

MINUTES OF THE DECEMBER 2, 2024
CHINCOTEAGUE TOWN COUNCIL MEETING
Council Chambers
7:00 p.m.

Council Members Present:

J. Arthur Leonard, Mayor
Christopher D. Bott, Vice Mayor
Denise P. Bowden, Councilwoman
William T. McComb, Jr., Councilman
Ellen W. Richardson, Councilwoman
K. Jay Savage, Councilman
Gene W. Taylor, Councilman

Council Members Absent:

Staff Present:

Mr. Michael T. Tolbert, Town Manager
Mr. Tyler Greenley, Chief of Police
Mr. Bryan Rush, Director of Emergency Services
Mr. Wes Parks, Public Works Director

Call to Order

Mayor Leonard called the meeting to order at 7:00 p.m.

Invocation

Councilman Taylor offered the invocation.

Pledge of Allegiance

Mayor Leonard led in the Pledge of Allegiance.

Mayor Leonard commented on a postcard that was mailed to Island residents. He advised that at the last Council meeting there was a representative from Rocket Lab who advised that the use of Queen Sound boat ramp is off the table. He added that Rocket Lab stated that this was a very backup plan if needed.

Proclamation

Mayor Leonard read the Certificate of Recognition for Mrs. Evelyn Shotwell.



CERTIFICATE OF RECOGNITION

PRESENTED TO

Mrs. Evelyn Shotwell

WHEREAS, Mrs. Shotwell and her Family moved to Chincoteague in 1997 and became full time residents and participants in the community; and

WHEREAS, Mrs. Shotwell held several positions in her career including teacher, business owner, hotel marketing director, tourism counselor, office manager and executive director; and

WHEREAS, Mrs. Shotwell directed and oversaw the staff optimization and expansion of the Chamber of Commerce including the hiring of additional staff and the administration of the Seafood Festival, an Eastern Shore tradition; and

WHEREAS, Mrs. Shotwell single handedly operated the Chamber of Commerce, providing all services during the COVID 19 pandemic while procuring sufficient funds to maintain operations; and

WHEREAS, Mrs. Shotwell had a long and distinguished career with the Chincoteague Chamber of Commerce providing exemplary services to the Chincoteague Business Community and Town government for over 24 years.

NOW, THEREFORE, by virtue of the authority vested in me as Mayor of the Town of Chincoteague, I do hereby deem it an honor and pleasure to extend this tribute to Mrs. Evelyn Shotwell on the occasion of her retirement, with sincere congratulations and best wishes for many happy years of enjoyment with her family.

Presented this 2nd day of December 2024.

Mayor John A. Leonard

Attest:

Michael T. Tolbert, Town Manager

Vice Mayor Bott presented Mayor Leonard with a plaque as a token of their appreciation. He recounted some of the accomplishments during Mayor Leonard's term as Councilman and Mayor. He listed: Public Works Department: Installed water filtration system near the Town's wells, expansion of the Town's paving projects, installed water meter reading system, and central sewage collection and processing system where the agreements have been finalized during his terms. Public Safety: expansion of the Police and EMS Departments to provide safer streets and emergency care, numerous upgrades within each of these departments that keeps the Town on the cutting edge of protection, he led the Town through the Covid pandemic. Budget & Personnel: He continually saw a balanced budget during each year he has served as Councilman and Mayor. He is also leaving public service after 12 years knowing that the Town is financially stable and in better financial shape than when he arrived. Parks and Infrastructure: He saw the purchase of the historic firehouse, the John H. Tarr Bike Trail, pickleball courts, tennis courts redone, the Amrien Gym redone, also the addition of Brianna's Park to the park system, and the Dog Park. Harbor Committee: He has seen continuous improvements as the Harbor, specifically the installation of the floating dock system throughout the entire space, and a new state-of-the-art boat ramp at Memorial Park.

Vice Mayor Bott added that even though these items highlight a few tangible accomplishments the main take-home is that he entered the public life and upon leaving it you will have left the Town of Chincoteague in great shape moving forward. He stated that he believes that the Town, the Council, and the citizens will be eternally grateful.

Public Comment

Town Manager Tolbert read the rules for public comment.

Mayor Leonard opened the floor for public comment.

