



Town Council MEETING MINUTES

Monday, June 6, 2022 - 5:30 PM
Council Chambers, Easton Town Office
14 S Harrison Street

5:00 PM Closed Session General Provisions Article 3-3-5(b) (7) to consult with counsel to obtain legal advice on a legal matter; and Article 3-305(b)(4) to consider a matter that concerns the proposal for a business or industrial organization to locate, expand, or remain in the state.

Mayor Robert C. Willey
Mr. Al Silverstein
Mr. Don Abbatiello
Mr. Ron Engle
Rev. Elmer Davis
President Megan Cook

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

At 5:00 p.m., President Cook called the meeting to order.

Upon motion by Mr. Silverstein, seconded by Rev. Davis and carried unanimously, President Cook convened the regular meeting into Closed Session.

At 5:16 p.m. upon motion by Mr. Silverstein, seconded by Mr. Abbatiello and carried unanimously, President Cook convened into Open Session and recessed until the regularly scheduled meeting at 5:30 p.m.

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

At 5:31 p.m., President Cook called the meeting to order.

Opening remarks and Pledge of Allegiance by Councilmember Engle.

President Cook read a statement regarding the Closed Session.

The Easton Town Council met in closed session on June 6, 2022 at 5:00 p.m. in the Easton Town Council Chambers.

The purpose of the closed session was:

General Provisions Article §3-305(b)(7) To consult with counsel to obtain legal advice on a legal matter, and; §3-305(b)(4) to consider a matter that concerns the proposal for a business or industrial organization to locate, expand, or remain in the State.

The five Council members present voted to close the meeting.

The following individuals were present: Mayor Robert C. Willey, Town Manager Donald Richardson, Council President Megan Cook, Council Members Al Silverstein, Donald Abbatiello and Rev. Davis, and Town Attorney Sharon VanEmburch and Kathy Ruf Town Clerk.

The Town Council consulted with counsel. No action was taken.

The meeting adjourned at 5:16 p.m.

Mr. Engle gave opening remarks and led those present in the Pledge of Allegiance.

Approval of Minutes.

Meeting Minutes of May 16, 2022 and Workshop Minutes of May 23, 2022.

Upon motion by Mr. Silverstein, seconded by Mr. Engle and carried unanimously, minutes of the May 16 and May 23, 2022 meetings were approved as written.

Municipal Official Items.

Items by Mayor Willey.

Confirmation for Appointment of Affordable Housing Alternate.

Upon motion by Mr. Abbatiello, seconded by Mr. Silverstein and carried unanimously, Mr. James Blessingame, Sr. was confirmed as an alternate to the Affordable Housing Board.

Items by the Town Manager.

Approval of Public Assembly Events:

2022 Law Enforcement Torch Run - June 16, 2022
Asbury Church Youth Event - June 18, 2022
Annual Elk's Parade - June 26, 2022
Frederick Douglas Honor Society - September 24, 2022
Carols by Candlelight, Friends of Hospice - November 26, 2022

Upon motion by Silverstein seconded by Mr. Engle and carried unanimously, the following Public Assembly Events were approved:

First Responder Tribute - June 15, 2022
2022 Law Enforcement Torch Run - June 16, 2022
Asbury Church Youth Event - June 18, 2022
Annual Elk's Parade - June 26, 2022
Frederick Douglas Honor Society - September 24, 2022
Mr. Richardson stated that soccer and baseball camps are starting next week with the Town of Easton Parks and Recreation Department. He stated that applications are on the town's website.

Items by the Town Attorney.

The Town Attorney, Mrs. VanEmburch stated that she has nothing at this time.

Presentations.

Mr. John Horner, Jr. Senior Vice President of Operations and Chief Operating Officer to introduce Tucker Bullock, P.E. Gas & Meter Department Manager.

Mr. John Horner, Executive Vice President & COO introduced Tucker Bullock, P.E., Gas & Meter Department Manager. Mr. Bullock comes from Dominion Energy and lives on the shore. Mr. Horner stated that they are excited to have Mr. Bullock join Easton Utilities.

Mr. Al Bond, President & CEO - Avalon Foundation, Inc. to discuss Centennial Celebration.

Mr. Bond was present to discuss the Centennial Celebration. He gave an update on how the Avalon is doing.

