

**TOWN OF ELSMERE  
COUNCIL MEETING MINUTES  
February 13, 2025  
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 <sup>ST</sup> DISTRICT	JANE MCDANIEL	PRESENT
2 <sup>ND</sup> DISTRICT	SALLY JENSEN	PRESENT
3 <sup>RD</sup> DISTRICT	MARY STEPPI	PRESENT
4 <sup>TH</sup> DISTRICT	CHARLES MCKEWEN	PRESENT
5 <sup>TH</sup> DISTRICT	JOANN I. PERSONTI	PRESENT
6 <sup>TH</sup> DISTRICT	DAWN DIBIASO	EXCUSED

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 January 9, 2025, Council Meeting.

**ACTION:** A motion was made by Councilwoman Personti to approve the minutes of the January 9, 2025, Council Meeting with no corrections. The motion was seconded by Councilman McKewen.

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

Minutes of the January 16, 2025, Special Council Meeting.

**ACTION:** A motion was made by Councilwoman Jensen to approve the minutes of the January 16, 2025, Special Council Meeting with no corrections. The motion was seconded by Councilwoman Personti.

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

## **OLD BUSINESS:**

Consideration and discussion of Third and Final reading of Ordinance 676.

An Ordinance amending Chapter 145 of the Code of the Town of Elsmere.

Councilwoman Mary Steppi provided a brief synopsis, stating that this ordinance amends Chapter 145 to allow the Town of Elsmere to revoke rental licenses, business licenses, and building permits not only for properties in violation of the nuisance ordinance or requiring excessive police services, but for all properties owned by the offending owner within Town limits until the problem property is mitigated.

**ACTION:** A motion was made by Councilwoman Steppi to approve the Third and Final reading of Ordinance 676. The motion was seconded by Councilman McKewen.

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

Consideration and discussion of Third and Final Reading of Ordinance 677.

An Ordinance establishing a procedure and rules for the 2025 Biennial Municipal Election.

Board of Elections Chairwoman Kathy Aiken provided a memorandum to the Mayor and Council, stating that a public meeting was held on February 11, 2025 where the Board has confirmed that there is no need for an election on April 26, 2025, as there are no contested positions. All candidates meet the requirements and of those who have filed, have been deemed to be elected. The memorandum also stated there will be a need for a Special Election since no candidates filed for the offices of the 3<sup>rd</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> Council Districts.

There was a brief discussion among the Council and Town Solicitor discussing a Special Election due to the two vacancies for the 3rd and 6th Council seats, which will be held within 60 days after the new Council is seated in May.

**ACTION:** A motion was made by Mayor Thompson to withdraw Ordinance 677 since there is no longer a need for the 2025 Biennial Municipal Election. The motion was seconded by Councilwoman Personti.

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

Discussion to provide updates on Impact Life's occupancy status at Town Hall.

Town Manager Steven Martin reported that Impact Life is now back at Town Hall as of last week and will be occupying the space two days a week from 9am to 1pm. Therefore, they are now abiding by the lease.

Councilman McKewen asked if this will interfere with the grant since they are only occupying the

space 2 days a week?

Town Manager Steven Martin replied no, it does not.

Councilwoman Steppi asked if they plan to increase the amount of time here gradually or just remain at 2 days a week?

Chief Giles replied no, however, they will be doing additional things here such as Narcan training and such, but she intends to put all of this in her report to the State. She also clarified that the grant ends in September, when she originally thought it was December and she will be asking for an extension as well.

#### Discussion to provide updates on RFP 24-07 – Chestnut Run & Little Mill Creek Drainage Improvements.

Town Manager Steven Martin summarized this, stating that there are two bidders for this project, with their initial bids coming in just above \$400,000, however the budget is \$323,000. In an effort to reduce costs, the engineers at KCI worked on value engineering and new bids are due by February 27<sup>th</sup>. The bids for the Patty Blevins and Tamarack Avenue Drainage Project are due March 10<sup>th</sup>. The work should be completed in about two and a half months, likely finishing in July, with construction possibly starting in April.

