

**TOWN OF ELSMERE
COUNCIL MEETING MINUTES
October 10, 2024
6:30 p.m.**

CALL TO ORDER: Councilwoman Personti called the meeting to order at 6:30 p.m.

PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE:

MOMENT OF SILENCE:

ROLL CALL:

MAYOR	ERIC SCOTT THOMPSON	ABSENT
1 ST DISTRICT	JANE MCDANIEL	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 (Arrived at 6:32pm)

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 September 12, 2024, Council Meeting.

ACTION: A motion was made by Councilwoman DiBiaso to approve the minutes of the September 12, 2024, Council Meeting with no corrections. The motion was seconded by Councilman McKewen.

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

OLD BUSINESS: None

NEW BUSINESS:

Consideration of appointing the following members to the Police Advisory Commission:

- a. Deacon Dave DeGhetto
- b. Leslie Palladino
- c. Stephanie Garcia
- d. Domenick Paoli
- e. Albert Gray

ACTION: A motion was made by Councilwoman Steppi to appoint the following members to the Police Advisory Commission, Deacon Dave DeGhetto, Leslie Palladino, Stephanie Garcia, Domenick Paoli, and Albert Gray. The motion was seconded by Councilman McKewen.

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

Discussion and consideration of reallocating funds for the repair of the street sweeper.

Town Manager Steven Martin explained that the street sweeper needed serious repairs. At first the Town was quoted around \$14,000, but the repairs came in at \$17,500. Town Manger Steven Martin is requesting that \$17,591.67 be moved from Long-Term Planning Future Project Allocation to pay the bill for the street sweeper.

Councilwoman Steppi questioned if the repairs had already been completed

Town Manager Steven Martin replied yes, the repairs have been completed and the street sweeper is working well and is in use for the Town.

Councilwoman Jensen asked if these repairs were in addition to another repair or if this was all the same repairs.

Town Manager Steven Martin replied that this was all the same repair job and gave a brief overview of the repairs that needed to occur due to the damage to the street sweeper.

Councilwoman Steppi asked if the street sweeper gets yearly maintenance.

Town Manager Steven Martin replied that yearly maintenance would be a cost to the Town since the street sweeper is out of warranty. He then explained that there wasn't any yearly maintenance to the street sweeper which contributed to the damage that occurred along with prior employee neglect. Furthermore, Town Manager Steven Martin explained that the street sweeper will now get yearly maintenance at the end of the season to ensure this doesn't occur again.

Councilwoman Personti asked what the current balance is on the Long-Term Planning line.

Finance Director Valarie Strzempa stated that there is \$165,631.34.

Councilwoman Steppi clarified that the money would be coming from the Future Project Allocation line.

ACTION: A motion was made by Councilwoman Personti to reallocate funds for the repair of the street sweeper from the Long-Term Planning, line item Future Project Allocations. The motion was seconded by Councilman McKewen

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

Authorization for the Mayor and Secretary of Council to have signed tributes given to Raymond Firmani on his 103rd Birthday and the family of former Mayor Richard Herold

Councilwoman Personti gave a brief overview of two events that occurred in the Town since the last meeting.

ACTION: A motion was made by Councilwoman Personti to approve the signed tributes given to Raymond Firmani on his 103rd Birthday and the family of former Mayor Richard Herold. The motion was seconded by Councilwoman McDaniel.

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

DEPARTMENTAL REPORTS:

Code Enforcement

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

- Councilwomen Jensen stated that 603 Baltimore Avenue appears to be vacant and is not on the report.
- Code Officer Nicole Facciolo stated she will make a note of this property.
- Councilwoman Steppi asked about the DelDot sidewalk project and if it has been completed.
- Code Officer Nicole Facciolo stated that DelDot did complete the project shortly after her report was finalized.