He stated that this is the 100th year for Avalon Theatre. Mr. Bond discussed the vision of the former Mayor and Council.

Mr. Bond stated that the Avalon Foundation is extremely grateful for the support. He discussed the kickoff this Saturday.

Mr. Silverstein stated that the upgrades that have been done are commendable. Mr. Bond stated that the entire community supports the Avalon.

President Cook extended thanks to Ellen Vatne who founded the Avalon Foundation.

Public Hearings.

5:35 PM FY2022/23 Constant Yield Tax Rate

At 5:44 p.m. President Cook opened the 5:35 p.m. scheduled public hearing. Mr. Richardson stated that the same tax rate will be in effect for the upcoming year; \$.52/100 of assessed value. President Cook asked for comments. There were none.

Mr. Richardson stated that there is no change in the tax rate.

At 5:45 p.m. President Cook closed the public hearing.

Upon motion by Mr. Silverstein, seconded by Mr. Engle and carried unanimously, the proposed FY2022/23 tax rate was approved.

5:40 PM Public Hearing for the purpose of discussing Resolution No. 6154, "A RESOLUTION OF THE TOWN OF EASTON REVISING THE TOWNS LICENSE, APPLICATION, PERMITS, INSPECTION, CERTIFICATE AND OTHER FEES."

At 5:46 p.m. President Cook opened the scheduled 5:40 p.m. public hearing.

Mr. Richardson discussed the updated proposed schedule of fees.

He stated that the Parks and Recreation fees are the fees receiving the most comments for North Easton Park and the pavilion at Idlewild Park. He stated that the updated impact fees are included as well as a handful of department changes, and updates to the Planning &

Zoning Department.

President Cook opened the floor for comments.

Ms. Taffy Wilson, present on behalf of Dark Horse Lacrosse Club stated they are a non-profit group that supports young people. She stated they are separate from Talbot Lacrosse although they do share coaches and players. She stated the pandemic hit them hard but they were able to piece their club back together. Ms. Wilson stated they are the lowest costing traveling club on the eastern shore as well as the state of Maryland. In doing the math, the fees would be a significant hardship to their club. She discussed being a year round sport and the cost potentially being \$12,000, which they don't have. Ms. Wilson stated they are good stewards to the park and asked for consideration.

She stated these fees are astronomical.

Corey Fink, past president of Easton Little League, stated he is here in opposition of fees. He stated these fees that are being proposed would be a detriment to the league. He stated the league has seen a decrease in participation. Fees should not be passed to the residents whose parents pay taxes in this town. He suggested charging travel teams.

Lynn Foxwell, 7614 Easton Club Drive, present in spirit of concern for the field use fee. He discussed the culture of the Easton Little League. He stated that many of the families have experienced financial hardships. Worked closely to re-invest into the ball park repair and maintenance for North Easton Park. Various detrimental effects would have to be passed on to children and parents. Respectfully asked the council to consider alternatives. He discussed the investment Easton Little League has made to North Easton Park. Mr. Foxwell thanked the council for consideration and asked that the field use fee be tabled.

Sean Proha, resident of Easton, present as parent and a 100% lacrosse guy. He stated his daughter enjoys playing the sport. He stated he wants her interest to continue. He stated he is thankful for Dark Horse for having low fees. Increased fees will affect the league. He stated that many kids are participating and it is what we should want them to do as often as possible. "You know that you can but really should you?"

Phil Foster, Willis Avenue, stated he supports most of the crowd. He stated he coached 27 years youth soccer, and really has to access where priorities are. Mr. Foster stated money could be found when you really look for it. He urged the council not to make mistakes and consider all the things those present have presented. He suggested taking these fees out of the budget and finding the money elsewhere.

At 6:07 p.m., President Cook closed the public hearing on Res. 6154. She stated this resolution is eligible for a vote. President Cook stated it is her suggestion to remove the Parks and Rec fees from this resolution and discuss those fees at a later time.

Upon motion by Mr. Silverstein, seconded by Mr. Abbatiello and carried unanimously, Resolution No. 6154 was approved with the amendment of removing the parks and recreation department's fees and to look at different opportunities at a different time.

