



Town Council MEETING MINUTES

Monday, February 3, 2025 - 5:30 PM
Council Chambers, Easton Town Office
14 S Harrison Street

4:30 PM Workshop: Discussion Regarding Annexations .

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

Also present was the Interim Town Manager Mr. Alan Lowrey, Town Attorney Mrs. Sharon VanEmburch, and Town Clerk Mrs. Kathy M. Ruf. Also present was Director of Planning and Zoning Miguel Salinas, Town Planner Lynn Thomas, Town Engineer Rick VanEmburch, Director of Engineering Kody Cario.

At 4:32 p.m., President Gunsallus opened the scheduled workshop.

Miguel Salinas discussed what is in the residential development pipeline as well as the building permit history. Mr. Salinas discussed the unit type breakdown by housing type according to the census data.

President Gunsallus asked if there were questions from the council.

Mr. Abbatiello asked if there are any other areas of town that have been annexed that could see development. Mr. Salinas stated the Corrigan & Trippe and the Lapidus property on the west side of Route 50 all the way to Chapel could be developed.

Town Engineer Rick VanEmburch stated that Port Street could be developed for residential areas once annexed.

Mr. Montgomery asked what the holdup might be for the Corrigan & Trippe development. Mr. Salinas discussed the water and sewer, the impact on traffic and schools and development activity.

President Gunsallus asked Mr. Salinas to clarify what projects were approved by the Planning Commission and which projects were approved by the Council.

President Gunsallus asked to focus on the area near the new hospital site.

President Gunsallus stated he would like to spend the remainder of the time discussing possible annexations.

Ms. Curry discussed the process and concerns that projects are not coming before the council.

President Gunsallus stated the main problem in town, in his opinion, is traffic.

Mr. Montgomery discussed omitting the PRD overlay.

Mr. Abbatiello discussed parameters for the size of projects.

President Gunsallus asked the Town Attorney to draft legislation to omit the PRD overlay.

Mr. Montgomery discussed establishing criteria for annexations.

President Gunsallus stated the town's population has doubled in 20 years.

Rev. Davis stated that there needs to be more communication with the Planning Commission. He discussed traffic in town. Rev. Davis stated he thinks the council should have input on proposed developments. He suggested quarterly meetings with the Planning Commission.

Mr. Salinas discussed middle housing.

At 5:24 p.m., President Gunsallus adjourned the workshop and stated the regular meeting would reconvene at 5:30 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 Dr. Montgomery.

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

President Gunsallus read a statement regarding the Closed Session Statement from the January 21, 2025 meeting. He stated there would be a Closed Session following the regularly scheduled meeting this evening.

Approval of Minutes.

Meeting minutes from January 21, 2025.

Upon motion by Mr. Abbatiello, seconded by Rev. Davis and carried unanimously, minutes of the January 21, 2025 meetings were approved as written.

Municipal Official Items.

Items by Mayor Cook.

Mayor Cook asked for a Closed Session after the regularly scheduled meeting this evening. She stated that members of Easton Police Department participated in the Polar Plunge this weekend which benefits the Special Olympics. She stated that the second class of the Community Police Academy is beginning March 5. Mayor Cook updated on things happening around town. Mayor Cook discussed traffic changes on Brookletts and Harrison and stated that Brookletts and Hanson will be next. She stated the storm drain project is taking place. The new sidewalk along South Aurora Street connecting the Rail-to-Trail to Idlewild on the east side of Aurora is being installed. This project will take two to three months. Public Works will be making traffic changes on the corner of Idlewild and Route 50 and installing a dedicated right turn lane. She stated that Public Works has also recently done a great job replacing the sidewalk on Glenwood Avenue as well as getting the sports fields ready at North Easton Park for the sports season. She stated Mr. VanEmburch has recently completed a training on the Complete Streets. Mr. VanEmburch also wanted to congratulate Mr. Cario for being accepted into the Shore Leadership Class. Mayor Cook asked everyone to be patient as the traffic lights are now on a cycle down from 4 minutes to 2 1/2 minutes. Mayor Cook reminded everyone about the Town's social media that keeps the community updated. Mr. Abbatiello was congratulated for being named Fireman of the Year at this year's Easton Volunteer Fire Department Annual Banquet. Mayor Cook congratulated Maryland Men's Lacrosse.

Ms. Curry asked that the deteriorating road at Chapel Road be addressed.

Items by Town Manager

Public Assembly Event: February 14 - February 15, Chesapeake Fire & Ice Festival

Public Assembly Event: February 22, Frederick Douglass Birthday Parade

Public Assembly Event: March 30, 50th Anniversary Parade for End the Vietnam War

Public Assembly Event: April 12, Easter Egg-Stravaganza

Interim Town Manager Lowrey brought the following Public Assembly events to the floor for approval, which were recommended by staff:

Chesapeake Fire & Ice Festival: Upon motion by Mr. Abbatiello, seconded by Rev. Davis and carried unanimously, the Festival was unanimously approved.

