

# **Minutes of the Council of the City of Easton, Pa.**

**July 12, 2023**

Easton, Pa  
Wednesday  
July 12, 2023  
6:00 p.m.

City Council met in stated session at the above date and time, in Council Chambers, located on the Third Floor of City Hall, 123 S. Third Street, to consider any business that may lawfully be brought before the body.

The invocation was given by Mayor Panto, followed by the Pledge of Allegiance,

## **ROLL CALL**

Present: Brown, Edinger, Melan, O'Connell, Ruggles, Sultana, Panto (7)

Absent: None (0)

Also, participating in the meeting were Rita M. Messa, City Clerk, Mark Lysynecky, Finance Director, Henry Hennings, Fire Chief, David Hopkins, Director of Public Works, Stephen Nowroski, Director of Planning and Codes, and Joel Scheer, City Solicitor. At the beginning of the meeting there were twelve (12) other participants present with several firefighters present to support the new firefighters who were being "sworn in".

## **APPROVAL OF AGENDA**

The agenda was approved on motion of Dr. Ruggles seconded by Mr. O'Connell by the following vote:

Yeas: Edinger, Melan, O'Connell, Ruggles, Sultana, Panto, Brown (7)

Nays: None (0)

## **ACTION ON THE MINUTES**

A motion was made by Mr. Brown seconded by Mr. O'Connell to approve the June 28, 2023 meeting minutes. The minutes were approved by the following vote.

Yeas: Melan, O'Connell, Ruggles, Sultana, Panto, Brown, Edinger (7)

Nays: None (0)

## **SWEARING IN OF NEW FIREFIGHTERS**

At this time Mayor Panto issued the Oath of Office to the City's three (3) new firefighters: Anthony Castillo, Michael Escrivao, Giovanni Peres

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Mayor Panto thanked all of the firefighters who came to witness the “swearing in” of the City’s new Firefighter’s and thank them all for keeping the City safe.

## **PUBLIC COMMENT – AGENDA ITEMS ONLY**

Ms. Angela Spear, 1020 Ferry Street asked Council about Bill No. 22 that would be voted on later in the meeting.

Ms. Spear is in the process of selling her house and she was concerned whether or not this Ordinance would change her status regarding selling her home.

Mayor Panto addressed Ms. Spear’s concern.

Mr. Nowroski, Director of Planning and Codes was in attendance and he will speak with Ms. Spear regarding this matter.

## **CONSENT AGENDA**

The following items on the Consent Agenda were approved on motion of Mr. O’Connell seconded by Mrs. Sultana by the following vote:

Bill No. 22 (Ord. 5827) - Approving Amendments to sections in Chapter 222- Buyer Notification

Bill No. 23 (Ord. 5828) – Approving Amendments to sections in Chapter 285 – Fees

Bill No. 24 (Ord. 5829) – Approving Amendments to sections in Chapter 515 – Streets & Sidewalks

Resolution 96-2023 - Authorizing application for PennDOT’s Trans. Alternative Set-Aside Program for reimbursement for repair/replacement to Abbott Street Bridge and Lock over Lehigh Canal

Yeas: Brown, Edinger, Melan, O’Connell, Ruggles, Sultana, Panto (7)

Nays: None (0)

## **REPORTS RECEIVED BY COUNCIL**

Fire Department Report was received for June, 2023

## **REPORTS OF COMMITTEES**

Mr. Brown, Chairperson of the Finance Committee had no financial report, however, he stated that he received a phone call from Mr. Campos who thanked everyone for their prayers, thoughts and cards.

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Mr. O'Connell, Chairperson of the Economic Development Committee had no report regarding Economic Development, however, Mr. O'Connell wanted to commend the County and the area non-profits for all of the work they have done to help the victims of the Ferry Street fire.

Mr. O'Connell stated that the City of Easton does not have a social services agency, however the aforementioned agencies provide the social services that are needed and the City of Easton provides help in any way it could.

