

**TOWN OF ELSMERE
COUNCIL MEETING MINUTES
January 11, 2024
6:30 p.m.**

CALL TO ORDER: Mayor 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 - Absent

PUBLIC COMMENT:

Jennifer Faust of 7 Locust Avenue stated she is concerned about speeding, trash, debris, littering up and down her street. She believes the Town is turning into a “ghetto” and wants to know what is being done. Chief Giles explained that she spoke to Ms. Faust a few weeks ago and sent police officers out to the area and pulled over 5 speeders and they were all residents of the neighborhood, she plans to have the officers sit out there periodically. Ms. Faust went on to state the trash everywhere is embarrassing. Councilwoman Steppi agreed and said she is making it her mission to have the businesses and DART clean the trash to stop it from blowing around. Councilwoman Steppi said she has already reached out to DART to have the trash cans in front of Season’s at the bus stops removed. Ms. Faust stated she believes most of the trash is a result of the clientele entering and exiting the smoke shop next to Season’s. Town Manager Steven Martin asked if the trash is blowing down her street to which Ms. Faust confirmed that yes, it is. Ms. Faust also complained about the large group of teenagers around the Wawa, especially during the summer. She stated she has witnessed a group of roughly 30 kids blocking the street and the parents need to be held accountable. Chief Giles stated they are aware of the group and unfortunately, they are allowed to be out. The police have responded and there is really no crime

they are committing. As unfortunate as it is, this is society today and they have no fear of the police. Mayor Thompson stated that perhaps it is time to have a conversation with the property owners around the businesses to inform them of the trash being their responsibility and putting more trash cans in front of the stores. Councilwoman Steppi suggested placing another speed limit sign out that is better placed at the top of the street on Locust. There was a brief conversation discussing the legality of the teenagers loitering.

Joe Pennington of 1015 Baltimore Avenue stated he agrees that speeders are an issue throughout Town. However, he wanted to bring to the Council's attention the parking issues in the alleyways, specifically the deeded spots. Mr. Pennington is frustrated with spot dimensions, locations and the neighbors who block spaces, knowingly (or unknowingly) take deeded spaces. The location of his home prevents him from parking in his deeded space due to the trash cans, other vehicles that are parked, some are unregistered and how the spaces are perpendicular. Mayor Thompson stated that unfortunately, we cannot change deeded spaces. Councilwoman Steppi clarified that he is referencing D Alley. Mr. Pennington confirmed. Chief Giles added that when police respond to parking issues, they cannot pinpoint by inch where the parking lines begin and end according to a survey unless there are stakes or paved out. She referenced another resident who installed a paved area with a bar which only allowed his vehicle to use. Mr. Pennington stated most residents do not know where their deeded parking space is located. Chief Giles added that wherever your deeded space is, get it surveyed out with stakes and provide it to the Police Department. Mr. Pennington also asked if better enforcement can be done on the vehicles that do not move for months. He is frustrated due to not being able to park while coming home from a nightshift. Mr. Pennington questioned the amount of out of state license plates and them having to register it in the state. Chief Giles stated yes, they are supposed to register but too often they find that it could be a friend visiting or something to that effect. Mr. Pennington added that most of the landlords do not know where their deeded spaces are to provide it to tenants, so renters just park anywhere, often taking other residents spaces.

APPROVAL OF MINUTES:

Minutes of the December 14, 2023, Council Meeting.

ACTION: A motion was made by Councilwoman Skipski to approve the minutes of the December 14, 2023, Council Meeting with no corrections. The motion was seconded by Councilwoman Personti.

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

Old Business: NONE

New Business:

Consideration of a change to the Senior Disability discount to remove the Police and Fire Pension from being exempt.

Town Manager Steven Martin requested this item be tabled on the agenda until next month to provide further information to the Mayor and Council.

ACTION: NO ACTION

Consideration of issuing an RFP for landscaping, median maintenance, and design.

Town Manager Steven Martin stated this is for the upcoming grass cutting season and since it is January, it is time to begin the process of sending out bids. This would put us on schedule for a yearly contract instead of fiscal.

ACTION: NO ACTION

Consideration of approving the 2024 Event Calendar.

