



Town Council MEETING MINUTES

Monday, November 7, 2022 - 5:30 PM
Council Chambers, Easton Town Office
14 S Harrison Street

5:00 PM Police Board.

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, Chief Alan Lowery and Town Clerk Mrs. Kathy M. Ruf.

At 5:00 p.m., Chief Lowery introduced himself to the listening audience. He stated he submitted to the Mayor and Council the Police Report which covers July thru September. Chief Lowery stated his department is being aggressive in seeking grants and has been awarded \$67,000 in this quarter. He stated they are continuing to apply for additional grants beyond highway safety and DUI grants. Chief Lowery stated that their operational strength is now down to 40. He discussed the six vacancies and stated another officer is transferring to Talbot County Sheriff's Department. Chief Lowery discussed the problems of finding qualified candidates. He stated there are currently three candidates in the background process with no guarantees everyone will make it through the Academy. Mayor Willey questioned the main reason for the elimination of applicants. Chief Lowery stated it is usually the mandatory question regarding essential drugs or the remarks from their references.

Rev. Davis asked what the plan is for the six officers to fill the void in the police department. He stated they have \$77,000 for recruiting and they plan to heavily invest in social media as well as targeting events. He stated the town is keeping the department competitive on the salary side. Chief Lowery stated they are instituting an internship in CIS. He stated they are planning a kickoff for a citizen police academy. He discussed benefits offered by the Town of Easton.

He stated that the overall cost for programs to train incoming officers is \$23,000. He stated they can cover cost thru existing vacancies due to the unpaid salaries sitting in the budget.

Mr. Silverstein asked if there will be more overtime? Chief Lowery stated they are recouping costs through special events.

Mr. Engle asked if there is a potential to pick up internships so they can see how the department works.

Chief feels very comfortable that they are covering their responsibilities.

President Cook asked about the question on the ballot regarding marijuana use. Chief Lowery stated that past mistakes are not always a deal killer.

Mr. Abbatiello discussed a criminal justice class in high school in Wicomico County. He stated he was not aware of any on the criminal justice side.

Chief Lowery stated it doesn't help now because you have to be 20 1/2 years old.

Chief Lowery stated logistically, everyone is sharing the load with being short. He stated that calls are up for service and the officers are used to the 2019 figures due to the pandemic. he stated that officers are out there re-engaging in the job of being a police officer.

Chief Lowery asked for questions.

Rev. Davis thanked Chief Lowery for his report.

The Police Board meeting adjourned at 5:26 p.m.

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

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

Opening remarks and Pledge of Allegiance by Councilmember Silverstein.

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

Approval of Minutes.

Meeting minutes from 10/17/22.

Upon motion by Mr. Silverstein, seconded by Mr. Abbatiello and carried unanimously, the minutes of the October 17, 2022 meetings were approved as written.

Municipal Official Items.

Items from Mayor Willey.

Mayor Willey stated that Norris E. Taylor Drive off Route 50 has been installed.

Mayor Willey stated that the demo work at Easton Point has commenced.

He stated that the Meintzer property to tie into the rails-to-trails is taking shape.

Items from the Town Manager.

Mr. Richardson stated that he has nothing for the agenda this evening.

Items from the Town Attorney.

The Town Attorney, Mrs. VanEmburch reminded those present that the re-districting workshop is scheduled for 4:45 p.m., November 21.

Presentations.

Mr. Don Bibb, Executive Director, Housing Commission of Talbot County and Pennrose to discuss Doverbrook project and request ARPA Funding.

Pat Bateman, Pennrose and Mr. Bibb had a presentation regarding the Doverbrook re-development. Mr. Pennrose stated there is a need for additional funding. He stated they are ready to close and start construction. He stated they are working hard to mitigate the shortfall due to interest rates. Mr. Bateman stated they are present to request additional funding. He displayed a rendering of the project. Mr. Bateman discussed who is working on the project as well as additional challenges in the economic climate. He stated that everyone is familiar with the site as it is on a major road in the town of Easton. Mr. Bateman stated that it is in a highly visible area. He highlighted the importance of the project. Mr. Bateman stated that the buildings are aging and there are concerns caused by time. An innovative HUD project, converted from public housing to Section 8, with a total of 64 units. There will be a community building addition with a multi-purpose room for residents.

