



Town Council MEETING MINUTES

Monday, September 16, 2024 - 5:30 PM
Council Chambers, Easton Town Office
14 S Harrison Street

4:30 PM Workshop: Proposed Budget Amendment for FY2025.

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

Ms. Curry was virtual.

Also present was Interim Town Manager Alan Lowrey, Finance Officer Carol Callahan, Kody Cario, Director of Engineering, Rick Farr, Chief Human Resource Officer, Town Attorney Mrs. Sharon VanEmburch, and Town Clerk Mrs. Kathy M. Ruf.

President Gunsallus called the workshop to order at 4:38 p.m.

Mr. Lowrey stated that Ordinance No. 828 is what brought us here this evening. He stated that they are pulling Ordinance No. 830 until further allocations are considered. He stated that the Port Street Underground Project is still county-owned property.

Mr. Horner stated that not knowing what future development is, and if it is materially different, it may be necessary to modify infrastructure.

Rev. Davis stated that this should have been included in 2022/23 to build the infrastructure due to when the money was received.

Chief Lowrey stated that it came it much more expensive and may be much more significant. He stated we need to hit pause and make a decision to re-allocate our taxpayers' money.

Mr. Abbatiello clarified what Phase 2 is. Mr. VanEmburch stated that it is just to put the conduit underground. He stated the cost would be 3 million dollars. He asked if there are grants. Mr.

VanEmburch stated they have not looked for funding. He discussed the bids that came in significantly higher.

Ms. Curry asked if there is a plan to finish this project. Mr. VanEmburch stated that he has not researched funding.

Mayor Cook stated that this money would sit for a number of years until additional money is found to finish the project.

Mr. VanEmburch discussed a timeline for the \$225,000 for the Port Street Underground Project.

Mr. Lowrey discussed the ARPA allocations. He stated that the bulk has been obligated.

Mr. VanEmburch discussed stormwater projects and the traffic signal projects. MS. VanEmburch stated we have to specify the projects and allocate the funds between the projects.

President Gunsallus adjourned the workshop at 5:04 p.m.

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

Mayor Megan JM Cook
Council President Frank Gunsallus
Mr. Don Abbatiello
Mr. David Montgomery
Rev. Elmer Davis

Ms. Scott-Taylor was excused and present virtually.

Also present was the Interim Town Manager, Mr. Alan Lowrey, Town Attorney Mrs. Sharon VanEmburch, and Town Clerk Mrs. Kathy M. Ruf.

Opening remarks and Pledge of Allegiance by Councilmember Dr. Montgomery.

Dr. Montgomery gave opening remarks and led those present in the Pledge of Allegiance.

Approval of Minutes.

Meeting minutes of September 3, 2024.

Upon motion by Mr. Abbatiello, seconded by Dr. Montgomery and carried unanimously, minutes of the September 3, 2024 meeting were approved as written.

Municipal Official Items.

Items by Mayor Cook.

Mayor Cook stated the town has been very busy. She stated that the Town had recently hit a gas line doing street work on South Lane. Everyone is safe and they will be working tonight until 8 or 9 p.m.

Mayor Cook advised that there is storm water work occurring across from the hospital and a new sidewalk near Talbot County courthouse as well as a streetlight. Mayor Cook advised that the tree planting will occur in October. Public Works is working in North Easton. Mayor Cook congratulated Parks & Rec for receiving a DNR Open Space Grant in the amount \$155,000 to renovate equipment at Golton. They will update what is there as well as adding swings.

Friday was a busy day. Secretary Paul J. Wiedefeld from the Department of Transportation was here. We had a lovely walk. and a great turnout. Friday Senator Paul Feldman was in Easton. They toured Easton Utilities as well.

Easton Chamber of Commerce hosted a Business Symposium.

Mayor Cook reminded everyone to get their spots for the Christmas parade.

Brett Whitehead, EVFD to update council on training facility.

