



Meeting of the Town Council
Tuesday, April 16, 2024
Online by ZOOM Videoconference
Approved August 12, 2024

Mayor John Compton called the meeting of the Town Council to order at 7:35 p.m. In attendance were Councilors Christine Dibble, Rob Gilmore, Peter Nagrod, Eva Patrone, Barbara Raimondo, and Mary Warfield. Also in attendance was Treasurer Jean Moyer and a number of residents.

Approval of Agenda: Peter Nagrod moved to approve the draft agenda. Mary Warfield seconded the motion. There were a few changes made.

Action: Vote: 6-0, as amended.

Public Appearances: There were none.

Treasurer's Report:

Treasurer Jean Moyer reviewed the March Treasurer's Report. She noted transfer of funds to the money market account, then answered questions. Rob Gilmore moved to accept the Treasurer's Report for March 2024. Barbara Raimondo seconded the motion.

Action: Vote: 6-0, report accepted.

Mayor's Report:

- a. *Kudos:* Peter Nagrod and Mayor Compton sang praises to Steve Werts for his continued volunteer work for the Town. Although retired from his Maintenance Supervisor position, Steve continues to frequently step in and perform many tasks around the Grove. Steve's experience and willingness to help out is a fantastic asset to the Town.
- b. *Gaithersburg Old Town Shared Use Path* – Received an update from Mark Kyle, a Gaithersburg planner, that they have applied for a grant from the Maryland State Highway Administration to continue working on the design of the project which includes a segment from the Commercial Corner to Brown Street. Mayor Compton provided Gaithersburg with a letter of support for the grant.
- c. *Annual Lake Clean-up* is scheduled for Saturday April 20. This will be focused on the West Woods.
- d. *Annual Woods Spring Clean-up* is scheduled for Saturday April 27th. An Arbor Day celebration will also take place.
- e. *Dog Spot Clean-up* is scheduled for April 27th.
- f. *RASEC and the Emory Grove community* are co-sponsoring a joint community event in Emory Grove on April 21st at which participants may share stories from their lived experience on racial issues.

- g. *In celebration of Earth Day and Arbor Day*, the Forestry and Beautification, Sustainability and Woods Committees are sponsoring a presentation by Master Gardener Janet Hostetler at the Hall on Sunday April 28 entitled “Using Locally Native Plants to Solve Common Landscape Challenges in Washington Grove”.
- h. *A Meatless Potluck Supper* is scheduled for April 28th at 6:00 pm, sponsored by the Sustainability Committee.

Administrative Matters:

- a. *Format for the Annual Town Meeting* – Approve as virtual or in-person in McCathran Hall. The Council discussed whether the format for the 2024 Annual Meeting on the May 11, 2025, would be in-person at the Hall, virtual by Zoom, or a hybrid. Mayor Compton reported that the current state of the Town’s technology capabilities does not make a hybrid meeting possible and asked that the hybrid option be off the table again this year. Noted during the discussion was the up-tick in attendance because of ZOOM, how nice in-person meetings are, the feelings of isolation that come along with ZOOM, inclusivity of the in-person and virtual formats, procedures for voting, and whether residents should be asked for their preference. It was moved and seconded to hold the Annual Town Meeting in person. Council consensus favored making possible a hybrid format for the 2025 Annual Town Meeting.
Action: Vote: 4 in favor; 3 opposed, with Mayor Compton voting to break the tie. The 2024 Annual Town Meeting will again be virtual.
Mayor Compton committed to acquiring technology to hold a virtual meeting in 2025.
- b. *Review procedures for the Town Elections* -- Nick Suzich, Chair of the Board of Supervisors of Elections, reviewed recent elections and explained the voting process and options for residents. This year will include in-person voting. Advanced voting ballots can easily be obtained, and all information is on the town website.
- c. *May Town Council Meeting* – The May Town Council meeting to follow the Annual Town Meeting and Election was scheduled for Monday May 20th.
- d. *Leaf Collection Contract* – Review of bids and award of contract.
Mayor Compton summarized the two bids received in response to the RFP offering a one-year contract renewable for four additional years. The bid from RJ Landscaping was for \$18,550.00 and the bid from Green Earth came in at \$16,740.00. Councilors commented that both companies had provided reliable services to the Town. It was moved and seconded to award the Leaf Collection Contract to Green Earth.
Action: Vote: 6-0, contract awarded to Green Earth.
- e. *Tennis Court Security* – Discussion.
Recent incidents of dogs and skateboard on the courts have been reported. The Mayor and Council discussed the rules for use of the tennis courts, how to enforce them, restricting access by locking the courts, better communication with residents, and better, tasteful, and well-placed signage.
Action: Councilors Nagrod, Dibble and Warfield volunteered will work on improving the signs.

f. Historic Preservation Commission Appointments:

Commissioner – Reappointment of Robert Booher for a 3-year term; June 1, 2024 – May 31, 2026.

Commissioner – Reappointment of David Stopak for the 3-year term; June 1, 2024 – May 31, 2026.

Alternate Commissioner – Appointment of Samantha Suzich for the 3-year term; June 1, 2024 – May 31, 2026.

Action: Vote 6-0, all appointments confirmed.

RASEC recommendations for furthering the goals of Resolution 2023-01, “Acknowledging Washington Grove’s Racially Exclusionary Past and Committing to and Equitable and Inclusive Future”

Two recommendations from RASEC were addressed at this meeting.

