



Town Council MEETING MINUTES

Tuesday, September 5, 2023 - 5:00 PM
Council Chambers, Easton Town Office
14 S Harrison Street

5:00 PM: Workshop

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, Chief Human Resource Officer Rick Farr, Chief of Police Alan Lowrey and Town Clerk Mrs. Kathy M. Ruf.

Easton Utilities staff present: President & CEO Hugh Grunden, Executive VP & COO John Horner, Senior Vice President of Finance & CFO Steve Osche, VP of Human Resources Vicki Petro, HR and Business Analyst I Julie Andrews, Senior Human Resources Generalist John Englehart.

At 5:00 p.m., Council President Don Abbatiello called the workshop to order and asked Mr. Farr to begin the discussion.

Mr. Farr stated he is part of the Joint Insurance Committee and they are present this evening to discuss health care benefits. He stated they are working to enhance benefits for the employees of the town. Mr. Farr stated they are present to discuss Resolution 6170 which authorizes changes in the handbook regarding health care benefits. Mr. Farr discussed members of the Joint Insurance Committee that have been working to enhance benefits. He discussed the cost savings.

Mr. Farr discussed the Town being eligible for the state program for health benefits. The under 65 retirees are not eligible for the state benefit plan but they can go to another avenue for benefits. He discussed the cost analysis he forwarded to the council regarding costs for the retirees under 65. In summary, he stated there is a potential for huge cost savings for retirees under 65. He stated that the retirees do not qualify and they will have to move to the Maryland Exchange and use an HRA account the town will fund and the retiree will use to pay their premium. The remaining funds will be put back in the town budget.

Ms. Petro stated this is only for retirees that have not turned 65. Once they are 65, they are offered a supplemental package.

President Abbatiello discussed not qualifying if under 65. He addressed Chief Lowrey regarding officers' coverage. He stated the benefit should be a benefit, no matter when you retire. Chief Lowrey stated that for the majority of the officers, they will be better positioned.

Mr. Richardson stated that this benefit would keep everyone equal no matter when they retire.

Ms. Curry asked how the employees/retirees will communicate.

Mr. Farr stated it is the administrator's responsibility to over communicate. He stated that PSA will help employees/retirees walk them thru the process.

Mr. Richardson stated the retirees will process their payments through an HRA.

Mr. Ochse stated this plan will be a lot more stable.

Ms. Curry discussed communicating with the retirees.

Mr. Farr stated that it is HR's job to over communicate.

Ms. Petro stated they will have one on one meetings to walk them thru and select insurance.

Rev. Davis thanked the JIC for their information during this workshop and stated he thinks this is a win-win, especially for the cost savings with everyone on the same playing field. He thanked everyone for their work and cost savings.

Mr. Montgomery stated he is very pleased that we have a better deal for the employees and is saving money for the town.

Mr. Abbatiello asked what the difference is for the 20 retirees on a monthly basis.

Mr. Farr stated that the difference is the multiple selections the members will have through the Maryland Exchange. He stated that Open Enrollment will be the same with retirees included, as usual. He stated there will be lower premiums for employees. The calendar year will be January 1 through December 31.

Mr. Farr stated there will be three different plan options; Blue Cross Blue Shield, United Health Care, and Kaiser with all enrollment online.

Mr. Farr stated that open enrollment starts in October with the Maryland state system. He stated if you miss the open enrollment, you are locked out. He stated HR will have access to records.

Mr. Montgomery discussed a typo to Resolution No. 6170 under the Defined Benefit. Mr. Richardson clarified and stated it would be corrected.

The Workshop adjourned at 5:27 p.m.

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. Davis.

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

Approval of Minutes.

Minutes from the August 21, 2023 meeting.

Upon motion by Rev. Davis seconded by Mr. Montgomery and carried unanimously, minutes of the August 21, 2023 meeting were approved as written.

Municipal Official Items.

Items by Mayor Cook.

Mayor Cook stated that the salary study with job descriptions had gone to department heads for review. She stated they will be packaged this week and will go back to USI for additional evaluation. Mayor Cook stated this information will be used for the upcoming budget. BOZA will vote on the Aspire project in October and may move to an evening meeting. The Housing sub committee met last week and many were heard from that work in housing in our community.

The sustainable working group met last week also. They are looking at boundaries and intend to create an action plan that is due in November.

WBOC recently visited Easton and reported on the creation of the skatepark and pump track. The pump track group is going out in September.

Buildings and Facilities have moved to Public Works. She thanked Public Works for accommodating that Department.

Mayor Cook reminded everyone that the September 11 Memorial Service will take place at the Memorial Walk at 8:30 a.m.

Mayor Cook asked that Chapter 5 of the Code be reviewed as it currently outlaws the operation of a skateboard or bicycle or similar devices and it is a mode of transportation.

Mayor Cook stated she submitted an application to join Comptroller Brooke Lierman's Local Government Advisory Council and has been accepted. She will update after their quarterly meetings.

Mayor Cook updated on bond projects in progress. She stated that the north/south trail crosswalks will be improved as well. She stated she would like to add \$136,395 to the bond list in case we fall short for the bond projects. Mayor Cook stated five crosswalks will be improved.

It was the council consensus to add the improved crosswalks to the bond project list.

Rev. Davis asked if markers are being considered for the rails-to-trails. Mayor Cook stated it is not in the bond projects but is being considered.

Mayor Cook stated she is pleased to announce that Shore Regional submitted their application for ESDR plan review. If all goes well and they pass ESDR, Shore Regional Health can go to Planning and Zoning on October 19.