A discussion between Council and Town Manager ensued due to some confusion about project details, as some maps and descriptions were unclear. One project involves engineering only for Chestnut Run and Little Mill Creek with a cost of around \$470,000 for both, while others like Taylor Tract, Silverbrook, and Dover Avenue are complete projects.

There was discussion about how the ARPA funds are being allocated, with some engineering already completed. The total funds available for the projects are about \$500,000, with some federal funding expected, but it may not cover all costs. The federal budget will be reviewed by March 13<sup>th</sup>, and an update will be provided after the next council meeting.

In concluding this agenda item, the Mayor and Council are hopeful that the federal funding will help but realize that costs have increased since the original plan and need to keep moving forward with the projects despite uncertainties. However, ARPA funds will cover all engineering for all the projects, and two full projects will be completed, and the remaining two will be fully dependent on federal funding.

#### **NEW BUSINESS:**

##### Representatives from Delmarva Power to answer questions and hold discussion on the recent increase in energy bills.

At this time, Mayor Thompson announced that this will be a question-and-answer session about the recent increase in energy bills for all Delmarva Power customers.

Representative Sabrina Knight, who is the External Affairs Manager for Delmarva Power, was present and gave a brief overview of the reasoning behind the increases in the last bills sent out. Sabrina explained that higher January bills were due to increased usage, not new charges. The company recently redesigned the bills in November to provide clearer breakdowns of delivery and supply charges, which may have caused confusion. Delivery charges, which cover infrastructure, storm response, and other costs, have always been part of the bill but were previously lumped together. Now

that they are all broken down into separate line items, it appears that there was a large increase in bills. Additionally, to assist customers, Delmarva Power has extended customer service hours, added Saturday availability, and is offering flexible payment plans to customers up to 24 months. There are no disconnections occurring in February, and reconnection fees have been waived. Customers can track their energy usage through "My Account" on Delmarva's website with tools like hourly usage graphs and high usage alerts. Budget billing is also available to smooth out seasonal spikes in bills, and customers can opt for paper bills if preferred. Sabrina also mentions that a significant increase in energy usage during colder weather, coupled with five mild winters the last few years, has led to higher bills. Customers are encouraged to review their bills for details and graphs comparing current and past usage. Finally, Sabrina explains that the company bills a month behind after usage, meaning the January bills reflect December usage. She acknowledges customer frustrations but clarifies that they cannot apply additional charges without following regulations set by the Public Service Commission.

Councilwoman McDaniel stated that she is aware of a property owner who received a \$200 electric bill when the owner's power has been shut off completely due to a fire in the house. How can this be possible?

Sabrina replied that she would like the owners to contact her directly and would like to look at the bill herself to see if there is an explanation, and if not, she can have it corrected.

Mayor Thompson asked Sabrina if she could now explain the actual increase on the bills.

Sabrina Knight confirmed that there was a rate increase, but this increase is still usage-usage driven.

Councilwoman Steppi asked if Sabrina could explain the PJM, which is the regional grid manager, and the auction market prices?

Sabrina replied that it is going to be for your supply, not usage. If the demand for electricity or gas is higher, then they are going to charge more for it and Delmarva is only the transmission and distribution company. Essentially, Delmarva Power buys it at an auction and then sells it to customers at the standard offer service.

Councilwoman Steppi clarified that PJM sets the rate and that is the rate you pass on to us.

Sabrina replied, yes and PJM stands for Pennsylvania, New Jersey and Maryland.

Councilwoman Steppi stated she heard on the news that the market rate went up in New Jersey and they will be affected soon as well. Is there another possible auction in July of this year?

Sabrina confirmed there is another auction in July, but that is for the supply.

Councilwoman Steppi asked if this is a yearly auction? She believes they are planning another increase.

Sabrina reiterated that would not go into the delivery, but rather the supply itself.

Councilwoman Steppi stated that it still affects the bills.

Sabrina confirmed that yes, it does. But the supply is the supply, while the delivery is what it costs to bring the gas and/or electric to you.

