

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

December 13, 2023

Easton, Pa
Wednesday
December 13, 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, Panto (6)

Absent: Sultana (1)

NOTE: Mrs. Sultana arrived at 6:08

Also, participating in the meeting were Rita M. Messa, City Clerk, Luis Campos, City Administrator, Mark Lysynecky, Finance Director, Joel Scheer, City Solicitor and Jeremy Clark, Assistant City Solicitor. At the beginning of the meeting there were eleven (11) other participants present.

APPROVAL OF AGENDA

A motion was made by Dr. Ruggles seconded by Mr. O’Connell to approve the agenda. The agenda was approved by the following vote:

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

Nays: None (0)

ACTION ON THE MINUTES

A motion was made by Mr. O’Connell seconded by Mr. Brown to approve the November 21, 2023 meeting minutes. The minutes were approved by the following vote.

Yeas: Melan, O’Connell, Ruggles, Panto, Brown, Edinger (6)

Nays: None (0)

PUBLIC COMMENT – AGENDA ITEMS ONLY

There was no public comment at this time.

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CONSENT AGENDA

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

Bill No. 38 (Ord. No. 5842) An Ordinance amending Pool Fees
Bill No. 39 (Ord. No. 5843) An Ordinance amending the 2023 General Fund Budget
Bill No. 40 (Ord. No. 5844) An Ordinance amending the 2023 Debt Service Fund Budget
Bill No. 41 (Ord. No. 5845) An Ordinance amending the 2023 Health Benefits Fund Budget
Resolution 183-2023 - Approving appointments to various Authorities, Boards and Commission
Resolution 184-2023 – Approving list of items for MUNICIPAL Auction

Yeas: Brown, Edinger, Melan, O'Connell, Ruggles, Panto (6)

Nays: None (0)

Mayor Panto thanked Council for approving the appointments to the Planning Commission which now has two members of the West Ward.

REPORTS RECEIVED BY COUNCIL

No reports were received.

REPORTS OF COMMITTEES

Mr. Brown, Chairperson of the Finance Committee spoke about legislation he would have later in the meeting and he is happy for the year to end.

Mr. O'Connell, Chairperson of the Economic Development Committee had no report.

Mrs. Sultana, Chairperson of the Planning and Code Committee was not present at this time.

Dr. Ruggles, Chairperson of the Public Safety Committee reminded everyone of the Lidar demonstration that will be on Monday, December 18th at the Police Department at 10:00 a.m.

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 Thyme, the Roof Top Restaurant at the Commodore will be open to the public sometime next week.

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Mayor Panto stated that the Bayou Restaurant had a collapsed sewer line over the weekend – the ice rink had to be dismantled for repairs, however, the ice rink will be reinstalled for the final week of the Winter Fest.

Mayor Panto stated that there will be a discussion on the special events due to the traffic issues that have been occurring.

The Winter Market will be hosting the Bach Choir this weekend at 4:00.

Mayor Panto stated that the City has received a suggested design for the Nesquehoning Memorial Cemetery Park. The initial cost is around \$450,000; however, the City will look into seeing what can be done “in house” to pare down the cost of the renovation.

Mayor Panto stated that the Ferry Street properties that were damaged by a fire are not owned by the City of Easton. He stated that one property has sold, one property is up for sale and one property is being renovated. Mayor Panto spoke briefly on this matter.

Mayor Panto stated that the City has received thirty-one (31) applications for the position of Parking Enforcement Officer in the Traffic Division of the Police Department.

Mayor Panto announced the Retirement of Rita M. Messa, City Clerk.

Mayor Panto stated that the annual Employee Appreciation Luncheon will be held on Wednesday, December 20th.

Mr. Campos, City Administrator stated that both he and Mr. Lysynecky attended the Third-Class City Managers Meeting and some of the topics discussed were finances, budget, ERP Systems just to name a few.

Mr. Campos stated that “insourcing” trash services were also discussed. Mr. Campos will look into this further.

Mr. Campos also stated that the City has a program through Service Line Warranties of America which covers water and sewer lines for homes. Mr. Campos stated that City of Easton has approximately 160 customers that subscribed to this program and has saved approximately \$75,000 using this program. Mr. Campos will be sending more information to Council regarding this program.

Mr. Campos also stated that the City was contacted by the Governor’s Office regarding funding for renewable energy. He stated that the Lease with New England Hydro is being held off at this time as the City is trying to do its due diligence regarding renewable energy.

Mr. Campos also stated that the State of Pennsylvania is looking at our Chain Dam and Easton Dam regarding this topic.

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Mr. Campos continued to speak on this matter.

Mr. Scheer noted that City supports green energy – he continued stating that the concept is one thing but the lease is something different. The lease is filled with adverse items and he wants Council to be aware of all of the provisions in the lease and wants to make sure that the citizens are not exposed to liability.