Finance Department

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

- There is a substantial tax revenue on this report due to the recent tax deadline.
- An analysis was provided at each Council members seat for the VAC to give a monthly picture of the revenue the Town Administration retains verses the fines, and what we return to the State for the quarter.
- Councilwoman Steppi asked if the \$53,000 is the net total fine revenue.
- Finance Director Valarie Strzempa replied that the fine revenue recognized in line one in the chart is specifically recognized for Public Safety Department's revenue. Then underneath is the Administration or Town revenue, and additionally the State fees that get returned to the State. She then stated the trend is we send the State about what the Town retains, aside from the fines being retained in Public Safety. Finance Director Valarie Strzempa continued explaining that there will be continued expenses throughout the year that will hit that Admin expense totals through the year, one being the reimbursement of the employee's salary out of that budget line. As the year progresses, she stated that her intention is to provide a quarterly analysis throughout this fiscal year to explain how overall expenses affect the net revenue for the VAC as a department.
- In September, we received our first MSA funds distribution. The second distribution should

take place in January.

Public Safety

Police Chief Laura Giles gave a brief overview of Public Safety:

- The homicide that took place behind the McDonalds will not be going to trial. The defendant will plead guilty to the charges, as there was an overwhelming amount of evidence against him. Chief Giles stated that Detective Sowden did a great job.
- In attempted homicide behind the McDonalds, Demir Watson pled guilty to strangulation and assault. A brief description of his crimes that were caught on video were discussed.
- Chief Giles received confirmation that the JAG grant for the reverted funds for \$15,000 was approved. Additionally, \$6,300 from this grant and reallocate \$2,350 from Salle will be used to purchase three surveillance cameras. They will be located by McDonalds, Route 2 and Route 100, and Sanders Road. One of the cameras will have a 360 view and DelDot is letting us use an old camera light pole for installation of one of the cameras. Chief Giles stated that the cost for the electric should be about \$30 she believes. The Town will gain 24-7 surveillance in key areas.
- The U/C car that has been in possession since 2020, a 2017 Volkswagen that hasn't been used in at least a year, will be sold to an employee of the Town in need of a vehicle. Chief Giles stated that they were going to get rid of it anyways. The vehicle will be coming off the insurance and the money collected for the vehicle will go back to SLEEF since the vehicle was acquired via seizure.
- The Elsmere Library contacted Chief Giles to participate in their Trunk or Treat which will be held on October 29, 2024, from 5:30pm to 7pm.
- Councilwoman Jensen congratulated Chief Giles regarding the juvenile suspect in the Vilone Village shooting that was arrested. Additionally, she stated that she was notified via Facebook and stated that the public knew before Council. Councilwoman Jensen asked if Council could be notified regarding these matters before they are posted on Facebook.
- Chief Giles stated that this situation had a lot of moving parts, and it was not intentional to not inform Council of this matter, but she will try to remember in the future to make Council aware.

Public Works

Public Works Supervisor Leon Joseph gave a brief overview:

- Councilwoman Steppi asked why there were so many Impact Life issues on the Public Works departmental report.
- Town Manager Steven Martin stated that he will elaborate during his report. He recommended that Leon review that he has an employee that will be taking their CDL test on the 21st of October.
- Public Works Supervisor Leon Joseph stated that Anthony is close to having his CDL and will be assisting with street sweeping. Additionally, he stated that the street sweeper has been out about two to three times a week. Public Works Supervisor Leon Joseph stated that the street sweeper was out today and commented that there were a lot of leaves on Birch and Baltimore Avenue. He stated that he has been on the North and South side of

- Town with the street sweeper as well.
- Councilwoman Steppi confirmed that she has seen the street sweeper out in the Town.

