



HISTORIC TOWN OF EATONVILLE, FLORIDA

COMMUNITY REDEVELOPMENT AGENCY

MEETING MINUTES

Thursday, March 19, 2026, at 6:30 PM

Town Hall (Council Chambers) – 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 Board Agenda Page.*

CALL TO ORDER – Director Ruthi Critton called the meeting to order at 6:32 p.m.

ROLL CALL – Quorum was established through roll call by Ms. Bellenger.

PRESENT: (5) Director Donovan Williams, Director Ruthi Critton, Director Tarus Mack, Director LaDwyana Jordan, Director Angela Thomas

STAFF: (5) Marissa Bellenger, **Records Coordinator**; Greg Jackson, **Attorney**; Paula Bradshaw, **CRA Fiscal Coordinator**; Chenea Henson, **CRA**; Shakeila Jones, **CRA**

INVOCATION AND PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE

Director Critton led the invocation through a Moment of Silence followed by the Pledge of Allegiance

PRESENTATIONS:

Attorney Greg Jackson Administrative/Legal issues discussion – Attorney Jackson began his presentation by commenting on the Board members who resigned. He stated that they should have been allowed to participate. Attorney Jackson also commented on the termination of CRA Executive Director Michael Johnson. He cited an opinion from the Florida Attorney General in relation to the Board members who resigned. Jackson stated that Randolph and Washington were allowed to serve on the Board until their seats were filled. Attorney Jackson also found another opinion from the Attorney General on the termination of a CRA Executive Director: the CRA Board is independent from the Town and their powers do not come from the Town's Charter. The Mayor cannot interject herself in the operations of the CRA. Florida law trumps the Charter. Moreover, the Town's charter does not control the actions of the CRA. (In response to Attorney Shepard seeking the opinion from the Florida Attorney General) Mr. Johnson would have to wait a year or more for an action from the Florida Attorney General. Mr. Johnson is not here today because he is being treated as an employee of the Town and has a trespass on the Town Hall. Attorney Jackson addressed the statements made by Attorney Shepard and the documents he provided, in which Attorney Jackson could not find. He stated that Attorney Shepard is wrong. Attorney Jackson continued by stating that he hates being in this position, and the Town and CRA should not be in this position. The bill for this agency for my service will be \$10,000. If I am charging \$10,000, how much is Attorney Shepard being charged? How much time/money will the Town and CRA spend? Mr. Johnson was served termination papers and his Town vehicle was taken over the weekend. I do not fault Mayor Gardner as she was following legal advice. Attorney Jackson continued by stating he received emails from Mr. Johnson saying that he was being threatened and intimidated by Human Resources staff. This Board has asked that Johnson be reinstated and disciplinary actions be removed from his file; he is not an employee of the Town. I asked Human Resources not to send anymore emails stating that Johnson was terminated. Johnson, by the authority of the Board, is a TOECRA employee. Mr. Johnson knows that I do not

