

Town of Camden
Regular Town Council Meeting
Camden Municipal Building
August 5, 2024

CALL TO ORDER

Mayor Dougherty called the meeting to order at 7:00 p.m. and noticed that this regular Council Meeting was being held in compliance with the Delaware Open Public Meeting Act by posting the agenda on July 29, 2024, in the following manner:

- a. The electronic sign,
- b. The official bulletin board, and
- c. The official Town of Camden website.

Vice-Mayor Sturgeon led attendees in the Pledge of Allegiance and a moment of silence.

Council Attending: Mayor Dougherty, Vice-Mayor Sturgeon, Councilwoman Rhodes, Councilman Woodall, and Councilman Ridgely

Council Absent: N/A

Staff Attending: Town Manager Harold Scott Jr, Account Specialist Malori Lewis, Administrative Assistant Diane Mosby, Town Solicitor Greg Morris, and Police Chief Marcus Whitney

AMENDMENTS

Mayor Dougherty advised that Chief Whitney will be discussing the purchase of new Police handguns to be voted on under New Business (c.).

ANNOUNCEMENTS

Tax bills for tax year 2024 were mailed out the first week of July.

Town Hall will be closed on September 2nd, 2024, in observance of Labor Day.

MINUTES

A motion was made by Vice-Mayor Sturgeon, seconded by Councilwoman Rhodes, to approve the July 1, 2024 Regular Meeting Minutes. All in favor; none opposed.

FINANCE REPORT

Ms. Lewis stated that the delinquent tax amount is \$11,068.19. She added that we received \$25,622.19 in RETT funds in the month of June. She advised that the tax revenue received thus far for the 2024 billing is \$358,658.31.

CAMDEN WYOMING FIRE DEPARTMENT

Jeff Brown gave a report that included but was not limited to fire and EMS calls. He added that tickets are still available for the crab feast on the 24th, the tickets are \$60 for general admission or \$80 for VIP.

CAMDEN WYOMING SEWER & WATER AUTHORITY

Councilman Ridgely explained that water tower maintenance that occurred in July caused a temporary drop in pressure that may have resulted in brown water in certain areas. He added that a copy of the 2023 Consumer Confidence Report reviewing their water quality is available on their website.

FRIENDS OF HISTORIC CAMDEN

Gail Christensen said the Peach Festival was a success, they were able to tell their story and heard lots of family stories from attendees. She added that they received a grant of \$7,500 for the flag project and their next meeting is scheduled for August 29th.

POLICE REPORT

Chief Whitney gave a report that included but was not limited to traffic arrests and criminal activity. He stated they have had 49.5 hours of paid overtime and 5 hours of court overtime. Chief Whitney said they have had a total of 638 calls for this period, compared to 542 calls for this period last year. Regarding new handguns, he explained that their current service weapons are 20 years old with ammunition that is hard to find, and costs are increasing. He wants to switch to 9mm/Glocks and the quote he received after a trade-in value of \$5,875 was \$11,890.44. This price includes new weapons, holsters, optics and gun lights. He would like to request the purchase come from the remaining ARPA funds.

Councilman Woodall asked how many weapons the price includes.

Chief Whitney advised that it is for 14 new weapons: 10 current Officers plus 2 new Officers approved in the budget, as well as 2 spare weapons on reserve.

Mayor Dougherty asked why the line item for Vehicle #129 (01-160-743) is at 155% of its budget.

Chief Whitney explained that each vehicle has its own budget line, and for this vehicle, the budget is \$1,000 to cover oil changes and standard maintenance. However, this vehicle suffered some catastrophic cooling system failures and the total for the repair was \$1,546.46, which is 155% of its budget for just one repair. The vehicle has not even had its scheduled oil changes yet. Chief Whitney also explained that this is one of their older vehicles and the older vehicles eventually get replaced since they typically get 2 new vehicles per year, but they do try to utilize any warranty offered at the time of purchase. He added that he is at 6% of his total budget spent so far.

Councilman Ridgely asked Chief Whitney what he believes to be the reasoning behind such a high increase in calls for service from year to year.

Chief Whitney explained that the calls for service are on a continuous increase due to an increase in population and traffic. We are considered a pass-through town, and we also have a very large commercial base, which results in more calls for service.

