

Council of the Town of La Plata
Town Hall, La Plata, Maryland
Regular Meeting
April 27, 2004, 7:00 PM

Present: Mayor William F. Eckman, Councilman Wayne Winkler, Councilman Thomas W. Fritz, Councilman Gene Ambrogio, Councilman Roy G. Hale; Douglas R. Miller, Town Manager; Patricia L. Bembe, Assistant Town Manager; Judith T. Frazier, Town Clerk

Town staff: Joseph W. Norris, Town Treasurer; Chief Cassin B. Gittings, La Plata Police Department

Guests: (see roster)

Minutes:

Mayor Eckman called the meeting to order at 7:00 PM and then led the Pledge of Allegiance.

Treasurer's Report

Mayor Eckman acknowledged receipt of the Treasurer's Report dated March 31, 2004.

Petitions, Communications and Appearances

Proclamation – Monica Piern

Mayor Eckman read the Proclamation of Congratulations to Monica Piern, Charles County recipient of the 2004 Agnes Meyer Outstanding Teacher Award and presented it to Ms. Piern, who thanked the Town for recognition of the award, the school principal, Mrs. Leveillee, and staff, and her family for their support.

Proclamation – 2004 Maryland Chiefs' Challenge Months

Mayor Eckman read the proclamation and presented it to Chief Gittings.

Public hearing

Constant Yield Tax Rate

Mayor Eckman opened the hearing. Mr. Miller and Mr. Norris advised that the notice of the hearing was initially advertised in the Maryland Independent, whose staff placed it on a page of legal notices, which was contrary to the State's instructions as provided by Mr. Norris. Mr. Norris received approval from the State for the notice's placement; however, it was subsequently advertised in compliance with the State's instructions.

Mayor Eckman explained that the State mandates the wording, point size of the font, and where the hearing notice may be placed in the newspaper. Mayor Eckman explained that the constant yield tax rate would be the rate set to yield the same amount of tax revenue as the previous year. The Town plans to maintain its current rate of 32¢ per \$100 of assessable value, which will increase the yield due to increased assessments and developed properties. Mayor Eckman also pointed out that the Town negotiates with the County so that Town property owners receive a tax differential of 7.5¢ per \$100 on their County tax bill.

Mayor Eckman asked if anyone wished to speak.

Garyton Echols, 806 Severn Drive, asked what the advantage is for the residents to maintain the current tax rate, and was advised that maintaining current services requires that the Town keep up with inflation raising the cost of those services, plus hiring a Director of Development and a Code Enforcement Officer. It was also noted that as undeveloped properties are developed and increase the assessable base, there is also an increase in the need for services.

There being no other speakers and no further discussion by the Council, Mayor Eckman closed the hearing.

Legislation (none)

Unfinished Business

Rupard rezoning

Following a brief discussion, the Council agreed to defer this for discussion at the next work session. Clarification was provided that it would only be discussed at the work session, and be voted on at a regular meeting.

Council reports

Councilman Fritz reported on Parks and Recreation Commission projects: the large pavilion, the five smaller pavilions, grills and picnic tables are in place at Tilghman Lake; the paving stones are in place at the Train Station; 10" of wood chip carpet installed at Wills, Silver Linden and Phoenix Run parks; new equipment has been ordered for Phoenix Run park and Hemlock Court park. Mayor Eckman noted that the Town is entering into a cooperative arrangement with Fifth Management in the Phoenix Run neighborhood, to make their playground available for use by others.

Councilman Hale reported on the events planned for the Celebrate La Plata Spring Festival scheduled for Friday through Sunday, April 30 - May 2, which is planned as the second recognition of the tornado and celebration of the Town's recovery and rebuilding efforts.

Councilman Ambrogio reported on topics discussed at the Beautification Commission's April 19 meeting: where to place the La Plata Star; concerns regarding the properties still not repaired since the tornado and how more can be officially done to remedy that.

Councilman Winkler reported there has been no activity since his last report on the Historic District Commission as they meet only as needed, and on the La Plata Business Association as they meet quarterly.

Mayor Eckman reported that bids were received last week for the street project for La Grange Avenue, Maple Avenue and Centennial Street, and that the project should be starting in late June or early July. He also reported that the new Town Hall project is progressing rapidly. Mayor Eckman reported that he was in Ocean City Sunday and Monday at the request of the Maryland Rural Water Association, and he spoke to several vendors in the exhibitors' area regarding different methods of metering water use and regarding manhole sealing methods. He also spoke to two companies who provide water tank maintenance for an annual fee. The Town of Indian Head has contracted with one of the companies. One of the water tank maintenance companies will be at the MML convention in June, and he advised them that the Town Council will be there. Mayor Eckman recommended to the Council members that this would be worth looking at.

New Business

Councilman Winkler explained that the balance of the Disaster Relief Fund paid for most of the cost of the three sirens the Town ordered and now has stored at the Town Hall. He further explained that he had spoken to SMECO, who installed the siren in front of the courthouse, and that SMECO advised they would install the Town's three sirens for approximately \$7,154.40, after which Don McGuire's Emergency Services Department would test the sirens. Councilman Winkler received confirmation from Mr. McGuire that he is working with MENA to obtain money for the installation of the sirens. Due to the importance of having the sirens installed as soon as possible, Councilman Winkler made a motion that the Town appropriate \$7,154.40 for installation of the sirens. Councilman Hale seconded the motion and it passed by unanimous vote.

Mayor Eckman asked Paula Winkler if she could provide a status report on the DNR grant for the treescape restoration project. Ms. Winkler advised she was not prepared with details to provide a status report at this meeting, and noted she had contacted Mark Rose to discuss what the next step would be in the project. Mayor Eckman asked Ms. Winkler to find out if any of the DNR grant money could be used for street trees on St. Mary's Avenue and on the new Town Hall property. Ms. Winkler noted it was her understanding that there was money in the budget for trees at the new Town Hall property due to design costs savings.

Councilman Winkler asked that the appointment of an alternate member for the Design Review Board be put back on an agenda. It was agreed that this would be discussed at the next work session and voted on at the next regular meeting.

Public Forum

Jim Goldsmith advised he met with the new Town Inspector, Jorge Thompson, and noted that Mr. Thompson advised he was committed to following through on the Safeway-Washington Avenue neighbors issues. Mr. Goldsmith noted he was very impressed with Mr. Thompson.

Gary Echols asked the Town to include St. Mary's Avenue in this summer's street improvement project discussed earlier, noting that the street handles a lot of traffic and has deteriorated to the point of being dangerous. Mayor Eckman advised that plans are being drawn to rebuild St. Mary's Avenue, with three options as to distance to include certain improvements. Councilman Ambrogio asked that this project be put on an agenda for discussion.

Councilman Winkler asked that the Washington Avenue sidewalk project be put back on an agenda for discussion and action. Councilman Fritz agreed he wished to discuss this project at the next work session.

There being no further business, Councilman Winkler made a motion to adjourn at 7:55 PM. Councilman Hale seconded the motion and it carried.

Submitted by:

Judith T. Frazier
Town Clerk