



Town Council MEETING MINUTES

Monday, June 3, 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.

Opening remarks and Pledge of Allegiance by Councilmember Rev. Elmer Davis.

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

Approval of Minutes.

Minutes of the May 20, 2024 meeting.

Upon motion by Mr. Abbatiello, seconded by Rev. Davis and carried unanimously, minutes of the May 20, 2024 meeting were approved as written.

Municipal Official Items.

Items by Mayor Cook.

Mayor Cook stated she has a lot to report. She stated the Housing Task Force, led by Mr. Salinas, has had two meetings. She thanked the Housing Task Force for their hard work.

Mayor Cook reported that the next meeting will be Thursday, at 4:30 p.m.

Mayor Cook reported that she had attended the BAAM Dedication. She thanked those involved and stated that it is an excellent project. She encouraged everyone to come to Moton Park to check it out.

Mayor Cook stated she was happy to present the Mayor's Cup for the middle school lacrosse for the spring championship. She stated Sts. Peter & Paul boys and girls won the championship.

Mayor Cook reported that the Arbor Day Foundation named Easton a Tree City. She stated that the Town of Easton plants 140 trees per year. She thanked Mike Young in Public Works for his work for that designation.

Mayor Cook stated that the Town of Easton recently celebrated Clarence Gould for his 50 years at the Town of Easton.

Mayor Cook congratulated all the 2024 graduates.

She reminded everyone that school will let out next week and there will be more pedestrians on the street with school out.

Mayor Cook stated she recently attended Career Day at White Marsh Elementary. She thanked them for letting her be there.

Mayor Cook discussed remarks made at the previous council meeting. She discussed her disappointment with Mr. Gunsallus' comments made and stated that she thought those comments fostered a climate of intolerance and exclusion. Mayor Cook stated, "asserting that the Pride flag, or support for our LGBTQ community, is antithetical to our Constitution and Country is incorrect. Our Constitution is built on principals such as liberty, justice, equality and the freedom from discrimination. Our 14th Amendment ensures that everyone, regardless of sexual orientation or gender identity, is entitled to the same rights and protections. And supporting equal rights is not about endorsing a particular ideology, but affirming the inherent human rights of every individual and ensure that everyone has the opportunity to live without fear of discrimination or prejudice. As elected leaders of our Town, it's our responsibility to foster a climate of inclusion. We are elected to represent ALL neighbors in our community but when such divisive statements are made it begins to tear at the fabric of our Town. As Mayor, I'm working to build a strong, and vibrant town. As legislators, I hope you will help and support me in keeping Easton a wonderful place to live."

Mayor Cook summed up her comments by saying that "a wise woman once told me: kindness is not an act, it is a reflection of your soul."

Confirmation of Appointment of Edward S. Forte, Jr. as Supervisor of Elections.

Upon motion by Ms. Curry seconded by Rev. Davis and carried unanimously, confirmation for the appointment of Edward S. Forte, Jr was approved following a roll call vote.

Items by Town Manager

Approval to accept bid from Ecosystem Planning & Restoration for the stream restoration - Glenwood Avenue & W Glenwood Avenue in the amount of \$417,930.69.

Mr. Abbatiello asked if the Town had contracted this company before. Mr. VanEmburch was present and stated the Town has not.

Upon motion by Mr. Montgomery seconded by Mr. Abbatiello and carried unanimously, approval to accept the bid from Ecosystem Planning & Restoration for the stream restoration on Glenwood Avenue and West Glenwood Avenue in the amount of \$417,930.69 was approved.

Items by Town Attorney.

The Town Attorney, Ms. VanEmburch stated that the public hearing for the PUD application for the previous Safeway property will be on the next meeting agenda for June 17, 2024, at 5:40 p.m.

Presentations.

Mr. Jim Bent, Affordable Housing Chairman to give an update and discuss the Housing Renovation Program for Owner Occupied Homes.