TOWN MANAGER REPORT

Mr. Scott stated that he did 28 inspections during the month of July. He mentioned that the Clubhouse and pool at Sunset Village are open, they plan to open another building at the end of this week and the paving should be done by either this week or next. The Town will eventually be responsible for the entrance road there. He added that we are getting close to taking over the roads in Tidbury Crossing and he hopes that the Mayor and Council are considering a parking plan within the development. Both on-street parking and narrow roads make it difficult for emergency personnel to maneuver through the development. He also mentioned that Delmarva Power is looking to increase lighting on Caboose Lane and replace leaning poles on South Main Street. He added that we have been approved for a cyber security grant to enhance the security on our server and may have some funds left over to replace outdated computers.

Councilman Woodall questioned why the parking situation at Tidbury Crossing wasn't addressed prior to being built and the need for additional parking.

Mr. Scott said there is a need for additional parking, such as an overflow lot. With townhomes, there are typically two parking spots per residence, but some houses have upwards of 6 family members living there and not enough parking in these scenarios. There are driveways, which are behind the townhomes with a backdoor entry to the home, but many people park on the street to enter the front of the house instead.

Councilman Woodall asked if the open space off of Lochmeath Way could be used for parking and if Tidbury Crossing should handle the parking situation before we take over the roads.

Mr. Scott said the open space is an option, but we cannot force Tidbury Crossing to handle the parking situation because the development was approved in 2005 based on standards in place at that time.

Chief Whitney added that our requirements have changed since this development was approved and suggests an overflow lot or possibly limit street parking to one side of the street only.

Mr. Scott confirmed that the size of the roadways in place in Tidbury Crossing is not something that would be approved by the Planning Commission today or in the future.

Councilman Woodall asked Mr. Brown what the Fire Department's thoughts are.

Mr. Brown said ambulances are easier, but they must be careful when maneuvering firetrucks.

Councilman Ridgely would like to see an orientation offered to newly appointed volunteers of our Planning Commission and/or Board of Adjustments.

Mayor Dougherty said that he will be doing a ride around town with Chief Whitney and Mr. Scott next week and they will ride through Tidbury Crossing to brainstorm parking options. He also asked Mr. Scott why the line item for our elevator inspection is at 105% of the budget.

Mr. Scott advised that the cost for the annual inspection increased. He also mentioned that the condenser panel on the AC unit overflowed and came through the ceiling on the 2nd floor. It has been repaired by Hiott, and ServPro will be coming in to dry it out to ensure there will be no mold or other damage.

Mayor Dougherty asked what the issue was and if we have a maintenance contract to cover the repair.

Mr. Scott said a drain was clogged and he will be contacting Hiott to see if this type of issue is covered under our annual service contract.

MAYOR

Mayor Dougherty advised that he, along with Chief Whitney and Mr. Scott, will be looking at what properties are and aren't within Camden town limits along Route 13, as Chief Whitney would like to expand the Camden Police Department coverage along the highway, but we must meet conditions with the state. He added that there is a resident in Camden Commons that did not comply with our written request regarding a dead tree, which may be removed shortly and the cost billed to the homeowner. He also thanked the ladies at Town Hall for the decrease in tax delinquency, stating that having a delinquency of \$11,000 is about 1/3 of what delinquency has run for many years and that they are doing a good job.

OLD BUSINESS

Salaries

Mayor Dougherty advised that Council was provided with information sheets on proposed salary increases for both Police and Town employees. For Police, they follow a pay scale, and the proposed salary adjustment is a base increase of \$10,000. For Town employees, the proposal is to reinstitute a pay scale with increases every other year, similar to Police. The total cost of salary adjustments would be around \$165,000 for this year; approximately \$148,000 for Police and \$18,000 for Town employees, which includes employer-paid benefits.

Vice-Mayor Sturgeon asked if the purpose of the adjustments for Town employees is to institute a pay scale rather than promotions or title changes. She also asked why the Police Admin was not included in this proposal.

Mayor Dougherty confirmed that there is no change in function or duties across the board. He explained that the Police Admin will continue to receive an annual increase, but her current level did not call for a base wage increase.

Chief Whitney explained that before he became Chief, the Police Admin position was removed from the Police side and moved into the Town side. Once he became Chief, the position was switched back to the Police side, and they did a wage alignment at that time.

