



Meeting Minutes

Tuesday, October 17, 2023, 7:00 PM CT

at Esto Town Hall, 3312 2nd Ave South, Esto, FL 32425

The data reflected in these proceedings constitute an extrapolation of information elicited from notes, observations, recording tapes, photographs, and/or videotape. Comments reflected herein are sometimes paraphrased, condensed, and/or have been edited to reflect essential subject matter addressed during the meeting. Parties interested in receiving a verbatim account of the proceedings are responsible for coordinating with the Esto Town Clerk and providing their own representative and equipment pursuant to Chapters 119 and 283, Florida Statutes.

Town Council Members in Attendance

Teresa Harrison (TH), Council President
Josh Davenport (JD), Council Vice President
Garet Skipper (GS)

Town Council Members Absent

Greg Wells (GW)

Others Present

Ben Tew (BT), Town Clerk
Billy Martin (BM), Director Public Works / Water Works Director
Michelle Blankenship Jordan (MBJ), Town Attorney

Invocation and Pledge of Allegiance

TH- Opening prayer, Pledge of Allegiance, and called meeting to order at 7:10 PM CST.

Consent Agenda

- TH called for Consent to agenda items, Consent to previous council minutes including special meetings, and Consent to bills to be paid. JD so motioned. GS seconded. All in Favor -- Motion Carried.

Public Comment

There were no members of the public at the meeting.

Esto Volunteer Fire Department Report

** Chief Cliff Kimble is absent, no one present to give his report, paper report not submitted to Clerk at this time. Will attach paper report to minutes when they are received.

Agenda Items

- **Resolution 24-03 Directing the 2023 Town Council Election**

BT, Town Clerk read Resolution 24-03 (attached) organizing the date, times and processes for carrying out the 2023 Esto Town Council Election. JD motioned to adopt Resolution 24-03. GS seconded. All in Favor -- Motion Carried.

- **Resolution 24-04 Enacting a new Community Center Rental Agreement**

BT, Town Clerk read Resolution 24-04 (attached) enacting a new park community center rental agreement starting January 1, 2024. The town is adopting a new rental fee structure and process for renting the Community Center at John Clark Park. GS motioned to adopt Resolution 24-04. JD seconded. All in Favor -- Motion Carried.

- **Resolution 24-05 Approving a Water Rate Increase in January 2024**

The town implemented a Revenue Plan in 2021. This plan, developed in collaboration with the Florida Rural Water Association, called for periodic increases to the town's water rates. Before the rate increase for 2024 could be enacted an enabling resolution had to be passed, and the rate increase had to be advertised 60 days in advance. JD read Resolution 24-05 (attached) approving a water rate increase starting January 2024. GS motioned to adopt Resolution 24-05. JD seconded. All in Favor -- Motion Carried.

- **Discussion of moving utility billing to Rural Billing**

BT brought up that the town's current utility billing system has had problems. BT elaborated on a couple recent bugs in the software. He suggested that having a separate utility billing system separate from the town's accounting software would give better results. He recommended that town switch to a program called Rural Billing. It is the same software that the Town of Noma uses. He has been working with a demo of the software and is very comfortable with the program. It would cost \$1,035 to set up the program and convert the town's current data. Then the town would have an annual support cost of \$450. BT recommended the town look to the changeover in December or January, due to the tight finances in October.

- **Discussion of solar panels at junkyard property and the park community center**

BT had been asked to look into the idea of setting up a solar farm at the town's junkyard property. BT said from discussion with people familiar with West Florida Electric (WFECA) the local co-op is not keen on solar panels, since the power they produce is variable. BT explained though if the town built a solar farm, then WFECA would have to accept the power, and credit the town for any power produced.

BT said a 1 Megawatt (Mg) solar farm takes 4-5 acres on average, which would fit just right in the junkyard property. The develop and installation cost for a 1Mg solar farm is roughly \$3-million. He said the property could generate between \$84,000 to \$170,000 per year.

BT also said there are grants available to business and civilian entities that want to develop solar facilities, he was uncertain about their availability to local municipalities.

BT said putting solar panels on the Community Center at John Clark Park is possible, the town just has to find a commercial installer, since almost all the solar companies advertising specializes in residential installations.

BM shared that Andy Howell with Alday Howell was working on grants for solar for the town. GS said solar is one of the few uses the junkyard property could be used for, since the property has been declared a brown field. JD shared that the town hasn't paid much on the loan for the junkyard property, and something must be done with it.

BT recommended that if the council wants to continue pursuing a solar farm at the junkyard property, then the town needs to engage an engineering firm to investigate the idea in detail and get specifics on rules, regulations, possible construction estimates, etc.

BT said there may be grants available to get solar panels on the Community Center that he was pursuing details for.

- **Discussion of retirement accounts for town employees**

At the last town council meeting it had been requested for the town clerk to investigate starting a retirement account for the town's full-time employees. BT said the town can't start or join a 401k. That isn't available to government entities. There are several alternate plans available to municipalities all of them with different levels of contribution, employee restrictions, and vesting. BT said he found a national retirement management company, Mutual of America Financial Services, that specializes in government plans. They would set up a plan for the Town of Esto for \$1,500 per year.

