

Minutes  
Easton Board of Selectmen  
Regular Meeting April 11, 2024  
7:30 PM  
Town Hall Conference Room (In-Person)  
And  
Virtually via Zoom

1. Nick D'Addario moved to approve the minutes of the Board of Selectmen meeting, April 4, 2024. Nick D'Addario seconded. Motion passed unanimously.
2. During public comment, a few residents shared concerns about soil testing and contaminants, legal fees, purchase of land and use of ARPA funds with regards to the EMS building. All were in favor of a new building for EMS. A volunteer from the EMS Planning & Building Committee shared that the committee has worked hard and makes decisions in the best interest of the town. Gina Blaze read a letter from her attorney to the town attorney regarding acceptance of the lease between the Blaze's (NEPC) and the town. Some residents urged the Board of Selectmen to use the ARPA funds elsewhere so the town can take their time with the planning of the EMS building, while others were in support of moving forward using the ARPA funds.
3. Nick D'Addario, Maureen Williams and Darin Bershefsky from the Task Force for the Protection of Town Volunteers and Officials presented the committee's report and recommendations to the Board of Selectmen (report attached). Kristi Sogofsky commented that it would be helpful to create a reporting process. Kristi moved to approve the report and recommendations from the Task Force for the Protection of Town Volunteers and Officials. David Bindelglass seconded. Motion passed unanimously.
4. David Bindelglass moved to accept the proposed amendments to the Demolition Delay Ordinance and add to the town meeting agenda. Kristi Sogofsky seconded. Motion passed unanimously. These changes will allow the committee to apply to become a certified local government so they can obtain grants through the state.
5. Kristi Sogofsky moved to accept the resignation of John Halleran as a member of the Easton Diversity and Inclusion Task Force effectively immediately and thanked him for his service. Nick D'Addario seconded. Motion passed unanimously. David Bindelglass moved to reappoint Scott Charmoy, Doreen Collins, A. Reynolds Gordon, Christine Lee, Paul Lindoerfer, Jim Riling and Masha Watson as members to the Tax Relief for the Elderly to expire 8/15/26. Nick D'Addario seconded. Motion passed unanimously.
6. Nick D'Addario moved to approve the award of bid for a Phase II Environmental Site Assessment for 444 and 448 Sport Hill Road to Sovereign Consulting in the amount of \$18,550. David Bindelglass seconded. Motion passed unanimously. The EMS Planning and Building Committee chose to do Phase II testing on both 444 and 448 Sport Hill Road, and with that change Sovereign Consulting was the low bid.
7. Nick D'Addario moved to approve the agenda for the Annual Town Meeting April 29, 2024, at Samuel Staples Elementary School, 515 Morehouse Road, Easton, CT at 7:00 pm, as amended (change c. to say Discussion of...). Kristi Sogofsky seconded. Motion passed unanimously.

- a. Election of moderator.
  - b. Discussion of the proposed Annual Town Budget of \$49,967,940 for fiscal year 2024-2025 as recommended by the Board of Finance.
    - Presentation by Board of Finance
    - Presentation by Board of Education
    - Presentation by Region 9
  - c. Approve the Town of Easton lease agreement with the New England Prayer Center.
  - d. Approve the proposed amendments of the Demolition Delay Ordinance.
  - e. Adjournment of the Town Meeting to a machine vote to be held on Tuesday, May 7, 2024, 6:00 a.m. to 8:00 p.m. at Samuel Staples Elementary School to vote on the Annual Town Budget and lease agreement with the New England Prayer Center.
8. A resident asked if there will be a town vote on the purchase of land at 444 Sport Hill Road and does the seller have any monetary liability to the Phase II soil testing. Gina Blaze spoke about the lease agreement.
  9. David shared during board comment that town council determined a peer review is acceptable, however, the EMS Planning and Building Committee agreed unanimously to conduct a Phase II of 444 Sport Hill Road. The Land Use Ordinance specifics that the purchase of land with a value of \$200,000 must be brought to a town meeting. That is not the case in regard to the purchase of 444 Sport Hill Road . A town vote will be needed because we will require funding from the town for the EMS building. David requested that DEEP's public relations staff clarify the findings at EVS. The purchase and sale agreement gives the town the right to complete testing and walk away if issues are found with the deposit returned. With regards to the NEPC lease, there were no changes made. Kristi Sogofsky stated her concerns with the terms of the purchase and sale agreement for 444 Sport Hill Road. She feels the Urban Grant was not submitted in a timely fashion. Kristi is in full support of the EMS building but has an issue with the process which makes it feel like something is going on behind the scenes. She does not feel it would be responsible to accept the purchase and sale agreement as is and thinks it should be re-negotiated. Lastly, she mentioned that the Board of Finance is aware of the ARPA funds deadline and has discussed other uses. Nick stated that the EMS Planning and Building Committee has the right to make the decision for a Phase II at 444 Sport Hill Road. The town meeting agenda is set and the New England Prayer Center lease will be voted on May 7<sup>th</sup>. Nick shared that only one person from the public came to a Task Force for the Protection of Town Volunteers and Officials.
  10. Kristi Sogofsky moved to adjourn the meeting at 9:18pm. Nick D'Addario seconded. Motion passed unanimously.