Mr. Bateman discussed the benefits to the Town of Easton. He stated that the project increases workforce housing in the Town of Easton. He stated that it is now a 14 million dollar construction project, total 21 million and they plan to utilize 9% tax credit. Site constraints were discussed. There will be a total of 64 units. They have gone thru BOZA.

Mr. Bateman stated there is a 1% vacancy rate with a 5 year waiting list for available units. He stated that construction costs are up a million dollars and the interest rates are rising, which causes a 2.6 million dollar budget issue.

Mr. Bateman discussed funding opportunities and the Town waiving permit fees as well as the Affordable Housing funds, and ARPA funding.

Patrick Stewart, Regional VP, Pennrose, stated they are not taking this lightly and he is available to help clarify the request.

Mr. Silverstein discussed current rents.

Mr. Bibb stated the rents are 30% of household income. He stated that the market rates in the Town are 1200 to 1300 dollars.

Mr. Bibb stated the current tenants are offered first right of refusal.

Mr. Engle asked if they are considered affordable housing.

Mr. Engle asked if the county is contributing. Mr. Bibb stated they have also requested funding from the county and will go before them on November 22.

Mr. Bibb stated there are approximately 9 vacancies.

Mr. Bibb stated the most descriptive is attainable housing.

Mayor Willey asked if the houses at West and Port are full. Mr. Bibb stated they are not.

President Cook asked about state funding. Mr. Stewart stated that the state committed \$2 million.

Mr. Bibb stated they have hired a professional re-location specialist. He stated there have identified 5 complexes interested in helping.

Rev. Davis asked if the children would have to be moved into different school systems.

Mr. Silverstein asked what the alternative is if the funding is not committed.

Mr. Silverstein stated the council should actively consider taking a million of the ARPA funding.

Mr. Abbatiello discussed the tax credits and energy costs as well as the contractor.

President Cook thanked Mr. Pennrose and Mr. Bibb and stated there is a lot to discuss.

Ms. Carolyn Jaffe to present the plan for First Night Talbot.

Ms. Holly DeKarske, EEDC Executive Director was present on behalf of Carolyn Jaffe and read a statement regarding the New Year's Eve events.

Ms. DeKarske stated they will request for permit at a following meeting.

Public Participation/Comments.

There was none.

Items by Members of the Council:

Mr. Silverstein thanked those motorists that stop at crosswalks for pedestrians and bikers.

Mr. Abbatiello urged everyone to get out and vote tomorrow.

Mr. Engle asked the listening audience to please vote tomorrow.

Rev. Davis stated the upcoming weekend is the Waterfowl Festival. He asked that everyone have a good time in the community and be safe.

Review of Invoices.

Invoices from 10/5 - 10/26 totaling \$1,518,637.52.

Upon motion by Mr. Abbatiello, seconded by Mr. Engle and carried unanimously, invoices totaling \$1,518,637.52 were approved.

Closed Session: General Provisions Article 3-305(b) (3) to consider the acquisition of real property for a public purpose and matters directly related thereto; and (4) to consider a matter that concerns the proposal for a business or industrial organization to locate, expand, or remain in the State.

At 6:29 p.m., upon motion from Mr. Silverstein, seconded by Rev. Davis and carried unanimously, President Cook convened into Closed Session for General Provisions 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.

At 6:51 p.m., upon motion by Mr. Silverstein, seconded by Mr. Engle and carried unanimously, President Cook adjourned the closed session and re-convened into Open Session.

Adjournment.

At 6:52 p.m., upon motion by Mr. Silverstein, seconded by Rev. Davis and carried unanimously, President Cook adjourned the regularly scheduled meeting.

Respectfully submitted,

Kathy M. Ruf, Town Clerk