

**TOWN OF ELSMERE
COUNCIL & FINANCE COMMITTEE MEETING MINUTES
June 8, 2023
6:30 p.m.**

CALL TO ORDER: Mayor Eric Thompson called the meeting to order at 5:00 p.m.

PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE:

MOMENT OF SILENCE:

ROLL CALL:

MAYOR	ERIC SCOTT THOMPSON	PRESENT
1 ST DISTRICT	MARIANNE SKIPSKI	ABSENT/EXCUSED
2 ND DISTRICT	SALLY JENSEN	PRESENT
3 RD DISTRICT	MARY STEPPI	PRESENT
4 TH DISTRICT	VACANT	
5 TH DISTRICT	JOANN I. PERSONTI	PRESENT
6 TH DISTRICT	DAWN DIBIASO	ABSENT

Town Solicitor, James McMackin – Present
Chief of Police, Laura Giles – Present
Town Manager, Steven Martin – Present

Finance Committee Paul Chalfant – Absent
Finance Committee Ronald Russo – Present
Finance Committee Steveni Keeley - Present

PUBLIC COMMENT: None

SWEARING IN:

At this time Mr. Charles McKewen was sworn into office as 4th District Councilman and joined the council for the meeting.

APPROVAL OF MINUTES:

Minutes of the May 8, 2023, Special Council Meeting

ACTION: A motion was made by Councilwoman Jensen to approve the minutes of the May 8, 2023, Special Council Meeting with no corrections. The motion was seconded by Councilwoman Personti.

VOTE: 5-0 with 2 Absent All-in-Favor Motion Carried

Minutes of the May 11, 2023, Council Meeting

ACTION: A motion was made by Councilwoman Jensen to approve the minutes of the May 11, 2023, Special Council Meeting with no corrections. The motion was seconded by Councilwoman Personti.

VOTE: 5-0 with 2 Absent All-in-Favor Motion Carried

OLD BUSINESS: None

NEW BUSINESS:

The Mayor, Council and Finance Committee will review, discuss and consider approving the Fiscal Year 2023 – 2024 Revenue, Operating and Capital Improvement Budgets.

Town Manager Steven Martin gave a brief overview of the proposed Revenue, Operating and Capital Improvement Budgets:

1. The proposed budget has a surplus of \$35,601.81 available to be allocated to expenses.
2. This budget has a proposed property tax increase of \$150.00 per base unit which results in \$335,400.00 in additional revenue. This is the first tax increase proposed since 2017 (6-years).
3. This budget includes a performance-based increase for all non-police employees of up to 3%.
4. This budget includes a proposed pay scale amendment for the Department of Public Safety.
5. This budget continues to fund the Town's various public events (weather permitting).
6. This budget continues to fund the long-term planning line items which help off-set large costs.
7. This budget absorbs the significant increase of \$73,936.00 to the Trash, Recycle and Yard Waste Contract with Republic Services.
8. This budget accounts for the additional auditing services needed for our Federal Awards such as ARPA and DOJ Grants.
9. This budget does not include any proposed capital expenditures.
10. This budget proposes eliminating the previously approved part-time position in the Public Works Department that we have been unable to find a suitable candidate to fill. In addition, it accommodates a number of known and anticipated personnel changes.

In addition, after submitting the budget, we considered raising taxes using a different calculation based on raising the rate charged on the assessed value of a property versus an increase on the base tax rate. Therefore, we are requesting to consider an amended version of Resolution 23-02 to change the tax rates as follows:

1. Setting the residential property tax rate for the 2023 – 2024 fiscal year at \$1.125 per \$100.00 of assessed value + \$447.95 per unit
2. Setting the commercial property tax rate for the 2023 – 2024 fiscal year at \$1.45 per \$100.00 of assessed value + \$447.95 per unit

3. Any unimproved parcel within the Town which has an assessed value of \$12,000.00 or less shall be taxed at a rate of \$1.125 per \$100.00 of assessed value, plus \$10.36 per parcel.
4. any unimproved parcel within the Town which has an assessed value of greater than \$12,000.00 shall be taxed at a rate of \$1.125 per \$100.00 of assessed value, plus \$77.74 per parcel.

This would result in approximately \$305,493.00 in additional revenue and would change the bottom line of the proposed budget by giving the Town a surplus of \$5,694.81 available to be allocated for additional expenses.

Councilwoman Steppi stated that she wholeheartedly supports the proposed amendments to Resolution 23-02 setting the tax rates. She believes that amending the rate charged by the assessed value of each property affects residents more fairly than based on the value of their homes.

