



Town Council MEETING MINUTES

Monday, December 18, 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

Also present was the Town Manager Mr. Don Richardson, Town Attorney Mrs. Sharon VanEmburch, and Town Clerk Mrs. Kathy M. Ruf.

Mayor Megan JM Cook
Council President Frank Gunsallus
Ms. Maureen Curry
Mr. Don Abbatiello
Rev. Elmer Davis

Also present was the Town Manager, Mr. Don Richardson, Town Attorney Mrs. Sharon VanEmburch, and Town Clerk Mrs. Kathy M. Ruf.
Mr. Montgomery was excused.

Opening remarks and Pledge of Allegiance by Councilmember Curry.

Ms. Curry gave opening remarks and led those present in the Pledge of Allegiance.

Approval of Minutes.

Minutes of the December 4, 2023 meeting.

Upon motion by Rev. Davis, seconded by Mr. Abbatiello, and carried unanimously, minutes of the December 4, 2023 meeting were approved as written.

Municipal Official Items.

Items by Town Manager.

Mr. Richardson wished everyone a nice holiday.

Board of Zoning Appeals Appointment.

Upon motion by Ms. Curry, seconded by Mr. Abbatiello and carried unanimously, Mr. Paul Weber's appointment to the Board of Appeals as Alternate for the remainder of a three-year term which will expire December 31, 2024 was confirmed.

Public Assembly Event: First Night Talbot, 12/31/23

Mr. Richardson stated that the Town of Easton finished the USA Today poll for the Crab Drop sixth in the Nation. He asked for approval for First Night Talbot's Public Assembly Event. Upon motion by Mr. Abbatiello, seconded by Ms. Curry and carried unanimously, First Night Talbot's Public Assembly Event was approved.

Confirmation of the election of Chief Morris E. Jones, Jr. to the office of Chief for Easton Volunteer Fire Department, Inc. for 2024.

Upon motion by Ms. Curry, seconded by Mr. Abbatiello and carried unanimously, the election of Chief Morris E. Jones to the office of Chief for the Easton Volunteer Fire Department for 2024 was confirmed.

Introduction of Holly DeKarske, EEDC Executive Director for presentation of the 2023 Christmas Parade Winners.

Ms. DeKarske introduced the winners of the 2023 Easton Christmas parade.

Best non-profit float: Easton Utilities

Best Commercial entry: Mid-Shore Veterinary Services

Best Marching Band: Easton Middle School

Presentation of Proclamation to Carolyn Jaffe/First Night Talbot in honor of their 30th year.
Ms. Curry presented a proclamation to Carolyn Jaffe/First Night Talbot.
Ms. Jaffe discussed the history of First Night Talbot.

Items by Town Attorney.

The Town Attorney, Ms. VanEmburch stated she had nothing at this time.

Public Hearings.

5:40 p.m. PUBLIC HEARING TO DISCUSS Ordinance No. 805, "AN ORDINANCE OF THE TOWN OF EASTON AMENDING THEIR TOWN BUDGET FOR FISCAL YEAR 2024 FOR OPERATING AND CAPITAL EXPENDITURES FOR THE FIRE DEPARTMENT."

At 5:47 p.m. President Gunsallus opened the 5:40 p.m. scheduled public hearing.
Mr. Richardson discussed the budget amendment for Easton Volunteer Fire Department's utility vehicle.

5:45 p.m. PUBLIC HEARING TO DISCUSS THE REQUEST OF BRENDAN MULLANEY (the applicant) ON BEHALF OF MALLARD CONSTRUCTION GROUP INC., AND ELLIOTT ROAD, LLC, (the owner) FOR A PROPOSED AMENDMENT TO A PREVIOUSLY APPROVED PLANNED UNIT DEVELOPMENT (PUD), LOCATED AT 8286 ELLIOTT ROAD."

At 5:49 p.m., President Gunsallus opened the public hearing on Mallard Construction Group Inc. and Elliott Road, LLC for an amendment of the PUD which was approved March 7, 2022 by the council.

The Town attorney administered the oath to those that may give testimony.