Fred Douglass Birthday Parade: Upon motion by Pres. Gunsallus, seconded by Ms. Curry and carried unanimously, the parade was approved.

50th Anniversary Parade Ending Vietnam War: Upon motion by Pres. Gunsallus, seconded by Mr. Abbatiello and carried unanimously, the parade was approved. Rev. Davis stated he wanted the Parade for all veterans. Mr. Lowrey stated he would pass that along.

Easter Eggstravaganza: Upon motion by Mr. Abbatiello, seconded by Dr. Montgomery, the Eggstravaganza was approved.

Items by Town Attorney.

Set Workshop for Draft Inclusionary Zoning Ordinance as recommended by the Planning and Zoning Commission.

The Town Attorney stated that in the packet, there is a recommendation from the Planning Commission regarding Inclusionary Zoning. She asked that a Workshop for Inclusionary Zoning Workshop be put on the March 3 agenda at 4:30 p.m. to go into more details.

President Gunsallus stated he wanted to address the topic and read a statement regarding Inclusionary Zoning. He stated it is our responsibility to see what has worked else where before determining the best course of action for Easton. He proposed that the council commission an independent firm to conduct a comprehensive study over the next 9 to 12 months to provide an objective analysis of the impacts and best practices. He stated he thinks March 3 is too soon.

Pres. Gunsallus made a motion and asked for a second. Dr. Montgomery seconded President Gunsallus' motion.

Mr. Montgomery discussed his concerns regarding how the council is moving forward with Inclusionary Zoning. He stated he wants another review of the newly revised ordinance. He discussed the difference it could make and if this an appropriate thing for a town the size of Easton to take on. He also questioned the budgetary cost of taking it on. He reiterated what President Gunsallus pointed out in regard to the drawbacks of inclusionary zoning. He stated that this is essentially a tax on builders as well as degrading housing values. He stated that a scope of work is going to have to be written for this.

Mr. Abbatiello asked for clarification and asked how much this study might cost. Pres.

Gunsallus stated it could be anywhere from \$20,000 to \$50,000.

Dr. Montgomery stated that the study may cost \$50,000.

Mayor Cook asked Pres. Gunsallus what he might try to find in a study regarding Inclusionary Zoning.

Mayor Cook asked what information are you looking to gain that has not been looked at.

Pres. Gunsallus stated he is looking to assess unintended consequences and how homeowners' property could potentially be affected.

Dr. Montgomery stated that no where has there been any implications of the negative aspects of inclusionary zoning. He stated there has not been any questions whether we want inclusionary zoning.

Mr. Abbatiello stated he would like to see the rest of the information before we approve of a study.

Ms. Curry stated she would like to see the scope of work before we decide to embark on a study. She asked who will engage the contract. Pres. Gunsallus stated the council will.

Rev. Davis stated he is not understanding all this inclusionary housing. He proposed to have the workshop meeting then make a decision. He suggested amending the motion.

Pres. Gunsallus suggested having the meeting March 3 with the findings coming back to the council and then at that time, the council will decide the course of action.

Mayor Cook stated that there has been a lot of work that has been put into this issue

Mayor Cook stated there is a real issue when the town employs a police officer that can not even live in the town they serve. She stated that is a real issue.

Pres. Gunsallus rescinded his motion and made a new motion that the council on March 3 will receive the findings and make a decision at that time or at a future meeting. He stated we will hold on this for the time being.

Mr. Salinas stated the information should be forthcoming in a week.

Fire Board.

(Past Chief) Sonny Jones to request expenditure of Impact Fees for purchase of outfitted Polaris Pro XD UTV to enhance capabilities for EVFD's response to trails and parklands.

Sonny Jones was present to discuss the Easton Fire Department's request to purchase an outfitted Polaris to enhance capabilities for their response to the trails and park lands.

Upon motion by Pres. Gunsallus seconded by Ms. Curry and carried unanimously, approval was granted for the purchase.

These funds will be from Impact fees related to growth.

Sonny Jones introduced the incoming Chief and President, JR Dobson. .

JR Dobson, Chief discussed stats from the last quarter and introduced the new line officers:

Asst. Chief: Daryl Caldwell, Captain: Justin Jones, 1st Lieutenant: Bill Keswick, 2nd

Lieutenant: Mike Ziegler, 3rd Lieutenant: Cameron Chance, 4th Lieutenant: Don Abbatiello,

Ambulance Captain: Mason Odenwald, Chief Engineer: Jason Spies, 1st Asst. Chief

Engineer: Adam Mayock, 2nd Asst. Chief Engineer: Gordo Seeber.

Chief Dobson stated they are looking for volunteers. He stated just come to the fire station 315 Leonard Rieck Drive as they are always looking for help.