Councilwoman Steppi then clarified that the supply is our usage, which is only going to keep increasing. That is really what is affecting the cost, our price that we are paying.

At this time, there was a discussion amongst everyone and their personal experiences of having both oil and electric heating. It included how space heaters and heat pumps can be inefficient in cold weather. Heat pumps are effective in moderate temperatures but struggle when temperatures drop

below 34°F, causing them to run continuously and significantly increase energy usage. This leads to higher bills.

Sabrina then mentions efforts to educate customers on ways to save energy and money, including keeping thermostats at 68°F, sealing windows, closing blinds, and turning off lights when leaving a room. She also suggests reducing thermostat settings at night.

Councilwoman Personti asked if there a chance that the delivery charges would ever be reduced? Does that have to go through legislature or the Public Service Commission?

Sabrina replied that they must go before the Public Service Commission for any increases and provide explanation as to why there is a need to increase the rate, such as reliability, grid modernization, and the Commission would make the determination. She then explained that Delmarva understands that these increases are shocking to people and they are doing everything they can to assist customers and they even have assistance programs through charities to help people pay the bills that are more donations, so customers do not have to pay them back.

Town Manager Steven Martin asked if there was a list of the organizations that provided assistance that we can have in order to advertise it?

Sabrina confirmed that she has a list and will send it to him. She then provided information sheets for us to provide to the public.

#### Introduction of First and Second reading of Ordinance 678.

#### An Ordinance amending Chapter 164 of the Code of the Town of Elsmere as it relates to Police Service Fees.

Chief Giles stated that, as you know, we have adopted Delaware Code, Title 21 into our Town Code for traffic regulations, however, the last time it was updated was four and a half years ago and the section for school zones was missed. This ordinance is simply adding a chart to include school zones to the Code.

**ACTION:** A motion was made by Councilwoman Jensen to approve the Introduction of First and Second reading of Ordinance 678. The motion was seconded by Councilman McKewen.

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

#### Consideration to waive any fees assessed by the Code Enforcement Department pertaining to the installation of three new surveillance cameras in Town.

Chief Giles stated that we are having surveillance cameras installed near Mulrooney's, Kirkwood Highway and Rt. 100 and another at Kirkwood Highway and Sanders Road. In order to have them installed, an electrical contractor is needed to excavate to install the line supplying the power to the cameras. Waiving any fees for permits and business licenses would help in cutting costs. Chief Giles further explained that having these cameras installed is going to help with a lot of investigations that the Police Department can look into.

**ACTION:** A motion was made by Mayor Thompson to waive any fees assessed by the Code Enforcement Department pertaining to the installation of the three new surveillance cameras in Town. The motion was seconded by both Councilwomen Personti and Jensen.

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

Consideration of awarding a contract in response to RFP 25-01 – Town Hall Door Replacements.

Town Manager Steven Martin stated that we had two companies participate in the RFP, but only one of those companies submitted a bid which was Diamond State Door. Their bid came in at \$33,943, which is \$4,000 less than the amount that was awarded. We have dealt with this vendor before for previous door installations. This will be funded by the EECBG grant.

**ACTION:** A motion was made by Mayor Thompson to award Diamond State Door the contract for RFP 25-01 – Town Hall Door Replacements. The motion was seconded by Councilwoman Personti.

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

Discussion regarding deeded parking spaces in rear alley ways on the South side of Town.

Town Manager Steven Martin stated there is an ongoing issue of parking in the rear alley ways on the south side of Town, particularly over the deeded parking spots for homeowners in these alley ways. Town Manager Steven Martin mentioned that he has considered options such as signs to warn violators of towing but then recognized that public funds cannot be used for private property concerns per the Town Code. He then suggested holding a meeting with residents to gather input on the best way to address the problem and acknowledged that this issue has persisted for decades, and the complaints only continue to persist.

Councilwoman Steppi added that the complaints she receives are along the lines of a homeowner getting home and someone is in their spot suddenly and what do they do? While she agrees it is not the Town's responsibility, but asked what can the residents do besides call Town Hall or contact a council representative? She knows that in years past, residents were advised to call a tow company, but do we have a relationship with any companies and who would pay for that? What advice can we give to the residents to take care of their own spot?