represent him, I represent the Board. Attorney Jackson reiterated his previous points. He spoke about his working relationship with Pat Gleeson and her opinion on Board members who have resigned. Attorney Jackson also looked at another report regarding a city trying to interject in CRA affairs. I am trying to advise this Board regarding the Mayor's actions and Johnson's termination. This agency may be at risk for wrongful termination. A CRA vehicle was taken by the Town of Eatonville. Mr. Johnson's employees are fearful for their own positions. Attorney Jackson requested that Mr. Johnson return. Director Thomas asked if the Attorney General's opinion is law or opinion. Attorney Jackson responded that it was an opinion. Director Thomas – What was the purpose of members putting in their resignation? The terms of resignation should have been clarified in their paperwork. Attorney Jackson clarified that the resignation was on March 17, 2026, and the CRA meeting was held a day prior. He also cited the Florida Statutes. Director Mack thanked Attorney Jackson for his presentation. He would like to motion to reinstate Johnson. He reiterated that Johnson is not an employee of the Town of Eatonville. He also commented on their being biased and believes the Board should trust the Attorney General's opinion. He stated that Mr. Johnson can only be fired by this Board and not liking someone is not justification for termination. He ended by stating litigation is something the Town does not want. Director Thomas – I am questioning because I do not understand myself. At the time, I was not on the Town Council, but I remember during Mr. Johnson's interview that Human Resources stated he was an employee of the Town which he understood. Director Thomas stated that she would like to table until she has time to review and understand. She believes that the Board should not vote on this. Director Mack continued with his statement by saying that he is in favor of the lease agreement item to have a separation between the Town and CRA. He would like to motion to have Johnson reinstated, pay returned, as well as the CRA vehicle. Mack stated that he makes decisions for the Town. We also need to protect the CRA employees. Mayor Gardner trusted legal counsel. We need to be communicating before making rash decisions. Attorney Jackson returned to Director Thomas' comment and cited the CRA by Laws as reasoning for Johnson's employment with TOECRA. Director Thomas stated that she understood but would like to read them herself before making a decision. Director Jordan – We voted Monday to reinstate Mr. Johnson, what will change if we do it again? Director Critton – I did not vote Monday (voting by proxy), but if I did vote, I would not have voted to reinstate Mr. Johnson. Director Critton stated that she received a legal opinion from Attorney Shepard who provided her with AGO 8960 regarding resigned Board members voting. She also cited an October 2024 CRA meeting in which it was stated that Mr. Johnson was a Town employee. Attorney Jackson stated that termination by Board is in the policies and procedures, not CRA by Laws. Jackson also asked for clarification on the source sent by Attorney Shepard. Director Critton addressed the CRA vehicle taken from Michael Johnson. She stated that the vehicle should have been at Town Hall. After having time to review Attorney Shepard's source, Attorney Jackson stated that it was inconsistent. Director Critton continued by stating vehicle usage should be clarified in the CRA by Laws. Attorney Jackson stated that the vehicle was given to Johnson by the CRA Board. Director Critton requested documentation of the appointment of the vehicle to Mr. Johnson. She also requested that Attorney Jackson give insight on the liability article of the CRA by Laws. Attorney Jackson stated that he reviewed the indemnification article earlier and expanded on his comments. Director Mack – Attorney Shepard has no standing with this Board. Why did Shepard not reach out to Attorney Jackson with the opinion? Mack states that the taking of the CRA vehicle from Michael Johnson was theft. We are facing potential litigation with the same employee, and he won and got paid last time. Director Mack commented on his attempt to reach a quorum for a special meeting but could not. He stated that new appointees should be available. Director Critton – It is more than appropriate to seek another legal opinion due to the situation. It is due diligence. To restrict a Board member from seeking outside expertise is wrong. Attorney Jackson – If the agency is paying, outside counsel would need to come to the Board. Director Mack responded in regard to Attorney Shepard and legal advice. Director Critton – The availability of this Board should not be abused. I will not be dragged around because someone feels some type of way. We already had this meeting scheduled. We should be respectful of each other's time.

CITIZEN PARTICIPATION:

Joyce Irby – Ms. Bellenger read Joyce Irby’s emailed public comment for the record.

Angie Gardner – (Candace Finley yielded her time to Gardner allowing her five minutes of commentary). The CRA by Laws state that Johnson (Executive Director) could be suspended. I terminated Johnson due to insubordination. I was leaving office and wanted to do an evaluation. I called two special meetings. During suspension, there should be no Town work. Johnson was using the CRA vehicle and Town resources for a special meeting. I sent communication to both Attorney Jackson and Shepard. Johnson could not meet for an evaluation. I was not going rogue; I was doing everything by the book. If something does not go right, it falls on the Mayor. Attorney Jackson – The Mayor’s actions is exactly what the statute I cited earlier is against. Jackson references evaluation email which was made on Town of Eatonville stationary with a “Mayor/Chair” signature. He stated that the Mayor did not receive authority from the CRA Board to do an evaluation. Director Critton – I have been on the Board for 3 years and did not see policy and procedures until this incident. Attorney Jackson cites section 4.13.3.3 from the CRA policies and procedures. He stated that the Town Attorney (Shepard) has given wrong advice before. I have to justify my opinion against Attorney Shepard’s. Attorney Jackson also commented on Joyce Irby’s public statement. Angie Gardner is brought back to the podium to answer questions. Director Mack asked Mrs. Gardner why she went to the Town Attorney and not Attorney Jackson. Angie Gardner stated that Attorney Jackson was ignoring her calls. She clarified when the issue with Mr. Johnson began. While Jackson was out of town, I shared my concerns, when he returned I received one response. The CRA started to ghost me. When I did an evaluation, I was told it was not my job. Attorney Jackson – Johnson is paid from the CRA Trust Fund. He then responded to Gardner’s comments on communication with him.

