



Town Council MEETING MINUTES

Monday, May 15, 2023 - 5:30 PM
Council Chambers, Easton Town Office
14 S Harrison Street

5:30 PM: Call to Order by President Cook.

Mayor Robert C. Willey
Mr. Al Silverstein
Mr. Don Abbatiello
Mr. Ron Engle
Rev. Elmer Davis
President Megan Cook

Also present was the Town Manager, Mr. Don Richardson, Town Attorney Mrs. Sharon VanEmburch, Councilmembers-elect Maureen Curry, William David Montgomery and Town Clerk Mrs. Kathy M. Ruf.

At 5:30 p.m., President Cook called the meeting to order.

Opening remarks and Pledge of Allegiance by Councilmember Abbatiello.

Councilmember Abbatiello gave opening remarks and led those present in the Pledge of Allegiance.

Approval of Minutes.

Minutes of the May 1 Budget Workshop and May 1, 2023 Meeting.

Upon motion by Mr. Silverstein seconded by Mr. Abbatiello and carried unanimously, minutes of the May 1, 2023 meeting were approved as written.

Oath of Office Administered to Mayor-Elect Megan JM Cook by Kathleen M. Duvall, Talbot County Clerk of the Court.

Kathleen M. Duvall, Talbot County Clerk of the Court administered the Oath of Office to Mayor-Elect Megan JM Cook.

Oath of Office Administered to Ward 1 Councilmember - Elect Maureen E. Curry by Mayor Megan JM Cook.

Mayor Cook administered the Oath of Office to Maureen E. Curry, Ward 1 Councilmember.

Oath of Office Administered to Ward 3 Councilmember - Elect William David Montgomery by Mayor Megan JM Cook.

Mayor Cook administered the Oath of Office to William David Montgomery, Ward 3 Councilmember.

Members of the Council Elect Acting President of the Council.

Councilmember Al Silverstein thanked everyone for their support, the Mayor and staff for eight years and his fellow council members for the collegiality and the ability to work together. He wished everyone well and pledged to help the Mayor and Council move forward.

Councilmember Ron Engle stated he is pleased with the progress made around town and thinks EEDC is working to bring new things to town. He wished Councilmember David Montgomery well and wished him the best success.

Mayor Willey reminded the new members that there is a lot of work to be done. He stated there are a lot of good things going on and Mayor Cook is capable of doing a good job and she will need the support of the council.

Acting President of the Council.

Upon motion by Rev. Davis, seconded by Ms. Curry and carried unanimously, the Council nominated Donald Abbatiello as Acting President of the Council.

Municipal Official Items.

Items by Mayor Cook.

Mayor Cook gave remarks as being elected the first woman Mayor of the Town of Easton. She thanked everyone and stated she is very honored to be here as the new Mayor. She thanked Mayor Willey for his hard work and dedication. Mayor Cook stated that Mayor Willey's

unwavering dedication has made a lasting impact on the Town of Easton. Mayor Cook stated that during future council meetings, she plans to inform every one of the good work the town is doing. She stated she is humbled and honored to be standing here tonight as the town's new Mayor. She stated that tonight is a monumental milestone and is thankful for the women that came before her to help make a meaningful impact for the women that will follow. She discussed meeting with staff to discuss goals and priorities. Mayor Cook stated that she believes we can work together to inspire positive change.

Items by the Town Manager.

Approval for Living Ecosystems Property Maintenance Bid for FY2023/24 as recommended by staff.

Town Manager, Don Richardson, requested the maintenance bid be tabled due to contractual issues.

Upon motion by Ms. Curry, seconded by Rev. Davis and carried unanimously, the application for Public Assembly Permit for outdoor concerts from the Avalon Foundation was approved.

Items by the Town Attorney.

The Town Attorney, Ms. VanEmburch offered congratulations to everyone. She stated she has nothing for this evening.

Public Hearings.

5:35 PM PUBLIC HEARING to obtain views of citizens on community, economic development, and housing needs to be considered for submission of an application to the MD Community Development Block Grant Program (CDBG). Citizens will have the opportunity to discuss the proposed project for the construction of The Hope Center Application.

At 5:50 p.m., Acting President of the Council, Mr. Abbatiello opened the 5:35 p.m. scheduled public hearing.

Ms. Kaesha Haythe, President and CEO for The Hope Center, discussed the Foundation of Hope offices and programming. She stated they are seeking funding to expand their program to a 5400 sq. foot facility. She stated they intend to have offices for rent and offered support letters in the packet. Ms. Haythe read a letter from a parent that was a graduate of the program. She stated they have a 100% graduation rate.

