

**TOWN OF ELSMERE
COUNCIL MEETING MINUTES
November 9, 2023
6:30 p.m.**

CALL TO ORDER: Mayor Eric Thompson called the meeting to order at 6:30 p.m.

PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE:

MOMENT OF SILENCE:

ROLL CALL:

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

Town Solicitor, James McMackin – Present
Chief of Police, Laura Giles – Present
Town Manager, Steven Martin – Present
Finance Director, Valarie Strzempa - Present

PUBLIC COMMENT: NONE

APPROVAL OF MINUTES:

Minutes of the October 12, 2023, Council Meeting.

ACTION: A motion was made by Councilwoman Personti to approve the minutes of the October 12, 2023, Council Meeting with no corrections. The motion was seconded by Councilman McKewen.

VOTE: 7-0 All-in-Favor Motion Carried

Old Business: NONE

New Business:

Consideration of approving the 2024 Holiday Schedule.

Councilwoman Sally Jensen asked that since we no longer have the Senior Center to use as a voting location, is it possible for the Department of Elections to consolidate the polling place to one location such as the Firehouse.

Town Manager Steve Martin stated he is not sure, but he can ask the Department of Elections if this is possible.

ACTION: A motion was made by Mayor Eric Thompson to approve the 2024 Holiday Schedule. The motion was seconded by Councilwoman Skipski.

VOTE: 7-0 All-in-Favor Motion Carried

Consideration of extending the Mobile Food Bank Distribution Events through December 2024.

Town Manager Steven Martin said that he has found the Mobile Food Drive to be a success which shows that there is a need for it in the Town. He stated there is still \$14,600 in funding for this and has spoken to the Food Bank and they have agreed to this amount.

ACTION: A motion was made by Councilwoman Jensen to approve the extension of the Mobile Food Bank Distribution Events through December 2024. The motion was seconded by Councilwoman Personti.

VOTE: 7-0 All-in-Favor Motion Carried

Introduction for First and Second reading of Ordinance 670:

An Ordinance updating the Town's fees for Rental Licenses.

Town Manager Steven Martin summarized the ordinance, stating that with the increased demand on the resources in the Code Enforcement Department with performing pre-rental inspections, these funds will offset the cost and has estimated the fiscal impact will be roughly \$50,500.

Councilwoman Steppi commented that she saw that there are over 500 rental properties which do not include commercial rentals or apartment complexes and since January, the Code Department has done 151 pre-rental inspections and there have been 27 new rental licenses this year so far in just 10 months. When reading the transfer reports each month, there are many LLC's. The last time the rental license fees were increased was in October of 2013. She came up with this idea and stated that this is not a fine, tax or deterred but rather an impact on investors that are making a profit which will cover the cost of the Code Administration.

ACTION: A motion was made by Councilwoman Steppi to approve Ordinance 670 as presented

for the First and Second Reading. The motion was seconded by Councilwoman Jensen, under the pretense that the additional revenue should be allocated towards the street repair program.

VOTE: 7-0 All-in-Favor Motion Carried

Consideration of approving the Elsmere Police Department's purchase of 2 new patrol vehicles.

Chief Laura Giles gave an overview of the need for the 2 new patrol vehicles. Chief referenced the 4 quotes given to Mayor and Council show the prices of a 2024 Ford F150 pick-up truck, a 2024 Chevy Tahoe, and 2023 Ford Explorers. The wear and tear on the 2017's is bad and idle time expires the warranties. The department hasn't bought any vehicles since 2019 and currently the wait time is anywhere from 6-9 months.

Councilman McKewen asked if they can be repaired.

Chief stated that the two vehicles she is looking to replace are 2017 models and they are not worth repair at this point.

Councilman McKewen stated he understands but this is a large sum of money.

Councilwoman Jensen asked when the pick-up truck was purchased.

Chief Giles replied it was purchased this year but it can only be used for certain funds and it was purchased through HSI.

Councilwoman Jensen asked if we give take home cars to officers.

Chief replied that only certain officers get a take home car and it is only under certain circumstances.

Councilwoman Jensen asked how many cars and how many officers we have.

Chief Giles replied that we have 10 cars and 10 officers, but currently, 2 vehicles are out of service.

Mayor Thompson asked that this year, there will be 3 new vehicles?

Chief Giles replied yes, but it seems every time they get a new vehicle, another one goes down and it is out of service.

