

## **TOWN COUNCIL WORK SESSION MINUTES**

### **Town Hall**

**Monday, February 24, 2014**

**1:03pm**

Mayor Scheessele, Vice Mayor Rice, and Councilman Albright met in work session on Monday, February 24, 2014 at the Town Hall. Also in attendance were Town Manager Ryan Hicks, Town Clerk Andrea Brady, Nicole Ramstedt from the Department of Assessments, and Maryland Independent Reporter Rebecca Barnabi.

Department of Assessments: Nicole Ramstedt- Ms. Ramstedt provided Mayor and Council with information packets covering home sales, and State Department of Assessments and Taxation Charles County Real Property Base Report. According to Ms. Ramstedt the number of home sales have gone back up a little bit in the Town. The past year single family home arm's length sales have increased by 22%. Townhouse arm's length sales have gone down by 4%. Villages of Potomac saw a large decrease in sales, only one home sold. The assessment is done every three years, and Ms. Ramstedt does not anticipate any major reductions, though due to foreclosures and short sales the assessment went down more than anticipated. Mayor Scheessele asked Ms. Ramstedt about the constant yield tax rate, but since this is not Ms. Ramstedt's area of expertise she referred Mayor Scheessele to Cynthia Barkley. Mayor Scheessele discussed an inquiry the Town has received in regards to how properties are assessed to determine the tax rate due to large tax rate differences between some of the commercial properties in Town. Ms. Ramstedt explained three ways to assess properties. Properties can be assessed based on cost, income, or market/sale. Mayor Scheessele's concern is that property owners have no incentive to maintain their property when allowing the property to become a blight to the community actually lowers their tax assessment and then they still put it on the market at a premium rate. Ms., Ramstedt explained that unfortunately she is required to assess the buildings at their current conditions and there is now way around that process. Ms. Ramstedt also explained that the zoning of a property will slight affect the tax assessment. Mayor Scheessele asked how the assessments can be based off of sales when there have not been recent commercial sales in the area. Ms. Ramstedt explained that in that case she would look at the last three years to extrapolate her figures and that recently the commercial land values have gone down. Mayor Scheessele asked if the value of residential land goes up and down as well. Ms. Ramstedt explained that residential land assessments will go up and down based on sales, and she takes the total value after the change in the assessment versus the value/sales price. Mayor Scheessele and Town Manager Hicks thanked Ms. Ramstedt for taking time to come out and speak at the meeting.

Department of Special Education: Adult Independence Program –Town Manager Hicks received a letter from the Department of Special Education about their Adult Independence Program seeking partnerships with local businesses to place students with disabilities in a job where they have the opportunity to learn from experience. Town Manager Hicks said the student would not be a laborer for public works but would be used to help offset some of the cleaning and assist Bunnie. At one point the Town had a co-op program set up with the public schools and at another a summer employment program. Town Manager Hicks has seen this program in action at Melwood and in the Town of La Plata. Councilman Albright asked if the Town would be interviewing applicants. Town Manager Hicks explained that the program would interview the applicants and pick someone to fill the position. Mayor and Council said that while they like the concept they would like to get more information. Town Manager Hicks will reach out to Tony Silva from the program and see if someone can attend the March Work Session to provide further information.

Heart & Soul Ministries: Senior Center Use- Councilman Albright explained that he asked to have this added to the agenda because with his current functions at work cause him to miss councilman duties and he regrets that but having to open for H&S is preventing him from being able to schedule things on Monday evenings in case he needs to open, and at this point he has not seen a straight forward or consistent regiment for this tutoring program. The Town tries to make accommodations for anyone and everyone we can but allowing the tutoring program to continue having use of the Senior Center needs to be taken under consideration again. Councilman Albright's suggestion was to discontinue H&S use of the Senior Center since they do not have consistent use of the facility and they have blocked in three evenings but they pick and choose when they will hold tutoring sessions. Councilman Albright asked Town Clerk Brady for verification that this issue was supposed to come up to be reviewed again. Town Clerk Brady said she would have to check prior minutes but she did believe Mayor and Council agreed to review it again. Town Manager Hicks explained that this has been happening for the past several years but Mayor and Council are more aware of it now because they have been more involved. Councilman Albright requested that it be taken out of council hands. Vice Mayor Rice agreed that the current system is not working and a new system needs to be worked out with Mr. Blake. Vice Mayor Rice suggested only allowing one of the three days and they are unable to use any of the school because they offer tutoring for elementary to high school students. Mayor Scheessele said H&S wants to continue offering three sessions a week. Town Manager Hicks explained that on half days which usually fall on Wednesdays H&S will not hold tutoring. Vice Mayor Rice and Councilman Albright agreed that H&S should only be permitted to use the facility on Saturdays from 10am to 2pm. Due to the majority agreeing Town Manager Hicks will have Karen Williams right up the new agreement.