3M~4.11.24

## **Report and Recommendations to the Board of Selectmen from the Task Force for the Protection of Town Officials and Civility in Governance**

The Task Force for the Protection of Town Officials and Civility in Governance was created in February 2024 by the Board of Selectmen. This bipartisan task force deliberated the best and actionable recommendations for the Town of Easton to protect town officials [board and commission members, elected officials, and town employees] and to promote civility in governance. We unanimously endorse the following recommendations.

Nick D'Addario, Chair  
Gerry O'Brien, Secretary  
Maureen Williams  
Darin Bershefsky  
Paul Lindoerfer

### **Recommendation #1:**

The Town of Easton should adopt a civility pledge. All board and commission members, elected officials, and town employees should be required to sign an acknowledgement of this pledge. See Appendix A for suggested text.

### **Recommendation #2:**

The Board of Selectmen should instruct board and commission chairs and town meeting moderators to remind the members of the public prior to each public comment period in a meeting that the Town of Easton has made civility in public discourse a community priority. A copy of the civility pledge should be accessible by the public at these meetings.

### **Recommendation #3:**

The Town of Easton should create an ongoing public awareness campaign regarding the town's commitment to civility—a townwide civility program. This marketing campaign should include the posting of the town's civility pledge online and in town offices.

### **Recommendation #4:**

The Board of Selectmen should instruct the human resources department to regularly review and update the *Town of Easton's Employee Handbook*. See Appendix B for suggested text. The section in the handbook on how to properly report harassment by town officials should be amended to include harassment by members of the public.

### **Recommendation #5:**

The Town Clerk should regularly review and update the *Welcome to Public Service: A Short Guide to Service as an Elected/Appointed Official of the Town of Easton*. See Appendix B for suggested text. There should be a section on how to properly report harassment by town officials or members of the public similar to the one found in the employee handbook.

### **Recommendation #6:**

Town of Easton departments should create clear office hours and/or appointment guidelines for members of the public. It is important to attempt to balance the rights of the public to access information with town employees' duty to perform their jobs without interruption.

Recommendation #7:

After studying the town's insurance policies, the Town of Easton has adequate liability insurance coverage for board and commission members acting in their official capacity. The town's insurance policy should be available to the public and a summary should be provided of its protections for board and commission members acting in their official capacity.

Recommendation #8:

The Board of Ethics should regularly review the Ethics Ordinance [approved in 2021, amended in 2022].

Recommendation #9:

The Board of Selectmen should provide resources for continuing education for all board and commission members, elected officials, and town employees. There should be a course on the topics of conflict resolution and conflict de-escalation. This could be done via online videos and/or online courses.

Recommendation #10:

The Town Clerk should regularly review compliance and maintain the documents required of board and commission members and elected officials. Examples of such requirements are contained within but not limited to the *Welcome to Public Service: A Short Guide to Service as an Elected/Appointed Official of the Town of Easton*.

## **Appendix A:**

### **Town of Easton's Civility Pledge:**

The Town of Easton pledges to practice and promote civility within its governing bodies. The way we govern ourselves is often as important as the positions we take. We pledge to build a stronger and more prosperous community by advocating for civil engagement, respecting others and their viewpoints, and finding solutions for the betterment of our town. This pledge ensures all communication—both spoken and written—to be open, honest and transparent as this is vital for cultivating trust and relationships.

All those who appear before the Town of Easton's board and committees have the right to be treated with respect, courtesy, and openness. We value all input. Accordingly, we commit to conduct ourselves with civility and courtesy at all times.

## **Appendix B:**

### **Expected Behavior in Interactions Between Citizens and Town of Easton Officials:**

Town residents should be held to the following expected behavior in interactions between citizens and town employees or appointed and elected officials:

1. The Town has procedures in place to help ensure that town employees and appointed and elected officials act in a professional, ethical, civil manner. These include:
  - a. Easton Civility Pledge
  - b. Easton Ethics Ordinance
  - c. Easton Employee Handbook
  - d. Easton's Social Media Policy
  - e. Easton's Public Participation at Board of Selectmen Meetings Policy
2. The Town of Easton expects all its employees and appointed and elected officials to conduct interactions with each other and with town residents in a professional, ethical, and civil manner. Likewise, town employees or appointed or elected officials expect citizens to treat them in the same manner.
3. In any interaction between town employees or appointed and elected officials and town residents, discourteous, abusive, harassing, or other significantly *uncivil conduct* is not conducive to a useful exchange of opinion and *will not be tolerated*. Town residents may be removed from the meeting.
4. As a citizen in contact with town employees or appointed and elected officials, you can expect that:
  - a. Town employees and appointed and elected officials will treat you in a professional, ethical, and civil manner.
  - b. Town employees and appointed and elected officials are not able to spend an inordinate amount of time with any one individual.
  - c. Some town departments have designated visiting hours.
  - d. All town and committee meetings are open to the public and provide time for public comment—except for Executive Session per FOIA rules.
  - e. Committee chairs and town meeting moderators may limit the amount of time any participant can take to make their public comment.
  - f. As a last resort, town committee chairs and town meeting moderators reserve the right to require individuals displaying behavior that is disruptive to the progress of the meeting to leave the meeting.