



Town Council MEETING MINUTES

Monday, November 20, 2023 - 5:30 PM
Council Chambers, Easton Town Office
14 S Harrison Street

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

Mayor Megan JM Cook
Council President Frank Gunsallus
Ms. Maureen Curry
Mr. Don Abbatiello
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 M. Ruf.

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

Closed Session Statement from 11/6/23 meeting.

President Gunsallus read a statement regarding the Closed Session that occurred during the 11/6/23 meeting.

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 of the November 6, 2023 meetings.

Upon motion by Mr. Abbatiello seconded by Ms. Curry and carried unanimously, minutes of the November 6, 2023 meetings were approved as written.

Municipal Official Items.

Items by Mayor Cook.

Mayor Cook stated she hoped everyone had a great Waterfowl Festival.

Mayor Cook invited everyone to Easton's Christmas parade on Dec 2.

Mayor Cook stated that the bathrooms at the park are closed and winterized for the winter.

She stated that the east-end neighborhood association map is live.

Mayor Cook congratulated Jessica Hayman on the Girl Scout Gold Award recently obtained.

She discussed the signs at Easton Point Park and thanked Lorraine Gould and Rick VanEmburch for their assistance.

Mayor Cook reminded everyone not to rake leaves in the street.

Mayor Cook gave an update on the Sustainable Communities Grant which was submitted today.

She stated that there had been a request to designate part of S Washington Street in remembrance of Lord Scott, "Scotty's Way", which reminds everyone to do something good.

The consensus was to put the street signs up.

Mayor Cook stated that Mayor Willey worked on obtaining 925 Port Street, which was purchased with Open Space funds. She stated that it is happening. Mayor Cook stated she will keep council informed as the transfer occurs.

USA Today wished everyone a Happy Thanksgiving.

Items by Town Manager

Public Assembly Event: Easton Holiday Parade 12/2/23 6-8:30pm

Upon motion by Ms. Curry, seconded by Mr. Montgomery and carried unanimously, Public Assembly Event: Easton Holiday Parade 12/2/ was approved.

Mr. Richardson wished everyone a Happy Thanksgiving.

Items by Town Attorney.

Town Attorney Ms. VanEmburch, stated that the Elliott Road PUD amendment request has been rescheduled to December 18.

Public Hearings.

(cont'd.) PUBLIC HEARING to solicit public comment on a proposed comprehensive update to Chapter 25 of the Town Code (Subdivision).

At 5:40 p.m. President Gunsallus opened the continued public hearing.

Mr. Abbatiello asked Mr. Thomas about the count for daily trips. He stated that this is one of the things we would like to revisit.

Mr. Abbatiello asked if this road standard change would affect previous developments.

The Town Attorney stated any new roads would have to adhere to new subdivision standards.

Mr. Montgomery asked what the relationship is for a subdivision versus a Planned Unit Development.

Mr. Thomas stated a PUD may or may not include a subdivision but may be subject to unique standards.

At 5:49 p.m., upon motion by Ms. Curry, seconded by Rev. Davis and carried unanimously, President Gunsallus closed the public hearing.

Ord. No. 804, "AN ORDINANCE OF THE TOWN OF EASTON REPEALING AND REENACTING, WITH AMENDMENTS, CHAPTER 25 OF THE EASTON TOWN CODE (SUBDIVISIONS).

Ordinance No. 804 was not acted on.

5:35 PM PUBLIC HEARING for a parcel of land located on the east side of Ocean Gateway/U.S. Route 50, consisting of 3.231 acres of land, more or less.

At 5:49 p.m., President Gunsallus opened the 5:35 p.m. scheduled public hearing.

Mr. Thomas read the Planning and Zoning recommendation. Mr. Thomas stated that he received a letter from the Maryland Department of Planning regarding the growth area.

President Gunsallus asked if there is anyone present from the state or county for comments on the annexation petition. There were none.

President Gunsallus asked if there is anyone for public comment.

Robert S Collison, Attorney was present on behalf of Basi Brothers.

Christopher Shaffner, Vice President DHW Holdings, LLC was present on behalf of the contract purchaser.

Mr. Shaffner asked the council to accept the recommendation of the Planning Commission.

He displayed a proposed building for the site and building elevation. He stated they are looking to expand as Preston Motorsports does not have enough space.

President Gunsallus asked for questions from the council.

Mr. Abbatiello asked if there will be a need to increase employment. Mr. Shaffner stated that there would.

Mr. Shaffner stated the property is under contract to purchase.

President Gunsallus asked for questions from the public.