Mr. Jim Bent was present to discuss the Affordable Housing Renovation Program for owner-occupied homes. He stated that the renovation program outline is in the council's packet. He stated that the program usually has a \$25,000 cap for renovation per property address. He stated that five applicants had come back for a second year. He asked for questions.

Rev. Davis asked if the application would be on the town website.

Mr. Abbatiello asked Mr. Bent to discuss what happens if the owner sells their house. Mr. Bent discussed the grant process and the loans which are to be paid back upon refinancing or the sale of their home.

Mr. Bent discussed changes to the application. He asked for questions.

Rev. Davis asked if there are any organizations that the Affordable Housing may reach out to.

Mr. Bent stated that most grants and loans are due to word of mouth. He stated they have reached out to churches as well as the Neighborhood Service Center. Mr. Bent discussed their success with 37 renovations, totaling \$291,000 to date.

Ms. Curry volunteered her services to help get the word out.

Public Hearings.

5:35 PM PUBLIC HEARING for annexation and zoning for a parcel of land located on the east side of Ocean Gateway/US Route 50 consisting of 17.329 acres of land, more or less.

At 5:47 p.m., President Gunsallus opened the 5:35 p.m. scheduled public hearing.

The Town Attorney gave the history of the application and stated that the Planning Commission put 25% Affordable Housing in the annexation agreement. She stated there is no definitive amount that is prescribed but it doesn't have to be that way.

Mr. Lynn Thomas was present and discussed the applicants, Corrigan & Trippe. Mr. Thomas stated the Planning Commission considered the request and by vote of 3 to 1, they found the annexation request to be consistent with the Comprehensive Plan and recommended approval with the suggestion of R-10A zoning. Mr. Thomas discussed the recommendation from the MD Department of State Planning. He stated that state law and Talbot County be given the opportunity to speak first.

Pres. Gunsallus asked if there were state or county representatives present. There were none.

Zach Smith, was present on behalf of Corrigan & Trippe, LLC. Mr. Smith discussed the location of the request. He stated it is currently vacant and appropriate for annexation. The plan is to build multifamily apartments. Mr. Smith discussed positive communications with Talbot County Housing Commission and the Affordable Housing Board.

Mr. Smith asked that the council support the annexation and the proposal.

Mr. Smith discussed what the process is and what could happen if the PUD is not approved. The Town Attorney stated that this application needs a zoning waiver from the county and is a process that needs to be accomplished.

Ms. Curry asked if there is a design plan. Mr. Smith stated there is no set plan. She asked if the applicant would consider increasing the 25% He stated they would.

Rev. Davis asked what is considered affordable housing. Mr. Smith stated their attest is to provide 100% affordable housing, minimum with 25% income levels. Mr. Smith discussed mixed income developments and stated they are not a bad thing.

Mr. Montgomery asked where these residents would come from.

President Gunsallus asked if anyone has been in contact with Talbot County Schools.

Mr. Abbatiello stated he has been in contact with Mr. Schaefer at Talbot County Schools.

Mr. Thomas stated that the Comprehensive Plan suggests a 1% growth rate. Mr. Thomas discussed the zoning which would be assigned to the parcel, and their by-right options.

President Gunsallus asked for Council comments. There were no additional comments.

President Gunsallus asked for public comments.

Mr. Tom Alspach, on behalf of Talbot Preservation Alliance, discussed the consistency issue. He discussed market rate units.

Mr. Montgomery asked about the annexation agreement.

The Town Attorney stated the annexation plan is not set in stone and can be revised.

Mr. Abbatiello suggested leaving the record open.

Pres. Gunsallus left the record open and stated it would be continued at the next meeting..

Res. No. 6185, "A RESOLUTION TO ANNEX A PARCEL OF LAND OWNED BY CORRIGAN AND TRIPPE VENTURES, LLC LOCATED ON THE EAST SIDE OF OCEAN GATEWAY/U.S. ROUTE 50, CONSISTING OF 17.329 ACRES OF LAND, MORE OR LESS, INTO THE TOWN OF EASTON AND TO PROVIDE FOR THE TERMS AND CONDITIONS OF THE ANNEXATION."