Public Works Director Report

- **Discussion of dock repair/replacement at John Clark Park**

BM said he is receiving complaints about the state of the dock at John Clark Park. He said he may need to replace the decking, and it could cost \$840. He said without repairs the dock may need to be condemned, which would be difficult. GS said he thinks the problem is just a few boards that have bowed up. BM also said the dock needed to be sprayed with a water seal product to preserve any repairs. BM said he couldn't give a good estimate since he didn't know what problems he'd run into when he started removing problem boards. JD pressed for an estimate on making just the basic repairs, until a more thorough solution could be found later. BM was approved up to \$300 to get boards to make basic repairs to the dock.

BM suggested the town might could have some benefit activities to raise funds for park repairs and improvements. JD and GS were supportive.

BM reported he had also needed to get the town truck's window repaired. He said the window had fell into the bottom of the door recently.

- **Discussion of what to do with Ford F-150 vehicle**

BM asked what the council wanted to do with the old Ford F-150 truck. BM said the truck was donated to the town from the Holmes County Sheriff's Dept.

BM asked MBJ what the town could do with the truck - donate it, take bids, etc.? MBJ asked if the town had a policy on dealing with surplus goods. The town does not have a surplus goods policy. MBJ said

the town could donate the truck as long as no town funds were used to get rid of it. MBJ said the town could also auction it. JD asked if the town could take sealed bids and open them at the next council meeting. MBJ affirmed. BT was directed to post the truck auction on Facebook, and accept bids for the next town council meeting.

EVFD Report

Chief Cliff Kimble was not present, but had given his report to the town clerk. BT read the report (attached) for the council.

Town Clerk Report

- **Town financial update**

BT provided the town council with a report on the financials (attached). The town's biggest expenses in the previous month was payroll, the First Federal Credit Card, and a deposit for the lumberjack show for the Two-Toed Tom Festival. In October the town is paying the first installment on the town's insurance. BT brought to the council's attention that after all bills are paid the town's general fund would have roughly \$1,500 -- not enough to cover payroll the next week. A big contributor to this drawdown in the General Fund was because the State of Florida had not deposited anything yet for the month of October.

BT recommended the town council move the remaining ARPA funds from the Two-Toed Tom / Improvement account into the town's General Fund. JD made a motion to move \$6,000 of the remaining \$6,391 into the General Fund account. GS seconded the motion. All in Favor -- Motion Carried.

Returning to the issue of the Junkyard Property GS asked if the town had ever bid out the property, or tried to sell it. JD elaborated on the history of the parcel. MJB was asked if the town could list the property with a real estate agent. She said without an enacted policy, resolution or ordinance the town could choose how it wanted to dispose of the property. BT offered to contact some real estate agencies to get some options on selling the property.

- **Water policy guidelines**

At the September Town Council meeting a document outlining the town's water bill late fee and disconnect dates had been presented. Council member JD had asked for language about accommodating customers with emergencies and writing off balances. BT presented the new policy guideline to the town council. TH signed the updated guideline.

The Town Clerk also reported on some smaller matters:

--FMIT requires an asset survey every three years and their representative will be in town soon to take pictures of all the town's insured property.

--The town's insurance claim on lightning damage at the well had paperwork problems and N-Lite-N / SCADA were working on correcting their documentation and repair of the damage.

--A representative from Reliable Copy Products in Panama City is offering a lease for the town to get a backup color printer/ scanner/ copier /fax machine.

--BT wanted the council to be aware that someone had broken into the outside accessible bathroom at the town hall, and damage the sink and toilet. BM needed to replace the faucet and lock to the toilet. BT brought up that there isn't much lighting around the town hall, and there isn't a camera watching the doors on the north side of the town hall. BM elaborated that many of the cameras around the property don't record, only monitor.

--BT said he had spoken with Version3 about internet service at the Community Center. Version3 said they had looked at the project about 9 months previously, and thought the project fell through over a right-of-way issue. JD elaborated that the previous project was scuttled when the contractor to run the fiber line to the Community Center was unable to guarantee he would miss the town's water lines. BT said Version3 is now proposing a beamed signal from the town hall, or a wireless cell solution.

--BT announced for the town council that the Florida League of Cities would host a webinar Wednesday, October 18 that meets the state mandated ethics training requirements for elected officials.

Council Member Items

TH asked about any council member items. TH announced she was signed up for the FMIT ethics seminar. JD expressed interest in getting the email on the ethics webinar with the login information.

Adjourn

TH adjourned the meeting at 8:28 PM CT.

Meeting minutes typed and prepared by Ben Tew, Town Clerk.

Council President, Teresa Harrison

Council Vice President, Josh Davenport

Council Member Seat 2, Greg Wells

Council Member Seat 4, (Open)

Council Member Seat 3, Garet Skipper