The Town Attorney stated she can draft an annexation agreement but there may still need a zoning waiver from the county.

It was the consensus of the council to close the public hearing and vote at a future meeting after receipt of an annexation agreement.

At 6:01 p.m., upon motion by Rev. Davis, seconded by Ms. Curry, President Gunsallus closed the public hearing,

Res. 6173, "A RESOLUTION TO ANNEX A PARCEL OF LAND OWNED BY BASI BROTHERS, LLC LOCATED ON THE EAST SIDE OF OCEAN GATEWAY/U.S. ROUTE 50, CONSISTING OF 3.231 ACRES OF LAND, MORE OR LESS, INTO THE TOWN OF EASTON AND TO PROVIDE FOR THE TERMS AND CONDITIONS OF THE ANNEXATION."

President Gunsallus brought Resolution No. 6173 to the floor for a first reading.

Ord. 801, "AN ORDINANCE OF THE TOWN OF EASTON AMENDING THE OFFICIAL ZONING MAP OF THE TOWN OF EASTON TO APPLY THE COMMERCIAL GENERAL (CG) ZONING DISTRICT TO CERTAIN LOTS OR PARCELS OF LAND ANNEXED TO THE TOWN OF EASTON BY RESOLUTION NO. 6173 LOCATED TO THE EAST OF OCEAN GATEWAY/U.S. ROUTE 50 CONSISTING, OF 3.231 ACRES OF LAND, MORE OR LESS." President Gunsallus brought Ord. 801 to the floor for a first reading.

Legislation.

Ord. 802, "AN ORDINANCE OF THE TOWN OF EASTON AMENDING CHAPTER 5 OF THE EASTON TOWN CODE REGARDING BICYCLES AND SIMILAR DEVICES."

Upon motion by Mr. Abbatiello, seconded by Ms. Curry and carried unanimously, Ord. 802, "AN ORDINANCE OF THE TOWN OF EASTON AMENDING CHAPTER 5 OF THE EASTON TOWN CODE REGARDING BICYCLES AND SIMILAR DEVICES" was approved following a roll call vote.

Chief Lowrey stated most calls are complaint-driven. He stated that bicycles are treated as vehicles on the road.

Ms. Curry discussed bicycles on the sidewalk in the downtown business district.

It was the consensus of the council to amend Ordinance No. 802 and vote at the next meeting.

Res. 6177, "A RESOLUTION OF THE TOWN OF EASTON AUTHORIZING AN ALL-WAY STOP (4 WAY STOP) WITH STOP SIGNS AND STOP BAR MARKINGS ON THE PAVEMENT AT ALL FOUR (4) LEGS OF THE INTERSECTION OF DUTCHMANS LANE AND AURORA STREET."

President Gunsallus read Resolution No. 6177 into the record and brought Resolution No. 6177 to the floor for discussion and vote.

Mr. Abbatiello stated there was another accident there this weekend. He suggested something to make stop signs more visible.

Mr. VanEmburch stated they have been looking at flags that say stop sign ahead and a crosswalk. Also, he has a meeting with vendors that provide signs with lights. He discussed putting up traditional stop signs with flagging then explore the lights with the sensors.

Mr. Gunsallus stated this is long overdue.

Rev. Davis asked how long this would be before taking effect.

Upon motion by Ms. Curry, seconded by Mr. Abbatiello, and carried unanimously, Res. 6177, "A RESOLUTION OF THE TOWN OF EASTON AUTHORIZING AN ALL WAY STOP (4 WAY STOP) WITH STOP SIGNS AND STOP BAR MARKINGS ON THE PAVEMENT AT ALL FOUR (4) LEGS OF THE INTERSECTION OF DUTCHMAN'S LANE AND AURORA STREET" was approved.

Presentations.

Engineering Department presentation of 2020 Bond Projects.

Mr. VanEmburch presented a summary of the 2020 Park Bond Projects. He recognized Kody Cario, the project manager for these projects. Mr. VanEmburch displayed the completed and proposed projects. He thanked the council for their time.

Public Participation/Comments.

Ms. Moonyene Jackson to address council regarding the depiction of Frederick Douglass on the wall/building on Washington Street.

Ms. Jackson was present and introduced Mr. Terrence Bailey, sixth removed ancestor of Frederick Douglass. Ms. Jackson stated that Frederick Douglass is recognized in Talbot county and those that are displaying the portrait should have had the courtesy to contact those in the trenches. She stated it is an insult to the people to talk about their heritage and not include them. She stated that the Historic District Commission does have an obligation. She asked that it be put on the record and asked if the Chair is related to Harriett Lowery as she was a Demby and it becomes an issue for her.