Mayor Thompson asked why they were considering purchasing an F150 pick-up truck.

The Chief replied it can be used to pick up trash and many departments are trying them. They can be used for undercover uses and surveillance as well.

Town Solicitor Jim McMackin says that there are many grants that are able to assist.

The Chief replied she has explored all grants and was informed that the chances are low of any getting approved.

Mayor Thompson asked will it get used in a 1 square mile?

Chief Giles said that is not fair to say since with all the equipment that is required to be installed in police cars, sedans are just not suitable anymore. The upfit for police cars has increased and the only vehicles large enough to accommodate are Ford's, Tahoes, or pick-up trucks. The Wilmington Police Department informed her that they will not use Dodges and Ford's are always in the shop for repairs and have been a nightmare. What she is really asking for is the purchase of 2 new Tahoes.

Councilwoman Jensen asked why the administration and temporary tags are not included on some of the quotes.

Chief replied that is what was given to her.

Councilwoman Skipski asked for clarification, that what she is asking for is the purchase of 2 new 2024 Chevy Tahoe's?

Chief replied yes, and she provided the other quotes as a comparison. Chief Giles then advised that upfit for police cars is roughly \$10,000 but she intends to utilize whatever possible from the old cars to cut those costs. She has previously applied for grants to the upfit of new cars but the requirements are a tight timeline, but she intends to apply again.

Councilwoman Personti stated that she is not opposed to the purchase, but taking 2/3 from Long Term Planning is huge. She then asked if there was anywhere else to pull the funding from.

Town Manager Steve Martin stated he was not sure at this time.

Councilwoman Personti stated that just because the money is there, does that mean we have to spend it? The Councilwoman went on to express concern over the financial future of the Town since we already had to raise taxes.

Councilwoman Steppi stated that this will drain that entire line item.

Chief Giles says we have to.

Councilwoman Personti says she understands the need but would rather see the funding come from another line item.

Chief Giles explained that right now, she is up on her fines, she received the grant from Impact Life and is pulling in funds from the VAC.

Councilwoman Personti stated the VAC does not show a profit.

Chief Giles stated you can see it where we have already paid the salary of the administration for it.

Town Manager Steve Martin said he will need to dive deep into the budget and analyze where the funding could come from.

Councilwoman Personti asked could Council approve one car now and one later?

Chief Giles said yes but it could take a year for the vehicle to come in.

Town Manager Steve Martin stated that the rental income from Impact Life of nearly \$60,000 by June to fund one car is a quick way to fund this.

Mayor Thompson says no one has ever been allowed take home cars, in fact he recalls the Council being asked and the answer was no.

Chief Giles said she finds it to be beneficial to some officers.

Councilwoman Personti said that in 2009, a resolution was passed to not allow take home cars.

Councilwoman Jensen says she sees this as a perk, but why do the vehicles run nonstop?

Chief replied that the computer times out if not on, all the other equipment must be on, weather can affect it for air conditioning and heat.

Councilwoman Jensen asked if we need a department that is entirely stealth?

Chief replied that in one square mile, it does not affect response times and forces people to take a second look which can stop crimes.

Councilwoman Jensen stated she would like for people to see marked cars.

Chief Giles stated that not all people can see Council but know they are there.

Councilwoman Jensen said that stealth is great but maybe just not all of them.

ACTION: A motion was made by Mayor Thompson to approve the Elsmere Police Department's purchase of two 2024 Chevy Tahoe's. The motion was seconded by Councilwoman Skipski.

VOTE: 5-2 Motion Carried

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

Discussion regarding cost sharing trash services at the 4 apartment complexes within the Town.

Town Manager Steve Martin gave a brief update on the cost sharing of trash services between the apartment complexes, stating that Manchester and Maple Walk Apartments both have agreed to 50% cost sharing for the first year. Parklynn was still pending and reviewing their options. Greenbrier has stated that they once had a gentlemen's agreement with a previous Town Manager that trash services would be provided by the Town, however Steve realizes this is not valid and plans to move forward with giving the complex their options. There will be another meeting on November 15, 2023, and he will send a calendar invite to those Council members involved in the meetings. Town Manager Steve Martin also stated that Dominick will get back to

him if an amended contract from Republic Services is needed and he will have all responses before the November 15th meeting.