Councilman Ridgely asked when the two new officers that were approved on July 1 may be hired and start the Police Academy.

Chief Whitney explained that the deadline for the Academy packets is October 9, but they will not be able to make that deadline due to limited applicants and the time it takes to conduct a thorough interview, background check, and written, physical and medical testing. He cannot make an offer until the background check is completed, which takes about a month and a half. He cannot request certain medical testing until an offer is made, and the medical testing is usually about a month and a half out. He added that he would prefer two certified Officers because the hiring process does not take as long as hiring new recruits.

Councilman Ridgely mentioned that if the two new Officers are not hired during this budget year, the budgeted funds will help offset the proposed salary increase.

Councilwoman Sturgeon asked when the hiring process should typically begin to ensure that new recruits can enter the Police Academy.

Chief Whitney explained that starting the process sometime between April and June would be ideal, but he must wait until budget approval on July 1.

Councilwoman Rhodes inquired on the number of academies that are available per year.

Chief Whitney said there are 4 options: Wilmington, New Castle, State Police, and Dover. The academy is 6 months, so finding an academy later in the year may be an option, but he would prefer certified Officers since it takes about a year to put a recruit out on the road.

Mayor Dougherty expressed that, if approved, he would like to implement the salary increases as soon as possible, at the start of the next payroll cycle, and asked Ms. Lewis if that would be possible.

Ms. Lewis said that it is possible to make the changes for the next cycle.

A motion was made by Councilwoman Rhodes, seconded by Councilwoman Sturgeon, to approve the proposed salary increases for both Police and Town employees. All in favor; none opposed.

NEW BUSINESS

Amendment to Ordinance #2016-O-02 – Rental License Standards – First Reading

Mayor Dougherty advised that this is a First Reading, a Public Hearing for the Second Reading, Public Comment and a Vote will occur during the September Town Council Meeting. This Amendment proposes that storage facilities will be required to have a rental license. This is not something that existing facilities have been required to do, but we have a large facility opening soon. The fee per unit would be \$20 per year, depending on the size of the unit. However, the fee

for the first year would be discounted to \$10 per unit. If the unit exceeds 2,000 square feet, the fee will be \$100 per year.

Councilman Woodall expressed his concern with this proposal and that he will not be voting to accept it. A rental license is typically used to cover rental properties, and he does not feel it is fair to enact a fee on something that is currently being built and on people who have never been charged previously.

Councilwoman Rhodes expressed her concern as well, stating that specific businesses in Camden have helped the Town by donating land and giving us a break on fuel tax. She is not sure she can vote to accept this.

Mayor Dougherty agreed that the King family did donate the land Town Hall sits on and that Kent Oil does not charge the Fire, Police or Public Works Departments tax on fuel purchased there. He mentioned that implementing a fee for storage units is comparable to Barclay Farms, who are currently paying \$100 per unit a year because the land is rented.

Councilwoman Rhodes mentioned that the storage units are meant to store personal property, not for someone to live in or run a business out of.

Councilman Woodall labeled this proposal as a “money grab”.

Councilwoman Sturgeon added that small businesses should not compare to big businesses and that this would be an unnecessary cost to a small business.

Councilman Ridgely mentioned that a tax increase seems inevitable and appreciates Mayor Dougherty for looking at ways to ease the burden on the general public. It is never popular to raise taxes or implement new fees and hopes the public understands that they are helping the Town to provide health, safety, and welfare protection by Police and help our Town operate with a balanced budget to minimize the impact on the general public. He added that this is a unique approach to this dilemma, and he looks forward to Public Comment because he feels it is worth exploring.

PUBLIC COMMENTS

Thomas Binkley (37 Strawberry Drive) – He expressed his concern that this fee would ultimately be paid by the consumer, not the business owner. He also asked what the cost would be for one building that is being rented by two businesses.

Mayor Dougherty advised that the owner of the building would be paying a total of \$200 in rental license fees per year because two businesses are renting the building. The standard rental license fee is \$100 per unit, per year.

Dawn Gonzalez (Barclay Farms) – She asked if there was storage facility with 100 units, would each unit be billed \$20 a year and she also wanted clarification on the 2,000 square foot unit mentioned previously, because a 10x20 storage unit is only 200 square feet.