- Mrs. Beverly Fleming, 3860 Main Street, addressed the postcard mailer about the Queen Sound boat ramp. She was concerned when she read the card and commented further about assurances. She asked if there is a contract in the future that the residents be notified.
- Mr. John H. Leonard, 7961 Church Street, also commented about the postcard. He feels the workshop worked out well where the clarification was given. He stated that the outlook regardless of what it is, Rocket Lab, NASA, or the government on Assateague, when something is said at a Council meeting, it's in the digital world. Someone will take what is said and spin it which caused the postcard. He added that the Town doesn't own the ramp. He commented further about the information and implored people to have a can-do attitude rather than a no, not here, not today attitude.
- Mr. Ricky Scherer, 6299 Cleveland Street, commented on the bicyclists. He stated that the Island is growing. Over the last couple of summers, he has seen that people on bikes are not following the rules and wants to know the laws and feels there will be a problem in the future.
- Mr. Danny Bowden, 5161 Chicken City Road, asked the Town to implement the No Wake Zone in the Chincoteague Channel. He advised that he is a fisherman. He stated he is taxed at times with loading and unloading when a boat is going by at a high rate of speed. He

feels it puts a little bit of a burden on him. He added that the Town has a ramp behind the America Legion. He asked if the Town requires a permit to launch a boat. There is a safety factor there and at Robert Reed Park. The least they can do is think about the people tying up. He explained how he idles down through the Downtown area. He stated it would be a little helpful for those packing at the dock.

- Mr. Ken Web, 4495 Main Street, thanked opening the No Wake Zone question. He sees there is discussion and asked what is the operational of the end of Marsh Island. He stated that he lives at the end of Lewis Creek and in the summer, they don't seem to think there is a speed limit there. He and his neighbor have floating docks. He doesn't want to put a damper on anyone's fun, but they can hold off on Lewis Creek and open back up at the high school. He mentioned Captain's Cove boaters coming in a little quick. He appreciates whatever can be done.

- Mr. Glen Leibick, General Manager of the commercial Space Port, advised he is in attendance this evening to answer questions of Council or the citizens on the operations. He encouraged anyone who has questions to give him a call. He would prefer to work these things out as quick and quietly as they can. He would like there to be a truth to the answers and doesn't want to work off of rumors and such.

- Mr. Eli Grovin, 4425 Eastwinds, stated he received the flyer as well, and stated it sounds like people are up in arms about it. He doesn't feel the Town should be anti-business. He trusts all of the elected officials to do what is right. He understands that Rocket Lab is not considering using Queen Sound boat ramp, but if they were he is sure they would find a way to make it work for everyone. He added that not having car access isn't good, but they can survive. He made suggestions for other options to explore that Rocket Lab would be willing to help with. He would hope that the Town would be pro-business. He also asked if anyone has looked into changing the method of traffic control for Church Street, Ridge Road, and Chicken City Road intersection. He explained that Eastwinds is off Church Street, and he advised that he nearly gets hit about once a week. He suggested a traffic circle. He was unsure if this had been discussed before.

Mayor Leonard advised that they have looked at it and they've added some things. He suggested coming to the Public Safety Committee.

Councilwoman Richardson stated that it has been that way since she's been here. She added that she drives a school bus through there and knows what he's talking about.

- Ms. Suzanne Rizzo, 7036 Josephine Lane, asked to address the Rocket Lab issue. She stated that she would appreciate that it isn't a cavalier answer that it's done already. She stated that it's not. She doesn't want it to be moved forward and not addressed with a public forum.

Agenda Adoption

Councilman McComb motioned, seconded by Councilwoman Richardson to adopt the agenda as presented. Unanimously approved.

Staff Reports

General Government

Town Manager Tolbert stated that the Town office staff has been busy with taxes since November 5th. As of November 27th, they have posted \$271,448 of the projected \$675,000 in Real Estate, \$125,841 of the projected \$240,000 Personal Property, and \$45,271 of the projected \$88,000 Motor Vehicle tax revenues for FY25. He added that this is the single busiest week of the year in the Town office. He reminded everyone of the December 5th due date. He reported on the plans for cleaning the Harbor beginning the first week of January. He also gave the November report for the Center which included a wedding, and Local, State and Federal elections. North Accomack Little League held the annual fund-raising auction and dance. He added that after months of planning, Center Director Leonard organized and presented the 1st annual Christmas Craft Fair held on Saturday the 23rd. The event attracted 43 vendors and over 600 shoppers. He added that she conducted a survey at the end of the event, and everyone wanted her to continue with this event. He reviewed upcoming events for the Center for the month of December. He gave the Meals and Transient Occupancy Tax report along with the Finance Report for November.