Councilwoman DiBiaso arrived and joined the meeting and discussion at 5:23pm.

Chief Laura Giles presented her reasons for proposing an amended pay scale for the Department of Public Safety:

1. Violent Crimes within the Town of Elsmere have escalated since 2018. She gave a lengthy presentation of 34 crimes committed here in Elsmere.
2. A startling trend in the reported cases of sexual assault and child abuse cases. Many of these complaints cannot be discussed due to their sensitive nature; however, these cases have resulted in the arrest of numerous sexual predators and child abusers.
3. Since 2018, the department has executed over 200 search warrants.
4. From 2006 to 2019 (13 years) there were approximately 3 homicides that took place in Elsmere, two occurred at the Elsmere Skating Rink via gunshot wounds, the third was a Vehicular Homicide. From 2020 to date, there have been 3 homicides that have take place, which is three in a period of 4 years versus 13.
5. Salary comparisons for Police Departments across Delaware show that Elsmere's approved Pay Scale for Police Officers is the second lowest in the State. The Proposed Pay Scale will move the town to the middle of the pack.
6. When you look at departments across New Castle County the Officers vs Resident Ratio shows that Elsmere has the highest officer to resident ration in New Castle County
 - a. Elsmere – 12 Officers with a ratio of 519 residents per officer.
 - b. Middletown – 46 Officers with a ratio of 504 residents per officer.
 - c. New Castle City – 14 Officers with a ration of 397 residents per officer.
 - d. Newark – 72 Officers with a ratio of 425 residents per officer.
 - e. Newport – 5 Officers with a ratio of 182 residents per officer.
7. In conclusion this data is just a small portion of the dangerous crime trends that have forced their way into the Town of Elsmere over the past five years. The amount of violent crimes and weapons related crimes are on the rise as is the

number of homicides. To handle these crimes properly there needs to be a full allotment of officers on the streets. When people hear about violent crime has come to small towns like Elsmere and is affecting the lives of the citizens as well as the officers who are handling crimes.

Councilwoman Personti asked about the possibility of implementing the increases over a period of two years instead of all at once.

Councilwoman Steppi and Councilwoman DiBiasco both agreed with the possibility.

Chief Laura Giles stated that it would send a message to the officers that they and their safety is not the Town's priority.

At this time there was a lengthy debate regarding the pay scale and whether it could be amended, implemented incrementally, and any additional options. It was discussed that the proposed budget includes the costs of implementing the proposed pay scale increase for the department of Public Safety.

ACTION: A motion was made by Mayor Thompson to approve the FY 2023 – 2024 Revenue, Operating and Capital Budgets as submitted on May 15, 2023, with no changes.

The motion failed to receive a second.

At this time there was a consensus to amend the proposed budget by inserting the proposed revenue for Resolution 23-02 Amended in the amount of \$2,707,700.00. This leaves the final position of the Town as \$5,694.81 of revenue in excess of expenses.

ACTION: A motion was made by Mayor Thompson to approve the FY 2023 – 2024 Revenue, Operating and Capital Budgets as amended during this meeting. The motion was seconded by Councilwoman DiBiasco.

VOTE: 6-0 with 1 Absent All-in-Favor Motion Carried

Consideration of approving Resolution 23-02.

Mayor Thompson gave a brief overview of the proposed amended version of Resolution 23-02 setting the FY 2023 – 2024 Municipal Tax Rates.

1. Setting the residential property tax rate for the 2023 – 2024 fiscal year at \$1.125 per \$100.00 of assessed value + \$447.95 per unit
2. Setting the commercial property tax rate for the 2023 – 2024 fiscal year at \$1.45 per \$100.00 of assessed value + \$447.95 per unit.
3. Any unimproved parcel within the Town which has an assessed value of \$12,000.00 or less shall be taxed at a rate of \$1.125 per \$100.00 of assessed value, plus \$10.36 per parcel.
4. any unimproved parcel within the Town which has an assessed value of greater than \$12,000.00 shall be taxed at a rate of \$1.125 per \$100.00 of assessed value, plus \$77.74 per parcel.

ACTION: A motion was made by Mayor Thompson to approve Resolution 23-02 as amended. The motion was seconded by Councilwoman Steppi.

VOTE: 6-0 with 1 Absent All-in-Favor Motion Carried

Consideration of approving Resolution 23-03.

ACTION: A motion was made by Councilwoman Personti to approve Resolution 23-03 adopting the New Castle County property tax assessments. The motion was seconded by Councilwoman DiBiaso.