Brett Whitehead, Chairman and Ed Forte, Co-Chairman, were present to discuss fundraising efforts and to update on the progress of the training facility. Mr. Forte stated that they have 3.2 million dollars including state and federal grants. He stated they hope to have the remainder of the money by the end of the year. He stated that the Clarke Foundation is matching private donations until the end of September.

Mr. Whitehead discussed construction and stated things are going very well. He stated that Willow Construction is the contractor for the main portion of the training facility. He stated Fire Facilities will construct the burn building. He stated the building is set up for all First Responders. They are securing a construction loan with Summit Bank. He stated that they are pleased to say that permitting is working very well and they plan to break ground November 14 with a 10-12 month completion timeline.

Mr. Abbatiello asked what else will be on the campus to help with training. He stated they will also have a pole barn for education as well as a place for open burns.

Approval of 3-5 Year Strategic Plan as recommended by Park Board.

Ms. Gould, Parks and Recreation Director, was present for questions. She asked for approval for the three to five-year Strategic Plan as recommended by the Park Board. She stated the Annual Plan was approved with input from the community.

Upon motion by Rev. Davis seconded by Mr. Abbatiello and carried unanimously, the Strategic Plan was approved.

Items by Town Manager

Introduction of Officers Promoted to Corporal: Greg Hall & Cody Bland.

Chief Lowrey introduced officers recently promoted to Corporal: Gregory Hall and Cody Bland. Cpl. Cpl. Hall's son pinned him and Cpl. Bland's wife pinned him.

Items by Town Attorney.

The Town Attorney stated there will be an update to the Ethics Ordinance for a meeting in October.

Presentations.

Mr. Wes Hagood, Sons of the American Revolution to receive Proclamation in support of Colonel Tench Tilghman Week.

Mr. Wes Hagood, President of Col. Tench Tilghman was present from Sons of the American Revolution.

Dana Newnam, Talbot County Library and Conway Gregory were present as well.

Conway Gregory discussed the adoption of Col. Tench Tilghman week and why he should be recognized and honored.

President Gunsallus presented Mr. Hagood with a Proclamation in support of Colonel Tench Tilghman. Mr. Hagood discussed Colonel Tench Tilghman. He stated he was an officer in the Continental Army during the American Revolutionary War. He served as an aide-de-camp to General George Washington, achieving the rank of Lieutenant Colonel, and was a leader of

Talbot County.

Mr. Hagood discussed why the dates were selected to celebrate Tench Tilghman Week.

Ms. Newnam stated it's important to bring heroes and recognize those born in Talbot County.

President Gunsallus read the Proclamation honoring Tench Tilman and proclaiming Col.

Tench Tilghman Week.

Public Hearings.

5:35 PM PUBLIC HEARING to hear comments on Ordinance No. 828, "AN ORDINANCE OF THE TOWN OF EASTON AMENDING THE CARRY FORWARD CAPITAL FUND EXPENDITURES FOR FISCAL YEAR 2025."

At 6:04 p.m., President Gunsallus opened the 5:35 p.m. scheduled Public Hearing on Ordinance No. 828. He asked for council questions and public comment. There was none. Upon motion by Rev. Davis and carried unanimously, President Gunsallus closed the public hearing.

5:40PM PUBLIC HEARING to hear comments on Ordinance No. 829, "AN ORDINANCE OF THE TOWN OF EASTON REMOVING THE REQUIRED FEE CHARGED BY RETAIL ESTABLISHMENTS FOR PAPER BAGS."

At 6:05 p.m., President Gunsallus opened the public hearing on Ordinance No. 829 regarding removing the required fee charged by retail establishments for paper bags.

Marion Arnold, 405 Goldsborough Street, a member of Plastic Free Easton, discussed the minimum charge for paper bags.

