



Town Council MEETING MINUTES

Monday, May 20, 2024 - 5:30 PM
Council Chambers, Easton Town Office
14 S Harrison Street

5:15 PM Workshop: Boomershine Updates - Charts & Pension Plans Mortality Tables.

Council President Frank Gunsallus
Ms. Maureen Curry
Mr. Don Abbatiello
Mr. David Montgomery
Rev. Elmer Davis

Mayor Cook was excused.

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

At 5:15 p.m., President Gunsallus called the meeting to order.

Mr. Richardson, Town Manager, introduced Mr. Greg Stump, FSA with Boomershine Consulting Group. Mr. Richardson stated they are in the process of making updates that has gone through the Joint Insurance Commission.

Mr. Stump discussed the actual equivalence basis. He stated the plan has no negative impact on the Plan's funding.

Rev. Davis asked why it had taken so long to make the updates. Mr. Stump stated there were certain steps that needed to be taken.

Mr. Abbatiello asked if this is available for all employees. Mr. Richardson stated that this plan was frozen in 2008 and only available to those employees that were in the plan prior to that date.

Mr. Richardson stated that a resolution would be brought before the council once it is drafted. He stated he is waiting for Empower to finish the Plan Documents.

Mr. Stump departed the meeting at 5:29 p.m.

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

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

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 May 6, 2024 meeting.

Upon motion by Mr. Abbatiello seconded by Rev. Davis and carried unanimously, the minutes of the May 6, 2024, meeting were approved as written.

Municipal Official Items.

Items by Town Manager

Affordable Housing (Re) Appointments as recommended by Mayor Cook.

Upon motion by Ms. Curry, seconded by Mr. Abbatiello, and carried unanimously, the Affordable Housing (Re) Appointments for an additional three-year term for James Bent, Chairman; James Blassingame, Sr.; and Bonnie Morro as recommended by Mayor Cook was approved. Tom Draper's appointment as an alternate for a three-year term was also approved.

Rev. Davis suggested having people on the Affordable Housing Board that is living that kind of life today to give practical application regarding those matters.

Public Assembly Events:

SSPP Church Religious Procession, June 2: 4pm - 7pm

First Responders' Month Kickoff, June 3: 11-12:30pm

2024 Outdoor Summer Concert Series, June 8: August 24, 7pm - 9pm

Carols by Candlelight, Nov 30: 5pm - 7pm (event time).

Upon motion by Rev. Davis seconded by Mr. Abbatiello and carried unanimously, approval was granted for the Public Assembly Events as recommended by Easton Police Department.

Request to enter into Contract for EV Charging Stations.

Mr. Abbatiello questioned the upkeep of the units. Mr. Richardson stated the Town will own them and will be responsible for upkeep and maintenance.

Rev. Davis asked why we are investing in this endeavor and is there statistical data regarding a charging station.

Mr. Montgomery discussed the level 2 charge devices.

Mr. Messick stated these would be a revenue generator and are not free. He stated that these chargers are tied in to an application and the intent is for them to stay.

Mr. Montgomery stated he would like to see what efforts EZ Volt has with other municipalities. He stated he wants to see some evidence these charges bring in revenue.

Mr. Richardson stated he would be happy to get in touch with EZ Volt to get information.

It was the consensus of the council to address the EZ Volt charging stations at the June 17 meeting.

Items by Town Attorney.

The Town Attorney reminded those present that on the agenda for the June 3 meeting, the public hearings for the DRRA for Shore Health and the Corrigan and Trippe Annexation were scheduled.

She stated she is doing research for the odor control measures recently discussed and she will have a recommendation.

Mr. Abbatiello asked if municipalities can enact more stringent penalties for establishments that sell tobacco or cannabis to minors. She stated she will look at that.

Presentations.

Ms. Arleace Green, Public Affairs Specialist Office of Disaster Recovery & Resilience, US Small Business Administration to discuss Declaration of Economic Injury with regard to the Francis Scott Key Bridge Collapse.

Ms. Greene was present to discuss SBA Disaster Loan Program. She stated that this is a program that does not have to cause any physical damages and is available for businesses and non-profit organizations. She discussed who is eligible. The damage comes in economic loss. Ms. Greene stated that the state encourages businesses to apply. She stated that the window is open until December 30, 2024. She discussed the bridge collapse and stated that everyone is affected. Ms. Greene explained that those affected can borrow up to 2 million dollars with no interest or payments for the first twelve months and low interest in subsequent months and up to \$25,000 unsecured. She asked that this information be shared with local businesses and non-profits organizations. Ms. Greene thanked the council for the opportunity. President Gunsallus asked Mr. Richardson to disseminate the information to Discover Easton and Chamber of Commerce.