Mr. Scheer continued to speak on this matter.

Mr. Campos stated that his final matter to discuss has to do with Bill No. 42 but he will wait until that part of the meeting.

At this time, Mrs. Sultana stated that she wanted to propose a few things, however, she will wait until Council discusses Bill No. 42.

CORRESPONDENCE

There was no correspondence received by Council.

UNFINISHED BUSINESS

Bill No. 42 (Ord. 5846) An Ordinance providing Revenues and Appropriating Specific Sums to be required for the City Budget during the Fiscal Year 2024 was adopted on motion of Mr. Brown and Dr. Ruggles by the following vote:

However, before the vote was taken, there was a discussion on Bill No. 42 with Mr. Campos explaining, in detail, why the Administration would like to move monies from Council's Line Item – Meetings and Conferences to the Administrations Line Item – Contingency. Mr. Brown stated that he has no problem with this change as he believes it makes everything “cleaner.”

Mrs. Sultana addressed the fire that destroyed a City block on Ferry Street on May 29, 2023. She stated that people had to save themselves and lost everything they had in this fire. She continued to speak on the events of that day. Community members have come together to help the victims of the fire; however, it took at least five months for the non-profits to help house everyone who was displaced.

She would like to create/propose a policy called F.E.R.R.Y. Aid (Fire, Emergency, Risk, Recovery, Yield). She believes that the Economic Development Department can handle this program since it directly correlates to housing.

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The policy will help anyone who may be affected by fires or other disasters. F.E.R.R.Y. Aid can help people in this community with rent payments, repairs, etc. with funds not surpassing \$4,000 per household.

Mrs. Sultana continued to speak on this matter.

Mr. Brown stated that when he was a housing manager – he would always advise his tenants to make sure they had Renter insurance to protect themselves.

Mr. Brown asked if the City would be able to have this program funded by tax-payers money, who would oversee this program, who will decide who is eligible for the monies and how much monies would be given as well as what line item would these funds come from?

Mrs. Sultana said that a lot of people in the City of Easton live paycheck to paycheck and cannot afford insurance. She also stated that, yes, this is taxpayer money but the money would be spent on taxpayers.

Mayor Panto asked who would decide what is a disaster? Mayor agrees with Mr. Brown that it is unfortunate that many cannot afford insurance but now many landlords are requiring renters to have insurance because they do not want to see the renter get hurt and secondly isn't that the job of our non-profits?

Dr. Ruggles stated that the City has organizations that do this kind of work. Dr. Ruggles also spoke of the Red Cross, FEMA and other agencies that provide aid and he does not believe that the City needs to do this. Dr. Ruggles spoke briefly on this matter.

Mayor Panto asked why this topic was not brought up in any of the three (3) budget hearings? The budget that has already introduced is a balanced budget. The Mayor asked how much money Mrs. Sultana would like to see in this "program," she stated \$100,000 and Mayor Panto asked where the money would come from and that she would have to cut \$100,000 from somewhere else in the budget.

Mr. Scheer stated that the budget was introduced two (2) weeks ago – now is the time to vote, however, any council member has the right to make an amendment but there would have to be another meeting because the suggested change would be a substantial change. The proposal for this "program" would have to have very clear details on how the funds on what this program is all about and how it would work. An outline should be worked on and discussed at a Committee meeting and without a clean plan of where the monies would be coming from – it would not be appropriate at this time.

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Mrs. Sultana stated that this does not have to happen tonight but would like to talk about this topic in the future and changes could be made.

A lengthy discussion continued on this matter with Mayor Panto, Mr. Brown, Dr. Ruggles, Mrs. Sultana and Mr. Campos all commenting on this topic.

Dr. Ruggles suggested that Council look at Mrs. Sultana's proposal, take it to the Public Safety Committee, work on it and work with the Administration to put together a possibility of what might come forward.

After a discussion, Dr. Ruggles made a motion seconded by Mr. Brown to amend Bill No. 42 by allowing the suggested change of moving \$15,000 from Council's Meeting and Conferences line item to the Administrations Contingency line item. The motion was approved by the following vote:

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

Nays: None (0)

The amended Bill No. 42 which Mr. Brown previously moved and Dr. Ruggles seconded, was then approved by the following vote:

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

Nays: None (0)

Bill No. 43 (Ord. 5847) An Ordinance setting the Tax Rate for 2024 was adopted on motion of Mr. Brown and Mr. Edinger by the following vote:

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

Nays: None (0)

NEW BUSINESS

Bill No. 44 – Amending Sections in Chapter 560, Vehicles and Traffic (Meters) was introduced by Mr. Melan and ordered processed for adoption.

Bill No. 45 – Amending Chapter 560 – Vehicles and Traffic (Trash Pickup) was introduced by Mr. Edinger and ordered processed for adoption.

