



Town Council MEETING MINUTES

Monday, February 19, 2024 - 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.

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 February 5, 2024 meeting.

Upon motion by Mr. Abbatiello, seconded by Ms. Curry and carried unanimously, the minutes of the February 5, 2024, meeting were approved as written.

Municipal Official Items.

Items by Mayor Cook.

Daon McLarin Johnson, Regional Manager for Mentor MD/DC awarded Mayor Cook a certificate for being a distinguished member of the Mayors for Mentoring program for outstanding commitment and dedication to promoting mentorship in their community. Mayor Cook's unwavering support has made a significant impact on the lives of young people, fostering positive relationships and providing guidance to help them reach their full potential. Mayor Cook stated this is a very busy weekend in the town of Easton with Fire and Ice. Testudo, the Diamond terrapin official mascot of the University of Maryland, will be carved out of ice and the Town of Easton will be sponsoring as well as the parade and 206th birthday celebration of Frederick Douglas.

Mayor Cook discussed ARPA projects and the needed storm drain projects. She stated there has been flooding due to undersized storm drain pipes.

Mayor Cook discussed Carlene Phoenix's retirement as Election Supervisor. She asked for the council's consensus on looking outside the Town of Easton for a replacement. She stated it would be take a Charter change for an appointment out of Easton's election district.

Mr. Abbatiello stated the town needs to get the best people we possibly can. He stated he supports the requirements stating you must be a resident of Talbot County.

Council President Gunsallus stated he would like to think about this a little more before deciding.

Rev. Davis stated he is concerned about getting the best person in the right place. He stated it would be informative to open up to Talbot County residents.

Historic District Commission Re-Appointments.

Mayor Cook asked for confirmation for the following three-year re-appointments to the Historic District Commission:

Ernest Demby, Chair
Kevin Bateman

She stated that both are willing to serve again.

Upon motion by Ms. Curry, seconded by Mr. Abbatiello and carried unanimously, the Historic District Commission re-appointments were approved.

Items by Town Manager.

Public Assembly Event: St. Patrick's Day Parade and Potato Race - 3/17/24.

Upon motion by Mr. Abbatiello, seconded by Ms. Curry, and carried unanimously, the Public Assembly Event: St. Patrick's Day Parade was approved.

Items by Town Attorney.

The Town Attorney, Mrs. VanEmburch asked the council if there was a consensus to move forward with Doverbrook? Ms. Curry stated she would like to keep Doverbrook separate.

Ms. VanEmburch stated she would prepare the ordinance.

Rev. Davis stated the stormwater projects should be included as well.

Town Engineer, Mr. VanEmburch discussed the stormwater projects. He discussed the flooding that occurs on Harrison Street and Higgins Street and East Avenue near the train station.

Ms. Curry asked how solid the numbers are. Mr. VanEmburch discussed the revision of the cost estimates.

Rev. Davis asked about the purchase of software. Mr. VanEmburch stated the software is for asset management and permitting software for grading. He stated the cost is from the company as well as updating.

Mr. Richardson stated the town can fund the amount in addition to what is left in ARPA in the upcoming budget. He stated there would be an ordinance next meeting for consideration at the next meeting.

Presentations.

Proclamation for Carlene T. Phoenix, Supervisor of Elections.

Ms. Curry presented a Proclamation to Carlene T. Phoenix commending her 21 years as Supervisor of Elections for the Town of Easton.

Ms. Phoenix thanked town staff that have helped her success.

Mr. Jim Bent, Chair to update Council on Affordable Housing.

Mr. Jim Bent was present to update the council on activities by the Affordable Housing Board and fund as well as the programs. He stated that the income was primarily from Easton Village and Ashby Commons. He discussed the renovation package. Mr. Bent stated there are five pending applications for renovations as well as three applications being considered. He stated the net fund balance is \$953,486.96 with an additional \$304,441.53 anticipated from Easton Village and Ashby Commons permits. Mr. Bent updated on the renovation program and the projects on The Hill.

President Gunsallus asked about primary challenges. Mr. Bent stated he doesn't recall primary challenges.

Mr. Bent stated that the houses that were sold were subsidized with grant funding.

Mr. Bent discussed a home assistance purchase program that is a \$5,000 grant that goes toward closing costs for town employees, firefighters and Easton Utilities employees.

Rev. Davis asked if there could be more consideration for entry-level employees.

Mr. Abbatiello stated that anyone that would like to sit in, the Affordable Housing meetings occur Tuesdays at 5pm.

Legislation.

Res. 6180, "A RESOLUTION OF THE TOWN OF EASTON ADOPTING RULES OF PROCEDURE FOR THE EASTON TOWN COUNCIL."

Upon motion by Ms. Curry, seconded by Mr. Montgomery and carried unanimously, Res. 6180, "A RESOLUTION OF THE TOWN OF EASTON ADOPTING RULES OF PROCEDURE FOR THE EASTON TOWN COUNCIL" was approved following a roll call vote.

