



HISTORIC TOWN OF EATONVILLE, FLORIDA REGULAR COUNCIL MEETING

MEETING MINUTES

Tuesday, April 21, 2026, at 7:30 PM

Town Hall – 307 E. Kennedy Blvd.

SPECIAL NOTICE: These meeting minutes are presented in an abbreviated format intended as a public record discussion of stated meeting according to the Florida's Government-in-the-Sunshine law. Meetings are opened to the public, noticed within reasonable advance notice, and transcribed into minutes for public record. ***Audio Recording are available through the Town's website on the Council Agenda Page.*

CALL TO ORDER AND VERIFICATION OF QUORUM:

Mayor Critton called the meeting to order at 7:34 p.m. and a quorum was established by Ms. Bellenger.

PRESENT: (5), Councilman Tarus Mack, Councilwoman Wanda Randolph, Councilwoman LaDwyana Jordan, Vice Mayor Angela Thomas, Mayor Ruthi Critton

STAFF: (5) Marlin Daniels, **Chief Administrator Officer;** Marissa Bellenger, **Records Coordinator;** Clifford Shepard, **Town Attorney;** Faith Woods, **Executive Assistant to the Mayor;** Chief Stanley Murray, **EPD**

INVOCATION AND PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE:

Invocation through a moment of silence led by Mayor Critton followed by the Pledge of Allegiance.

APPROVAL OF THE AGENDA:

Mayor Critton MOTIONS to **APPROVE** the Agenda with an **AMENDMENT** to Table the Approval of Town Council Meeting Minutes, add a presentation by Dr. Candace Finley on Juneteenth Celebrations after the Eatonville Police Presentation, and move Council Decision #4 after presentations; **moved by** Councilwoman Randolph; **second by** Councilman Mack. **AYE: ALL, MOTION PASSES.**

PRESENTATIONS:

Presentation of the Community Partner Award for Mr. David Washington (Police) – Chief Stanley Murray presented David Washington with the Community Partner Award.

Updates on the 2026 Juneteenth Festivities – Dr. Candace Finley presented an update to Council on the Juneteenth celebrations.

COUNCIL DECISIONS:

Approval of Resolution 2026-26 Terminating The General Town Attorney – Attorney Shepard handed out his letter of resignation to the Council and read his statement into the record. Councilwoman Randolph asked if there was any pending work which will need to be transferred. Attorney Shepard – There are daily tasks, but at the moment, no. Councilwoman Randolph also asked for clarification on Attorney Shepard's contract. Mayor Critton – Since there is active litigation, how do we navigate? Attorney Shepard – The injunction was denied. The Town has 100% control over the CRA lawsuit and could ask the attorney (Jackson) to throw it out. At the last CRA meeting, the Executive Director was rehired. Vice Mayor Thomas asked if the Council were to hire Attorney Jackson, how would he represent the Town and CRA? Attorney Shepard stated that in his opinion, it would be a conflict of interest. Vice Mayor Thomas stated that she does not accept Attorney Shepard's resignation. Marlin Daniels, CAO – If you accept the resignation, I ask that you allow him (Attorney

Shepard) to work with the next person for a smooth transition. At least 30-60 days. Councilman Mack explained his reasoning for the proposed resolution to fire Attorney Shepard. He stated that he is willing to allow him to help transition with the next attorney. He also stated that Mr. Daniels should have coordinated between Attorney Shepard and Jackson. Mr. Daniels – I do not have authority over Attorney Jackson. However, we did have a meeting. I am putting a transition in place so further lawsuits do not happen. Vice Mayor Thomas requested that they move on so they can conduct Town business. Mayor Critton asked Attorney Shepard if he would be willing to stay until they finish the agenda. Attorney Shepard – That is fine with me, but it will be a waste of time and money. The Council discussed accepting Attorney Shepard's resignation and terms. Councilwoman Randolph stated that they needed to move Item #5 up in the agenda so the Council can have adequate legal counsel. Mayor Critton – If Item #5 does not pass, you do not have an interim unless I invoke my executive powers. The appointment of Attorney Jackson could also be a conflict of interest. Councilwoman Randolph **MOTIONS** for the Extension of Attorney Shepard for thirty (30) days as collaborator; **moved** by Councilman Mack, **MOTION FAILS** for lack of second. **Comments:** Mayor Critton stated that Item #5 can be moved before public hearing.