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Bill No. 46 – Amending the 2023 General Fund Budget was introduced by Mr. Brown and ordered processed for adoption.

Bill No. 47 – Amending the 2023 Debt Service Budget was introduced by Mr. Brown and ordered processed for adoption.

The next item on the agenda was a Resolution approving a proposal with Barry Isett & Associates for work regarding the demolition of 911-933 Ferry Street.

The following Resolution was introduced by Mrs. Sultana, however, after a brief discussion and before the vote was taken on this matter, Dr. Ruggles made a motion to table this item until more information is available on whether this contract is even needed.

The next item on the agenda was a Resolution approving a proposal with Palmiq Inc. for Centripetal Cybersecurity (Clean INTERNET) Services for a cost of \$72,678.06.

The following Resolution was introduced by Mr. Melan

185-2023

The above Resolution was approved on motion of Mr. Melan and Mr. O’Connell by the following vote:

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

Nays: None (0)

The next item on the agenda was a Resolution naming the Press Box at the Ed McMurtrie Field House at Heil Park the Scott Ransom Press Box.

The following Resolution was introduced by Mayor Panto

186-2023

Before the vote was taken Mayor Panto stated that Scott has been involved in the City’s Recreation Program for over thirty (30) years.

Mayor Panto also gave an explanation about the “time date” for the naming of the Press Box.

Mayor Panto also spoke about when the Field House was built.

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At this time, Mr. Pintabone got Mr. Ransom on the phone advising him that Council is going to name the Press Box the Scott Ransom Press Box.

Mr. Ransom addressed Council by stating that he is at a loss for words, he is honored and appreciative of having his name on the Press Box. He thanked all of Council.

The above Resolution was then approved on motion of Mayor Panto and Dr. Ruggles by the following vote:

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

Nays: None (0)

The next item on the agenda was a Resolution approving money amounts for Councilmember Conferences.

The following Resolution was introduced by Mr. Brown

187-2023

The above Resolution was approved on motion of Mr. Brown and Mr. O'Connell by the following vote:

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

Nays: None (0)

The next item on the agenda was a Resolution approving the Administration Benefits Package for the year 2024.

The following Resolution was introduced by Mr. Melan

188-2023

The above Resolution was approved on motion of Mr. Melan and Mr. Sultana by the following vote:

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

Nays: None (0)

The next item on the agenda was a Resolution approving the 2024 Salary and Wages

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The following Resolution was introduced by Mr. Melan

189-2023

The above Resolution was approved on motion of Mr. Melan and Mrs. Sultana by the following vote:

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

Nays: None (0)

The next item on the agenda was a Resolution canceling the December 27, 2023 Council meeting.

The following Resolution was introduced by Mayor Panto

190-2023

The above Resolution was approved on motion of Mayor Panto and Mr. O’Connell by the following vote:

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

Nays: None (0)

The Ordinances that were just introduced – they will be placed on the Consent Agenda for the January 2, 2024 meeting to “clean up” this business. Once this is complete the reorganization agenda will take place.

There was also a brief discussion whether these Ordinances will be affected immediately since they are budget related or in thirty (30) days.

PUBLIC COMMENT
On any item)

Mr. Ed Lamontagne, 722 Jackson Street addressed Council stating that he sent Council emails through the City’s website, however, no Councilmembers received these emails so our system must not be working.

Mayor Panto stated that D. Kollmorgen, in the City’s IT Department will look into this matter.

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Mr. Lamontagne concern is the N. 7th Street new construction design which will have an island and is worried about coming down 7th Street and not being able to stop in bad weather. After some discussion, Mayor Panto stated that he will look into Mr. Lamontagne's concern.

Mr. Lamontagne also asked who was on the committee regarding the West Ward Sign. Mayor Panto addressed Mr. Lamontagne question. Mr. Lamontagne stated that he feels that the money that was spent for the West Ward sign could have certainly been used for much better uses like lights or cameras.

There was a brief discussion on this topic.

Ms. Precious Chenekan, 345 Ferry Street spoke about the construction that is going on. Due to the construction a cabinet has fallen off the wall, the phone and internet service has been interrupted.

Her business relies on both phone and internet services. She stated that she has been in contact with Verizon more than once but the situation has not yet been resolved. She stated that other businesses have also been affected.

Mayor Panto stated that he will speak with Verizon, Met-Ed and Northstar to address her concerns.

Ms. Lynn Fraser, 1044 Ferry Street stated that dumpsters were placed at the 900 block of Ferry Street properties that were burned down. She stated that the street trees are still there and are hoping that these trees will be preserved.

Ms. Fraser is concerned with what will be built on these properties. She spoke about properties that had burned down in the past and were replaced with cheaply built buildings. Ms. Fraser continued to speak on this topic.