Town Manager

Town Manager Steven Martin gave a brief overview:

Stormwater Project:

- Town Manager Steve Martin reached out to Carter Thompson to find that there aren't any updates on the Congressional Direct Spending Fund. There should be more information after the election.
- There have been two meetings with KCI regarding the Patty Blevins Walking Path and Chestnut Run. KCI is finishing up the drawings and they will be submitting permits to DNREC. Town Manager Steven Martin hopes to have the bid documents in October, but we are currently waiting on DNREC.
- A brief discussion took place between Councilwoman Jensen and Town Manager Steven Martin about the length of time it takes to receive the permits for this type of project and the timeframe of when the project would start.
- The Rosemont and Taylor Project, this is the intersection that the firetrucks have difficulty getting through. The contractor that bid on the project was met with and they have come up with an alternative plan that could be completed for about \$125,000 - \$130,000. Neil from Vandemark and Lynch is going to survey the area and take measurements to see if the alternative plan would work because we don't want to make the repairs if it isn't going to fix the problem. Neil should have that information to us by next week.
- Councilwoman Steppi asked what the cross streets are.
- Town Manager Steve Martin replied its Taylor Road and Rosemont Drive. He states that it's an intersection with swales and commented that trash trucks and cars also have issues in this intersection. There are visible marks on the asphalt showing where people have scratched at this intersection. Additionally, the fire trucks cannot get through the intersection. He stated that this projects dates back a couple of years.
- Brief discussion between Council, Town Manager Steve Martin, and Chief Giles regarding that route in which the firetruck would have to take to get back into that area should there be an emergency. Additionally, it was discussed how much this project would cost the Town and to further discuss this issue with the Elsmere Fire Chief. It was noted that this issue has persisted for years but only the bridge was repaired. The need for a ladder truck in lieu of an emergency was discussed but concerns were raised about the size of the truck and the need for a truck that large in this fire district. Further concerns were raised about modifying the intersection when it was originally designed due to the Town's historical flooding issues. Discussion ended with final comments that the Town will not be putting money into this project other than what has been awarded to cover the costs.
- Street Project: Domenick Paoli began the street project on Wednesday and has made some progress. In fact, he will start working on Gamble Ave on the 15th of this month. K Street is almost complete. The goal is to have this project complete in 60 days before it becomes too cold.
- Councilwoman McDaniel asked when Dumont would be getting started.
- Town Manager Steve Martin replied that Dumont is the third street on the list and should

be started at the end of the month but that is just an estimate

- Park Project (Maple Park): Vandemark and Lynch is finishing up with the survey and we expect bids documents by next week, at that time it will go out to bid. Town Manager Steven Martin stated that he is concerned with the timing of this project due to the weather. If it becomes too cold, then this project will get pushed to the spring.
- Fall Festival was unfortunately cancelled due to the recommendation from DNREC regarding evidence of risk for West Nile virus in the park. Town Manager Steven Martin brought up that DNREC did spray for mosquitoes back in August. He stated that he was concerned for the safety of the residents and the staff and wanted to minimize the risk of contracting the virus.
- Councilwoman Steppi commented that we should move the Fall Festival back to October.
- Town Manager Steven Martin agreed and stated that we should wait until the end of the month like in previous years.
- The Spooktacular Event will take place on Friday, October 25th. There will be a costume parade starting at Town Hall at 5:00pm followed by indoor trick or treating, costume contest, and pumpkin decorating. There will not be a movie this year. Town Manager Steven Martin asked if anyone from Council would be attending this event.
- Councilwoman Personti replied that she usually does the Spooktacular.
- A meeting was held with Impact Life about their concerns about the rental space. Impact Life expressed they are not pleased with historical issues with flooding that occurred while they have occupied the space. Town Manager Steven Martin stated that all issues were resolved in a timely manner, within 24 to 48 hours of the occurrence. Mold testing was done by ServePro and BATTA which showed that there is no mold. A follow-up meeting with Impact Life will take place on Tuesday.
- There was a brief discussion between Councilwoman Steppi and Town Manager Steven Martin regarding the flooding issues that took place in the building and the remediation that was provided by the Public Works Department.
- Councilwoman Jensen questioned if these floods are common due to the age of the building.
- Town Manager Steven Martin replied no.
- Finance Director Valarie Strzempa stated that there has been flooding in the basement with previous tenants and added that there has been repeated repairs over the years to wherever the water was coming from.
- Town Manager Steve Martin stated that a French drain and two sump pumps were installed. Additionally, the walls were repaired, and bathroom renovations were completed. With these repairs there hasn't been any flooding.
- Brief discussion between the Town Manager Steven Martin and Councilwoman Steppi regarding the repairs and issues that have occurred in the building.
- A meeting with DNREC was held about Elsmere's MS4 permit audit, which went well.
- Town Manager Steven Martin attended the Delaware League meeting, featured speaker was Representative Mike Ramone.
- A light has been installed at the Dog Park by Delmarva Power.
- Senator Mantzavino's office was contacted about the overgrown weed on the Route 100 bridge. There has not been any progress with that issue.
- No dumping signs have been placed around the Town.
- The Conservation District was contacted about a sinking hole at 203 Dumont Road. It is believed to be the result of some work that the Conservation District did to the creek.

