Town Council
MEETING MINUTES
Monday, August 21, 2023 - 5:30 PM
Council Chambers, Easton Town Office
14 S Harrison Street

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

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 VanEmburgh, and Town Clerk Mrs. Kathy M. Ruf.

Opening remarks and Pledge of Allegiance by Councilmember Montgomery.

Mr. Montgomery gave opening remarks and led those present in the Pledge of Allegiance.

Approval of Minutes.

Minutes from the August 7, 2023 meeting.

Upon motion by Rev. Davis, seconded by Mr. Montgomery and carried unanimously, minutes of the August 7, 2023 meeting were approved as amended by Ms. Curry.

Municipal Official Items.

Items by Mayor Cook.

Mayor Cook stated the boundary modification for the sustainable community meeting is August 30.
Mayor Cook stated that the EV stations has been discussed and there is a meeting with Easy Volt-E on August 24. She stated that they are currently turned off until there is a resolution.
The Building Department is very busy. They have 15 applications for a new inspector and 40 applications for the Code Enforcement Department. The Building Department has also recently received a new code and will begin reviewing it and then schedule workshops for adoption early next year. She stated it has to be adopted by May 2024. Mayor Cook stated there were 145 permits issued in July with 358 total inspections.
Mayor Cook stated the bond projects are gaining speed. She discussed the flurry of projects taking place around town. She stated Public Works is leveling the ground for the new pump track.
Mayor Cook gave updates on work continuing around town. An additional soccer field is being constructed due to a sponsor. She stated the field will be turned over to the Parks and Recreation Department. She stated school begins next week. The Hunter Mill playground will commence soon and the Hill Project houses are progressing with the rafters going up soon.
Mayor Cook reminded those in attendance, the next council meeting will be held Tuesday, September 5th due to the observance of Labor Day.
Ms. Curry asked if there has been any outreach regarding EV stations being turned off. Mayor Cook stated it was on Facebook.
Mr. Abbatiello questioned the possibility of changing some of the meeting times for some of the Commissions, specifically the Planning and Zoning meeting for those that are interested and work to attend, maybe for some of the major projects Mayor Cook discussed the process for reviewing the meetings.
Mr. Montgomery asked if the council will be briefed on the Code Revisions. Mayor Cook stated that Mr. Diem will hold workshops.

Items by Town Manager.

Approval for contract award for Indoor Sports Complex Utility/Infrastructure Design to KCI in the amount of $107,200.

Upon motion by Ms. Curry, seconded by Mr. Abbatiello and carried unanimously, approval for the contract award to Utility/Infrastructure Design to KCI in the amount of $107,200 for an indoor sports complex utility infrastructure design was approved. Mr. Richardson stated there is $115,000 in bond money associated with this.

Mr. Montgomery asked about when and how the deposits are made into the employees' accounts. Mr. Richardson stated it is not part of that regular run. Mr. Montgomery asked for the date of when deposits had been made in July and what the pay period was from when the deductions were taken.

Items by Town Attorney.

Mrs. VanEmburgh stated she has nothing at this time.

Public Hearing.

5:35 PM Public Hearing to discuss Ordinance No. 800, the sale of Lots 2 and 3 at Mistletoe Hall Commerce-Business Park.

At 5:43 p.m., Acting President Abbatiello opened the 5:35 p.m. scheduled Public Hearing to discuss Ordinance No. 800.

Mr. Richardson discussed the prospective buyer, APEG International (Vetagro). He stated they intend to invest 10 - 15 million dollars and will initially have 25 employees. He stated they are considering now going to a second shift and possibly human consumption supplements.

Ms. VanEmburgh stated their contract calls for a study period of 150 days. He stated a lot of due diligence has been completed.

He discussed the feed and food supplements, as well as exploring additional shifts.

Mr. Montgomery asked if there are odors or environmental issues.

Mr. Richardson stated there are no odors and they have asked about other environmental issues in the vicinity. He stated the contract seas signed July 31.

Mr. Abbatiello asked if Easton Utilities had any problems.

Mr. Richardson stated they have met with EU and they can meet their needs.

Mr. Abbatiello asked for public comments.

There were none.

At 5:51 p.m., Acting Council President Abbatiello closed the scheduled public hearing.