Ms. Fraser also spoke about two (2) \$10,000 façade grants that were given to a property on Ferry and Mulberry Streets. She stated that the improvements that were made are very unattractive – she stated that they painted over wavy, broken siding, they painted over rotting window frames and that the new front door is an industrial door with wired glass – she asked how this is an improvement.

Ms. Fraser stated that she is hoping something better would be done in the 900 block of Ferry Street.

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Ms. Fraser believes that the monies should be placed into a land trust. She believes that this would increase owner occupancies.

There was a lengthy discussion on this matter.

Mr. Jim Bloom, 1044 Ferry Street spoke about the parks in the West Ward. Mr. Bloom stated that there are plenty of pocket parks in the West Ward, however, they are not very useful. The West Ward has the smallest parks and the least number of parks.

Mr. Bloom also stated that the Karl Stirner Arts Trail is not feasible for use for a lot of West Ward residents.

Mr. Bloom stated that Neston Heights, when built, reduced the number of units by 100, however, the West Ward will be getting more units with the purchase of the Old Easton Home by the Easton Housing Authority.

Mr. Bloom is concerned about the amount of “green space” with the Old Easton Home project.

Mr. Bloom stated that Nevin Park has received some major improvements and there have been some improvements to Centennial Park. It was explained to Mr. Bloom that the improvements to Nevin Park were done by the neighborhood. The fountain was completed by the neighborhood; however, the City did give some money for that project.

Mayor Panto stated that he always believed that Centennial Park area was a good place for a Community Center, however, many residents stated that a Community Center would take away what little green space the West Ward had.

A lengthy discussion continued on this topic.

Mr. Ray Smallberger, 838 W. Milton Street asked about the lifeguard situation for the City pools - only having enough lifeguards for one pool. Mr. Smallberger asked if it would be wise to close one of the pools.

Mayor Panto addressed Mr. Smallberger’s question but also asked which pool should be closed.

Mayor Panto stated that the YMCA is recruiting lifeguards all year.

Mr. Hagai Feiner, 3961 Mountain View Ave., advised Council that the Grand Opening of 915 Northampton Street happened about one (1) year ago and wanted to give Council some good

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news. He stated that a very successful multi-million dollar business with fifteen (15) full-time employees will be moving into his building at 915 Northampton Street which is a big win for the City of Easton. His business will move into 913 Ferry Street which is being renovated now.

Mr. Feiner continued to speak on this matter and thanked the City for their support.

He also stated that the West Ward Clean and Safe Committee will be able to continue to meet in that building.

ADJOURNMENT

With no further business, the meeting was adjourned at 7:43 p.m. on motion of Dr. Ruggles and Mr. O'Connell 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

December 8, 2023

COUNCIL MEETING NOTICE

A meeting of City Council has been scheduled for Wednesday, December 13, 2023 beginning at 6:00 p.m. for the transaction of Regular Business.

The meeting will be held in Council Chambers located on the 3rd floor of City Hall, 123 S. 3rd 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
December 13, 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 November 21, 2023
7. PUBLIC COMMENT – Agenda Items Only
8. CONSENT AGENDA
 - (a) Bill No. 38 – An Ordinance amending Pool Fees
 - (b) Bill No. 39 – An Ordinance amending 2023 General Fund Budget
 - (c) Bill No. 40 – An Ordinance amending 2023 Debt Service Fund Budget
 - (d) Bill No. 41 – An Ordinance amending 2023 Health Benefits Fund Budget
 - (e) Resolution approving appointments to various Authorities, Boards & Commissions
 - (f) Resolution approving items for MUNICIBID Auction
9. REPORTS RECEIVED BY COUNCIL
10. 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)
11. CORRESPONDENCE
12. UNFINISHED BUSINESS
 - (a) Bill No. 42 – Approving the 2024 Budget
 - (b) Bill No. 43 – Approving the Tax Rate for 2024

13. NEW BUSINESS

- (a) Bill No. 44 – Amending Sections in Chapter 560 – Vehicles and Traffic (Meters)
- (b) Bill No. 45 – Amending Chapter 560 – Vehicles and Traffic (Trash Pickup)
- (c) Bill No. 46 – Amending the 2023 General Fund Budget
- (d) Bill No. 47 – Amending the 2023 Debt Service Budget
- (e) Resolution approving a proposal with Barry Isett & Associates
- (f) Resolution approving a proposal with Palmiq Inc.
- (g) Resolution naming the Press Box at Heil Park the Scott Ransom Press Box
- (h) Resolution approving amounts for Councilmember Conferences
- (i) Resolution approving the Administration Benefits Package for 2024
- (j) Resolution approving the Salary and Wages for 2024
- (k) Resolution canceling the December 27, 2023 Council meeting

14. PUBLIC COMMENT – On Any Matter

15. ADJOURNMENT