Mr. O'Connell also stated that the City does help in ways that are not immediately observable to the general public. He stated that the Neighborhood Center and Safe Harbor are non-profits that are all housed in City owned property. The City charges one dollar (\$1.00) rent to each of these agencies which allows all of their financial resources to be devoted to helping people.

Mr. O'Connell also said that the City, in collaboration with the Easton Redevelopment Authority, is actively pursuing ways to offer affordable housing to those who need it. He stated that blighted properties are being taken/purchased, rehabbed and then selling them at below market value to those who might not otherwise be able to afford a home.

Mr. O'Connell also stated that the City is in the process of establishing a Non-Profit Housing Development Corporation to help provide properties and financing to people who need affordable housing.

Mrs. Sultana, Chairperson of the Planning and Code Committee stated that she would be having a Committee Meeting on Tuesday July 25, 2023 to continue the discussion of whether to allow chickens in the City.

Dr. Ruggles, Chairperson of the Public Safety Committee had no report.

Mr. Edinger, Chairperson of the Public Works Committee had no report.

Mr. Melan, Chairperson of the Administration Committee had no report.

Mr. Scheer, City Solicitor had no report.

Mayor Panto stated that unfortunately Heritage Day was a "washout" but wanted to thank all of the businesses who helped out during the storm.

Mayor Panto stated that he appointed Mr. David Hopkins as the Acting City Administrator in the temporary absence of Mr. Campos.

Mayor Panto stated that the fireworks will be held this Sunday and Mayor Panto wanted to thank Wilson Borough for opening their field on Wood Ave. to allow people to watch the fireworks.

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Mayor Panto stated that there is another Cruise Night scheduled for Saturday, July 15, 2023 with a Few Good Men playing music.

Mayor Panto also stated that the Housing Authority wants to raise the rent for the Boys and Girls Club which is located in Neston Heights, which could possibly cause the Boys and Girls Club to close.

Mayor Panto stated that he really does not understand why this would happen now as the Boys and Girls Club has been operating in that area since 1974 and he is hoping this could be resolved quickly as the Boys and Girls Club is a “shining star” for that area.

Mayor Panto also stated that the Director of the Housing Authority wants to meet with City Officials to discuss the Choice Neighborhood Grant. Mayor Panto spoke briefly on this topic.

Mayor Panto also stated that the correct title for the housing authority is the Housing Authority of the City of Easton.

Mr. Campos, City Administrator was not present at the meeting.

## **CORRESPONDENCE**

There was no correspondence received by Council.

## **UNFINISHED BUSINESS**

There was no unfinished business at this time.

## **NEW BUSINESS**

Bill No. 25 – Amending Sections in Chapter 318 – Historic Preservation of the Code of the City of Easton introduced by Mrs. Sultana and ordered processed for adoption.

The next item on the agenda was a Resolution approving an Agreement with Grace Industries for Phase I of the Cattell Street Safety Improvements.

The following Resolution was introduced by Mr. Edinger

97-2023

However, before the vote was taken, Mayor Panto asked Mr. Hopkins to give Council a brief description of what work would be done on Cattell Street.

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Mr. Hopkins stated that Phase I will include bump-outs, flashing beacons, intersection lighting among other things.

Mr. Hopkins also stated that there will be two other phases for this project, however, we are waiting on designs. He also stated that discussions with PennDOT are ongoing to develop a complete comprehensive plan.

Mr. Hopkins also updated Council on the Wood Avenue Project and also stated that bids are due later this week.

Dr. Ruggles stated to Mr. Hopkins that he believes that the markings on the curve at Knox Avenue and Cattell Street are slowing down the traffic.

Mr. Hopkins stated that there is possibility that a medium could be installed to also help with the traffic.

Dr. Ruggles stated that with the construction on McCartney Street for Lafayette College's new residence hall – he is concerned about also having part of Cattell Street closed during the upgrade.

Mr. Hopkins addressed Dr. Ruggles' concern.

Dr. Ruggles also asked about the unit block at 7<sup>th</sup> and Wood Avenue being one way. Mr. Hopkins explained that the unit block will still be one way but it will be one way going East instead of West. The concern was the possibility of losing parking, however, Mr. Hopkins assured Dr. Ruggles that this would not be the case.