Public Hearing.

5:35 PM PUBLIC HEARING to solicit public comment on Ordinance Number 809, which proposes amendments to Chapter 28 of the Town Code (Zoning). The purpose of the proposed amendments is to revise the Code to regulate cannabis-related uses in light of the State of Maryland's approval of various recreational cannabis uses.

At 6:29 p.m., President Gunsallus opened the Public Hearing on Ordinance No. 809. Mr. Thomas, Town Planner, was present to discuss the proposed amendments. He stated these are a targeted set of amendments to address the uses associated with recreational cannabis. Mr. Thomas stated that these uses will operate under guidance from the state of Maryland. He stated the dispensary growing facility and processing facility must be allowed someplace in town. Mr. Thomas stated that the Planning Commission suggested not allowing onsite consumption. There may be further guidance coming down from the state. He stated that the onsite consumption facility is optional in town, which is what the Planning Commission is suggesting at this time. Mr. Montgomery asked if there would be an opportunity to address questions after public comment. President Gunsallus asked for public comment. Tom Ledvina, 7585 Polly's Hill Lane, stated he is in support for Mr. Bent's programs. He discussed affordable housing and Habitat for Humanity. President Gunsallus asked for council questions. Mr. Montgomery asked if there are definitive legal opinions regarding restrictions. The Town Attorney, Ms. VanEmburch stated there are no clear guidelines as of yet as decisions have not been made in Appellate Court. She discussed the language "unduly burden." Mr. Montgomery asked about restricting cannabis signage in certain districts, houses of operation, signage, lighting and additional standards for cannabis facilities. Mr. Thomas stated there are existing regulations that apply that should be adequate. Mr. Thomas stated that existing language applied. He stated he suggested looking at the regulations for liquor and making liquor and cannabis consistent. Mr. Montgomery asked what the enforcement is for violations such as air quality issues. Mr. Thomas stated that it was a concern where the Planning Commission entertained expectations and proposals regarding odors. Mr. Gunsallus discussed odors in Centreville where the community has complained about a growing facility and the measures that are being implemented. the Town Attorney stated that the operator in Centreville has agreed to cooperate and install odor controlling measures for the process to reduce the smell during harvesting. Mr. Gunsallus spoke with the Sunburst architect and stated that they are following the parking guidelines set forth Cambridge's Zoning Code. Mr. Gunsallus stated the town of Easton needs to look at parking. He discussed Eco Zorb that helps with odors. Mr. Thomas discussed the city of Cambridge parking and how it compares to Easton. He stated approval can add unique parking standard for cannabis dispensary. Mr. Abbatiello asked for clarification on where industrial areas and BC areas are in town. He asked Mr. Thomas to outline giving him a rough idea. He discussed concerns regarding placement of a growing facility. President Gunsallus stated this is the opportunity to get this amendment right. Ms. Curry thanked the Planning Commission for erring on the conservative side. Rev. Davis stated that if the state of Maryland wants this, they need to offer guidelines. Mr. Montgomery stated we need to take as careful and protective stand as we can take. He stated he would like to see maps to see where Industrial and Business Commercial is located in town. Mr. Thomas stated he would send the council a Zoning Map before the next meeting. President Gunsallus stated the public comment would be left open. He stated that no licenses have been granted through the lottery process. The Town Attorney stated that the moratorium expires May 27.

Ordinance No. 809, "AN ORDINANCE OF THE TOWN OF EASTON AMENDING CHAPTER 28 OF THE TOWN CODE (ZONING)."

Not acted on.

Public Participation/Comments.

President Gunsallus asked for Public Comment. There was none.

Items by Members of the Council:

Ms. Curry congratulated Easton Economic Development (EEDC) for an amazing weekend. She stated that the town was buzzing with happy shop owners.

Mr. Abbatiello echoed that this past weekend was amazing and EEDC did a great job. Congratulations to Mayor Cook and Carlene Phoenix for her 21 years of service to the Town.

Mr. Montgomery enjoyed the Brews and Stews event at the EVFD. He stated it was a very enjoyable weekend. Mr. Montgomery thanked Carlene for her service and offered congratulations to Mayor Cook. Mr. Montgomery stated that this evening there was good discussion and he is proud of what we have accomplished.

Rev. Davis echoed his colleagues' comments. He thanked Mayor and Carlene for their service. Rev.

Davis stated that without a struggle, there can be no progress. Rev. Davis stated that he still believes that Easton is the best city on the eastern shore.

Rev. Davis said don't miss March 17 and the St. Patrick's events.

President Gunsallus echoed sentiments regarding the successful events over the weekend. President Gunsallus thanked the police for their assistance.

Adjournment.

At 7:10 p.m., upon motion by Rev. Davis, seconded by Mr. Abbatiello, and carried unanimously, President Gunsallus adjourned the regularly scheduled meeting.

Respectfully submitted,

Kathy M. Ruf, Town Clerk