VOTE: 6-0 with 1 Absent All-in-Favor Motion Carried

Consideration of extending the Town's towing contract with First State Towing for a period of 3 years. If extended, the new contract would expire on June 30, 2026.

Chief Laura Giles stated that she supports this renewal.

ACTION: A motion was made by Councilwoman Personti to extend the Town's Towing Contract with First State Towing for a period of three years to expire on June 30, 2026. The motion was seconded by Councilman McKewen.

VOTE: 6-0 with 1 Absent All-in-Favor Motion Carried

Introduction for First and Second Reading of Ordinance 668.

Mayor Thompson stated that this ordinance is an ordinance amending the zoning map of the Town of Elsmere by rezoning the property known as 1 Spruce Avenue (Tax Parcel ID 19-004.00-010) from its existing zoning classification of R-1 Residential District to a zoning classification of CC Community Commercial District.

At this time there was a lengthy discussion concerning the proposed project where many expressed concerns regarding the condition of the Liquor Store which has been excluded from the proposed renovations and changes to the property stating that seeing the conditions of this property improve would go a long way with the community to gain their support of the proposed project.

ACTION: A motion was made by Mayor Thompson to approve Ordinance 668 for first and second reading. The motion was seconded by Councilman McKewen.

VOTE: 4-2 with 1 Absent Motion Carried

1st District – Absent, 2nd District – No, 3rd District – No, 4th District – Yes, 5th District – Yes, 6th District – Yes, Mayor – Yes

Introduction for First and Second Reading of Ordinance 669.

Mayor Thompson stated that this ordinance is an ordinance allowing the reverse subdivision of 7 property tax parcels into a single tax parcel.

ACTION: A motion was made by Councilwoman Personti to approve Ordinance 669 for first and second reading. The motion was seconded by Mayor Thompson.

VOTE: 4-2 with 1 Absent Motion Carried

1st District – Absent, 2nd District – No, 3rd District – No, 4th District – Yes, 5th District – Yes, 6th District – Yes, Mayor - Yes

DEPARTMENTAL REPORTS:

Code Enforcement

Code Enforcement Officer Scott Allen gave a brief overview of the Code Enforcement Report.

- The department issued 112 violations during the month, of those 55 were corrected without fines being issued, 37 received fines and 20 remained pending at the end of the month.
- Issued 8 Repeat Public Nuisance Violations, 2 of which were for 2nd or Subsequent Occurrences.
- Requested Public Works to perform 3 abatements as the result of a violation.
- Performed 17 Pre-Rental Inspections.
- Processed 24 permits.
- Issued 6 “In Town” business licenses, and 4 new “Out of Town” business licenses.
- Issued no new Rental License.
- Tagged 6 vehicles for Tow, 6 were removed without being towed, 1 was towed.

Finance

Town Manager Steven Martin gave a brief overview of the Finance Department Report.

- Transfer Taxes received for the month of April was \$26,775.00 which brings our Year-to-Date total to \$295,482.17.
- Receive a franchise tax payment of \$7,052.22 from Verizon.
- Was awarded \$1,000.00 from M & T Bank to help fund the Holiday Parade.
- Worked with EPD to obtain a grant for Vehicle Enhancement.
- Spent significant time preparing the annual budget.

Public Safety:

Chief Laura Giles gave a brief overview of public safety.

Public Works:

Maintenance Worker Thomas Harrison gave a brief overview of the Public Works report.

- The department is continuing to address potholes throughout Town.
- Installed 2 new handicapped parking spaces.
- Continued training on the Street Sweeper.

- Performed 5 abatements at the request of the Code Enforcement Department.
- Performed regular maintenance throughout Town.

Town Manager's Report

Town Manager Steven Martin gave a brief overview of his monthly report.

PUBLIC COMMENT: None

STATEMENTS BY THE MAYOR AND COUNCIL:

ADJOURNMENT:

ACTION: A motion was made by Mayor Thompson to adjourn. The motion was seconded by Councilwoman Personti.

VOTE: 6-0 with 1 Absent All-in-Favor Motion Carried

These minutes summarize the agenda and other issues discussed at this Council Meeting. Votes are recorded accurately. The audio recording of this meeting will be available at Town Hall for a period of two years from the date these minutes are approved. The audio recording may be reviewed at Town Hall by appointment and in accordance with the Freedom of Information Act.



**ERIC THOMPSON
MAYOR**



**SALLY JENSEN
SECRETARY**