Joseph Mayer, Plan Reviewer, discussed the PUD amendment. He stated they are requesting an increase of an additional sixteen units. Mr. Mullaney stated that the development with the additional units will meet minimum and maximum parking standards and has essentially the same layout. There will be no pool but now pickleball courts. He stated that offsite improvements will be completed before the summer of 2024. He stated the project has proposed 178 parking spaces.

Rick VanEmburch, Town Engineer, stated he has been working with State Highway regarding the whole corridor project. Discussions occurred regarding improvement to the stacking lane. He stated that the state intends to do improvements in spring or summer. President Gunsallus asked about the traffic impact study.

Mr. Brennan Mullaney, introduced Mr. Jim Didonoto, and Victoria Hoffman and the Traffic Impact Study contractor. He stated the proposed project is a modern garden style apartment complex. Instead of the pool, they have planned the addition of a dog run and the addition of a pickleball court as well as a bike rack. He stated it is zoned cg general commercial with a maximum of 50'. There will be a minor increase in traffic but no detrimental change. Four more units will be designated affordable. 30% open space, 40.7% includes landscape; 28 total affordable units.

President Gunsallus asked if there are any questions from the council.

Ms. Curry asked about the breakdown of the bedrooms.

Victoria Hoffman, discussed fair housing standards. specific rent criteria. every person has to meet the same criteria. police has been something they have committed to do.

Ms. Curry asked what the rent prices will be. Mr. Mullaney stated \$1,250 to \$1,450 for a one-bedroom with a 2 bedroom around \$1,500, committed to have rents within the affordable range.

Mr. Abbatiello stated the original was approved almost two years ago. He stated that these units will provide somewhat affordable housing for the community. worth the increase to provide attainable housing for professionals.

Mark Keely, Traffic Concepts, stated they did the original traffic study and the updated study. Mr. Keely discussed traffic counts and their time frames; 7am-9am and 4pm - 6pm. 41 to 48 and peak stayed at 53.

President Gunsallus asked for additional council questions.

Rev. Davis stated it's a sacrifice for individuals that work in the town to live in the town of Easton.

Terrance Bernard, Easton Maryland asked where the visitor's parking is and where would they park. He asked if there is a turnaround for school buses and asked where the visitors would park.

Mr. Mullaney stated the code requires a range and they are well within that range.

Larry Smith, resident of Talbot County stated that Elliott Road is not sufficient. Delivery trucks cannot make that turn now. He stated the roads need to be widened. He asked how will the people get out because the traffic on Rt 328.

Mr. Gunsallus asked Mr. Richardson to assess Elliott Road. He stated the intersection is

under the purview of SHA.

Leslie, a resident in Trappe, rents and wanted to live in Easton. She stated she is very much in support of this project.

At 6:34 p.m., President Gunsallus closed the public hearing.

Ms. VanEmburch discussed the process.

Ms. Curry stated she is in favor of moving forward.

Mr. Abbatiello stated the Town needs to harp on SHA regarding improvements.

Rev. Davis stated there is a consensus.

CONT'D. PUBLIC HEARING to comment on proposed Electric and Gas Tariff Revisions.

At 6:37 p.m., President Gunsallus continued the public hearing on the proposed Electric and Gas Tariff Revisions.

Ms. Curry stated that this is the first step and discussed how fortunate the town of Easton is to have a first-class utility company.

Mr. Abbatiello stated that you get what you pay for. He discussed a recent gas leak and EU's efficiency. Mr. Abbatiello stated that moving forward is a positive step.

Rev. Davis stated that it is essential to help them to move forward. Rev. Davis stated his electricity never goes out. Rev. Davis stated he is grateful for their hard work and he appreciates the dialogue.

President Gunsallus closed the public hearing at 6:40 p.m.

Res. No. 6178, "A RESOLUTION OF THE TOWN OF EASTON APPROVING THE 2023 GAS SERVICE RATE AND TARIFF REVISIONS PROPOSED BY THE EASTON UTILITIES COMMISSION."