Mayor Cook asked the council for approval to amend the bond project list to include the north-south rails-to-trails signage to the bond money.

Upon motion by Mr. Montgomery, seconded by Rev. Davis and carried unanimously, amending the bond project list to include the north-south trails crosswalks in the amount of \$136,395 was approved.

Mr. Connelly discussed the 2020 Bond Projects. He stated the town had spent 3 million dollars. He stated invoices received from contractors that the Town has paid so far leaves 4 million dollars we need to spend in the next 7 weeks. Mr. Connelly discussed where we are. Rev. Davis asked to see Mr. Connelly again for an update in four weeks.

Items by Town Manager

Approval of bid from Hickman Overhead Door for EVFD Station 60 Engine Bay Doors Replacement

Upon motion by Ms. Curry, seconded by Mr. Montgomery and carried unanimously, the approval of bid from Hickman Overhead Door for EVFD Engine 60 was approved in the amount \$59,694.

Discussion occurred regarding the difference in the quote. Mr. Richardson stated they switched to tempered glass.

Mr. Richardson expressed his thanks to Mr. Abbatiello for his time as Acting President.

Items by Town Attorney.

Town Attorney, Mrs. VanEmburch reminded everyone that the Zoning workshop would need to be continued for zoning changes and subdivision regulations. She stated it could be held on October 2, prior to the meeting and could get done in one hour. The Zoning Workshop was scheduled for 4:30 p.m.

Presentations.

Elgin's Army to ask for community support for bringing a turf field to Easton High School after Elgin Hawley's suffering of an aneurysm on the hockey field.

Ms. Hawley, the mother of Elgin Hawley, a senior, who had suffered a brain aneurysm on August 18, 2021 during field hockey try-outs, was present. She discussed Elgin's aneurysm which ruptured. She discussed goals Kennedy Krieger Institute (KKI) had for Elgin and how she had surpassed those goals and on November 6, walked out on her own. Ms. Hawley stated she will never play field hockey again. In May, Elgin qualified for Make-A-Wish. With her parents, decided to ask for a turf field. Elgin asked for support for everyone that has supported her.

Ms. Hawley described Elgin's passion for field hockey. She stated a turf field has been discussed in this county. She stated Make-a-wish is behind Elgin's wish but with a small fraction of funding.

Ms. Hawley discussed modeling EHS after Queen Anne.

Mr. Mike Hawley was present to discuss why the Hawleys are supporting Elgin's effort.

Mr. Hawley asked for support to help the community.

Mayor Cook discussed the collaboration the town has with Talbot County. Mayor Cook stated she will be in touch with Ms. Hawley.

Presentation of Proclamation for Fred Douglass Month.

The Proclamation recipients were not present at this time.

Ms. Beth Anne Dorman, For All Seasons CEO and Lauren Weber, VP Philanthropy & Education to update on resources and discuss how they can partner in the Town and Eastern Shore.

Ms. Beth Anne Dorman, President and CEO, discussed critical moments in the community. She stated For All Seasons continues to move through the pandemic. She discussed services for everyone, no matter their ability to pay, and discussed funding through donors.

Ms. Dorman discussed their employees being trauma informed and trauma certified, for depression, anxiety, rape crisis, taking service to the community. She stated they live Ms. by "nothing changes if nothing changes." Ms. Dorman discussed the pen access program.

President Abbatiello thanked Ms. Dorman, CEO for coming.

Rev. Davis asked how For All Seasons works with African Americans. Ms. Dorman discussed how they are going to the community and also hiring black and brown clinicians.

Ms. Curry stated she is a huge supporter of For All Seasons and asked how we can help.

Legislation.

Res. No. 6170, "A RESOLUTION OF THE TOWN AMENDING THE TOWN OF EASTON EMPLOYEE HANDBOOK RELATED TO POST-RETIREMENT BENEFIT SUMMARY."

Upon motion by Ms. Curry, seconded by Rev. Davis and carried unanimously, Res. No. 6170, "A RESOLUTION OF THE TOWN AMENDING THE TOWN OF EASTON EMPLOYEE HANDBOOK RELATED TO POST-RETIREMENT BENEFIT SUMMARY" was approved following a roll call vote.

Res. 6171, "A RESOLUTION OF THE TOWN OF EASTON REVISING THE TOWN'S LICENSE, APPLICATION, PERMITS, INSPECTIONS, CERTIFICATE AND OTHER FEES."

Upon motion by Mr. Montgomery, seconded by Ms. Curry and carried unanimously, Res. 6171, "A RESOLUTION OF THE TOWN OF EASTON REVISING THE TOWN'S LICENSE, APPLICATION, PERMITS, INSPECTIONS, CERTIFICATE AND OTHER FEES" was approved.

Public Participation/Comments.

There were no audience comments.

Items by Members of the Council:

Ms. Curry discussed a recent mailing that she was appalled at regarding the upcoming election and previous Mayor Robert Willey.

Mr. Montgomery discussed EEDC and a recent agreement with a policy position. He stated he was concerned that there was only two days to respond. Mr. Montgomery stated EEDC needs to set policies regarding pushing policy positions. He stated he has concerns about the Board and how they are intervening in town elections. Mr. Montgomery stated he thinks EEDC should be staying out of town politics. He stated they have no business in town politics.

Acting President Abbatiello reminded everyone about the upcoming election.

Mr. Abbatiello stated that negative politics should have no place in our town.

Adjournment.

At 6:54 p.m., upon motion by Ms. Curry, seconded by Mr. Montgomery and carried unanimously, Acting President Abbatiello adjourned the regularly scheduled meeting.

Respectfully submitted,

Kathy M. Ruf, Town Clerk