Police Department

Chief Greenley reviewed the monthly Police report advising that on November 18th – 22nd, Sgt. Stevens attended the FBI First Line of Supervisor Training at the Virginia State Police Academy in Richmond. He commented that he went to this training approximately 12 years ago. He stated that on November 20th the Department held the Senior Luncheon with over 150 seniors. Don's Seafood Restaurant catered the event. He reminded everyone that the Toy Run is Saturday. The bikes will leave Walmart in Onley at 11:00a.m. The entry fee is a new unwrapped toy. The participants will receive a t-shirt and lunch at Capt. Zachs. He added that they plan to have Coffee with a Cop on December 16th from 8:00a.m to 10:00a.m. at Blackfins.

Public Works Department

Public Works Director Parks reported that last year temporary drainage improvement was done to Accomac and Annessex Streets. This month they installed 12" storm drain pipe as a permanent solution. They also installed Christmas decorations. He added that last month drainage repairs were done on Poplar Street and early this month they patched the road with asphalt. He stated that the Department has been challenged keeping the streets cleared from leaves and debris. He reported that the new street sweeper was delivered on the 25th, and the "Right turn on red after stop" signs have been installed. He added that they had a water leak that was repaired on Thanksgiving afternoon. He expressed his appreciation for staff who come in without hesitation. He reviewed the December schedule as well.

Councilwoman Bowden asked how they were progressing on the ditch maintenance.

Public Works Director advised that a lot of what they did this month was maintenance and improvements. He stated that if she has specific areas, he'll be glad to look into it.

Councilwoman Bowden advised there are a couple of places that half have been dug out and the pipe itself hasn't been cleaned out.

Public Works Director Parks stated he would be glad to get back on that.

Councilman McComb thanked the Public Works staff for putting up the Christmas decorations. He advised there are 50+ more pieces that were installed. He stated they put in a lot of work and staff did a great job.

Emergency Services

Director of Emergency Services Rush reported that they had 76 calls in November, which was 2 less than last year. He reported that a staff member reached out to the Chincoteague Elementary School Career Day. They continue with weather monitoring. The Trick-or-Treat AAR has been completed to help make next year's event even better. He reviewed the hurricane outlook from June. He gave the storm statistics. He informed everyone that this week is winter weather awareness week. He reminded everyone to prepare now.

Public Hearing – No Wake Zone

Mayor Leonard opened the public hearing at 7:44p.m.

- Mr. John H. Leonard, 7961 Church Street, commented on the proposed “No Wake Zones”. He stated that there is no way to get around those areas. He added that delays add up. He advised that he took over 700 tours of this Island this year. If he has to slow down, this could cost 100 hours in a year. He feels that (the “No Wake Zone” in) Sheepshead Creek and Lewis Creek is needed. However, in the main channel-ways of the Island there's no effective way. He agreed with Mr. Bowden that the fish docks are being used but feels it's not worth the “No Wake Zone”. Mr. Leonard stated that the Assateague Channel is the most used waterway. He feels it's a boater safety issue and a “No Wake Zone” wouldn't be beneficial long-term. He added that time is money. He stated that everywhere on the Island is losing shoreline. If you go anywhere that doesn't have bulkhead, you're losing land. He concluded that he is strongly opposed to any “No Wake Zone”.

- Mr. Ricky Scherer, 6299 Cleveland Street, advised he has been a fisherman his entire life and has talked about this topic for years. He had a big boat, and people would go by so fast that it would slam his boat against the dock which beat the paint off of it. The last few years he has been launching and pulling up his skiff that he uses for crabs. He advised he uses the launch behind the American Legion every day. Boats speed by and make it nearly impossible to load or unload. He asked how they would like to have a boat and people damage it. He reminded everyone that fishing boats cost from \$200,000 - \$400,000. He commented about having a boat that cost that much being beaten against a dock. He feels they should schedule a few more minutes, rather than tear somebody's boat up.

Town Manager Tolbert showed the map of the proposed “No Wake Zone”.

Mr. Scherer feels the south end of Marsh Island is good, there should be markers and he asked who would enforce it. He also suggested adding signs. He stated that he didn't want to slow up someone's business, but this has been a problem going on for 12-20 years.

Mayor Leonard closed the public hearing at 7:53p.m. He asked for comments from Council.