CITIZEN PARTICIPATION – (6)

Michelle Fort – Ms. Fort commented on the Council's recent actions and statements made by Councilman Mack. She asked if there was an explanation for Executive Director Michael Johnson's miscellaneous expenses. She also asked why Council wanted to hire the attorney who filed against the Town, as well as when they would start working for the people. She ended her comments by speaking on the Hungerford sale: why would OCPS sell to the Town?

Joyce Irby – The smartest man in the room just walked out. Now we are hiring the attorney of Michael Johnson. There is no such thing as the people. They (Council) do not listen and do not care. We want to fire our only protection. Since 1994, Michael Johnson has been documented as a swindler. Mr. Jackson called me a liar but he is the liar. I am up here for my ancestors and those who cannot be here. The CRA Executive Director can just hand out money. He has accosted our mayor on the street. As N.Y. (Nathiri) said to me, the government belongs to the people.

Bruce Antone – Mr. Antone is the representative from District 41. He stated that he is present tonight to talk with Council about the Black History Museum. Four years ago, he drafted legislation to get a Black History Museum in Eatonville. He came to ask Council if they would like to partner to get TDT dollars from Orange County. He passed out copies of his proposal.

Ryan Novak – Mr. Novak began his comments by stating that on the CRA side, the Executive Director operates at the behest of the Board. He commented on Attorney Jackson and Michael Johnson's actions, as well as the OCPS-Dr. Phillips sale for the Hungerford Property which involved former Mayor Gardner. He requested that the impact fees remain the focus. He ended by stating that he does not accept Attorney Shepard's resignation.

James Williams – Mr. Williams stated that he is concerned about the resolutions regarding Attorney Shepard and Attorney Jackson. He does not believe Attorney Jackson could respond to the lawsuit within 20 days. Also, any new firm would need time to review and create a litigation strategy. Hiring Attorney Jackson would be a conflict of interest. He requested that current counsel remain until the deadline is met.

Dwayne Rackard – Mr. Rackard wanted to speak on Attorney Shepard's resignation. He addressed Councilman Mack and Councilwoman Randolph by stating that if it were up to him, they would not be on the Council. He continued by saying that the citizens are tired of listening to the bickering. Attorney Jackson said he does not represent liars, but attorney's do.

Mayor Critton MOTIONS to TABLE Item #3, remove Item #4, and move Item #5 before the public hearing; **moved** by Councilman Mack, **second** by Councilwoman Jordan. **Comments:** Councilwoman Randolph stated that signage in the audience should not be allowed.

COUNCIL DECISIONS (CONT.):

Approval of Resolution 2026-27 Hiring Greg Jackson As The Interim General Town Attorney for the Town of Eatonville – Ms. Bellenger read the Preamble. **Mayor Critton MOTIONS to CONSIDER** Resolution 2026-27; **moved** by Councilman Mack, **second** by Councilwoman Randolph. **Comments:** Mayor Critton asked Attorney Jackson if there was a conflict of interest. Attorney Jackson – Attorney Shepard mentioned comments made in a 286 (shade) meeting and there was a recommendation to forego the lawsuit. The conflict can be waived. Councilman Mack asked if that were something they could do legally. Attorney Jackson confirmed. Mayor Critton asked if there was another colleague or associate of his that the Council could look into. Attorney Jackson – There are names of attorney's that I could recommend. **Mayor Critton resumes the question.** **AYE:** Councilwoman Randolph, Councilman Mack. **NAY:** Councilwoman Jordan, Vice Mayor Thomas, Mayor Critton. **MOTION FAILS, 2/3.**

Due to the Council having no legal counsel, the public hearing could not take place. Mayor Critton – There may be a special meeting to consider a new Town Attorney. She suggested Friday, April 24, 2026. Ms. Bellenger took a quorum call. Mr. Daniels suggested that Mayor Critton invoke her executive powers and do an emergency hire. Mayor Critton – I am waiting for information, so I am not ready to do an emergency hire. Since we agreed to have Attorney Shepard transition the new attorney, I would emergency hire him, but I do not feel that is a desire of this Council. A Special Meeting for April 24, 2026, at 6:30p.m. is confirmed to discuss new legal counsel. Before the Council moved to comments, Ms. Bellenger clarified that the Consent Agenda was not approved.