- a. *Recommendation to collaborate with neighboring communities regarding the shared use path.* Peter Nagrod opened discussion with a question asking what the Town Council was being asked to do about this (and several other) recommendation. Paula Puglisi from RASEC expressed dismay questions about the RASEC recommendations. She went on to address misconceptions and confusion by clarifying that this particular recommendation asks for town officials to implement a mechanism for collaborating with neighboring communities (e.g. Emory Grove, Amity, Shady Grove Crossing) by sharing the status of the Washington Grove Connector and of the Gaithersburg Old Town-Washington Grove pathway and involving them in supporting the projects and providing input from the perspective of their own interests. Council opinions were expressed in agreement that the Town has not done a very good job of reaching out to others and that involving the larger community made sense regarding the new multi-user pathways. Eva Patrone made a motion that “the Town Council supports for outreach to neighboring communities to facilitate collaboration and communication on the shared use paths in the area.” Peter Nagrod seconded the motion. During further discussion Mayor Compton suggested that the Shared Use Pathway Liaison committee be tasked to reach out to our neighboring communities to engage them in the multi-user pathway projects. He also agreed the Town should and can do better in collaborating with our neighbors on matters of with mutual impacts.

Action: Vote: 6-0, motion in support of outreach approved.

Mayor Compton will work with the Liaison Committee to reach out to neighboring communities.

- b. *Recommendation for Town Website Protocol.* Develop a protocol for handling racist, discriminatory, insulting, accusatory, harassing, threatening, or anonymous statements submitted for Town website posting. Mayor Compton summarized the current guidelines for vetting information for posting on the website already created by webmaster Christine Dibble created guidelines. Paula Puglisi indicated that RASEC agreed this recommendation had been adequately addressed.

Action: Two other RASEC recommendations, on communicating with Heritage Emory Grove and for DEI (Diversity, Equity and Inclusion) training, were deferred for discussion to a future meeting of the Town Council.

Proposed FY2025 Tax Rate, Dwelling Tax and Budget for the Town Meeting –

Discussion and approval. The Town Council reviewed the draft FY25 tax rates and budget to be recommended by the Council for adoption at the Annual Town Meeting on May 11th. Treasurer Jean Moyer and Mayor Compton answered questions about the draft. The proposed property tax rate was set at the constant yield rate to raise the same funds as in FY2024. The proposed dwelling tax, which passes through costs for refuse and recycling collection to property owners, was based on the new contract with Casella but was adjusted lower to refund a portion of the FY24 dwelling tax assessment due to lower than expected actual contract costs in FY24. The ARPA funds provided the Town are restricted for expenditure on the stormwater infrastructure project that must be committed by contract by December 31, 2024. Following brief discussion of several expense line items, it was moved and seconded to recommend the Council’s draft budget and tax rates without changes.

Action: Vote: 6-0, approved the Council FY25 Town Budget and Tax Rates for the Annual Town Meeting.

Ordinance 2025-01 – Adopting the Town Budget and Tax Rates for FY25.

It was moved and seconded to introduce Ordinance 2024-01 “Adopting the Town Budget and Tax Rates for FY25”. This annual ordinance meets State requirements that municipal tax rates and budgets be adopted by ordinance. The Ordinance will be adopted after the tax rates and budget are finalized by the Annual Town Meeting.

Stormwater Infrastructure Maintenance – Review and possible approval. The Mayor and Council had a lengthy discussion about the expectations and details in the RFP. Additions and revisions will be addressed by the RFP group (Mayor Compton, Patty Klein, Joan Mahaffey, Steve Werts, Bob Booher and Dave Cosson), and the draft RFP will be reviewed at the next meeting.

New Business

None.

Other Regular Business

Town Council Reports – Of note:

- a. *Maintenance (Nagrod)* – Extensive list of maintenance projects underway around town.
- b. *Maintenance (Nagrod)* – Plans for identity fencing at McCathran Hall.
- c. *Recreation Committee (Patrone)* – The Committee is soliciting resident opinions about Fourth of July and Labor Day events. Residents may [complete the survey here](#).
- d. *Recreation Committee (Patrone)* – Summer in the Parks this year will be held July 8, 2024, to August 1, 2024.

- e. *Woodward Park (Patrone)* – Addition or removal of playground equipment is being deferred until next year due to time constraints for reviewing the many responses to the Playground Survey. In the coming months will see a variety of safety concerns, handicap access, renovations and other improvements addressed.
- f. *Forestry & Beautification (Raimondo)* – Twelve trees to be planted in April and early May.
- g. *Sustainability (Warfield)* – Following the success of last year’s Meatless Potluck meal, another has been scheduled for 6:00 pm on Sunday, April 28, in McCathran Hall. Consider that meat accounts for over 40% of the greenhouse gases from food consumption.

Approval of Minutes

It was moved and seconded to approve March 11, 2024, Town Council minutes. No changes were made.

Action: Vote: 6-0., approved.

Next Meetings

- Annual Town Meeting Saturday May 11th at 8:00 pm
- Regular Town Council and Organizational Meeting: May 20, 2024, at 7:30 p.m.

Adjournment

There being no further business, the meeting was adjourned at 10:15 p.m.

Kathryn L. Lehman
Town Clerk