

The Mayor and Commissioners of the Town of Elkton

MINUTES

October 13, 2010

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; and Mary Jo Jablonski; Town Administrator Lewis H. George, Jr.; Finance Director Steven Repole; Chief of Police William E. Ryan; Administration Office Secretary L. Michelle Henson; and Town Attorney H. Norman Wilson, Jr. Commissioner Earl M. Piner, Sr. was excused from the meeting.

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

Discussion – Welcome to Main Street Archway

Mr. George presented a preliminary drawing of the “Welcome to Main Street” archway, as designed by Mr. Ed Dowell of the Department of Public Works (“DPW”). Mr. George stated the archway would be located at the bottom of the stairs leading from the municipal parking lot to West Main Street.

Commissioner Jablonski commended Mr. Dowell’s design and stated the lighting in the stairway and parking lot needed to be upgraded. Mr. George stated he could obtain a quote for the improvements to the lighting.

It was the consensus of the Board to erect the archway and investigate the costs associated with upgrades to the lighting in the municipal parking lot and stairway leading to East Main Street.

Discussion – Ordinance 9-2010 – Traffic Violation

Mayor Fisona stated the Town was owed more than \$199,000 in unpaid parking citations, and said he asked Chief Ryan and Mr. George to investigate possible solutions to the issue. Mayor Fisona said out of state violators amounted to about one half of the total in fines, adding that Maryland did not have reciprocity with other states regarding parking fine collection.

Mr. Repole stated that the Town flagged Maryland registered cars with outstanding parking fines, and the Maryland Motor Vehicle Administration (“MVA”) did not permit registration of a vehicle until all outstanding fines were settled.

Mr. George stated he drafted an Ordinance that would permit towing and storing, or immobilization of vehicles upon which \$75.00 or more in violation fines was outstanding.

Chief Ryan expressed concerns regarding the Ordinance, saying Police Officers and Parking Enforcement staff would need access to finance information in order to determine which cars would be towed or immobilized. He said this would require a hand held computer device which would cost approximately \$225.00 per month. He asked if the local towing companies accommodate the Town with towing and storage services, and said towing a car that was parked between two vehicles on the street would be difficult. He asked how many immobilization devices (“boot”) the Town intended to purchase, and asked what type of procedure would be in place if damage to the boot or violator’s vehicle occurred. He stated the boots weighed about fifty pounds, and expressed concern that officers could be injured while installing and removing the devices.

Chief Ryan asked what would happen if a vehicle was impounded or booted, and the owner wanted to pay the outstanding violations on a Friday afternoon at 4:30. He said the car would be inaccessible for the weekend.

Commissioner Jablonski stated the parking time limits should be clarified on signage, and suggested that the Town advertise free parking in the municipal lots.

Commissioner Givens thanked Chief Ryan for his comments and stated the Ordinance had more negative impacts than positive.

Discussion – Blight Ordinance and Rental Housing Ordinance

Mr. Patrick Sypolt, Risk Manager for the City of Havre de Grace, was introduced to the Board. Mr. Sypolt stated Commissioner Givens asked him to discuss the City of Havre de Grace’s procedures for inspection of residential and commercial properties.

Mr. Sypolt stated that 33% of Havre de Grace’s residential housing units were rental, and added that the city used the International Property Maintenance Code for its residential inspection guidelines.

Mr. Sypolt stated the city worked to create a partnership with landlords and real estate agents. He said education and uniform enforcement were keys to the success of their program, adding that his department partnered with the Police Department so the officers could recognize code violations during their investigations.

Discussion ensued regarding the Town of Elkton’s Code. Commissioner Jablonski stated the Town’s Code contained the tools needed to address blighted and problem properties.

Discussion continued regarding the City of Havre de Grace’s Rental Property Registration. Mr. Sypolt stated the process was lengthy but it aided the city in creating a database of rental properties and tracking of problem properties. He said the registry was a useful tool to bring landlords together for education and to lend assistance when needed.

Commissioner Hicks questioned how Havre de Grace addressed vacant properties. Mr. Sypolt stated the city followed up with property owners or the holding company. He said the city initiated needed repairs and billed the appropriate party for the costs, adding that unpaid fees resulted in a lien on the property. He added that the city contracted cutting of high grass, which freed up city staff.

Commissioner Jablonski reiterated her opinion that the Town Code contained the tools needed to address properties that had a deleterious effect on the surrounding neighborhood, and expressed support for a Rental Property Registration. Mayor Fisona and Commissioner Hicks agreed that the Town should initiate a Rental Property Registration program.

Commissioner Hicks expressed support for Cecil County's proposed Ordinance regarding Rental Housing Maintenance and Occupancy.

Discussion ensued regarding the Rental Registration inspection process. Mr. Sypolt stated the landlord and tenant complete separate inspection checklists for the City of Havre de Grace.

Commissioner Hicks stated a Rental Registration was a tool to assist landlords and tenants in property maintenance and overall community success. He stated the registration would not be used to target residents or landlords. Commissioner Jablonski concurred with Commissioner Hicks' remarks.

Commissioner Jablonski stated the Zoning Department should be involved in discussions regarding Rental Registration.

Hearing no additional business to come before the Board, Mayor Fisona adjourned the meeting at 5:33 p.m.

L. Michelle Henson
Administration Office Secretary

A RECORDING OF THIS MEETING RETAINED
AT THE ADMINISTRATION OFFICE