Ms. Holly DeKarske, Executive Director, to give Easton Economic Development Corporation update.

Ms. DeKarske was present to give updates. Ms. DeKarske stated she has given out the SBA loan information to businesses. She stated they are wrapping up with the Chesapeake Group which will help them fill out commercial spaces throughout town. They will forward a report by the end of the month. She stated they operate two websites, Discover Easton and EEDC website at the visitors center which highlight the main street district with a walking map. Ms. DeKarske stated they have applied for several grants and they will be applying for Community Legacy Grant in June although they have been advised that it is very competitive. She stated they are trying to finalize their Strategic Plan. Ms. DeKarske discussed rebranding and the banner program. She stated they are working on a walking map to hand out to visitors and to mail to prospective visitors. She stated there are new stores and apartments coming to town as well as relocations.

Rev. Davis asked that Ms. DeKarske submit her quarterly report to them prior to coming to the meeting.

Public Hearing.

5:40 PM Budget Public Hearing to consider the fiscal year 2024-2025 Budget.

At 6:06 p.m., President Gunsallus opened the 5:40 p.m. scheduled Budget Public Hearing. Mr. Richardson stated the Mayor has presented the budget and the Public Hearing has been advertised. Mr. Richardson stated this is eligible for a vote this evening but he anticipates carrying over the public hearing until the first meeting in June. President Gunsallus stated that is the original timeline, so he intends to stick to that. Mr. Abbatiello asked where the budget is. He stated he could not find it on the website for the public and if we are expecting the public to make a comment, they should see the budget. He stated that he has asked for the budget to be the website to be as transparent as possible. President Gunsallus stated that if this budget is to be passed, it is a strong stance they are taking on this. He stated that salaries should also be posted on the home page on the Town's webpage. He asked for quarterly oversight of financial transparency at a regular council meeting as well as monthly department head.

Mr. Richardson stated he will discuss with Mayor Cook and take appropriate action. President Gunsallus asked for transparency and financial fiscal responsibility and quarterly updates at a regular council meeting as well as monthly review of departments at a council meeting.

President Gunsallus stated that military leave should match Talbot County's Sheriff's Department, which is 15 days to serve, so military personnel do not have to use PTO. President Gunsallus stated that all sworn officials should re-affirm their oath annually and essential Department Heads should attend council meetings as part of their duties. Mr. Montgomery asked that we stick to budgetary items. The Town Attorney advised that it would probably be a Charter Amendment. President Gunsallus stated that he thinks taxpayer funds should not be allocated to promote ideologies and taxpayer funds should focus on town events and the business of the town and anything outside of that, is a step too far. Rev. Davis asked for examples. President Gunsallus discussed banners that were purchased for LGBTQ flag and stated that the town should not be using taxpayer funds. Rev. Davis stated we need to be real mindful in how we move forward and representing the town and we need to be careful. Rev. Davis stated he needed clarification regarding salaries. Mr. Montgomery stated he would like to defer any suggestions until further discussions with Mayor Cook. He stated he has concerns regarding some of the private organizations putting on events and whether it is the right policy of the town. Mr. Montgomery stated that we need to set EEDC on a course of 50/50 with private funding. He stated he intends to spend more time talking with Mayor Cook. Mr. Abbatiello asked about the Schedule of Fees. Mr. Richardson stated the carry forward and schedule of fees could be brought to the floor at the first meeting in June effective July 1. Mr. Abbatiello stated that the Schedule of Fees may impact the residents of the town and they should be able to weigh in on that. President Gunsallus asked for comments on proposed salary changes. Asked for discussion now. Mr. Montgomery discussed the costs for some events and stated he prefers to pay for those events directly. He discussed the aid to private organizations. He stated he would prefer to remove the funds from EEDC for private organizations.. Mr. Montgomery stated that the funds can come directly from the town instead of going to EEDC. He stated the town does not need to fund the Avalon. Mr. Montgomery stated these funds could help fund other things in the budget. Mr. Richardson will set up meeting with Mr. Montgomery and Mayor Cook. Mr. Richardson discussed the merging of the Code Department and the Building Inspection Department. Mr. Abbatiello discussed the 60/40 versus this year's salary and benefits split which equate to 73% of the budget and the ability to provide services. Mr. Gunsallus discussed salaries and stated due to proposed increases, we are looking at an additional \$150,000 in this year's budget. He stated that there are increases in the double digits. He stated that in the name of fiscal responsibility, we should weigh heavily on the proposed changes. Rev. Davis stated we do have valued employees. He asked that we be mindful of the emotions of what may be carried to the employees. Rev. Davis stated that someone might carry a message. He stated that this may not be the appropriate arena and it is important to be fair. He stated there is a lot of talking going on by individuals in the town. Rev. Davis stated that there is work to be done but not here. Mr. Montgomery stated that cost of living increases should be given to employees. He stated that merit increases should be determined by the Mayor and Town Manager. He stated for the budget side, the council should be looking at the top line. He stated that the council does not need to be making the decisions regarding the merits of employees. He stated that the percentages are very useful to see and thanked Mr. Abbatiello. President Gunsallus stated he agrees with that. Mr. Abbatiello stated they made their concerns known and there were cuts in those increases. He discussed his concern with merging the departments. He commended the Mayor and stated it may take time to get it straight. President Gunsallus stated it is a step in the right direction. Ms. Curry stated that she agrees with Mr. Montgomery's approach.