Mayor Panto stated that three (3) speed timing devices have been placed throughout the City.

Mr. Hopkins stated that he is hoping to be able to place more of these devices around the City.

There was a brief discussion on this matter.

Mr. Art Ravitz, 144 Church Street asked if the change to the unit block of Wood Avenue slow down the traffic.

The answer to his question was yes and the lighting at that intersection will be changed as well.

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Mayor Panto stated that the lights on the north side of the circle were hit by lightning and Mr. Hopkins advised everyone that this was already fixed.

After all the discussion the above Resolution was approved on motion of Mr. Edinger seconded by Mr. Brown by the following vote:

Yeas: Edinger, Melan, O'Connell, Ruggles, Sultana, Panto, Brown (7)

Nays: None (0)

## **PUBLIC COMMENT**

**On any item)**

Ms. Michelle Oncay, 932 Ferry Street thanked Councilperson Sultana for all of her help regarding the Ferry Street fire victims. She stated that Mrs. Sultana was at the scene every day. She also stated that she too was outraged that Lance Wheeler was arrested while he was helping the victims and she believes that should not have happened.

Mayor Panto asked her if she went to Wilson Borough Council to express her outrage since it was Wilson Borough's warrant not the City of Easton's warrant.

Ms. Oncay also stated that some people did not receive any monies that were collected.

Mayor Panto stated that as far as he knew all of the monies were distributed and if someone did not get the monies he would like proof of that.

Dr. Ruggles stated that he was present when the money was being distributed and taken.

Dr. Ruggles also stated that while Ms. Oncay did not see people who are "high profile" does not mean they were not working in the background.

Mrs. Sultana thanked Ms. Oncay for her kind words.

Ms. Evette Simmons, 1019 Ferry Street stated that she watched Mrs. Sultana show up every day to help the victims. She stated that she very rarely sees someone "in office" there to help.

Mayor Panto explained what he and the City have done to help the victims and will continue to do whatever he can to help.

There was a brief discussion on this matter.

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Mrs. Sultana thanked Ms. Simmons for her kind words.

Mr. Joe Atkinson, 1116 Russell Ave, Bethlehem voiced his support for Mrs. Sultana stating that whenever something is happening in the City she is always there and he does not believe that she has anything to apologize for. He stated that Easton is very fortunate to have her.

Mrs. Sultana thanked Mr. Atkinson for his kind words.

Mr. Jay Hyman, 518 Parson Street read a statement to Council regarding a property he was going to purchase and rehab. (copy attached hereto).

When Mr. Hyman was done reading his statement Mayor Panto stated that his concern cannot be handled by the City of Easton.

Mr. Scheer also stated that municipal government has no say in Mr. Hyman's concern, however, Mr. Hyman could certainly file a complaint with the Pennsylvania Ethics Board if he feels something was done unethically.

Mr. Frank Pintabone, 1107 W. Berwick Street applauded the audience for thanking Mrs. Sultana for all of her help with the Ferry Street fire victims, however, he stated that many people in the City have come together to help the victims as well, without being recognized, so no one should assume that they were not there helping.

Mr. Pintabone spoke briefly on this matter.

Ms. Samantha Juckem stated that she attended the last meeting and spoke about the position of City Mediator. Ms. Juckem stated that she has spoken with the City's Community Advocate and believes that this position will make the process easier for any victim.

Ms. Juckem thanked the community for all of their help during this time.

Mrs. Sultana stated that she believes everyone affected by the fire has found new housing.

Mr. Barron VanDerburg, 6 Starlight Drive stated that he was very inspired as an advocate of Easton. He believes that one of the greatest things the City could do is establish an Office of Public Advocate which will serve as liaison and will minimize any misunderstandings and will create better communication.

Mr. Art Ravitz, 144 Church Street stated that Mayor Panto is the Public Advocate.

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Mr. Sal Pugliese, 2225 Hackett Avenue stated that he did not know that Easton Auto Body had a City dump because loads and loads of bananas were dumped behind 13<sup>th</sup> & Elm Street.