Town Manager Steven Martin presented and summarized the events, which include the Food Drive dates. He further explained that some of the events have been moved slightly to not conflict with other events that same weekend, such as the Fall Festival conflicting with New Castle County's Sleeping Under the Stars and Delaware City Day.

Councilwoman Personti asked if we can add an event in the summer, like a Movies in the Park.

Councilwoman Steppi suggested a Community Night with food trucks and a movie, held here at Town Hall.

Town Manager Steven Martin suggested choosing a date for the event.

A brief discussion was held regarding the Fall Festival date being moved to the last weekend in September.

Councilwoman Personti suggested June 22, 2024, for the Movies in the Park/Community Night.

ACTION: A motion was made by Mayor Thompson to approve the 2024 Event Calendar with the addition of the Movies in the Park/Community Night for June 22, 2024. The motion was seconded by Councilwomen Personti and Skipski.

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

DEPARTMENTAL REPORTS:

Code Enforcement

Code Enforcement Officer Nicole Facciolo gave a brief overview of the Code Enforcement Report.

- The department issued 70 violations during the month, of those, 42 were corrected without fines being issued, 24 received fines and 4 remained pending at the end of the month.
- Issued 5 Repeat Public Nuisance Violations, all of which were for 2nd or Subsequent Occurrences.
- Currently have 11 vacant properties on file.
- Requested Public Works to perform 2 abatements as the result of violations.
- Performed 17 Pre-Rental Inspections.
- Processed 25 permits.
- Issued 1 new “In Town” business licenses.
- Issued 7 new “Out of Town” business licenses.
- Issued 14 new Rental Licenses of those 11 were only change of ownership.
- Tagged 2 vehicles for Tow, both were removed without being towed.
- Councilwoman Steppi asked if the 1 new in Town business license was retail or home occupation?
- Code Officer Nicole Facciolo replied that she needs to confirm since she is not always the person processing those, but she believes it was retail of some nature.
- Councilwoman Jensen asked if there is a way to show the addresses and type of violations, permits, ect. that each property receives.

Finance Department

Town Manager Steven Martin gave a brief overview of the Finance Department Report in Finance Director Valarie Strzempa’s absence:

- Continued collection of delinquent taxes. The Finance Department ran an aging receivables report as it relates to tax liens, and at 6 months into the year, this showed the receivables at \$69,000 and a tax lien aging receivable of \$38,000. Next month they plan to run a comparison to see if they are better or worse than the previous year regarding receivables.
 - Total taxes received during the month: \$6,043.02.
 - Total penalties and interest received during the month: \$514.89.
 - The department started account review/preparation of delinquent tax notices at the end of our 2nd quarter (12/31/23) in anticipation of mailing January 2024.
- Collected \$34,261.50 in Transfer Taxes.
- Town of Elsmere Sheriff Sale Properties
 - 16 Tamarack Avenue, this is a Fannie May property, which is a Federal

Government based entity and to date the tax balance is \$6,633 and is continuing to accrue fines. Safe Properties manages all Fannie May properties, and they contacted them and have established a point of contact moving forward.

- 206 Rosemont Drive, mortgage company redeemed the property, and they were able to contact PNC and establish a point of contact with them as well.
- 7 Beech Avenue
- Audit Presentation will be in the month of February at the regular Council meeting.
- HERA Registry (Abandoned Property Revitalization) revenue received during the month \$4,600.00.
 - October 2023 total \$800.00.
 - November 2023 total \$3,600.00.
- Continued working with the Auditors while in the office this month.
 - Pulled necessary paperwork and produced numerous reports as requested to control the Auditors' time spent and overall costs associated.
- The department has continued to support the Voluntary Assessment Center (VAC) during the employee credentialing period and process necessary paperwork/tasks to complete DELJIS/CJIS access for the VAC.
- Grant Management, record close out/awarded grant budget and audit file preparation, in addition to performing continual maintenance/permanent file updates of our records.
- State of Delaware Police Pension contribution received \$45,193.85.
- Attended Edmunds GovTech End of Year Webinar
- Attended the Quarterly Pension Committee Meeting
- Authorized Funds transferred to First State Trust for the payment of fees relative to the original police pension plan.
- Councilwoman Steppi added that she contacted the Finance Director and Town Manager regarding line items for Impact Life, questioning why the line item was at zero.
- Town Manager Steven Martin replied that the income is received on a quarterly basis. Regarding the \$800 utility bill which was estimated by the realtor and then put in the lease, but when the grant was executed, the CJC changed that to \$500 and they will be amending the lease to reflect the income.
- Councilwoman Steppi clarified that the money is not coming directly from Impact Life, but rather the grant.
- Town Manager Steve Martin replied yes, and therefore, there will always be a lag on the revenue received.
- Councilwoman Steppi questioned the refund status of the Doncaster donation to the Elsmere Fire Company for the parade being cancelled.
- Town Manager Steven Martin replied that they have requested the refund and have not yet received it back.
- Councilwoman Steppi asked if it is possible to break the transfer fee projection?
- Town Manager Steven Martin replied he believes it is possible since the market has not slowed.

