulin or Coard Benson and buy a home here, too.

The social media hit job was gross. The stated rules of the Easton, Maryland Community Group on Facebook prohibit personal attacks, attacks on business and yet, the administrators of this site seemed happy to allow posts that were baseless, rude, horrific and defamatory. But ask the administrators to identify themselves and NO; these cowards who administrate the Easton, Maryland Community Group Facebook page hide behind some sanctimonious statement posted late last week that said something to the effect of “....*we all work so hard and give generously of our time so we must remain anonymous*”. What bull. In fact, Megan Cook’s friends, Dr. Curtis Foy, Dr. Laurie Porter and Mike Campbell worked hard to screen, filter and prevent posts from supporting members of the community, all the while allowing vicious, mean, and untrue slander being posted by uninformed experts who have no

investment in downtown, financial or spiritual; they hit Target and Dicks rather than fight for a parking spot downtown, and all of that, all that vicious social media fiction yielded ugly threats of boycott, physical violence and vandalism to me, my family, employees and businesses.

How did we get here?

Megan Cook wanted to close the main street in town for an ill-conceived promenade in the midst of a pandemic. The Police Dept. suggested it was a BAD idea. First Responders, too. There wasn't a clear objective. There wasn't a way to measure success or failure. There was zero planning. The fellow at the Washington Pub had better planning, he at least made cool Bud Light banners to hang on the metal barricades to pretty up our downtown. Not one notion of how this might affect our businesses, our employees, our customers, our tenants, contractors, the courthouse, law firms, realtors or ninety (90) other businesses in town; NOT one thought about how we might **lose** business, lose tourism with some rank amateur plan **that wasn't planned**. And Ross the ticket seller at the Easton Business Alliance, a front for Jeff Schneider's vision of town; it didn't occur to them to first consult with experts about the dire consequences of no parking for two full months, the risk to an individual in medical crisis in the back of an ambulance racing to the ER detouring around town because main street is closed, how people in need desperately waiting for that police cruiser or first responder, how they might suffer due to a delayed response because Megan wanted to party on Washington Street. No one consulted the hospital, and let me remind everyone, we are in the midst of a pandemic. So having Megan Cook and some interloper named Len Foxwell on the other side of this attempted social media hit job against me, my businesses and Al Silverstein, with its repugnant and thinly-veiled anti-Semitism – well, it elevates me, our team and all those who actually care about this town and community and choose to act responsibly.

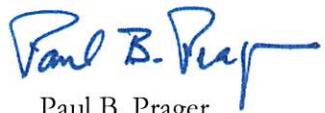
I am hopeful the other Town Council Members now understand that as Town Council President, Megan Cook has no authority other than to preside over these meetings. *Megan*: you are but a facilitator. As Council President, you no longer represent Ward 4. You do not have more votes; your vote is equal to the vote of Al, Ron, Don and Elmer. That's all. Sure, if you want to hear testimony from Jeff Schneider's assistant Ross, fine. But the other Council Members have the right to call testimony from someone more informed – and that's a pretty low bar you set with Ross. Town Council members might want to listen more intently to someone who actually built a business, stayed up nights worrying how to make payroll, and put his or her money at risk. Megan: you alone, at least here, don't have the authority to edit what people say, people who rightly dissent from your uninformed perspective the way your friends secretly edited the Easton, Maryland Community Group Facebook page. You are but one vote, equal to all others on this Town Council. In fact as Town Council President, I remind you that you have a duty to be above your own views, to be truly objective, and work even harder to consider a view inconsistent with your own to ensure you have acted fairly and responsibly.

The process you put in place has business leaders meeting Thursday to discuss their ideas. You are acting irresponsibly here and now to front-run and diminish the value of that

endeavor. The Promenade makes no sense. It should have been dead on arrival, given our towns construct, architecture, traffic, parking and this horrible pandemic. You have demonstrated poor leadership, and misguided and divided a town.

We are thrilled that Rev. Elmer Neal Davis, Jr. has been appointed to the open council member seat on July 6, and that he will represent Ward 4, despite Megan's hidden agenda and backroom maneuverings to prevent his appointment. Maybe that too is worth discussing in an open forum. In all her years on the Easton Town Council, Megan Cook never once called on us. We are humbled and delighted that Elmer Neal Davis, Jr. took the time to do so and get to know us during his first month in office. We are confident that with Elmer Neal Davis, Jr. and other responsible members of the Easton Town Council, our beloved town will enjoy the stewardship it deserves.

Sincerely,



Paul B. Prager