Mayor Panto stated that the City has a dumping problem and also stated that the City's allows a lot of things to be placed out for garbage collection.

Dr. Ruggles stated that while a police officer cannot be stationed at that location – he suggested that Mr. Pugliese call the police when this is happening.

Mr. Pugliese stated that he has called the police in the past and has gotten nowhere. Mr. Pugliese stated that Easton Auto Body is allowing/doing the dumping.

Mayor Panto stated that we would look into this matter.

Ms. Samantha Juckem stated that she actually lives in Kansas City and they have composting services and the City should look into that.

Mayor Panto spoke briefly on this topic.

Ms. Evette Simmons, 1029 Ferry Street addressed Council again by stating that while she was in the audience listening to everyone comment on who helped the fire victims she now believes that when Mrs. Sultana was at the fire scene she was representing all of Council.

## ADJOURNMENT

With no further business, the meeting was adjourned at 7:09 p.m. on motion of Mr. O'Connell and Mr. Brown by the following vote:

Yeas: O'Connell, Ruggles, Sultana, Panto, Brown Edinger, Melan (7)

Nays: None (0)



Rita M. Messa  
City Clerk





# CITY OF EASTON

PENNSYLVANIA  
City Clerk's Office

July 7, 2023

## COUNCIL MEETING NOTICE

A meeting of City Council has been scheduled for Wednesday, July 12, 2023 beginning at 6:00 p.m. for the transaction of Regular Business.

The meeting will be held in Council Chambers located on the 3<sup>rd</sup> floor of City Hall, 123 S. 3<sup>rd</sup> Street, Easton, Pa.

All meetings of City Council are open to the Public and are accessible to persons with disabilities.

The City of Easton Council Meeting will also be live streamed starting at 6:00 p.m.

Live Stream video: <http://bit.ly/EastonLiveStream>

**MASKS ARE OPTIONAL**

Rita M. Messa  
City Clerk

CITY COUNCIL  
AGENDA

Stated Session  
Wednesday  
July 12, 2023  
6:00 p.m.

1. CALL TO ORDER
2. INVOCATION
3. PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE
4. ROLL CALL
5. APPROVAL OF AGENDA
6. ACTION ON MINUTES -- Approving minutes of June 14, 2023 meeting
7. SWEARING IN OF NEW FIREFIGHTERS:            Giovanni Peres  
   Michael Escrivao  
   Anthony Castillo
8. PUBLIC COMMENT – Agenda Items Only
9. CONSENT AGENDA
  - (a) Bill No. 22 – Approving amendments to sections in Chapter 222 -Buyer Notification
  - (b) Bill No. 23 – Approving amendments to sections in Chapter 285 – Fees
  - (c) Bill No. 24 – Approving amendments to sections in Chapter 515 – Streets & Sidewalks
  - (d) Resolution authorizing application for PennDOT’s Trans. Alternative Set-Aside Program
10. REPORTS RECEIVED BY COUNCIL
  - (a) Fire Department Report for June, 2023
11. REPORTS OF COMMITTEES
  - (a) Finance (Kenneth Brown)
  - (b) Economic Development (David O’Connell)
  - (c) Planning and Code (Taiba Sultana)
  - (d) Public Safety (Roger Ruggles)
  - (e) Public Works (James Edinger)
  - (f) Administration (Peter Melan)
  - (g) Report of City Solicitor (Attorney Joel Scheer)
  - (h) Report of Mayor (Salvatore J. Panto Jr.)
  - (i) Report of City Administrator (Luis Campos)
12. CORRESPONDENCE
13. UNFINISHED BUSINESS

14. NEW BUSINESS
  - (a) Bill No. 25 – Amending Sections in Chapter 318 – Historic Preservation
  - (b) Resolution approving an Agreement with Grace Industries
15. PUBLIC COMMENT – On Any Matter
16. ADJOURNMENT

Good evening Mr. Mayor and Council My name is Jay Hymans Owner of ICONIQ Waste Management and ICONIQ Cash Equity resident at 518 Parsons St, on College Hill.