DEPARTMENTAL REPORTS:

Code Enforcement

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

- The department issued 83 violations during the month, of those, 36 were corrected without fines being issued, 44 received fines and 3 remained pending at the end of the month.
- Issued 7 Repeat Public Nuisance Violations, 5 of which were for 2nd or Subsequent Occurrences.
- Currently have 11 vacant properties on file.
- Requested Public Works to perform 4 abatements as the result of violations.
- Performed 18 Pre-Rental Inspections.
- Processed 19 permits.
- Issued 1 new “In Town” business licenses.
- Issued 8 new “Out of Town” business licenses.
- Issued 10 new Rental Licenses.
- Tagged 4 vehicles for Tow, all were removed without being towed.
- Community Liquor has completed remediation of all the citations issued.
- Councilwoman Jensen asked about 900 Kirkwood Highway being partially commercial and partially residential and if the commercial portion would need a trash service of their own.
- Councilwoman Skipski asked about Nuisance Property 206 Rosemont and that she noticed it has been placed on the New Castle County Sheriff Sale list.

Finance Department

Finance Director Valarie Strzempa gave a brief overview of the Finance Department Report.

- Continued collection of delinquent taxes for the month and took in \$128,384.58 and one-time 6% penalty was applied to all delinquent accounts which went into effect as of 10/18/2023.
- Collected \$26,364.75 in transfer taxes.
- Processed payments for Code Enforcement License Renewals.
- There are 3 properties going to Sheriff Sale:
 - 1 Oak Avenue, sold at Sheriff Sale during the month of October.
 - 16 Tamarack Avenue, tax balance and corresponding late fees were paid which has brought the account back into good standing and was removed from Sheriff Sale list.
 - 7 Beech Avenue, the only property that remains on the list.
- Audit preparation was completed in anticipation of the Auditors reporting to the office as

of 11/1/2023.

- Performed Final End of Year Routine/Closing in the accounting software (Edmunds).
- Prepared annual Employee Longevity pay and Police Holiday pay for pay date of 11/3/2023.
- Received \$5,000.00 from Doncaster Funds for the Fall Festival.
- Received \$1,000.00 from M&T for Town Events Donation.
- Performed accounting record grant close-out for multiple Highway Safety Grants and Combat Violent Crime.

Public Safety

Chief Laura Giles gave a brief overview of Public Safety.

- Chief Giles stated that the contractors finished installing the gate to the parking lot of the police station but that the electrician needs to come back so that the gate can open and shut automatically.
- Councilwoman Jensen questioned the type of fence installed, stating she thought it would be a split rail style with vertical bars rather than the vinyl privacy style.
- Chief Giles replied that style isn't very secure and she is looking into slats to install in the gate for added security.
- Chief Giles stated that the publicized trial for the homicide at Metro PCS should be wrapping up sometime next week and the attorney general is extremely happy with Detective Sowden's investigation.
- Chief Giles also recognized Detective Sowden's work on getting the very first conviction of forced labor of a juvenile.
- Due to Detective Sowden's diligent work, Chief Giles has put him in for Crime Stoppers Officer of the Year Award which will be selected on December 1st
- Chief Giles is also hoping to have a better update on the homicide in Silverbrook Gardens soon.
- Councilwoman Skipski said she received a call from a resident on Sycamore Avenue complaining of too many handicap spaces in front of her home.
- Chief Giles stated that as long as they have a hard plate and are deemed necessary by a doctor, she cannot deny them the space.
- Chief Giles also stated she firmly believes we need to get out of issuing handicap spaces due to the potential liability and having to determine who is more handicapped than the other. This could turn ugly and this is not our fight, she is not sure what the solution is but ADA parking is not the answer for our parking situation being as congested as it is. Our streets look like a circus due to the different color curbs around Town and it is out of hand, she thinks the streets are public parking and she should not be issuing handicapped tags. Now that people know how to get them and see them being installed, she is being inundated with requests.

Public Works

Public Works Supervisor Anthony Gaines gave a brief overview of Public Works.

- New Hire Anthony Disanto was hired and started November 6, 2023.
- Attended Public Works Safety meeting for Delaware.
- Attended Chainsaw training.
- Attended driver's training.
- The table in Brian Martin Park has been bent again for the second time and Council has requested it to be permanently removed at this point.
- Councilwoman Steppi asked why we are still Halo Silling Town Hall and if we are still buying the supplies.
- Public Works Supervisor Anthony Gaines replied that the supplies are from our existing inventory.