Town Manager Steven Martin replied that the residents have the right to have the car towed because it is their spot. It is their deeded area.

Chief Giles asked what money the Town would be putting towards this ordinance? What would it cost the Town? The last discussion she had with the Town Manager, it was discussed that if a resident came in and stated this is their deeded spot and provided the deed proving such, then the Town would provide the resident with a sign, but they would have to pay for it. They would have to erect it in that spot and make sure that it is visible. A preliminary procedure was discussed, stating that, for example, a neighbor is parking in my spot, behind my house where a sign has been installed and it is clearly marked. At this point, that resident would call the Police Department who would then call the tow company, just like they currently do on private property for a business. They would have the homeowners sign off to confirm they want the car removed, it is on their property, the onus is on them.

Councilwoman Jensen then added that if an elderly resident could not install the sign, perhaps there could be a flat charge for the Public Works Department to install it.

Chief Giles replied yes, and the only upfront cost would be roughly \$25 for the Town to purchase the sign, but the resident would purchase it from the Town, and it would be reimbursed. Additionally, the person would either put it on their fence or somewhere visible, then Code Enforcement would go out and deem it appropriate according to the deed and placement and agree that it meets all guidelines, and then we would know moving forward if vehicles can be towed by the Town. Chief Giles stated it would also alleviate the issue of having an officer respond out and the owner claiming a vehicle is parked in their spot, the officer cannot prove that it is that homeowners deeded spot now, but this sign will be the proof since the Town approved it.

Mayor Thompson stated that, in his opinion, a sign is not needed. It is your property. If somebody parks in your driveway, you do not need a sign to have someone towed.

Chief Giles replied that while she understands that, in these alley ways, we have done everything that we possibly can to show that these are deeded spots, and you should not park in it.

Mayor Thompson asked hypothetically, if somebody comes and gets a Town sign, they will then get assistance from the Town. But if they go buy their own sign, they won't get assistance of the Town?

Chief Giles replied that in that case, it would not be verified by the Code Department if they bought their own sign.

Mayor Thompson replied that there is no requirement that I put no trespassing on my property for people not to trespass.

At this time, a pilot program was discussed to try the idea of placing Town signs, with the Town not incurring any extra costs. Residents who need a sign would be responsible for the cost and installation, though the Town could assist if necessary, but the importance of avoiding liability on the Town was emphasized. Additionally, the legal responsibility of the residents who want a sign should sign a document that they are solely responsible for any disputes or actions related to parking in that spot.

## **DEPARTMENTAL REPORTS:**

### Code Enforcement

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

- Councilwoman Steppi commented that she saw the property at 16 Tamarack is now up for sale after being a vacant property and public nuisance for a long time.

### Finance Department

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

- Finance Director Valarie Strzempa reported she provided an explanation about a budget evaluation program that was adopted in 1988. It has not been implemented for quite some time, meaning there are items within the program that are outdated and items that do not align with present-day operations. However, the general idea of the budgetary evaluation

program is to keep the Mayor, Council, department heads and Town Manager aware of the state of the budget. Typically, this will be provided in the month of March, but she presented it now to provide adequate time for review. At this time, there is no cause for concern with the budget.

- Received final MSA funds from the State for the year and is seemingly decreasing each year.