Public Safety

Chief Laura Giles gave a brief overview of Public Safety:

- Chief Giles stated that they had their third homicide at the end of the year. The investigation is slow, but Detective Sowden is making strides.
- Submitted for reverted funding for tasers and received \$15,000 for 4 new tasers, which covers 5-year maintenance and cartridges for qualifications. She was advised to submit again in February or March for additional tasers. Hopefully there will be 12 new tasers by the end of the year.
- Councilwoman Steppi thanked Chief Giles for the response to Locust Avenue.

Public Works

Public Works Supervisor Anthony Gaines gave a brief overview:

- Fully staffed now and training the new hires on catch basin inspections and plowing.
- Concentrating on filling potholes and trash pickup.
- Councilwoman Steppi stated she noticed the catch basins are clear and function properly and thanked Public Works for working to keep these clear.
- For the recent inclement weather, the department responded to multiple fallen trees and debris cleanup across Town.
- Resident Jennifer Faust asked about a low hanging wire on Locust Avenue.
- Both Mayor Thompson and Anthony Gaines replied that there is nothing that can be done since they are managed by the utility companies and to report all wire hazards to Delmarva.
- There was a brief discussion about fallen trees and the near miss of damage to houses.
- Councilwoman Jensen asked about the trash can at Brian Martin Park and it being removed. Anthony Gaines replied that it was set on fire and removed, not to be replaced at this time.

Town Manager

Town Manager Steven Martin gave a brief overview:

- Participated in several meetings with KCI and University of Delaware discussing the Town's Storm Water Project and specifically, the opportunity of a grant from FEMA's BRIC Construction Grant. Although we were hoping to apply for the BRIC Grant by the deadline of February 29, 2024, KCI will not have enough of the design work completed by then. Further, the grant submission requires an alternate remedy to be included with application. We agreed that it makes most sense to apply for the next round of funding for this grant in October 2024 to make sure we have a strong application. We are still waiting for the final design and construction drawings from KCI which are due by May 2024. The focus is on the Vilone Village project of the Stormwater Study.

- Received our pre-award notice from the DOE Energy Efficiency and Conservation for the EECBG Grant. The application will be submitted next week and will include a request for funding of new exterior and Library doors.
- Submitted a grant for identity theft and Phishing Security Awareness Training and this has now been implemented. Emails have been set up and the program is underway. This is to purposely send out fraudulent emails to test employees. This grant provides the Town with a one-year free monitoring and Security Awareness Training for the staff.
- Received proposal from Vandemark and Lynch for the 5-Year Street Project for the streets that were decided last month, however Councilwoman Steppi has eluded that she has another idea for the specific streets selected in year one.
- Councilwoman Steppi stated that being as though the streets selected allowed for one street in each district, she believes the selection should be based on the worse streets rather than one per council district. She is willing to forfeit her district selection of Baltimore Avenue for another street in another district that may be worse. She believes we need to triage the streets in order from failing or emergent as opposed to one street per district and recognizes there are streets in other districts that are worse off.
- Town Manager Steven Martin added that he initially wanted to be fair to each district and have one street repaired in each district, but that since no money has been expended, this can be reselected based on the Council's opinion.
- Mayor Thompson added that this is a conversation that should be revisited and revoted upon at the next Council Meeting.
- Town Manager Steven Martin stated that he would send all the Council an email with the streets for them to reevaluate.
- Councilwoman DiBiaso asked if the Storm Water Project would impact the streets selected. If there is a street involved in the 5-Year Street Replacement program, would it then be torn up by the upcoming Storm Water Project?
- Town Manger Steven Martin answered no, the streets that are included in the 5-Year Street Replacement Program are purposely not included in the Storm Water Project to avoid this.
- Town Hall experienced flooding in the basement during the last two rainstorms. We are not sure why the sudden flooding is happening, but he spoke to National Restoration, and they stated the repair may be failing. He plans to have a professional come in and evaluate. We have identified the areas where the water is coming in, but we need to establish an action plan for repair. We have roughly \$30,000 in Bond Bill money left for this.
- Councilwoman Jensen added that she highly recommends Adams Basement for the excellent job they did at her home recently.
- All of the Cost Sharing Trash Contracts have been signed including Greenbrier as of this week.
- Sat in on a GAAP Year End Processing webinar session held by Edmunds Gov Tech. The session revolved around some functions pertaining to year end processes.
- The Tree Lighting event went very well. Again, Town Manager Steven Martin expressed his thanks to the Mayor and Council for all the support with the event.