President Gunsallus read Res. No. 6185 into the record.

Ord. 811, "AN ORDINANCE OF THE TOWN OF EASTON AMENDING THE OFFICIAL ZONING MAP OF THE TOWN OF EASTON TO APPLY THE R-10A RESIDENTIAL ZONING DISTRICT TO CERTAIN LOTS OR PARCELS OF LAND ANNEXED TO THE TOWN OF EASTON BY RESOLUTION NO. 6185 LOCATED TO THE EAST OF OCEAN GATEWAY/U.S. ROUTE 50 CONSISTING, OF 17.329 ACRES OF LAND, MORE OR LESS."

President Gunsallus read Ord. 811 into the record.

Approval of the Annexation and Public Facilities Agreement.
Not acted on.

5:40 PM PUBLIC HEARING on the petition of Shore Health System, Inc. to enter into an amendment to an existing Development Rights and Responsibilities Agreement with the Town of Easton and Talbot County, Maryland dated October 14, 2014, and recorded among the Land Records of Talbot County in Liber 2206, Folio 266 regarding portions of Parcel 129 on Talbot County Tax Map 17, which consists of 199.149 acres, more or less."

At 6:36 p.m., President Gunsallus opened the 5:40 p.m. scheduled public hearing.

Ryan Showalter and Ken Kozel were present on behalf of Shore Health System.

Mr. Thomas, Town Planner, discussed the history of the amendment of the Development Rights and Responsibilities Agreement.

Mr. Thomas stated that the Planning Commission found the plan consistent with the Comprehensive Plan.

The Town Attorney discussed the original 2014 DRRA. Mrs. VanEmburch categorized the changes. She stated the original was drafted some time ago and now they would like to add 30 years to the amended version. She stated they are taking a lot out with respect to the public works agreement and the amended version is merely housekeeping. Shore Health has taken title to the property.

Mr. Montgomery asked if there is anything that obligates Shore Health System. The Town Attorney stated that there are obligations within the document which are triggered to go forward.

Ken Kozel, CEO, Shore Health stated that approval is moving along nicely. He stated they have received unanimous approval from local bodies as well as UMMS finance committee which is scheduled for Wednesday, June 12.

Mr. Abbatiello stated he understands the costs but asked for consideration for the purchase of the ladder truck. Mr. Abbatiello asked for support from the hospital for equipment or portion thereof.

Mr. Showalter stated that the request did not make it into the original DRRA.

Res. No. 6187, "A RESOLUTION OF THE TOWN OF EASTON AUTHORIZING THE

EXECUTION OF A DEVELOPMENT RIGHTS AND RESPONSIBILITIES AGREEMENT
AMENDMENT BETWEEN THE TOWN, SHORE HEALTH SYSTEM, INC., AND TALBOT
COUNTY RELATED TO THE DEVELOPMENT OF A REGIONAL MEDICAL CENTER."

President Gunsallus read the resolution into the record.

President Gunsallus stated that the public comment would be held open until June 17, at which time the public hearing would be continued.

CONT'D. FY2024/25 BUDGET.

At 6:52 p.m., President Gunsallus opened the continued public hearing. He asked for questions or comments. There were none.

At 6:53 p.m., upon motion by Mr. Davis, seconded by Mr. Abbatiello and carried unanimously, President Gunsallus closed the public hearing.

Legislation.

Ord. 820, "AN ORDINANCE OF THE TOWN OF EASTON ESTABLISHING THE TOWN
BUDGET FOR FISCAL YEAR 2025."

The Town Manager discussed the budget as presented. He stated the budget as presented is \$28,057,079.

He asked for questions from the council. There were none.

Upon motion by Rev. Davis, seconded by Mr. Abbatiello and carried, Ordinance No. 820 passed unanimously following a roll call vote.

Ord. No. 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."

Upon motion by Mr. Abbatiello, seconded by Mr. Montgomery and carried unanimously, Ord. No. 821 was passed unanimously following a roll call vote.

