

# **The Mayor and Commissioners of the Town of Elkton**

## **MINUTES**

July 10, 2013

A public meeting (workshop) of the Mayor and Commissioners of the Town of Elkton (“the Board”) was held on this date at 4:00 p.m. with the following persons present: Mayor Joseph Fisona, Commissioners Charles H. Givens, Sr.; Charles E. Hicks, V; Mary Jo Jablonski and Earl M. Piner. Sr.; Town Administrator Lewis H. George, Jr.; Finance Director Steven H. Repole; Administration Office Secretary L. Michelle Henson; and Town Attorney H. Norman Wilson, Jr.

Mayor Fisona called the workshop to order at 4:00 p.m.

### **Discussion – Vacant Building Ordinance**

Mayor Fisona stated several Board members attended a seminar presented by the City of Salisbury regarding registration of vacant buildings during the recent Maryland Municipal League (MML) Convention.

Mr. George stated he printed the City of Salisbury’s Vacant Building Ordinance and distributed it to the Board for review, and asked if the Board wanted to pursue such an ordinance for the Town.

Commissioner Hicks expressed support for pursuing a Vacant Building Ordinance for Elkton.

Commissioner Jablonski stated Salisbury’s population was over 30,000 and the city had four Code Enforcement Officials, compared to Elkton’s population of 15,000 and employed one Code Enforcement Official. She stated any additional enforcement efforts would add to the current official’s workload.

Mayor Fisona expressed support for a Vacant Building Ordinance, stating many properties were not being maintained even after receiving a Code Enforcement notice of violation.

Discussion ensued regarding filing of court proceedings against property owners who did not respond to Code Enforcement notices. Commissioner Jablonski stated the Town was achieving success with taking property owners to court under Ordinances contained in the current Town Code.

Commissioner Hicks stated many issues that were considered minor added up to a major problem, stating all departments should take a team approach with the community to report and address poorly maintained properties.

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Commissioner Hicks, referring to his previous role as Code Enforcement Official, stated he filed suit against all property owners who did not respond to notices, adding that the owner would typically correct the issue at the last minute prior to going to court.

Commissioner Piner questioned if registration would be required in the event a property owner was working on their rental and it was vacant for 6 months. Commissioner Hicks stated the ordinance provided the opportunity for owners to present a plan to repair properties that were in need of maintenance, adding the Town could reject the plan, and the owner could then appeal.

Commissioner Jablonski, referring to a previously proposed ordinance, stated the Town's Code currently contained ordinances to address property maintenance. She expressed concerns that the proposed ordinance would be costly to administer.

Referring to Commissioner Piner's concerns regarding a requirement of registering a well-maintained, albeit vacant property, stated the ordinance placed another fee on business owners.

Commissioner Piner questioned if registration would be required in the event that a property damaged by fire, or other event, could not be repaired immediately due to insurance settlement. Commissioner Hicks stated the ordinance could include language addressing special circumstances. He stated the ordinance could be used to ensure building safety for a neighborhood.

Commissioner Hicks stated the ordinance placed the responsibility of property maintenance follow up on the owner instead of the Code Enforcement Official.

Commissioner Givens questioned how the ordinance would address a property that was vacant for a period of time, but was well maintained. Commissioner Hicks stated the owner should still present a plan regarding the property's future.

Mayor Fisona, referring to his neighborhood, stated there were five vacant houses that were not being maintained. He stated a Vacant Building Registration Ordinance would provide the Town with a mechanism to address property owners.

Commissioner Piner stated Mr. John Smith, Code Enforcement Official, and Mr. J. Craig Trostle, Zoning Administrator, should be included in the discussion. Commissioners Givens and Jablonski agreed with Commissioner Piner. Commissioner Jablonski stated the Board should review the Town Code with Messrs. Smith and Trostle to determine if additional ordinances were necessary. Commissioner Givens stated Mr. Smith could educate the Board regarding the primary violations and issues he faced in enforcement.

Commissioner Piner stated he did not feel responsible property owners should be required to register their properties and pay fees because of owners who did not maintain theirs.

### **FY 2014 Budget Update**

Mayor Fisona, referring to the current Fiscal Year's deficit, asked the Board for suggestions regarding cost savings for the upcoming year.

Mr. Repole stated the Fiscal Year 2013 budget called for the use of \$1.6 million of Fund Balance, adding he anticipated using about \$1 million of that amount.

He stated he contacted 2 banks and the Local Government Infrastructure Finance Program regarding refinancing of a loan in order to save interest costs. He stated the Local Government Program could not offer a lower interest rate however Columbia Bank responded with a 2.39% interest rate. Mr. George requested a consensus from the Board regarding refinancing the loan through Columbia Bank at 2.39% interest rate. It was the consensus of the Board to refinance the loan through Columbia Bank at 2.39% interest rate.

Mr. Repole stated he would provide data from the actuarial study, which was required under the Elkton Police Department (EPD) Pension Plan. He stated the actuarial study, at a cost of \$8,000, was used to determine the amount of the Town's required contribution to the Plan.

Discussion ensued regarding costs associated with upgraded computers and anticipated increases in health insurance benefits.

Mr. Repole encouraged the Board to ask questions regarding the budget, saying it was not necessary to wait until a meeting to discuss Town finances with him.

Commissioner Jablonski stated all contracted services should be routinely reviewed and put out to bid.

Commissioner Jablonski questioned if grass cutting could be contracted. Mr. George stated the Town previously investigated outsourcing grass cutting services, and the estimate came in at \$100,000.

Commissioner Jablonski suggested Department Managers should meet regularly with the Board to discuss the upcoming budget instead of just once at the end of the year. Mr. George suggested the Board initially meet with the Department of Public Works (DPW) and the Elkton Police Department (EPD), which were the two most expensive departments.

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Commissioner Givens questioned if unexpended budgeted funds from a department were returned to the General Fund. Mr. Repole responded in the positive. Referring to the EPD Pension Plan, Mr. Repole stated the financial impact of the actuarial study would affect Fiscal Years 2015 and 2016.

Commissioner Hicks requested discussion of the DPW budget at the August 14, 2013 workshop.

Hearing no additional business to come before the Board, Mayor Fisona adjourned the workshop at 5:40 p.m.

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L. Michelle Henson  
Administration Office Secretary

AN AUDIO RECORDING OF THIS MEETING IS RETAINED AT THE  
ADMINISTRATION OFFICE