Jon Frank & Associates Inc.- Jon Frank gave Mayor and Council packets that included an employee census report, current health insurance charges, cost of renewal, alternative plans, and dental and vision plan analysis. Mr. Frank explained that this will be the first time the Town is renewing since the health insurance rules changed, and the Town's renewal date is May 1. Due to the new rules coverage has changed from average age to individual age of each person covered under the plan. Councilman Albright asked if the ages are broken down in windows or by each individual age. Mr. Frank explained that ages 0-16 are under one cost then it is broken down by each individual age up to 64 years of age then ages 65 and up are grouped together at a rate. Mr. Frank spoke about the individual market people can go to for insurance as opposed to group market offered by their employer and reviewed some of the rates listed on the census report. The only change to the Town's current plan would be prescription copays and there are no changes to the dental or vision coverage. The Careflex program has always been very successful for the Town. The Town allocated \$41,166.62 to the program and only \$19,406.50 has been used. The Town currently pays \$9,034.00 a month on health insurance and the plan would renew for \$8,488.55 saving the Town almost \$500 a month. Jon Frank's suggestion is not to make any changes to the plan and to continue with the same payroll deductions. Mayor Scheessele and Town Manager Hicks thanked Mr. Frank for coming to the meeting to review this information with everyone.

Resolutions: Reappointing CAC & PC members – Mayor and Council reviewed the ordinances for reappointment of members to the Community Activities Committee and the Planning Commission. Mayor Scheessele noticed a typo on the Planning Commission ordinance where it needed to be changed from saying 3 years to 5 years. Mayor and Council approved the resolutions with the correction.

Ordinance: Utility Charges Late Payments Charge- Mayor Scheessele requested to have his middle initial corrected at the beginning of the ordinance. Town Manager Hicks explained that the 10% late charge is in the budget ordinance but the Town's attorney Fred Sussman said that it should be in the utility ordinance as well and that is the purpose for this ordinance. Mayor and Council inquired about the penalty charge. Town Manager Hicks said the penalty charge will be addressed in a later ordinance that Fred Sussman is working on.

Application for Appointment to the EDC: Donald Anderson- Mayor and Council reviewed the application for Donald Anderson and agreed he should be appointed to the open non-resident position on the Economic Development Commission.

Review of March Town Meeting Agenda – Mayor and Council requested to have a resolution added to the agenda to appoint Donald Anderson to the EDC, and asked that the March SMMA meeting be added to the list of events and make sure to put by invitation only since it is not a public meeting. Mayor Scheessele asked when the Town received bids for the Trailhead Plaza and how long those bids would be good for. Town Manager Hicks contacted Richard Parks and set up a meeting for Thursday February 27 at 10am to discuss the bids and when the contracts would need to be awarded. There were no other additions to the agenda.

Councilman Albright excused himself from the meeting around 2:45pm due to an appointment.

#### Roundtable:

Mayor – Mayor Scheessele spoke about his Mayor's Message for the quarterly Smoke Signals. In the message the Mayor spoke about actions being taken on the blighted properties in Town. The property on East Poplar has been largely taken care of and a consent order has been agreed upon with the owner of the 3 properties on Indian Head Highway and it has been filed with the court. The Mayor mentioned the Town is targeting both ends of Town and moving to the middle to take care of all blighted properties in Town. The Mayor also mentioned three businesses interested in opening in Town. Vice Mayor Rice inquired about the blighted property on Bertha Circle. Town Manager Hicks said the property on Bertha along with a property on Strauss Avenue and a property on Indian Head Avenue or the next properties the Town is focusing on. Mayor Scheessele stated that at a prior Economic Development Commission meeting an engraved brick paver fundraiser for the Trailhead Plaza was mentioned but the Commission has not advertised at all. The Mayor said the Town will have to figure out a way to advertise the engraved brick pavers, potentially in a future issue of the Smoke Signals. The Town has received one donation so far for a memorial bench. The Connector Trail had been moving along well before the winter weather set in. Public Works plans to wait on the Connector Trail work at the highway until the gas line has been put in.

Vice Mayor – None

Councilman – Not present.

Town Manager – None

Town Clerk – Town Clerk Brady reminded everyone about the March SMMA meeting on March 5 at 7pm, and asked if the dates for the September and October Work Sessions could be changed since she will be out of town. Mayor and Council agreed to change the September meeting from Monday the 22<sup>nd</sup> to Monday the 29<sup>th</sup>, and the October meeting from Monday the 27<sup>th</sup> to Monday the 20<sup>th</sup>.

Meeting adjourned at 2:54pm

  
Andrea Brady, Town Clerk