Ord. No. 824, "AN ORDINANCE OF THE TOWN OF EASTON TO CARRY FORWARD
CERTAIN CAPITAL FUND EXPENDITURES INTO FISCAL YEAR 2025."

President Gunsallus set a Public Hearing for June 17 at 5:50 p.m., to hear public comments regarding Ord. No. 824, "AN ORDINANCE OF THE TOWN OF EASTON TO CARRY FORWARD CERTAIN CAPITAL FUND EXPENDITURES INTO FISCAL YEAR 2025."

Res. No. 6188, "A RESOLUTION OF THE TOWN OF EASTON REVISING THE TOWNS
LICENSE, APPLICATION, PERMITS, INSPECTION, CERTIFICATE AND OTHER FEES."

Mr. Richardson discussed changes to the Schedule of Fees. He stated this Resolution needs to be voted on due to the sanitation and recycling costs that need to be included in the tax bills.

Rev. Davis stated he has concerns with Parks and Recreation fees. He stated they are not addressed in this resolution.

Mr. Richardson stated the Schedule of Fees can be updated.

Mayor Cook stated there is an upcoming workshop with Parks and Recreation.

Mr. Abbatiello stated that with the other budgets, the Schedule of Fees has always been brought forward prior to passing the budget in order to hear public comments. He stated the parks fees are really important and he appreciates that the resolution can be amended to include those. He stated that it would have been nice to have it sooner.

Ms. Curry stated that everyone should be charged \$75 for parking in the fire lane or handicapped.

Mr. Richardson stated that he agrees that those fees may need review.

Mr. Montgomery suggested approving the resolution with the budget items and take up the rest of the fee schedule later.

Mr. Richardson stated the unmodified sections can be approved and the rest can be taken up later.

The Town Attorney advised that the resolution can be approved to only approve those pertinent items and a new resolution or amended can be brought to the council at the next meeting.

Upon motion by Mr. Abbatiello, seconded by Ms. Curry and carried unanimously, Res. No. 6188 was passed unanimously following a roll call vote.

Review of Invoices.

Review of invoices totaling \$1,362,498.71.

Upon motion by Ms. Curry, seconded by Mr. Abbatiello and carried unanimously, invoices totaling \$1,362,498.71 were approved as recommended by staff.

Public Participation/Comments.

President Gunsallus stated that there is a three-minute time limit for public comments that has been passed way in advance that will be implemented.

Ms. Elizabeth Parks, 7387 Michael Ave, gave comments regarding Pres. Gunsallus' statement at the prior meeting and stated that LGBTQ's rights are the same as any other person.

Mr. Montgomery stated that the bylaws do not allow personal attacks. He proposed that this be enforced tonight.

Tina Grace Jones, Co-Founder of Delmarva Pride Center, asked the council to be inclusive of everyone. She discussed personal obstacles she has endured and actions she has witnessed. She thanked the Mayor for the banners and lights that have been put up.

Shari Wilcoxon, 27991 Waverly Road, Easton discussed fiscal responsibility and stated that the Town Council President is diligently looking out for the financial well-being of Easton. She stated this is not political. She asked that the Mayor and Council represent all how they spend their money.

Lauren Fearman, 341 N Washington Street, spoke regarding her disappointment with the council. She stated that the comments made at the last meeting make her believe she cannot trust the council. She talked about inclusion and citizenship. She asked for respect and care.

Angel Perez, Caroline Pride CEO, expressed his disappointment regarding comments expressed at the previous meeting. He asked everyone to be mindful of their comments. He discussed making communities more inclusive. He stated that as elected officials, we should be more mindful of how opinions are expressed. He stated that comments had passed the lines of Talbot County.

Robert Alvarado, 28258 Knapps Street, stated that him and his wife are taxpayers and he doesn't have a problem with his taxpayer's money paying for banners. He stated it had to be all or none. He stated in his line of work as a paid firefighter, he protects everyone. He stated that language hurts, and previous remarks had a fascist tone. He asked everyone to be civil.