Mayor Dougherty said she is correct on the fee of \$20 per unit per year, and that he made a mistake quoting the square footage, it would be 200 square feet, rather than 2,000. A unit within 200 square feet would be \$20 a year, and a unit that exceeds 200 square feet would be charged \$100 a year.

John Paradee (Baird, Mandalas Brockstedt & Federico in Dover - 6 S. State St.) – He explained that he represents J. King Real Estate LLC, who owns the storage facility property in front of Town Hall, and his client is concerned with this proposed Ordinance. He wanted to confirm that tonight is just a First Reading and that there will be a Public Hearing and a vote in September. He will hold the bulk of his questions until then but requested that a copy of the proposed Ordinance Amendment be available to the public to review before September.

Mayor Dougherty confirmed that the Public Hearing and vote will occur in September and that anyone who would like a copy of the proposed Ordinance Amendment can leave their name and address and one will be sent to them.

Brian Lessard (336 Upper King Rd.) – As the builder of the storage facility owned by the King family, he mentioned that the cost of building permits in Camden is very high. The permit for this project was \$212,000, compared to the cost of a permit in Sussex being \$50,000. He said that to come back and add another fee appears to be a “money grab”. He understands that the Town does not want to dive into their savings, but homeowners and businesses are just trying to survive. He also mentioned that Police are mainly servicing commercial properties and select residential properties and that those businesses or homeowners should pay towards the increased budget for the Police Department at an individual rate.

Mayor Dougherty explained that there have been many discussions on how to fund the police, including a potential New Construction Public Safety Impact fee and the percentage for real estate taxes. He added that the \$20 fee is not going to make the town rich, and he could not justify not charging a rental license fee for a specific type of business when other property owners or businesses are paying the fee.

Mr. Lessard added that the tax rate for businesses are high and adding another fee on top of that could break businesses.

Bruce King – He said that after listening to Mayor Dougherty’s comments, he believes that the Mayor has never owned or operated a business and never had to worry about making payroll, paying taxes, or keeping up with equipment. These types of fees are not being charged outside of town. Storage facilities are a very competitive business and a fee like this would put them at a disadvantage. He added that the land he donated to the Town of Camden appraised at over \$1M at that time and he never asked for anything in return, and this fee feels like a kick in the gut, and it is targeting certain businesses or business owners.

Frank DiMondi (Camden business owner) – He is concerned about real estate taxes and said that he will be keeping an eye on residential and commercial rates because the County is tax neutral. He asked if the tax increase has been discussed.

Mayor Dougherty explained that we have not had a discussion on the tax rate because we were waiting on the updated assessment from Kent County. He added that we need to consider an

increase because it has been many years since there has been a tax increase and our budget increases year after year due to rising costs across the board.

Mr. DiMondi said that this should not fall on the residents and the businesses, there must be other revenue to balance the budget or expenses that can be cut.

Councilwoman Sturgeon requested to circle back to topic at hand and move forward to cover the remaining agenda items and other public comment.

Dwayne DiAntonio (40 Holly Cove Ln.) – He said that he owns the current storage facility in Camden, which has 94 units. Paying a fee of \$20 a year per unit would result in a total of \$1,880 per year for a rental license, and that is based on his facility being fully occupied. There will be instances that he has open units, as well as potential issues with delinquent units, which can take upwards of 5 months to evict the tenant. He does not want to see this fee implemented. As for the new facility owned by the King family, there will be 700 units, and it will take years to fully occupy this facility. He added that there are multiple storage units in the planning phase, which will bring an additional 1,800 units within a 6 mile radius, making it even harder to fully occupy facilities.

Mayor Dougherty advised that a license will not be required if the unit is vacant.

Mr. DiAntonio clarified that he would need to complete an application and pay a fee each time a unit is rented to a new tenant, which would be difficult because the units tend to turnover on a regular basis.

Councilwoman Sturgeon expressed that we are at a good stopping point.

Mayor Dougherty reminded attendees that this is a First Reading, the Second Reading and Public Hearing will be held in September.

NEW BUSINESS (CONTINUED)

Nationwide 457 Plan – Increase of Employer Contribution

Mayor Dougherty said that the proposal regarding the Nationwide 457 Plan is to change the employer contribution from \$50 a month to \$100 per month for those employees who choose to invest in their retirement. He added that approximately 14 employees are eligible, and only 8 are currently enrolled.