Legislation.

Ord. No. 800, "AN ORDINANCE OF THE TOWN OF EASTON AUTHORIZING THE TOWN OF EASTON TO SELL LOTS 2 AND 3 AT MISTLETOE HALL COMMERCE-BUSINESS PARK TO APEG INTERNATIONAL, INC."

Upon motion by Mr. Montgomery seconded by Rev. Davis and carried unanimously, Ord. No. 800, "AN ORDINANCE OF THE TOWN OF EASTON AUTHORIZING THE TOWN OF EASTON TO SELL LOTS 2 AND 3 AT MISTLETOE HALL COMMERCE-BUSINESS PARK TO APEG INTERNATIONAL INC." was approved.

Presentations.

Don Bibb, Executive Director - Housing Commission of Talbot County & Development Team to discuss Doverbrook funding.

Don Bibb was present to discuss the Doverbrook project. He discussed the allocation of $750,000 from the Town of Easton.

Pat Bateman, Pennrose, updated the council on the status of the project. He stated it is very important to the Town of Easton to provide affordable housing.

Mr. Bidd discussed the reconstruction of 50 aging apartments and 14 new apartments.He stated the development will be completely demolished and re-built. The community clubhouse will be expanded. All residents have the right to return. Affordability will be set and based on their income and based on their family size.

Ms. Curry asked if tenants that will be relocated can return. Mr. Bibb stated they will have temporary housing vouchers. once construction complete will be phased back in. 14 months once they break ground.

Mr. Bateman stated the construction project has faced significant challenges. In August 2020, they applied for credits through the state. They have had increased construction costs as well as rising interest ratres.

Mr. Bibb stated that the shortfall is now over 1.5 million dollars. Mr. Bibb stated they have a Community Legacy application in.

Mr. Bateman discussed the need for this project. He stated there is a shortage of 125,000 rental units for low income.

Mr. Bibb stated that the rents will be 30% of the adjusted household income.
Mr. Montgomery asked if the rents will be at market rate. Mr. Bibb stated they will be income based.
Discussion occurred regarding what other jurisdictions have committed.
Mr. Bateman discussed the benefits to Easton.
Mr. Bateman reiterated a request for the waving of permits and impact fees to help support the project as well as the PILOT.
The project has never paid taxes.Mr. Bibb asked council to support project for the most vulnerable residents in Easton.
He stated the residents have been surveyed and are interested in returning to the project. They will have right of first refusal.
Rev. Davis discussed his concern about how the residents and school children are treated and how they can handle change in their community.
Mr. Bateman stated they have hired a full-time relocation consultant to do detailed resident' survey to focus on residents'needs.
Mr. Bibb discussed state limitations on income on that program.
Mr. Montgomery asked if the documents viewed could be forwarded to the council prior to meetings.
Mr. Montgomery asked if there could be large screens for viewing what is being discussed.
Mr. Richardson stated it is in the works.
Mr. Montgomery asked what is being asked in the total.
Mr. Bibb stated the project is 24 million dollars, total costs. They are asking for tax credit equity awarded, with 2 million dollars requested from DHCD. $250,000 from Talbot County from ARPA as conduit and a $500,000 loan from the Housing Commission as well as a seller's note.
Mr. Bateman stated they went with FHA loan which is under 5 million.
Mr. Abbatiello asked if fees could be negotiated. Mr. Bateman stated the loan originator was a selected investor from 2021.
Mr. Bateman stated they weighed all the financing options and fees.
Mr. Abbatiello asked if there is any local financing.
Mr. Bateman stated that getting someone to provide equity is nearly impossible.
Mr. Abbatiello asked what happens to the project if funding isn't received.
Mr. Bibb stated they can't close until they have all the financing. They expect to settle at the end of October.
Mr. Abbatiello stated they appreciate their time and the request will be looked at.

Public Participation/Comments.

Mr. Abbatiello asked for public comments. There were none.

Items by Members of the Council:

Rev. Davis thanked Easton Police Department for working with other agencies for their collaboration in the recent shooting and their professionalism.
Mr. Abbatiello offered an apology to Easton Utilities for the miscommunication regarding the EV invoice.

Adjournment.

At 6:47 p.m., upon motion by Rev. Davis, 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