President Rich Williamson stated that Greg Mueller from the Town of Easton is going to help the Department with a recruitment video to interest volunteers.

The Stews and Brews is scheduled for February 15.

President Rich Williamson introduced the administrative staff: Vice President: Russel Miles, Secretary: Becky Caldwell, Treasurer: Chris Hash, Board of Trustees: Ken Bush, Pete Griffin, Sol James, Tim Knotts, Jeff Meintzer, Jt Morris and Brett Whitehead, Parliamentarian: Ken Bush, Chaplain: Rev. Elmer Davis. He thanked the Town for the ATV funding.

Mr. Ron Engle to present Strategic Highway Safety Plan.

Mr. Ron Engle, Public Safety Consultant, was present to discuss the Strategic Highway Safety Plan.

He discussed developing the dashboard. He stated that Easton is the first jurisdiction in Maryland to have it. Mr. Engle discussed safety as one of Easton's three core values. He discussed the Vision

Zero Strategic Plan for the years 2025 through 2030 and the steps to achieve it. Mr. Engle displayed

a crash map and discussed the roads with the most crashes. He stated the strategic plan is the result

of a collaboration between the Town of Easton and industry experts. He offered thanks to the RAVEN

team from the GIS program at Washington College for their efforts in data research and compilation.

He stated they worked to build out the Easton Interactive Traffic Dashboard which was instrumental

in the creation of this plan. Mr. Engle stated that with this plan, Easton can apply for substantial

grants.

Legislation.

Ordinance No. 838, "AN ORDINANCE OF THE TOWN OF EASTON AMENDING CHAPTER 2 ARTICLE VI OF THE TOWN OF EASTON CODE TO UPDATE THE TOWN'S ETHICS PROVISIONS."

Upon motion by Pres. Gunsallus seconded by Ms. Curry and carried unanimously, Ordinance No. 838 was approved following a roll call vote.

Review of Invoices.

Invoices from 1/8/25 thru 1/29/25 totaling \$1,571,361.41.

Upon motion by Mr. Abbatiello seconded by Ms. Curry and carried unanimously, invoices totaling \$1,571,361.41 were approved.

Public Participation/Comments.

Paul Haddaway, an 85 year old veteran living on a fixed income bought his house for \$40,000. He stated his taxes on \$300,000 would give him a \$4,000 tax bill. He stated he would like council to look into options for property taxes for veterans and first responders. He stated he would like the council to look at something to help out.

Erin Saunders, 29568 Brant Court, Apt. 319, discussed housing shortage and traffic concerns. She stated that perfect is the enemy of good. Ms. Saunter discussed the hospital that is proposed to be built and the housing shortage. She stated she does not trust the traffic and crossing Route 50 and asked if anything can be done.

Items by Members of the Council:

Ms. Curry stated she was sorry to have missed the EVFD banquet. She congratulated the award winners. Ms. Curry reminded everyone about the EVFD's Stews and Brews as well as the Chesapeake Fire & Ice Festival.

Mr. Abbatiello stated the state is working on something for crossing to Dover and Goldsborough from Rt. 50. Mr. Abbatiello thanked Mr. Engle for all his hard work.

Dr. Montgomery thanked Mr. Engle for his hard work and congratulated Mr. Abbatiello for Firefighter of the Year. He stated he and his wife enjoyed the recent EVFD Banquet. Dr. Montgomery stated he congratulated EPD for Coffee with a Cop at the Multi-Cultural Resource Center and addressing the concerns with the Hispanic community.

Chief Lowrey stated the Department has gone to four churches since then.

Rev. Davis discussed the multi-cultural meeting and stated he is not in agreeance in how they are being treated. Rev. Davis thanked Mr. Engle for his service and his report. He thanked Don Abbatiello for his service with EVFD and being Firefighter of the Year. He stated he is grateful to be able to serve Easton.

Pres. Gunsallus thanked EVFD for a wonderful evening. He clarified his comments from the last meeting and stated that we should run the numbers since we are in budget season and come up with some solution, together as a team. Pres. Gunsallus congratulated Don Abbatiello for Firefighter of the Year.

At 6:46 p.m., President Gunsallus asked for a Closed Session to discuss Personnel General Provisions Article 3-305(b)(1) to discuss the appointment, employment, assignment, promotion, discipline, demotion, compensation, removal, resignation.

Upon motion by President Gunsallus seconded by Rev. Davis and carried unanimously following a roll call vote, President Gunsallus moved into Closed Session.

At 7:00 p.m., upon motion by President Gunsallus, seconded by Mr. Abbatiello and carried unanimously following a roll call vote, President Gunsallus moved back into the Regular Meeting.

Adjournment.

At 7:00 p.m., upon motion by President Gunsallus seconded by Mr. Abbatiello and carried unanimously, President Gunsallus adjourned the regularly scheduled meeting.

Respectfully submitted,

Kathy M. Ruf, Town Clerk