- Filled the vacant Code Enforcement Officer position, and the new hire is training and working out very well.
- At the last Council Meeting, Councilwoman Personti stated she would like to revamp the annual spring newsletter and there is a meeting date of January 17, 2024 at 4pm. This would be rebranding information going out to the Town and informing residents of all the events, projects, and future items. He noted that Councilwomen Personti, Jensen, and DiBiaso plan to attend.
- Town Manager Steven Martin added that on Wednesday, January 17th he will be attending a training in Dover hosted by the Institute for Public Administration for Planning.
- Councilwoman Personti asked what the outcome of the gas leak was?
- Public Works Supervisor Anthony Gaines answered that it was a failing gas line and DP&L completed the replacement.
- Town Manager Steven Martin added that he has been in contact with Artesian regarding the roadwork they have been doing and noted that he intends to ensure all the patches are repaired.
- Town Manager Steven Martin stated he has been selected to be put on WILMPACO's Advisory Commission to work on the Kirkwood Highway project. The Town has been spoken about extensively since we are the only section of Kirkwood within the plan that is both commercial and residential. The plan will be used by New Castle County, WILMAPCO, and DNREC to determine funding opportunities, best practices, street calming ideas and residential and commercial improvements. He implores each Council member to send him their ideas and visions. There will be many upcoming meetings for all to attend this year and he will advise of the dates, times, and locations. There has already been one meeting and he believes the Town can really benefit from this.

PUBLIC COMMENT:

Jennifer Faust of 7 Locust Avenue asked if Councilwoman Jensen could repeat the name of the basement company she used. Councilwoman Jensen stated it was Adams Basement and she would be happy to pass along their information to Jennifer after the meeting.

STATEMENTS BY THE MAYOR AND COUNCIL:

Councilwoman Jensen stated she contacted the Assistant Land Use Manager for New Castle County regarding contacts for banks for code violations. She advised you to report all violations to Compliance Connections and they will relay it to the banks. She will pass along the information to Town Manager Steven Martin.

Councilwoman Jensen also asked if she would be updated regarding the reschedule date of the grand opening for Impact Life?

Town Manager Steven Martin stated he was unsure but plans to find out during their meeting tomorrow.

Councilwoman Jensen also asked if we could have printed copies of the 2024 Food Bank dates to hand out at the Food Drive this month?

Town Manager Steven Martin stated yes, they are already printed and planned to be handed out to all residents in line at the Food Drive.

Councilwoman Steppi added that she had an interaction with Tyler Technologies for the tax assessment being performed by New Castle County and it was quick and harmless. She answered a few short questions as he took a few measurements and that was it.

Mayor Thompson added that he believes they have just extended the time frame for the assessment.

Councilwoman Steppi added that the 3 Year Library Lease will be up this year and it is something to keep in mind.

Mayor Thompson added that Wiki Maps is open until January 31st and advised to take a look and submit any ideas or thoughts to them via WILMAPCO.

Mayor Thompson also added that the projected traffic increase for I-95 from 2024-2045 is 53%.

ADJOURNMENT:

ACTION: A motion was made by Councilwoman Jensen 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