



## Town Council MEETING MINUTES

Monday, July 17, 2023 - 5:30 PM  
Council Chambers, Easton Town Office  
14 S Harrison Street

### 4:00 PM Workshop.

Inclusionary Zoning.

Mayor Megan JM Cook  
Mr. Don Abbatiello  
Ms. Maureen Curry  
Mr. David Montgomery  
Rev. Elmer Davis

Also present was the Town Manager, Mr. Don Richardson, Town Attorney Mrs. Sharon VanEmburch, and Town Clerk Mrs. Kathy Ruf. Also present was Director of Planning & Zoning Miguel Salinas, Town Planner Lynn Thomas, and Affordable Housing Chair Jim Bent.

Mr. Abbatiello called the meeting to order at 4:00 p.m.

Mr. Salinas discussed the timeline for the Inclusionary Housing Ordinance.

Mr. Salinas outlined what attainable housing is, "market rate housing that is available and affordable to the spectrum of Easton's workforce." He stated there is a shortage of attainable housing. He stated that increasing housing prices has a negative impact on businesses. He stated that the Inclusionary Zoning Ordinance is to promote the creation of affordable housing, and a legislative body may enact local laws to include inclusionary zoning. Mr. Salinas discussed developers' requirements. He discussed incentives. He stated exempt projects can be included in the legislation. Mr. Salinas stated there are 76 projects in the pipeline but not yet built and 58 rentals would have been in the pipeline should this affordable housing ordinance have been enacted. Issues for consideration such as fiscal impacts were discussed.

Mr. Jim Bent discussed where the Town of Easton stands regarding the lack of available housing. He stated there is nothing on the real estate market around \$200,000 and \$350,000 which is the market where workforce housing should be.

Mr. Montgomery stated he appreciated candid advice and laying out some things we should consider. He asked who is the target for this affordable housing? Mr. Montgomery stated that this ordinance is short on data such as who it is that is suffering, and why people choose to live in Caroline and Dorchester County. He outlined parameters for additional information.

Rev. Davis asked how the inclusionary ordinance would benefit the Town of Easton.

Rev. Davis asked for a small study just with the employees of the Town of Easton. He asked how many employees actually live in Easton. He wants to see budgetary items for additional staff.

Ms. Curry revisited the current number of houses in the pipeline and potential redevelopment, new development, hospital, hospitality and economic development that may need workers.

Discussion occurred on the current interest rates, which are around 6 3/4 - 7 1/4%. Ms. Curry stated she wouldn't be able to afford her home in this current economic climate.

Ms. Curry thanked Mr. Bent for his service on the Affordable Housing Board.

Mr. Abbatiello asked Mr. Salinas to explain the affordability period.

The Town Attorney discussed the town's affordable housing program, which has been in the program since 2005.

Discussion occurred regarding moderately priced affordable units (MPU dwellings) that target those in the medium income units.

The Town Attorney stated that the town would not provide financing.

Mr. Abbatiello asked who would administer the incentives as listed in the ordinance?

Mr. Abbatiello appreciates all the work that has been done. He asked for questions.

Rev. Davis stated that Dr. King stated that the time is always right to do right and he thinks now is the time we should work diligently and be the best product going forward. Rev. Davis stated that he wanted to make affordable housing available for those that look like him so they can live here. He stated that now is the time.

Mr. Salinas concluded that the discussion in this workshop is complicated but can be effective. He appreciates the time with the Mayor and Council.

Mayor Cook stated a developer should be able to open a book and know what is required of them. She hopes that this conversation will continue. She stated that to add to the housing stock would be wonderful.

At 4:57 p.m., Acting Council President Abbatiello adjourned the workshop.

## **5:00 PM Police Board.**

Introduction of New Officers:

Daniel Miller Reading

Colin David Woodard

Present for the Police Board meeting in addition to the Mayor, Council, Town Attorney, Town Manager and Town Clerk, were Chief Alan Lowrey and Deputy Chief Greg Wright.

At 5:00 p.m., Acting President of the Council Abbatiello called the Police Board meeting to order.