President Gunsallus asked for public comment.
President Gunsallus stated that the budget public hearing would be left open.
Ms. Curry asked to let the council know when the budget will be on the website in order to let their constituents know.

Legislation.

Ord. 820, Budget for a twelve-month period from July 1, 2024, as submitted by Mayor Megan JM Cook.

President Gunsallus brought Ordinance No. 820 to the floor for a first reading.

Ord. 821, "AN ORDINANCE TO PROVIDE FOR THE RAISING BY TAXATION THE AMOUNT NECESSARY TO PAY THE ORDINARY EXPENSES OF THE TOWN OF EASTON AND TO PROVIDE FOR THE PAYMENT OF INTEREST ON THE VARIOUS BOND ISSUES AND THE REDUCTION OF CERTAIN BONDS AND NOTES FOR THE PERIOD OF TWELVE MONTHS AND SETTING THE INTEREST AND PENALTY FOR DELINQUENT BILLS, COMMENCING ON JULY 1, 2024 AND ENDING JUNE 30, 2025."

President Gunsallus brought Ord. 821 to the floor for a first reading.

Ord. 823, "AN ORDINANCE OF THE TOWN OF EASTON TO REGULATE AMPLIFIED MUSIC FROM COMMERCIAL ESTABLISHMENTS DURING NIGHTTIME HOURS."

President Gunsallus brought Ordinance No. 823 to the floor for a first reading.

The Town Attorney stated it would reduce the hours for amplified music and provides for penalties.

Mr. Abbatiello asked what the hours are for the county ordinance.

President Gunsallus asked the Town Attorney to check if it is 9pm or 10pm for other jurisdictions.

Mr. Abbatiello discussed commercial versus residential establishments.

President Gunsallus stated that disturbing the peace would address residential noise.

Rev. Davis stated we need to look at this for a little while and have a deeper dive.

Ms. Curry stated there needs to be discussion with the business establishments.

The Town Attorney stated the Police Department may have comments.

Deputy Wright discussed permits. He stated that private establishments could not get a permit. He discussed Oxford's noise ordinance which is 10pm to 7am. He questioned who would receive the citation. He stated there are enforcement issues. He stated there should be some consistency.

President Gunsallus stated he looks forward to input. He directed the Town Attorney to have discussions with the Chief.

Public Participation/Comments.

President Gunsallus asked for public comments. There were none.

Items by Members of the Council:

Ms. Curry congratulated Mayor Cook and her husband on their son's graduation from college. She offered congratulations to all graduates.

Mr. Abbatiello stated he serves as the town's liaison on the Library Board. He stated there is a bunch of wonderful programs over the summer. Mr. Abbatiello stated he is bragging on his daughter that achieved National Honor Society and his son, who survived his first year of college.

Mr. Montgomery discussed the Eastern Shore magazine and congratulated the Town Attorney, Ms. VanEmburch. He stated the Town Attorney is one of the best lawyers in the area, which includes Administrative Law, Liquor Law, Trusts and Wills. He stated he is very proud of Ms. VanEmburch. President Gunsallus thanked Mayor Cook and the Town Manager for their work on the budget. He stated he appreciates the positivity throughout the experience.

Adjournment.

At 6:58 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