5:45 PM Public Hearing for the purpose of discussing Ordinance No. 784, "AN ORDINANCE OF THE TOWN OF EASTON PROHIBITING RETAIL ESTABLISHMENTS IN THE TOWN FROM PROVIDING CUSTOMERS WITH SINGLE USE DISPOSABLE PLASTIC BAGS AND PROVIDING FOR EXEMPTIONS FROM THE PROHIBITION AND PENALTIES FOR VIOLATIONS."

At 6:08 p.m., President Cook opened a Public Hearing to discuss Ordinance No. 784.

Mr. Jeff Harrison, lifetime resident of Talbot County, President Talbot Waterman's Association, discussed the detriment of plastic bags. He stated he worked the waters of Talbot County for 45 years, with 600 miles of shoreline in Talbot County. He stated he sees more trash and bags in the summertime due to boat activity. He stated that bags are so cheap that they are discarded and are floating around, are a nuisance and a serious problem.

Mr. Alan Girard, Eastern Shore Director, Chesapeake Bay Foundation, summarized the science of plastic bags. He stated that plastic is not good for human health. Mr. Girard discussed the studies of microplastics.

Ms. Brook Edsminger, a student at EHS, discussed the death of 100 million marine animals per year and the environmental impact of plastics and related products.

Plastic-Free Easton presented a video by local business owners was presented in support of banning one-time-use plastic bags.

Ms. Sue Hosser brought a "low-tech demonstration" showing a plastic bag in water and discussed the problems for marine life.

Ms. Elaine Tama suggested modifications to Ordinance 784 which would add the definition of single-use bags as well as language mandating that retailers charge a fee for paper bags. Ms. Tama discussed enforcement and educating the public and retailers. She stated that Plastic-Free Easton would like to partner with retailers.

Ms. Amy Kreiner, President and CEO Talbot County Chamber of Commerce, speaking on behalf of the Board of Directors, voiced opposition to Ord. 784. She stated she is present to serve as a collective voice of Talbot County. Ms. Kreiner stated that the ordinance is an unfair burden on retailers at a time when they are facing numerous challenges such as Covid and inflation and worker shortages and supply chain delays. She stated she visited 25 small businesses to inquire their opinions and most felt this ordinance is overreaching and intrusive.

She stated that they feel this does not achieve what the intention is as some bags will still be used. Ms. Kreiner discussed the purchase of plastic bags by Trex. She stated that they feel businesses should have the choice to decide what they are offering.

Ms. Tama stated they do not support the Trex recycling program.

Ms. Kathy Hostetter, 12335 Mill Creek Lane, Wye Mills, stated facts she found regarding plastic bags, recycling and decomposition. She stated that she hopes the convenience aspect is overlooked.

Mary Yantze, member of Plastic-Free Easton stated she is a resident of Easton over 40 years. She thanked the Mayor and Council for their service to Town of Easton. She stated that plastic recycling does not work and we need to use less plastic that ends up in our environment. She said our community will be better for it.

Ms. Sara Price, present on behalf of Maryland Retail Association, thanked council for speaking to her over the last two weeks. Retailers Association have gotten involved. She suggested handling at state level. There are several concerns with how it was drafted. She suggested banning plastic and putting a fee on paper. Ms. Price's suggestions include exemptions to make sure appropriate items are covered and language is appropriate. She stated she would like to participate in a work session. Ms. Price discussed the costs of plastic bags versus paper bags.

Mr. Melvin Thompson, representing the Restaurant Association of Maryland, stated their organization is opposed to this legislation as proposed. He stated this legislation as proposed would prohibit the use of plastic bags by restaurants and other food service establishments. He stated it is effective for industry to package products in plastic bags with a very narrow profit margin. He respectfully requested an amendment to restaurants and food service establishments to allow plastic bags for their use.

President Cook asked if there was anyone else to voice opinions. There were no further comments.

At 6:50 p.m., President Cook stated that the public record would be open through the next few meetings. President Cook stated that Ordinance No. 784 would be brought to the floor during the second meeting in July. She encouraged those with comments to reach out and submit comments.

CONT'D. Public Hearing to consider the fiscal year 2022-2023 Budget.

At 6:51 p.m., President Cook opened the Public Hearing to consider the fiscal year 2022-23 Budget.

