

CITY OF MILFORD
CITY COUNCIL MEETING MINUTES
September 23, 2024

The City Council of the City of Milford met in the Joseph Ronnie Rogers Council Chambers in Regular Session on Monday, September 23, 2024.

PRESIDING: Mayor F. Todd Culotta

IN ATTENDANCE: Councilmembers Daniel Marabello, Madula Kalesis, Nadia Zychal, Lori Connor, Michael Stewart, Nirmala Samaroo, Katrina Wilson and Jason James Sr.

STAFF: Police Chief Cecilia Ashe, Interim City Clerk Katrina White, Planning Director Rob Pierce

ABSENT: City Manager Mark Whitfield

COUNSEL: Solicitor David Rutt, Esquire

Councilmember Samaroo was present virtually.

PUBLIC COMMENT

The Public Comment period commenced at 6:00 p.m. after which Solicitor Rutt read the public comment rules into record.

Kim Wills, 8061 Shawnee Road, Milford, DE 19963, was present and stated that she continues working with the homeless in Milford. She stated that there are more coming to and through Milford from Georgetown because the money and food are drying up and they are headed up north.

Annette Billings, 22726 Cedar Beach Road, Milford, DE 19963, was present and stated that the citizens of Milford do not want to park outside of Milford city limits. The park cannot be policed by the City of Milford, there is no legal entrance, it is 50 feet one way in and one way out and DeIDOT requires 60 feet for a public road. She stated that who's ever decision it was to purchase those 19 acres did not have the best interest of Milford in mind. The citizens of Milford would like the charter to be changed. She also stated that she has offered to buy the property back and the money could be used to better serve the community in a more positive way within the walls of the city.

CALL TO ORDER

Mayor Culotta called the regular meeting to order at 6:05 p.m. Roll Call showed that there were nine members present.

INVOCATION AND PLEDGE

The innovation was given by Councilmember Wilson, followed by the Pledge of Allegiance.

RECOGNITION

Brian Jester, Building Operations & Refuse Supervisor, introduced Deron Lucas. He is from Philadelphia, PA and is a retired driver from Septa after 27 years of service. He joined the Solid Waste Department on August 26, 2024.

Proclamation 2024-04/Law Enforcement Suicide Prevention Awareness Day

Chief Ashe read the Law Enforcement Suicide Prevention Awareness Day proclamation which was included in the packet.

Proclamation 2024-21/Suicide Prevention Awareness Month

City of Milford intern, Lance Tressler read the Suicide Prevention Awareness Month proclamation which was included in the packet.

Proclamation 2024-20/ Prostate Cancer Awareness Month

David Sauls read the Prostate Cancer Awareness Month proclamation that was included in the packet. He stated that he is a member of the Delaware Prostate Cancer Coalition out of Dover, Delaware and is 19-year survivor of prostate cancer.

STAFF REPORT

Milford Police Department/2024 Edward Byrne Memorial Justice Assistance Grant

Chief Cecilia Ashe stated that this is just a requirement of federal notification to the city that the Milford Police Department, along with other jurisdictions in the area, have applied for the 2024 Edward Byrne Memorial Justice Assistance Grant. They are required to put out public notice to the city that they are applying. She explained that the agencies collaborate with those funds and the application goes through the breakdown of not only Milford, but also the City of Seaford, Town of Laurel and the Town of Georgetown for the total allocation to Sussex County police departments in the total of about \$55,619.

COMMUNICATIONS & CORRESPONDENCE

There were no reports of communications and correspondence.

MONTHLY FINANCE REPORT

Finance Director Lou Vitola reviewed the August 31, 2024 financial statement that was included in the packet. (Pages 10-20)

He reported that cash was as tight as it could be especially in the general fund. It's the 11th month away from last year's tax collections so that should rebound this month and on the October report, there should be a return to much stronger cash in the general fund. The utilities, just as predicted last month came through very strong in August and they're ahead of both, the first two periods last year and very strong against the seasonalized budget through August. He explained that it is too early in the fiscal year to extrapolate from that and project but the short-term predictions from last month are sound and proven this month.

Councilmember James made a motion to accept the monthly financial report. Councilmember Wilson seconded. The motion carried unanimously.

UNFINISHED BUSINESS

There was no unfinished business.

NEW BUSINESS

Presentation/Partners for Wellbeing/The Blue Project

Kimberly Blanche, Director of Community Outreach at Beebe Healthcare and a founder of Partners for Wellbeing gave a presentation on the Blue Zones Project that was included in the packet. (Pages 21-52)

Councilmember James stated that he and City Manager Whitfield saw this presentation at the SCAT meeting in Georgetown and that is why they wanted to invite them to come and present this to Milford. Many of the things that were listed in the presentation like connectivity, sidewalks, walkability, community gardens, and food establishments are things that the city has been working to enhance. He said that they assumed that this would be a great alignment and hoped that would be shown through the assessment.

Ms. Blanche stated that there was so much opportunity for alignment. The National Team does have the city's Comprehensive Plan and the focus group is a perfect opportunity to emphasize all of those areas of alignment.