Town Manager

Town Manager Steven Martin gave a brief overview:

- Town Manager Steven Martin stated that KCI is continuing to work on the design phase and construction documents for Vilone Village and Vilone Park. We should receive the report any day.
- Town Manager Steve Martin stated he attended the weekly FEMA Grant Application and Development Training and information session and said this is a national grant that is competitive, but we have the help of University of Delaware, DEMA and our KCI Stormwater Study being completed is extremely beneficial.
- Town Manager Steven Martin stated he attended an informational session regarding the EECBG Grant and learned there is technical assistance and equipment rebate vouchers needed to complete the application.
- The Ansul System above the new stove in the kitchen downstairs is complete.
- Received approval from Town Solicitor to execute the contract with Ferris Home Improvements for construction of the ADA bathroom downstairs.
- New Castle County along with their subcontractor (Richard's Paving) has already begun repair of the streets and the 200 block of Filbert Avenue, 31-33 Spruce Avenue, 1103 Matti and 118 Washington are already completed.
- We are still waiting for Vandermark and Lynch for the engineering of the 5 year street program.
- Received permission from 301 Osborne homeowner and have developed an Easement agreement for Town Solicitor Jim McMackin to review.
- Town Manager Steven Martin stated he attended a meeting at the Firehouse regarding the Holiday Parade and has requested the Show-Mobile from New Castle County. Councilman Toole has waived the fee. We intend to send him a thank you card for his gratitude.
- We have been discussing the concept of creating a new website since ours is outdated and extremely difficult to work with. We have no technical support to call if there is an issue.
- Town Manager Steven Martin stated that the Town's staff worked all month on the Fall Festival event. Rachel and Scott did a wonderful job organizing the event. As well as the Spooktacular event which was as well attended as it could be due to the amount of trunk or treat events happening throughout Town on the same night.

- Town Manager Steven Martin also reported the following staffing changes:
 1. Scott Allen has been elevated to Administrative Assistant to the Town Manager. He has also agreed to split his time with the Code Department until that vacancy is filled.
 2. Valarie Strzempa has been elevated to Finance Director.
 3. We hired a new Public Works employee Anthony Disanto who started just this week.
 4. Rachel Ritter will be transitioning to an Account Clerk in the Finance Department and her replacement will be Mrs. Katherine Pierce who was one of the top applicants for the Administrative position.
- With these changes, 90% of the vacancies are filled with the exception of the Code Department.

PUBLIC COMMENT:

John Jaremchuk of 301 Southern Road asked Councilwoman Personti if she recalls why they banned police cars being taken home. Councilwoman Personti replied yes, it was because the chief at that time was taking advantage. Mr. Jaremchuk confirmed and stated that he believes this would be interfering with daily operations and the Charter clearly states that daily operations should not be interfered with and the Charter trumps all resolutions. He believes that resolution is not enforceable to police. Mayor Eric Thompson referred to Town Solicitor Jim McMackin for advice. Solicitor McMackin stated he believes this would not be interference with daily operations but more like a term of hire and this resolution is up for rewriting. Councilwoman Personti identified the resolution as Resolution 09-07.

STATEMENTS BY THE MAYOR AND COUNCIL:

Councilwoman Steppi spoke about the recent installation of the 3 bricks in Veteran's Memorial Park. She expressed how nice they look and how she went and took pictures. While admiring the bricks, she began thinking that something was missing and she needed more. She explained how she went back to the families of the Veterans whose names are on the bricks that were installed and asked for their stories and background of their time in the military and roots to the Town of Elsmere. At this time, Councilwoman Steppi read the brief biographies given to her of USMC Veteran George B. Giles, USMC Veteran Butch Franklin, and US Navy Veteran William Joyce. Once she concluded reading, she stated that since Veteran's Day was this weekend, she would be remiss if she did not acknowledge the veterans in the room tonight. Councilwoman Steppi asked all veterans to please stand at which point a round of applause and gratitude was shown towards Councilman McKewen, Mr. John Jaremchuk, and Public Works Supervisor Anthony Gaines.

Councilwoman Personti thanked everyone for the Spooktacular Event.

ADJOURNMENT:

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

VOTE: 7-0 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