Christina Drostin, 34 Londonderry Drive, stated that she takes voting responsibilities serious and she will remember what has happened here. She discussed treating everyone with dignity and respect.

Kelly Moran, 8113 Lee Haven, discussed the impact of the language heard May 21. She spoke about trustworthiness. Ms. Moran discussed the council wanting to remove the Pride flags. She gave statistics regarding suicide with LGBTQ people and banning Pride flags.

Elizabeth North, 119 S Harrison Street, teacher and scientist discussed supporting diversity. She asked the council to support the LGBTQ community. She discussed pride she has for all the flags that support all the citizens.

Terrance Bernard, Dutchman's Lane, supports President Gunsallus as council president and the direction he has taken regarding his fiscal responsibility. Mr. Bernard thanked everyone for their service. He discussed comments regarding discussions the council has prior to meetings.

Iryna Gunsallus, 623 Goldsborough Street, stated that Frank Gunsallus is her husband and she has never heard husband speak about the LGBTQ community.

Lizzy Wolford, 100 Prospect Ave, a public middle school teacher, reminds her students that words matter. Now she needs to remind adults of public that words matter. She stated that everyone needs to be represented.

President Gunsallus asked if there are any other public comments. There were none.

Items by Members of the Council:

Ms. Curry stated she is grateful for those that came out this evening. She stated we are an inclusive community and she is fully supportive of the LGBTQ community and the Pride Center. She stated she looks forward to celebrating with everyone. She said no one is speaking for her.

Mr. Abbatiello echoed Ms. Curry's remarks and thanked everyone for sharing their comments. He stated that participation adds to a vibrant community. Mr. Abbatiello thanked Rev. Davis for his comments at the beginning of the meeting.

Mr. Montgomery stated he did not hear a single word at the last meeting that constituted an attack or a slur on any individual person. He stated we were discussing the town displaying pride flags. He stated it is not the town's business to make everyone feel good about their identity as our country is being torn apart by identity politics. He stated we need to be neutral on this and not affirm identities.

Mr. Montgomery stated that he believes that our obligation is to preserve public, health, welfare and safety and he believes giving support. He discussed every individual is infinitely valuable as they were created by God. He stated what we are concerned about here is how we address the common good.

He stated it is not a matter of addressing the common good when we celebrate a movement, an ideology, the transsexual ideology. Mr. Montgomery stated everyone misstated what Mr. Gunsallus and he spoke about. He stated there is a danger to our community for the promotion of this transsexual ideology. He discussed puberty blockers and studies published. He discussed changes to the constitution in the state of Maryland that would change parental rights. He stated this town has no business putting up flags that promote the notion that you will feel better and you will solve your teenage problems if you decide to go out and demand that your sex be changed. Mr. Montgomery

stated that's what he objects to. He stated that he believes it is not the business of this town to support this.

Rev. Davis stated he is the representative of Ward 4 and quoted Dr. King and stated that our lives begin to end the day we become silent about the things that matter. He also said that injustice anywhere is injustice everywhere. He stated everyone needs to be careful what we say and that his concern on this council is that everyone is treated fair. He thanked everyone for being here tonight. Rev. Davis stated everyone be treated fair and everyone should be wise as a serpent but gentle as a dove. He discussed his own personal experiences of being treated unfair. He stated he has lived it all his life because of the color of his skin. He stated we need to learn to love everybody. Rev. Davis stated that Easton is the best place on the whole eastern shore to live. We no longer need to hurt anybody.

President Gunsallus thanked everyone for coming out and taking the time to sit through this meeting. He stated he firmly believes that all people are equal and should be treated as such. This is why he supports all members of the community while aiming to be cognizant of the challenges they face. As an elected official, he stated he has to be fiscally responsible and use hard-earned taxpayer dollars to support the town's operations and needs. He stated that was the focus of his comments at the last meeting. Mr. Gunsallus apologized if his content was not clear.

Adjournment.

At 7:53 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