Discussion/The Willows Homeless Issue2

Chief Cecilia Ashe stated that some issues came to their attention in reference to The Willows based off of public comment from the previous Council meeting. She said they met with The Willows staff who they have a very good relationship with as well as some of the residents to address any concerns, rumors, or perception of what has been going on. She explained that there were about 2-4 individuals living in the wood line along The Willows property. One of the things that was discussed was the fact that the homeless were cutting through The Willows property. That was not a concern of management or the residents at the time. It was discovered that the adjacent properties were not owned by The Willows and there are very small parcels back there. She further explained that they met with each of the owners and none of those residents or property owners raised concern in reference to the homeless individuals living on their property. However, they did express concern about any potential liability to them being on the property.

She stated that the Milford Police Behavioral Health Unit works in concert with them to address any of the mental health or substance issues that any of these individuals face and offer services continuously. Once the property owner expresses that they don't want them on the property, they would issue them a Banning Notice.

That is not the department's Banning Notice, but it is the property owner's Banning Notice presented typically by their in-house counsel or their attorneys. Once it has been issued to the individual and if they return to the property, the owner can elect to prosecute for trespassing, depending on the circumstances.

She stated that it's important that the police department stays apolitical and doesn't take sides. Their job is to provide public safety for all. The police department can not be used as an enforcement tool by others and have to be very careful in the lines that are tread as far as borderline, harassing people who may choose or are not ready to get the help. As individuals and as a community, continue to support them when they need the support and so they know that we're there for them.

Councilmember Kalesis stated that when a resident sees the homeless in a park, they may wonder why the city isn't doing something.

Chief Ashe responded that when they are in public parks, they have the constitutional right, regardless of their housing status, to be in those parks as long as what they are doing in the parks is legal.

Adoption/Resolution 2024-15/Halloween Trick or Treat Observance @3

Solicitor Rutt explained the rules of the public hearing. There were no public comments.

Mayor Culotta stated that Trick or Treating in Milford would be on Thursday, October 31, 2024 between the hours of 6:00 PM. and 8:00 PM.

Councilmember Zychal made the motion to adopt Resolution 2024-15 Halloween Trick or Treat Observance. Councilmember Kalesis seconded. The motion carried unanimously.

Authorization/ NE Front Street Phase II – TAP Agreement

Director Pierce stated that the city applied to the State of Delaware Department Transportation TAP Program which is Transportation Alternatives Program for Phase II of the Northeast Front Street Streetscape Project. The scope for this project would include bicycle and pedestrian improvements and traffic calming measures on Northeast Front Street from Northeast 4th Street to North Rehoboth Boulevard. The project would be an extension of the Phase I work that is nearing completion that went from North Washington Street to Northeast 4th Street. He explained that The TAP program covers 80% of the construction and design costs associated with the project requiring the city to only fund 20%. So, the anticipated construction costs for Phase II would be around \$1.75 million and the city would be responsible for \$350,000 of that. Staff is recommending Council to authorize the Mayor to execute the agreement, allowing DeIDOT to proceed with the preliminary design and engineering for Front Street Phase II.

Councilmember James made a motion to authorize the Mayor to execute the agreement allowing DeIDOT to proceed with the preliminary design and engineering for Front Street Phase II. Councilmember Wilson seconded. The motion carried unanimously.

Authorization/ NW Front Street Phase I – TAP Agreement

Director Pierce stated that the scope of the work would include an extension of decorative brick sidewalks along the north side of Northwest Front Street from North Church Street to Truitt Avenue and decorative brick sidewalks along the south side of Northwest Front Street from North Church Street to Mill Street. The state would cover 80% of the construction and design costs and the city would fund 20%. They anticipate the same or very similar construction costs for this segment as well, which means the city would be responsible for around \$350,000. Staff recommends City Council authorized Mayor to execute the agreement, allowing DeIDOT to proceed with the preliminary design and engineering of the Northwest Front Street Phase I TAP Project.

Councilmember James made a motion that the City Council authorized the Mayor to execute the agreement, allowing DeIDOT to proceed with the preliminary design engineering of Northwest Front Street Phase I TAP Plan with an anticipated funding of FY26 of \$400,000 and anticipated funding in FY27 of \$300,000 per the CIP summary. Councilmember Connor seconded. The motion carried unanimously.

Authorization/Tax Payment Deadline

Director Vitola stated that the tax bills were up and online in the ordinary course of business. It took another week to get them printed in the new system. And there have been a handful of issues. People are looking at a new bill and there are some bill presentment issues that affects a very small number of accounts. He stated that regardless of the timing of the bills or any of these issues, he thinks it is a good idea that the first month of penalties be deferred until the next month. It is a business and resident friendly move and staff recommends approval from Council.

Councilmember Connor made a motion to accept the memo to extend the deadline for the current tax year to November 1, 2024. Councilmember Zychal seconded. The motion carried unanimously.

Adjournment

Councilmember James made the motion to adjourn. Councilmember Wilson seconded. The motion carried unanimously.

Mayor Culotta adjourned the meeting at 7:24 pm.

Respectfully submitted,

Katrina L. White, MMC
City Clerk/Recorder