Acting President Abbatiello asked for questions.

There were no questions for Ms. Haythe.

Acting President Abbatiello stated this is a public hearing and asked for public comments.

A. Reza Jafari, Oxford Road, stated he liked what Ms. Haythe has presented. Mr. Jafari stated he strongly recommends support and positive vote.

There were no other public comments.

At 5:53 p.m., Acting President Abbatiello closed the public hearing.

Resolution No. 6164, a resolution authorizing the submittal of an application for Community Development Block Grant funds in the amount of \$800,000.

Upon motion by Rev. Davis, seconded by Ms. Curry and carried unanimously, Resolution No. 6164, a resolution authorizing the submittal of an application for a Community Development Block Grant was approved following a roll call vote.

5:40 PM PUBLIC HEARING to consider the FY2023/24 Budget.

Ord. 796, Budget FY2023/24.

At 5:55 p.m., Acting President Abbatiello opened the 5:40 p.m. scheduled Public Hearing. President Abbatiello read the Ordinances and Resolution No. 6165 revising the Schedule of Fees for the budget into the record.

Mayor Willey opened the meeting stating the budget is balanced. He stated the draft budget should be voted on June 5.

Mayor Willey stated that Code Enforcement and Building Inspection employees have been added back in to the proposed budget. Property rates have remained the same, \$.52/\$100 of assessed value. He stated that the budget included ARPA funds and had to be committed and spent by 2026. He stated that General Government is mostly wages and benefits. Mayor Willey stated that Public Safety includes take home cars for police officers. He stated that 4th of July will be funded by the Town of Easton and run by EEDC.

Mayor Willey stated that the tax rate is left the same. With a \$.01 increase, there would be approximately \$248,000 increase in funding.

Mayor Willey stated the town's rating is AA+ with a stable outlook which is the best for a town its size. He discussed the tax rate compared to other Talbot County towns. He stated that

pension is funded at 89%. He stated that the other POEB is also funded at 93.5%. President Abbatiello asked for questions for Mayor Willey. Councilmember Montgomery asked how far along the projects on the Carry Forward Ordinance are and how many projects have not been started yet. Councilmember Montgomery asked to have a breakdown of the ARPA funds. Councilmember Curry thanked Mayor Willey for keeping Easton the premier town it has been for the last 30 years under his leadership. She stated she wishes him and Betsy all the best. Mayor Willey stated it has been a real pleasure and if anyone needs anything, don't hesitate to call or stop by. President Abbatiello asked for a workshop to discuss some budget issues. Mayor Cook stated she would send an invitation for a workshop. Acting President Abbatiello asked for public comments from the audience. He asked that participants give their name and address. There were no comments. Acting President Abbatiello stated the public hearing would be kept open to allow for public comment prior to the June 5 meeting.

Ord. 797, Taxation Ordinance.

Acting President Abbatiello read Ordinance No. 797 into the record.

Ord. 798, FY2023/24 Carry Forward Ordinance.

Acting President Abbatiello read Ordinance No. 798 into the record.

Res. No. 6165, "A RESOLUTION OF THE TOWN OF EASTON REVISING THE TOWN'S LICENSE, APPLICATION, PERMITS, INSPECTION, CERTIFICATE AND OTHER FEES."

Acting President Abbatiello read Res. No. 6165 into the record.

Public Participation/Comments.

Kimberly Blake, Easton thanked the councilmembers for their service. She stated she has found an apartment for rent and it is \$1,300. She stated she can't afford to live here. She stated she is almost a working homeless person. She stated she has been here all her life and she is asking for help for the rent crisis that is here. Ms. Blake stated she is asking for someone to hear her and help her. Rev. Davis stated that there is no definition of affordable housing. He thanked her for speaking and bringing truth to the matter. She discussed being the Director and Site coordinator for Shore Up.

Items by Members of the Council:

Ms. Curry stated it's great to be back.

Mr. Montgomery thanked all those that supported him and stated he looks forward to working with those.

Rev. Davis stated we have work to do. He stated that the Mayor made history tonight.

President Abbatiello thanked the council for nominating him interim President of the Council.

Adjournment.

At 6:34 p.m., upon motion by Rev. Davis, seconded by Mr. Montgomery and carried unanimously, Acting President of the Council adjourned the regularly scheduled meeting.

Kathy M. Ruf, Town Clerk