Ms. Jackson asked what the process is to appeal the Board of Zoning Appeals' decision regarding the mural and its appropriateness. She asked to make an application for an appeal without having to pay the \$500 as there wasn't sufficient discussion on the record regarding the mural and its appropriateness. She said the art is wonderful but is it really historic.

Mr. Terrence Bailey, Old Trappe Road, has been asked why Fred Douglass is looking like a thug?

He stated that it does not look like Fred Douglass and is tasteless and shows no respect. He stated that the elders don't want to see that. He stated that this mural should have been done with tact and taste. Mr. Bailey stated that stuff like this should be stopped before it gets going. He stated it is not appropriate in Talbot County.

Ms. Andrea C. Proimos, 45 S Washington Street, works at Rise Up, stated she is attending Washington College. She stated she is very emotional. She stated she wants to respect the family. Ms. Proimos stated she traveled and researched Frederick Douglass and did her thesis on his life and accomplishments.

John Mann, S Harrison Street, discussed the process of Historic District approval. He stated the mural is on private property, and the taxpayers were not involved. He stated the council has no jurisdiction to take it down. Mr. Mann stated that the approval was unanimous by the Historical Commission and any considerations could be treading on very dangerous territory. Ms. Stephanie D. Chester, stated she is an original member of Fred's Army. She discussed how upset she is with the mural. Ms. Chester said that the people that approved the mural do not look like her.

Ms. Pamela Gates, of Easton, Maryland, stated she opposes the type of picture and where it is. She feels it is misplaced. She stated that it is not encouraging nor what we want Frederick Douglass to portray.

Ms. Jackson stated that she is aware that it's public property and there is freedom of speech.

Ms. Jackson understands that there are voices that understand. She stated these issues should be considered by council. She suggested placing requirements in the Zoning Code with extensive notice to the public.

Mr. Abbatiello asked if any member of the family was approached regarding this project?

Mr. Bailey stated he was not aware of any contact regarding the mural.

Discussion of ARPA for the Arc Central Chesapeake Region.

Mr. Johnathon Rondeau stated he has had dialogue with former Mayor Willey regarding Port Street Commons. He stated that Arc Port Street Commons is a project with nine affordable housing units. He stated the construction has started and they hope for completion by October 2024. Mr. Rondeau stated they have raised 5.2 million of an 8 million dollar project they are currently fundraising for. He asked for questions from the council.

Mr. Rondeau stated they hope to have housing and an additional 35 employees.

Mr. Montgomery asked who The Arc serves. Mr. Rondeau stated they serve the eastern shore of Maryland and Anne Arundel County, serving over 3000 across the region and 500 in Talbot County.

Mr. Abbatiello asked if other consideration would be accepted. Mr. Rondeau stated that any funding would be appreciated.

Items by Members of the Council:

Ms. Curry wished everyone a very happy thanksgiving. Ms. Curry asked that everyone be mindful of all those around the world and give thanks for everything.

Mr. Abbatiello thanked Mr. VanEmburch, Mayor Cook, Mayor Willey, Mr. Cario for their work on the bond projects.

Mr. Abbatiello stated he hopes everyone has a good thanksgiving.

Mr. Montgomery wished everyone a Happy Thanksgiving. He stated he appreciates the opportunities here and the reactions to the Frederick Douglass mural. He stated he understands and shares those feelings. This council should not be in business as part of appropriate speech. Mr. Montgomery stated he is concerned about a culture that cancels voices. He stated the council does not have the authority to cancel expressions or opinions or views. He thanked the participants for being present to voice their concerns.

Rev. Davis wished everyone a happy Thanksgiving. He stated that being an African American, he would like to write our own history and not others. He stated it is difficult how things are received and respected. Everything we do. Folks have been heard. Rev. Davis stated that none of this came before the council. He stated that it is time to be heard as African Americans. We need not wait until something happens, and we should show up proactively with an expectation to be heard. Rev. Davis stated that every depiction of Frederick Douglass, he is standing up. Rev. Davis reiterated that Easton is one of the greatest towns to live in.

President Gunsallus stated he hopes for remediation with the owner of the building as the council can only do some much. He hopes we can find some common ground.

Adjournment.

At 7:37 p.m., upon motion by Rev. Davis, seconded by Ms. Curry and carried unanimously, President Gunsallus adjourned the regularly scheduled meeting.

Respectfully submitted,

Kathy M. Ruf, Town Clerk