Upon motion by Ms. Curry, seconded by Mr. Abbatiello and carried unanimously, Res. No. 6178 was approved following a roll call vote.

Res. No. 6179, "A RESOLUTION OF THE TOWN OF EASTON APPROVING THE 2023 ELECTRIC SERVICE RATE AND TARIFF REVISIONS PROPOSED BY THE EASTON UTILITIES COMMISSION."

Upon motion by Mr. Abbatiello, seconded by Ms. Curry and carried unanimously, Res. No. 6179 was approved following a roll call vote.

Legislation.

Amended Ord. No. 802, "AN ORDINANCE OF THE TOWN OF EASTON AMENDING CHAPTER 5 OF THE EASTON TOWN CODE REGARDING BICYCLES AND SIMILAR DEVICES."

Ms. Curry asked if Ordinance No. 802 could be tabled until the next meeting. She stated she had a meeting with Talbot Thrive and Chief Lowrey. Ms. Curry suggested eliminating the age, and instituting rules which would be the same for everyone. Ms. Curry suggested instituting a dismount district due to her concern with the bicycles in the historic downtown center.

Rev. Davis stated he does not want bikes on the sidewalks and the whole town on sidewalks should be a dismount district. He stated there are already too many laws on the books that aren't enforced. Rev. Davis stated he is supportive and willing to listen. The Town Attorney, Ms. VanEmburch asked for clarification regarding the age limit. Ms. Curry stated that she feels everyone should be able to ride their bike with no age restrictions, except within the dismount district then no one should be allowed to be on the sidewalks. Rev. Davis stated this will have serious conversations.

Public Participation/Comments.

Ms. Lynn Mielke, a resident of Easton Club, discussed the continuance of Ordinance No. 803. President Gunsallus stated that it would not be discussed until February, after the January 16 workshop which is scheduled at 4:30 p.m.

Terrance Bernard, Easton, Maryland, discussed bicycles in town and safety issues. He stated he likes the idea of head protection.

Landon Frase was present and stated he is here on behalf of Tenderfoot and trying to earn his Communications Merit Badge. He stated he would also like to speak about an issue that needs attention, which is middle school children crossing the road on Peachblossom Road. He stated that drivers need to pay attention and follow rules. He stated no one stops to look. He suggested adding

blinking lights for those that need to cross and make the crosswalk safer for drivers and mid-schoolers.

Rev. Davis suggested moving the crosswalk in that vicinity.

Town Manager Mr. Richardson stated we will contact SHA regarding safety measures.

Items by Members of the Council:

Ms. Curry wished everyone a Happy Holiday. She asked everyone to stay safe.

Mr. Abbatiello stated that he thought tonight's meeting was great. He stated it is amazing that people want to participate in the process. Mr. Abbatiello suggested that for the New Year, individuals in the community join one of the many organizations that help this community.

Rev. Davis wished everyone a Merry Christmas and Happy New Year. He stated that anyone that lives in this age can have wisdom. Easton is the greatest place to live and interact, and has the best police, utility company and fire department. It is my prayer that this community can grow together.

Rev. Davis wished everyone a Merry Christmas and Happy New Year.

President Gunsallus wished everyone a Merry Christmas and Happy New Year.

Adjournment.

At 6:59 p.m., President Gunsallus stated he would entertain a motion to move into Closed Session for General Provisions Article 3-305-(b)(4), to discuss the appointment, employment, assignment, promotion, discipline, demotion, compensation, removal, resignation, or performance evaluation of appointees, employees, or officials over whom this public body has jurisdiction; or any other personnel matter that affects one or more specific individuals.

Upon motion by Rev. Davis, seconded by Ms. Curry, President Gunsallus moved into Closed Session.

At 7:17 p.m., upon motion by Ms. Curry, seconded by Mr. Abbatiello, President Gunsallus adjourned the Closed Session and moved into an Open Meeting.

At 7:18 p.m., upon motion by Mr. Abbatiello, seconded by Ms. Curry, President Gunsallus adjourned the regularly scheduled meeting.

Respectfully submitted,

Kathy M. Ruf, Town Clerk