I would like to thank you, Mr. Mayor and Council, for allowing me to exercise my right as a tax paying citizen to address you this evening. My concern is I feel a disconnect as a small yet growing black business owner in the city of Easton. And I would like some clarity and thoughts on how the city holds probate attorneys accountable for illegally obtaining administrator positions over appointed executors and executrix by the wishes of deceased family members that left those responsibilities to those family members through a will?

My company ICONIQ Cash Equity went into agreement with the estate of Joseph Dawson (deceased) with the executrix Vieta Hymans (present) on March 15th, 2023. And signed two addendums to extend closing to July 3rd, while I was still obtaining funds to close. My numbers all checked out as real estate investors we use a certain formula which I'd be happy to share if Mr. Mayor and Council allows me tonight.

I started to raise the \$100,000 for purchase and rehab. In which I created two pitch decks, a video of the deal on college hill, how my company will save student tenants living off campus a better product, investors return, city of Easton taxes, and a few other pieces of literature. Rejected by 44 banks, credit unions, hard and private money. Also, in my pitch deck I explained how I want to develop on college hill like the late great Mr. David W Nevin of the paxinosa inn and other luxury developments from the early 1900s. I just rolled my sleeves up and not knowing how to do it got to work with no complaints.

Finally, I obtained what I thought was a partner and as you know in business, specifically in real estate, they're a lot of frauds. And this partner was too. So, I had to get back out here and raise funds again this time to be rejected by 27 private investors. This took 5 months day in and day out exhausting all my personal finances to make this work. And finally, one investor believed in my deal and generous return and put his money in the title company, and we were ready to close on July 3rd as my addendum stated. This seems like a happy story, right? Black kid from the Bronx, that went to liberty high school had made it in the world of small business and now private equity. Well, I thought so too until an attorney stepped in on June 14th and without any evidence except for "I gave the executrix enough time" and by the judge was granted to be the administrator of the estate. The executrix also happens to be my mother in which she had paid out of her own pocket over \$9000 which includes Easton taxes, appraisals, junk removal, lawyer fees ect. She has been misled and taken advantage of by this attorney and other attorneys in this process as she was just learning herself. I have been told by this attorney that he will not close, and my contract is not valid, which it is, and we have put every last dime into closing this deal so we can renovate and make this property a rental keeping it in our family.

My question to you, Mr Mayor and council, is how is this attorney Steven Gousanzion above our laws of the great city of Easton and who is there to hold him accountable?

I'm sure this is some of your all's friend but let me remind you.

**No one is above the law.**

You can ask former mayor Pawloski from Allentown serving his 15-year sentence. I feel discriminated against as a black business professional, as I the police were called on myself and family when we had a meeting with this attorney, in which we committed no crime, my mother has been lied to and robbed of her inheritance position to settle the estate. And now the property is going into foreclosure because attorney gousasaion has not paid the property taxes on June 30th when he had documentation too.

It is my belief that

We need attorneys and judges that take the oath of office seriously. We need attorneys that believe not in just the letter, but in the spirit of democracy.

And the central spirit of democracy is that as an attorney you are just one representative of the people. In a series of coequal branches there are checks and balances to the system, you are subject to those checks and balances. You cannot ignore them. You cannot make your own rules. You cannot view the justice department and local government as your personal law firm. You cannot ignore norms. Guard rails.

They have been put in place to ensure that your self-interest isn't what drives these institutions and law firms in our city. But rather is the interest of the American people. And so, if you have anybody that's occupying these offices that disregard that higher purpose. Then you're going to have problems.

The good news is that through the mechanism of voting the people in our community will have the opportunity to reaffirm their belief in American democracy.

And Mr. mayor and council, I do believe that what happens in our United States matters around the world starting with our local government. So, I am here to ask for clarity of how one can take a possession of a position from an executrix without any evidence of misconduct or misappropriations of funds. Just a simply because "I said so" from this attorney won't do. Any suggestions?