### Public Safety

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

- Chief Giles reported that Lt. Shelton was given an opportunity to attend the Northwestern University School of Police and Command in Philadelphia. This is a 10-week course and is essentially a step below FBI academies. He is attending and just completed his first 2 weeks.
- Received the Office of Highway Safety funding for the speed trailer and it has been ordered and expected to be delivered in 60 to 90 days.
- Chief Giles reported that for the Police Advisory Board, it has been difficult to adhere to the number of restrictions being such a small department. Therefore, she has asked the Town of Newport to combine in as a joint group as a Police Advisory Committee. Additionally, Chief Warner in Newport is very well versed in the requirements which will be an asset to the Chief as well. Some of the committee meetings will be held in Newport and Chief Giles will advise of the dates and times of those meetings.
- Councilwoman Jensen stated she would like to give a shout-out to Officer Sommers, the newest police officer. She stated she had the pleasure of meeting him during an incident involving an unresponsive person in a vehicle. Officer Sommers arrived quickly, even while she was still on the phone with 911, and he handled the situation professionally and efficiently. Councilwoman Jensen appreciated the chance to speak with him afterward and praised his performance.
- Councilwoman Steppi also thanked Officer Sommers for his quick response for the incident that occurred. His response time was impeccable, and he was professional and efficient in getting the person the help needed.

### Public Works

Public Works Supervisor Leon Joseph gave a brief overview:

- Councilwoman McDaniel said the department did a good job plowing during the recent snow events and she has received compliments from numerous residents in her district.

### Town Manager

Town Manager Steven Martin gave a brief overview of the Town Manager's report:

- The street projects are on hold due to the temperature being below 45 degrees.
- Received \$33,000.00 from the ORPT grant, which will be funding the installation of solar lights along the Patty Blevins Walking Path.
- The RFP for the Maple Park parking lot, we are working with the same company that the Police Department is using to install surveillance cameras. In addition to cameras at Maple



Park, we evaluated Joseph Walling and Vilone parks and have asked the company to provide us a proposal to install cameras at those locations as well, which the ORPT grant will also fund.

- In addition to the RFP for door replacements at Town Hall, we also have an RFP out for the window replacements at Town Hall and is due back on February 27<sup>th</sup>.
- Submitted a grant application to the Department of Homeland Security for new network infrastructure and network infrastructure upgrading for roughly \$13,000 and there is no match needed from the Town. This will up fit us with a new firewall, switches and cleanout our server room.
- Recognized and thanked Administrative Assistant to the Town Manager Scott Allen for all he has done with all the RFPs. Currently, there are six RFP's out which is a testament to the staff in addition to their daily duties.
- Attended a presentation regarding future expansion at the Delaware Rifle and Pistol Club.
- Councilwoman Jensen asked the reason she was not included since this is in her district.
- Town Manager Steven Martin implied it was an oversight, and he would be happy to request another meeting for her.
- Delaware Food Bank has stated that they will be scheduling bi-monthly food pantries at no cost to the Town. The next dates for the food drive will be February 18<sup>th</sup> from 11am to 1pm and April 15<sup>th</sup> from 11am to 1pm.
- There was a slow water main break on South Grant Avenue which went unresponded to by the City of Wilmington for quite a few weeks, which created severe icing in the neighborhood.
- Met with the FOP. A meeting will be held tomorrow to review exactly what they are requesting and we have also submitted our comments back.
- Sinkhole on Western and Baltimore Avenues. Paoli responded and investigated the cause. It is suspected to be a water main or a storm water main that has broken. Cones have been placed over it to make sure that no one drives a walk over it.
- Received an email from Representative DeShanna Neil asking if she can use Town Hall every first Monday of the month from 7pm to roughly 9pm beginning on March 3<sup>rd</sup> to host committee meetings. The concern is that a staff member would have to be here to lock and unlock the building.
- Councilwoman McDaniel asked if the Town Manager was informed of an airplane that was going back and forth over Elsmere? She received several inquiries.
- Administrative Assistant to the Town Manager Scott Allen stated he also observed it and noticed it was not just Elsmere, but rather the greater portion of New Castle County and based on the flight pattern and type of plane, it could have been a general survey doing a type of mapping.

**PUBLIC COMMENT:** None

**STATEMENTS BY THE MAYOR AND COUNCIL:** None

#### **EXECUTIVE SESSION AND ADJOURNMENT:**

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.

Mayor Thompson stated that since there are no new items that have arisen from the litigation, there is no need for an Executive Session this evening.

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

**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.



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**ERIC THOMPSON**  
**MAYOR**



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**SALLY JENSEN**  
**SECRETARY**