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WICOMICO COUNTY COUNCIL
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May 8, 2025

County Executive Julie Giordano
125 N. Division Street, Room 301
Salisbury, MD 21801

Dear County Executive Julie Giordano,

At the May 6, 2025, legislative session, the Wicomico County Council formally received and reviewed the Internal Auditor's report on the Safari at the Quarry event held at the Connelly Mill property. The audit was officially presented during the session; however, the Council voted to table the resolution accepting the audit until such time as the Council's concerns were documented and formally conveyed to your office.

During the session, Council members and members of the public expressed significant concerns regarding the manner in which this event was authorized, managed, and audited. The following points summarize those key concerns:

- **Lack of Some Supporting Documentation**: The Internal Auditor reported that requested support documents—including time sheets, labor cost records, and activity logs—were not all provided. The absence of these documents hinders transparency and accountability in how public resources were used.
- **Questionable Cost Reporting**: Claims that trail construction and obstacle preparation cost only $136.95 for five hours of work are inconsistent with drone footage, eyewitness accounts, and the apparent scale of equipment use. These assertions raise serious doubts about the accuracy of reported expenses.
- **Inadequate Financial and Economic Impact Data**: The economic impact statement provided by the Department of Recreation, Parks, and Tourism lacked verifiable figures or third-party validation.
- **Failure to Follow Proper Procedures**: The Council is deeply concerned that the agreement for the event was executed in the form of a "Memorandum of Understanding" rather than a lease.

As a result, it appears the transaction circumvented Council approval and public notice requirements under Maryland law.

- **Disregard for Legal Restrictions**: Questions remain as to whether federal or state regulations prohibiting public events on active mining sites were violated, and whether sufficient due diligence was performed in this regard.
- **Lack of Public Engagement**: Neither the Council nor the residents of surrounding communities were consulted prior to the approval of this event. This lack of public input, particularly in the Shadow Hills community, has led to considerable mistrust and frustration.
- **Perceived Obstruction of the Audit Process**: The Council is alarmed by the Executive Branch's apparent reluctance to cooperate fully with the Internal Auditor, despite Charter obligations to provide requested information.
- **Disproportionate Financial Risk to the County**: The County invested over $6,000 in taxpayer funds for this event, while the private promoter reported a loss of only $1,800. The imbalance raises questions about fiscal oversight and risk management.

We also note that Charter Section 305, titled *County Internal Auditor*, letter E, provides clear authority for the Internal Auditor to access all necessary records:

> "Inspection. All records and files pertaining to the receipt and expenditure of county funds by all officers, agents, and employees of the county, and all records and files pertaining to management and performance of the functions and activities of any office, department, or agency funded in whole or in part by county funds, and all offices, departments, institutions, boards, commissions, and other agencies thereof shall at all times be open to the inspection of the County Internal Auditor."

Additionally, Charter Section 402. C underscores the Executive Branch's duty to cooperate with the Council:

> "The duties and responsibilities of the County Executive shall include, but not be limited to:... Providing the Council with any information concerning the executive branch which the Council may require for the exercise of its powers."

These Charter provisions make clear that full transparency and cooperation are not optional but are fundamental legal obligations.

The Council believes strongly in the importance of fostering public trust, ensuring government transparency, and adhering to established procedures. This event and the administration's subsequent response to the audit have undermined those goals.

The Council asks that any future events involving County-owned property, particularly those requiring site modifications or significant County resources, be brought to the Council for public review and formal approval.

We remain committed to working collaboratively with your office but must underscore that it is your responsibility to ensure that agreements are executed with transparency, due diligence, and legal compliance.

Sincerely,

WICOMICO COUNTY, MARYLAND

John T. Cannon, Council President

cc: Wicomico County Council
Paul Wilber, County Attorney
Bob Benson, Council Attorney
Anjali Chatelle, Internal Auditor