APPROVAL OF CONSENT AGENDA:

Mayor Critton MOTIONS to TABLE the Consent Agenda (Approval of Town Council Meeting Minutes; Approval of Resolution 2026-24); **moved** by Councilman Mack, **second** by Vice Mayor Thomas. **AYE: ALL, MOTION PASSES.**

REPORTS:

Chief Administrative Officer - Marlin Daniels – On April 30th, Town Hall will be closing at 3p.m. for a hurricane readiness meeting with all staff and law enforcement. We are trying to prepare ahead of time, and we will also use this as a training day. In light of everything that is going on, I would like to encourage everyone to continue to put Eatonville first.

Records Coordinator (Clerk Office) – Marissa Bellenger – No report.

TOWN COUNCIL REPORT/DISCUSSION ITEMS –

Councilwoman Wanda Randolph – No report.

Councilman Tarus Mack – Thank you everybody for coming out this evening. Everyone has an opinion, and I respect that, but I have a tough job to do as a legislator and as a leader in this community. It is not always easy making the decisions that I make, but I want to make sure that I am staying up front and making the best educated decision. Also, my condolences to anyone who has suffered a loss in the community. Thank you all for the presentations tonight. To Mr. Daniels (CAO), I have a serious issue with you not responding to my emails, especially with the issues that I raised. It is extremely unprofessional and I am going to hold you accountable. If I were the mayor, I would have terminated you immediately. Be mindful of your duties as the CAO. As for Attorney Shepard, I feel like the direction with him was not in the best interest of the Town. Moreover, I respect every citizen in this town, whether you like me or not. I am going to always do the will of the people and do what is right. I am praying that we can get some things done with the new mayor. Mayor

Critton, I respect you so much for the integrity that you carry. I also heard some disrespectful comments this evening from citizens in the community and those who live outside. You are entitled to speak however you want. At the end of the day, I am going to fight, but I am going to fight with white gloves. Have a blessed evening.

Councilwoman LaDwyana Jordan – Thank you, Dr. Finley, for your presentations. I love your work. In terms of Attorney Shepard, it was a tough call. Thank you to the residents—we are going to get there.

Vice Mayor Angela Thomas – If this is love, I wonder how we hate Eatonville. I would like us to be respectful of the people’s time when we are up here.

MAYOR’S REPORT - Mayor Ruthi Critton – Congratulations to Mr. Washington for receiving the Community Award. I share my condolences with him as well. Councilman Mack and Councilwoman Randolph, I did hear your concerns about decorum. If we silence you at the podium, you will disengage. Speak up, that is what we owe you. Mayor Critton commented on a recent event she went to. Concerning recent events, Mayor Critton stated that gun violence is real and urged everyone to be careful and look out for each other. Her heart also goes out to the family who lost a loved one in Lake Weston. She shared her thoughts about domestic violence within the state and nation.


Ms. Bellenger handed out a list of EPD Unverified Data Calls to the Council.

ADJOURNMENT Mayor Critton Motions for Adjournment of Meeting; **moved** by Vice Mayor Thomas, **second** by Councilwoman Randolph; **AYE: ALL, MOTION PASSES. Meeting Adjourned at 9:15pm.**

HANDOUTS: Resolution CRA-R-2022-14; Resolution 2022-33; Attorney Shepard 6-month Contract; Resignation as Town Attorney (Cliff Shepard) letter; Florida Museum of History at the Town of Eatonville; EPD Unverified Data Calls


Respectfully Submitted by: Marissa Bellenger

ATTEST



Veronica L King, Town Clerk

APPROVED



Ruthi Critton, Mayor