Recent graduate Officer Daniel Reading was introduced. Officer Colin Woodard had a family emergency.

Officer Reading stated he grew up on Kent Island, joined the National Guard 175th Infantry regiment. He stated that Sgt. Coxon encouraged Officer Reading to apply. He stated he is looking forward to the next few years. Chief Lowrey encouraged everyone to reach out to possible recruits.

Chief Lowrey stated he had forwarded the Police Board report for everyone to have the opportunity to review.

He discussed staffing issues with supervisors with six that are currently out of 10. He stated it is humbling to see how EPD officers have stepped up to maintain staffing. Chief Lowrey stated that the police officers are working hard.

Chief Lowrey discussed the stats. He stated that when compared to 2022, they show Easton doing very well.

Chief Lowrey stated there will be a transition in the legalization regarding marijuana.

Currently, the Department has not seen an uptick.

Chief Lowrey stated the Ford interceptors have been ordered and should be delivered in July. He stated the cost to upfit the cars, has increased. He stated they will be white and hopefully, cooler.

Despite the challenges, there have been a lot of special events that will occur throughout Christmas. Chief Lowrey stated the current operational strength is at 32, with 9 eligible to retire anytime in the next six months. Recruitment has added an emphasis on military facilities as well as local colleges.

Chief Lowrey discussed promotions. He stated the Department has really good people in those positions.

Chief Lowrey stated the Department has transitioned to a Glock 9mm pistol with red dot optic which has a lot better accuracy for the subject, and a good progressive move. Most of the department is shooting at 90%. Chief Lowrey stated they have attended numerous special events. National Night Out is August 1, 1st Tuesday at Moton Park.

Chief Lowrey stated they are waiting for grant funds for recruiting. He stated they have applied for \$100,000 but due to all the requests, they are receiving \$15,000. Sgt. Milton Orellana is working to recruit interns as well.

Rev. Davis discussed his concerns regarding rails-to-trails on Goldsborough and Dover Street in regards to the crosswalks and traffic.

Chief Lowrey stated that we need to sit down and do a comprehensive walking and biking plan. He suggests raised crosswalks. He stated that if we are going to be a bike and pedestrian community, then we need to engineer accordingly.

Rev. Davis discussed 25 mph in town and suggested implementing consideration moving forward. Chief Lowrey discussed Mr. Engle working with them and the Safety Council to look at safety measures.

Rev. Davis stated that it is his concern for the health and fitness of his people.

At 5:22 p.m., Acting Council president Abbatiello adjourned the Police Board meeting.

## **5:30 PM: Call to Order by Acting President Abbatiello.**

At 5:30 PM, Acting President Abbatiello called the meeting to order.

## **Opening remarks and Pledge of Allegiance by Rev. Elmer Davis.**

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

Acting President Abbatiello read the Closed Session Summary from the July 3, 2023 meeting.

## **Approval of Minutes.**

Minutes of the July 3, 2023 Regular and Closed Session meetings.

Upon motion by Mr. Montgomery seconded by Ms. Curry and carried unanimously, minutes of the July 3, 2023 meetings were approved as written.

## **Municipal Official Items.**

Items by Mayor Cook.

Mayor Cook updated the council on what is happening around the town of Easton as well as the bond projects.

Mayor Cook showed slides of the Easton Point Park Demo.

The site for the North Easton Park sheds is progressing. She discussed the town recently hosting tournaments at North Easton Park.

Mayor Cook showed improvements to the tennis wall at Idlewild Park.

Director of Parks and Recreation Ms. Lorraine Gould asked Mayor Cook to remind the listening audience that Memorial Walk bricks are still on sale. Mayor Cook stated that the Town employees are doing a great job and she hears great comments.

Mayor Cook reminded everyone that National Night Out is August 1, at 5pm at Moton Park. She stated the county pool will also be open.

Items by Town Manager:

Brewers Lane Dog Park - Site Work Recommendation.

Upon motion by Ms. Curry, seconded by Rev. Davis and carried unanimously, Brewers Lane Dog Park - Site Work recommendation was approved.

Closed Session.