Alan Girard, Chesapeake Foundation, presented the use of plastic and paper bags and the effect on the environment. He discussed communities that have a plastic bag ban but no fee for paper bags. He encouraged the council to reject Ordinance No. 829. Ms. Barbara Winegarden, thanked the council for passing the plastic ban legislation. She discussed not using plastic bags and teaching children about legislation.

Richard Arnold, Goldsborough Street, stated he opposes the removal of the \$.10 bag fee. He discussed Moms for Liberty that is trying to change the law.

Margo Miller, Easton, discussed why this matter has come up.

Mary N Washington Street, discussed why paper bags are more harmful than plastic bags. She encouraged the council to not remove the fee.

Sara Price, Maryland Retailer's Alliance, representing retail businesses discussed businesses in communities that prefer to not use plastic or bag fees.

Shari Wilcoxon, Waverly Road, publicly apologized to Ms. Curry. She stated this is about Freedom. She stated she is for a clean environment and is not for bringing back plastic bags. She stated she gathered over 800 signatures to remove the \$.10 fee. She showed the petition with signatures to remove the fee. Ms. Wilcoxon stated that she thinks the Ward 4 residents hope that Rev. Davis has their back.

Robin Page, thanked the council and mayor for the previous passage for the plastic bag fee of \$.10. She stated it is to defray the cost of the paper bag. She asked the council to keep the legislation as it is.

Terrance Bernard, supports Ms. Wilcoxon stated they went face to face with residents. He stated they saw 800 people.

Steve Mangassarian, S Aurora Street, reiterated that this is not a referendum on plastic bags. He stated the paper bag has been around for 140 years and has been built into the cost of the goods. Mr. Mangassarian proposed that the town purchase cloth bags. He stated it would defray the cost of the bag.

Sara Claggett, Elm Avenue, stated that this is not only about freedom but also about responsibility.

Grace Soltis, stated she cares about the town and the environment. She stated she is a proud American and appreciates freedom. She stated the bag fee is a small and avoidable fee.

James Brennan, Easton Village, discussed previous council and stated he wants no change in the previous ordinance.

Mr. Mangassarian asked for clarification on language in the ordinance.

Chad Hill, Easton discussed keeping reusable bags in his trunk. He discussed the importance of this ordinance. He stated the legislation has taught him to do better. He stated if the bags are free, we are going to go back to where we were. He stated it's ok to not agree but hopes the council hears the collective passion.

Eddie Guam, Goldsborough Street, asked what is a shopping bag. He stated \$.10 is good and teaches you to bring your own bag.

At 6:38 p.m., upon motion by Mr. Montgomery, seconded by Rev. Davis and carried unanimously, President Gunsallus closed the Public Hearing.

Legislation.

Amended Ord. No. 828, "AN ORDINANCE OF THE TOWN OF EASTON AMENDING THE CARRY FORWARD CAPITAL FUND EXPENDITURES FOR FISCAL YEAR 2025."

Mayor Cook stated that the total for the Capital Fund Expenditures is \$423,630.

Upon motion by Mr. Abbatiello, seconded by Mr. Montgomery, and carried unanimously, Amended Ord. No. 828, was approved following a roll call vote.

Ord. No. 829, "AN ORDINANCE OF THE TOWN OF EASTON REMOVING THE REQUIRED FEE CHARGED BY RETAIL ESTABLISHMENTS FOR PAPER BAGS."

President Gunsallus read a statement regarding the fee for the bag and giving the retailers the freedom to choose.

Mr. Montgomery read a statement regarding the \$.10 fee and stated this is a substantial cost to the businesses as well as to the customers. He stated that studies have shown that it is a failure.

Rev. Davis stated we have used an enormous amount of time on this.

Upon motion by Rev. Davis seconded by Ms. Curry and carried unanimously, Ord. No. 829, was voted down 3-2 with Mr. Abbatiello, Ms. Curry and Rev. Davis voting to keep the \$.10 fee for bags and President Gunsallus and Mr. Montgomery voting yes to remove the \$.10 fee for bags.