Councilman Taylor stated that he enjoys the slowness of it and enjoying the Island. He referred to the Sunset Bay and around the Harbor adding that when a wake comes through it can do damage. He added that he is for it and people need to slow down.

Councilwoman Bowden stated she has watched people at the boat ramp behind the American Legion trying to get on the dock and can't for the wake. She feels it's a safety thing. She hopes, if it passes, it is marked better than what they have on Eastside.

Mayor Leonard stated he is the Chairman of the Harbor Committee, and they proposed it. The one on Eastside was sent to the state and they lost it. They designed it by giving those faster vessels the east side of the Channel to travel. Along the shoreline is a "No Wake Zone". This was done for safety because of the Town's dock at Memorial Park. He added that Sheepshead Creek has always been a "No Wake Zone". He stated that on the western Channel things changed. The boating styles have changed, back then they didn't have the motor capacity and ability to throw a wake like they do now. He stated that the problem with going fast is the people who boat in our area don't have ware-with-all to maintain speed that is manageable for them and the people on the shore. They don't care or realize what wakes can do. When the men are unloading fish, they're more concerned with unloading that catch. By making this a "No Wake Zone" it will give the VMRC another tool to be able to have patrol in the area. It takes the public to make sure the VMRC is on it. The waterways are controlled by the state. They plan to have better markings and signage on the north and south portion on Marsh Island. He feels it's a step they need to take as the Town is progressing and it's a safety issue.

Councilwoman Bowden motioned, seconded by Councilman Taylor to approve the "No Wake Zone" from Waterside Motor Inn to Lewis Creek. Unanimously approved.

Committee Report

Public Works Committee

Councilwoman Richardson advised they met on November 5th. Public Works Director Parks has reviewed some of what was discussed. She stated they did road patching, and the new street sweeper has been going.

Harbor Committee

Mayor Leonard stated they discussed cleaning up the storage behind the hill and the "No Wake Zone". He added that the fuel tank area will be fixed up, cleaned up and painted.

Adoption of Minutes of November 4th and November 21st Council Meetings

Councilman Savage motioned, seconded by Councilman McComb to adopt the minutes of the November 4th and November 21st Council meetings as presented. Unanimously approved.

Mayor and Council Comments

Councilwoman Bowden thanked Mayor Leonard for his 12 years of service, for his guidance, and his leadership, and all he has done. She stated that he and his family has been a staple in this community all the way back, forever. She thanked him.

Councilman McComb advised it was a pleasure serving with Mayor Leonard. He also wished everyone a “Merry Christmas”.

Councilman Taylor stated that Mayor Leonard didn’t do it for the money. He appreciated what he did, adding that it was a labor of love.

Councilman Savage stated that it has been a pleasure to serve with Mayor Leonard. He also gave a shoutout to Chamber Executive Director Shotwell for her exemplary service at the Chamber and the Town.

Mayor Leonard advised that this is his last comment. He stated that it has been pleasurable and a good run, 12 years of public service and before that the Zoning Board. He will enjoy some time off. He had a good time, and it was made more pleasurable by having a good staff. He added that it makes his job a lot easier when you have good people behind you. He commented that the 4 Department Heads in attendance have certainly made his life a lot easier. He added that it isn’t just those 4 in attendance, it’s all the Town employees. He stated that when the Town is running right, it makes the Mayor job a heck of a lot easier. He expressed how great it is to live in the Town of Chincoteague. He added that for the most part they get along, they do have differences between themselves every now and again, but they work them out. He stated that it’s a great place to live, a great place to be from, and a great place to be Mayor. He concluded with, “Roll Tide”.

Closed Meeting in accordance with §2.2-3711 (A) (3) for the discussion of the acquisition of real property for a public purpose.

Councilman Taylor motioned, seconded by Councilwoman Bowden to go into a closed meeting in accordance with §2.2-3712 (A) (3) of the Code of Virginia for the discussion of the acquisition of real property for a public purpose. Unanimously approved.

Certification of Closed Meeting in Accordance with §2.2-3712 (D) of the Code of Virginia
Councilman Taylor motioned, seconded by Councilwoman Bowden to certify the Closed Meeting was in accordance with §2.2-3712 (D) of the Code of Virginia. Unanimously approved.

Adjourn

Councilman Taylor motioned, seconded by Councilwoman Bowden to adjourn. Unanimously approved.

J. Arthur Leonard, Mayor

Michael T. Tolbert, Town Manager