Mr. Richardson asked for a Closed Session regarding personnel 3-305(b)(1).

Items by Town Attorney:

Discussion of Cannabis Moratorium.

Town Attorney Ms. VanEmburch gathered information regarding a moratorium for cannabis.

She stated that Talbot County enacted a zoning moratorium ordinance for nine months.

Rev. Davis requested legislation be drafted for a zoning moratorium.

The Town Attorney stated it would be prepared and ready for introduction at the next meeting.

She stated a public hearing would need to be scheduled and a recommendation from Planning and Zoning.

It was the consensus to move forward with legislation for a moratorium.

## **Petition for Annexation.**

Annexation Application of Basi Brothers, LLC for their property located at 9719 Ocean Gateway (*to be referred to P&Z for recommendation*).

Acting President Abbatiello brought to the floor the annexation request of Basi Brothers, LLC, 9719 Ocean Gateway. This annexation had been tabled for additional information. A letter has been provided by Robert S. Collison, P.A. Attorneys, which states the applicant has no specific plan.

Upon motion by Ms. Curry, seconded by Rev. Davis and carried unanimously, the annexation request was referred to Planning and Zoning for a recommendation.

## **Presentations.**

Town Engineer Rick VanEmburch to discuss Sidewalk Replacement and Tree Removal Process.

Mr. VanEmburch discussed sidewalk replacement and tree removal processes.

He stated they do sidewalk inspections every year where they walk every single street, and compile a spreadsheet of necessary repairs for aesthetic improvements as well as safety concerns. He stated they try not to cut tree roots and replace trees one at a time, minimally and only when needed. Public Works plants approximately 150 trees per year, and removes about 60 trees. Mr. VanEmburch stated they are always increasing the number of trees.

Mr. Abbatiello asked if someone has a failed sidewalk, must they have it replaced. Mr.

VanEmburch stated that residents eventually agree to have the sidewalk repaired.

Mr. VanEmburch discussed ADA minimum standards so cut out is ADA compliant.

The Town Engineer advised residents to keep water flowing off sidewalks to minimize damage.

## **Public Participation/Comments.**

Mr. Abbatiello opened the floor for public comment.  
Kimberly Blake, a resident, addressed the council and stated she was here a few months ago regarding problems with her rental. She expressed her gratitude to the Mayor and Council as the inspectors came to the building she resided in and addressed her concerns which ultimately, caused the owner to release her from her lease.

Al Silverstein, 300 Dixon Street, Unit 105, discussed concerns on the rails-to-trails and stated they need to spend time and attention to make repairs.

Carla Wieland Cherry discussed the Festival of Trees. She stated the Carols By Candlelight will be held in front of the Tidewater. There is concern with downtown merchants that the event interfered with Shop Small Saturday as well as closing the street too early. It was suggested to close the street at 5:00 p.m. Ms. Cherry stated she really wants to reach families to let them know how they support the community. She stated she will continue to work with First Sgt. Sally to bring the event back before the council.

Noah Matten was present and commented on the plan for the Dog Park. Discussion occurred regarding the shade structure. Mr. Matten thanked the council for their time.

**Items by Members of the Council:**

Ms. Curry stated she would be happy to work with the public on an art project at Idlewild. Ms. Curry encouraged everyone to get out for Plein Air Festival.

Rev. Davis encouraged everyone to keep safe walking.

Acting Council President reminded everyone about National Night Out, August 1 and stated petitions for Council President are due August 14.

At 6:17 p.m., upon motion by Rev. Davis, seconded by Mr. Montgomery and carried unanimously, Acting President Abbatiello moved into closed session to discuss personnel.

At 6:39 p.m., upon motion by Mr. Montgomery, seconded by Ms. Curry and carried unanimously, Acting President Abbatiello moved out of Closed Session.

**Adjournment.**

At 6:39 p.m., upon motion by Ms. Curry, seconded by Mr. Montgomery and carried unanimously, Acting President Abbatiello adjourned the regularly scheduled meeting.

Respectfully submitted,

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Kathy M. Ruf, Town Clerk