Town Manager Mr. Richardson stated that the budget has been amended following direction in the budget workshop. He stated all the employees are non-exempt; he addressed the 35 hour employees, the compression and he has worked with the town engineer addressing the storm water concerns. With that in mind, all the changes incurred result in a balanced budget. President Cook stated that this budget is over 37 million dollars and is something to be proud of with benefits to the community as well as the employees. President Cook commended everyone for their efforts on the budget. She stated that positions were added and raises were implemented.

Rev. Davis asked for clarification regarding the raises.

Mr. Richardson stated that in March there was a 7% increase across the board. He stated that the budget before the council today includes a 4.2% increase across the board effective July 1 and a \$5,000 salary increase to keep with the market rate of salaries for every employee of the Town of Easton.

President Cook asked for questions or comments.

Mr. Engle asked for clarification regarding the \$5,000 increase.

Mr. Richardson clarified that it is not a bonus but a salary increase.

Officer Joey Schinault, Talbot County FOP President, discussed pay increases and statistics for the Easton Police Department. He stated this makes EPD competitive while retaining high level officers. Officer Schinault stated that they need to stay competitive with surrounding agencies. On behalf of members of Talbot FOP, Ordinance No. 785 needs to be passed. He stated that they appreciate the increase in salaries.

Rev. Davis stated that it is continuing with expectations on everyone. He stated we have the best officers in Easton. He stated that the council is committed.

Mr. Engle stated that we give the best of what we have.

At 7:04 p.m., President Cook closed the Public Hearing.

Ordinance No. 785, "AN ORDINANCE OF THE TOWN OF EASTON ESTABLISHING THE TOWN BUDGET FOR FISCAL YEAR 2023."

Upon motion by Mr. Engle seconded by Mr. Abbatiello and carried unanimously, Ordinance No. 785, was approved.

Ordinance No. 786, "AN ORDINANCE OF THE TOWN OF EASTON TO CARRY FORWARD CERTAIN CAPITAL FUND EXPENDITURES INTO FISCAL YEAR 2023."

Mr. Richardson stated that this Ordinance of carry forwards represents bond projects and ARPA projects with a total of 7.8 million dollars.
President Cook asked for comments. There were none.
At 7:03 p.m., President Cook closed the Public Hearing.

Upon motion by Mr. Engle seconded by Mr. Silverstein and carried unanimously, Ordinance No. 786 was approved.

Ordinance No. 787, "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, 2022 AND ENDING JUNE 30, 2023."

At 7:04 p.m., President Cook brought Ordinance No. 787 to the floor.

Upon motion by Mr. Silverstein, seconded by Mr. Engle and carried unanimously, Ordinance No. 787 was approved following a roll call vote.

Ordinance No. 788, "AN ORDINANCE OF THE TOWN OF EASTON REPEALING AND REENACTING THE IMPACT FEE SCHEDULE."

Town Manager Mr. Richardson stated that Ordinance No. 788 is eligible for a vote and intended to go into effect with the rest of the budget. President Cook stated it could be acted on. She asked for audience comments. There were none.

Upon motion by Mr. Abbatiello, seconded by Mr. Silverstein and carried unanimously, Ordinance No. 788, was approved.

Review of Invoices.

Invoices from 5/4/22 - 5/25/22 totaling \$986,568.89.

Upon motion by Mr. Silverstein, seconded by Mr. Engle and carried unanimously, invoices totaling \$986,568.89 were approved.

Public Participation/Comments.

There were no audience comments.

Items by Members of the Council:

Mr. Abbatiello stated he hopes this is the last time the sidewalks on Elliott Road have to be carried forward.

Mr. Abbatiello thanked EVFD and EPD for their efforts and working together with the fire on Aurora Street and the ammonia leak at Sea Watch.

Mr. Engle thanked the council and staff for this year's budget. He stated that this budget is something to be proud of.

Rev. Davis, concurred with Mr. Abbatiello with the efforts of the Fire Department and EPD. He stated he is grateful that we have raised the consciousness of the employees to look at what is going on in the town of Easton.

President Cook, echoed comments regarding the budget and asked everyone to be mindful of the children with school not in session.

Adjournment.

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

Respectfully submitted,

Kathy M. Ruf, Town Clerk