Ord. No. 830, "AN ORDINANCE OF THE TOWN OF EASTON AMENDING THE CARRY FORWARD CAPITAL FUND EXPENDITURES FOR FISCAL YEAR 2025."

Ord. 830 was withdrawn.

Review of Invoices.

Invoices totaling \$1,686,266.59.

Mr. Abbatiello thanked Mayor Cook for getting the figures he has been asking for from Lombardo & Ayers. He stated he expects to see the results of the audit.

Upon motion by Rev. Davis, seconded by Mr. Abbatiello and carried unanimously, invoices totaling \$1,686,266.59 were approved.

Public Participation/Comments.

Johanna Norris, South Aurora Street discussed traffic concerns on Brookletts and Aurora between Needwood. Ms. Norris discussed traffic incidents and stated she is open to other options that have been discussed. such as a flashing sign or speed bumps between Needwood and Melville Ave.

Peter Maloney, S Aurora Street discussed the 25 mph zone. He stated that something needs to be done about speeding. He stated there are five to six children and there will be more. He stated it is only going to get worse.

Steve Mangassarian asked what is going on with the traffic light at Glebe and Washington.

Mr. VanEmburch stated that it is part of the traffic signal upgrade. Mr. VanEmburch stated they are trying to focus on the ARPA funds. He stated they need to review the proposal and make a recommendation to the council and get the project under construction. He stated they would like to begin by the beginning of the calendar year.

Mr. Abbatiello asked that consideration be given and associated costs for Aurora Street be brought forward to the council for speeding on N. Aurora Street.

Mr. VanEmburch stated they would like to look at striping and shoulder lines and continue to analyze the data by working with the Police Department. He stated they have funded a complete street study and will look at how to implement traffic-calming measures. He stated they have looked at speed bumps and rumble strips. He stated that the sounds cause different problems.

Rev. Davis stated those that live in the community are the experts. He stated he will talk to the chief for documentation.

President Gunsallus asked if the trailer that records speed has been put in the area.

Chief Lowrey stated there were 805 speeders in the school zones with Red Light this month. He stated enforcement is good while they are there. He stated that traffic complaints are one of their biggest complaints. He stated there needs to be a multi-facet approach.

Erin Saunders, discussed fast cars and her sibling that walks. She voiced her support for different

solutions for speeders.
Rene Bozart, Choptank Avenue discussed traffic and speeders. She stated she can't walk her dog.
She stated she can't go out Choptank Avenue.

Items by Members of the Council:

Ms. Curry stated she has nothing this evening.
Mr. Abbatiello clarified that he is registered as an Independent, not a Republican. He stated he had attended the Hispanic Heritage Festival this weekend. Mr. Abbatiello stated there was great food and great company. Mr. Abbatiello discussed the bomb threat at Easton High School. He stated that it was handled professionally with care for the children and he was much appreciative.
Dr. Montgomery will bring to the attention of Fr. Nash regarding the consideration for dropping off students at St. Peter & Paul Elementary School.
Rev. Davis thanked everyone for the discussion tonight. He stated we have to face issues and move forward. He stated we need to stay focused in working diligently. He stated it is disheartening for members of the community to make comments. Rev. Davis stated he is grateful for those that went door to door in Ward 4.
President Gunsallus stated the council has to consider everything that everyone says.

CLOSED SESSION: General Provisions Article § 3-305(b)(1) 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.

At 7:53 p.m., upon motion by Ms. Curry, seconded by Rev. Davis and carried unanimously, President Gunsallus convened into Closed Session to discuss personnel.

At 8:15 p.m., upon motion by Rev. Davis seconded by Ms. Curry and carried unanimously, President Gunsallus re-convened into the regular council meeting.

Adjournment.

At 8:15 p.m. upon motion by Mr. Abbatiello seconded by Rev. Davis and carried unanimously, President Gunsallus adjourned the regularly scheduled meeting.

Respectfully submitted,

Kathy M. Ruf, Town Clerk