Councilman Woodall stated that it does not make sense to discuss this topic amidst all the money discussions this evening.

Councilwoman Rhodes added that she would not be on board at this time.

Councilman Ridgely asked the catalyst behind the change from \$50 to \$100 a month, such as being in line with other municipalities.

Mayor Dougherty said the driving force is to encourage employees to save for their retirement and that this program is a great advantage to them.

Councilman Ridgely believes it is a good idea but agrees that this is not the right time for this discussion. He asked if there was a reason it was brought up during this meeting considering current budget constraints.

Mayor Dougherty explained that it was brought up because of salary changes and it is a strong benefit to employee retention. It is one of the cheapest benefits we can provide them, adding less than \$5,000 a year, and provides a significant incentive to employees.

Councilwoman Rhodes does not believe this is the right time considering the salary adjustments that were just granted.

Councilwoman Sturgeon added that this is a good retention tool and something we should look at in the future, but considering all the discussions tonight, it should be a budget discussion, not after the budget has been approved.

A motion was made by Councilman Woodall, seconded by Councilwoman Rhodes, to deny the proposed increase to the Nationwide 457 plan Employer Contribution. All in favor; none opposed.

Purchase of New Police Handguns

A motion was made by Councilman Ridgely, seconded by Councilwoman Rhodes, to approve the purchase of the new Police equipment through ARPA funds for a total of \$11,890.44. All in favor; none opposed.

PUBLIC COMMENTS

Audrey Bethea (101 Meeting House Ln.) – She would like a copy of the proposed Ordinance Amendment mentioned during this meeting. She requested an update on the bus stop issue in Camden Commons. Thanked Mayor Dougherty for coming through her development and speaking with residents. There are still issues with certain properties and she would like to know how we are handling these concerns. She also mentioned the bug and overgrowth issue behind her house, as well as old political signs in the brush.

Mayor Dougherty said that the sidewalk for the bus stop in Camden Commons has been discussed recently and we are filing for grants to cover the improvements.

Mr. Scott advised that Mosquito Authority sprayed the area, and the political signs will be removed.

Mr. Morris reminded everyone of the procedure for Public Comment, which is limited to 3 minutes and Council does not have to respond.

Gale Christensen (21 S. Main St.) – She expressed her concern with the lack of research on how many storage units are in the Town of Camden and the Public Comment allowed during the Ordinance Amendment discussion. She also mentioned the live virtual meetings not being available.

Mayor Dougherty explained that live meetings are still in the testing phase, and we are waiting for the funding to purchase the additional equipment necessary to host live meetings.

Carole Milton (305 Meeting House Ln.) – She mentioned the dead tree and overgrowth in Camden Commons and requested an update on the “no parking” signs for the development. She was told to contact the Police if there were any parking issues and feels like she gets grief when she calls.

Chief Whitney asked to meet with Ms. Milton after the meeting to discuss her calls to the Police Department.

Kahan Maniar (Camden Liquor/Camden Cigars) – He would like to see more activities available within the Town of Camden and to focus on what the town needs. He also suggested hiring cadets to issue parking citations at Camden Town Center and a pickleball court at Brecknock Park.

Chris Kellar (158 Periwinkle Dr.) – He expressed his concern about an incident that occurred between him, his friends and Councilman Woodall at the Camden Brew Company on July 26th and does not feel like he is fit as a Councilman and would like to see him removed.

Mayor Dougherty advised that they will not entertain any more discussion of this issue and it should be taken to the proper authorities.

At this time, there was an elevated discussion between the Mayor and the audience.

Chief Whitney mentioned that he spoke with a few of the audience members prior to the meeting and reiterated that he is in no one’s pocket.

COUNCIL COMMENTS

None.

EXECUTIVE SESSION

To consider strategy with respect to pending and/or potential litigation and/or with respect to personnel issues and/or collective bargaining.

ADJOURNMENT

A motion was made at 9:10 p.m. by Vice-Mayor Sturgeon, seconded by Councilwoman Rhodes, to adjourn the council meeting. All in favor; none opposed.

*Respectfully submitted,
Malori Lewis, Account Specialist*