- The ORPT grant for solar lighting has been submitted.
- A meeting took place with Wilmington Glass regarding the RFP for the windows in Town Hall. They stated that they could not do the job due to the granite around the windows and that an architect would need to come to spec out what needs to be done. Wilmington Glass does not make a window that would fit, and it is recommended that an architect specifies the windows and gives a recommendation. There are two coming next week and the following week.
- Councilwoman Jensen, Lieutenant Shelton and Town Manager Steven Martin had a meeting to discuss a handicap spot at 914 Dover Ave that was revoked. It was agreed that this was justified.
- The owners of 1300 Kirkwood Highway met with the Town, the plan they had did not make sense. They will need to create a new plan and present it to Code Officer Nicole Facciolo before submitting it to the Planning Commission.
- There was a discussion about the property at 1300 Kirkwood Highway, what the owners had planned for this property, and why it wasn't going to work.
- A discussion was held about the Elsmere Police holding cell that needs updating and what the plan is for renovating that space.
- Councilwoman DiBiaso brought up concerns about Vilone Park. She stated that the baseball fields are unused. She acknowledges the efforts to get the fields rented out but feels that they are just a wasted space. She feels that the Fall Festival shouldn't have been cancelled but moved to Vilone Park and commented on the terrible parking on Dover Avenue. Councilwoman DiBiaso stated that there is a beautiful park that ARPA funds were spent and is barely used. She suggested taking down the fencing in one field and creating a dog park in the other field for larger dogs. She stated she has recommended using Vilone Park for Fall Festival in a previous year and was shot down. It is felt that there would be more attendance if the Fall Festival was moved to Vilone Park. Councilwoman DiBiaso feels that we need to figure out what can be done with this park.
- Town Manager Steven Martin commented that the fireworks company just came out to look at Vilone Park since we need to have a fireworks display.
- Further discussion took place among Council regarding fireworks in the Town, the Fall Festival event, and suggestions for Vilone Park.
- Councilwoman DiBiaso added that it was suggested to add a walking path to Vilone Park.
- Councilwoman Steppi recommended that the Town should start promoting that baseball fields in the spring for rentals.
- Chief Giles suggested that the Town should open a swimming club and a discussion took place of what that would entail.
- Town Manager Steven Martin stated that he will think about what can be done to repurpose the park and bring it back to Council in December or January.

PUBLIC COMMENT: None

STATEMENTS BY THE MAYOR AND COUNCIL:

Councilwoman Jensen stated that she will not be at the next council meeting as she will be on vacation.

EXECUTIVE SESSION:

Pursuant to 29 Del. C. Section 10004(b)(9), the Mayor and Council will adjourn into an executive session to discuss personnel matters and a potential litigation matter. The Mayor and Council will not return to public session.

ACTION A motion was made by Councilman McKewen to enter an executive session pursuant to 29 Del. C. Section 10004(b)(9). The motion was seconded by Councilwoman McDaniel.

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**