Ryan Novak – (Selina [resident] yielded her time to Novak which allowed him five minutes of commentary). Mr. Novak began by referencing the CRA’s mission statement. He stated that the CRA has received millions of dollars, but what is there to show for it? The CRA claims that they have done redevelopment but it has not happened. He referenced a recent public records request with an invoice payment of about \$5,000. He also commented on purchases by the CRA Executive Director, by Laws, and asked the Board to explain CRA purchases, including Amazon and Chipotle.

Michelle Fort – (Payton Gardner yielded her time to Fort which allowed her five minutes of commentary). Ms. Fort began by commenting on Mr. Johnson’s expenses. She stated that she would like to see the checks and approvals for the past six months. \$19,000 was allocated to a development company which Anthony Grant is the owner of. Fort referenced Florida Statutes regarding resignations. The last time Johnson was fired, both you (Attorney Jackson) and Shepard were there. Ms. Fort also referenced merit pay, the Orange County comptroller’s opinion which Johnson violated with his actions. The CRA received a violation from the comptroller. Fort gave handouts of the AG opinion she referenced as well as the comptroller document to Attorney Jackson and CRA Board.

Angela Johnson – Ms. Johnson requested that the Board move items 5 and 6 from Consent Agenda to Board Decisions. She stated that there is always a concern on walk-on items as citizens do not get the opportunity to review them in a timely manner, which seems to happen often with the CRA. She also requested that the Board table items 5 and 6.

CONSENT AGENDA:

Director Critton MOTIONS to MOVE Items 5 and 6 from the Consent Agenda to Board Discussion. **Comments:** Director Mack asked Director Critton if she would like to table the items instead. He would like to reinstate Michael Johnson. Attorney Jackson shared his opinion on tabling and reinstatement. Director Critton

recommended tabling Items 2-5 and moving Item 6 to Board Discussion or Decisions. She asked if any members would be opposed. Director Mack requested Attorney Jackson's opinion. Attorney Jackson – (On reinstatement) if it is not done, this Board will potentially face litigation. An action has already been made to reinstate Mr. Johnson which has not been respected. Director Mack agreed and stated that the Board needs to reinstate Johnson based on Monday's vote. **Director Critton MOTIONS to TABLE Items 2-5 and move Item 6 to Board Discussion; moved by Director Thomas, second by Director Jordan; AYE: ALL, MOTION PASSES.**

BOARD DISCUSSION:

Approval of Resolution CRA-R-2026-9 Nullifying Unauthorized Actions of the Mayor – Ms. Bellenger read the Preamble. Director Critton began discussion with her disagreements. Director Thomas requested that "former Mayor" be used in the Resolution as well as removing the language, "both past and present." Director Jordan asked for clarification on vote that took place on Monday. She also requested clarity on the resignation issue. Attorney Jackson restates statutes and Florida Attorney General's opinion. Director Jordan addressed former Mayor Gardner's public comments and stated there is a need for the Board to do an evaluation on Mr. Johnson. Director Critton – I spoke with HR regarding evaluations because they seemed outdated. Director Critton suggested using the Mayor's evaluation as a starting point. Attorney Jackson stated that he was in a meeting with Mayor Critton and HR. One solution was to have a similar evaluation process as the Town Clerk. Director Critton requested that a copy of the evaluation form for appointed members be emailed to Board members. Ms. Bellenger did a quorum call for a special meeting to establish a review of the Town's evaluation policy on March 31, 2026, at 6:30p.m. Director Williams requested that Attorney Jackson be in charge as he does not want a Town official to tell the CRA Board what to do. Attorney Jackson stated that he is not opposed to the suggestion. Director Mack requested that an email confirming a quorum be sent out to Board members. Director Critton asked for Attorney Jackson's opinion on the action. Attorney Jackson suggested moving forward with Monday's action to reinstate and reimburse Michael Johnson as well as removing the disciplinary action. Director Critton – Who has the authority to implement? Attorney Jackson – You as the chair could direct the administration. Director Critton stated that she would direct the administration tomorrow morning. **Director Critton MOTIONS to REMOVE Resolution CRA-R-2026-9; moved by Director Mack, second by Director Williams. AYE: Director Mack, Director Williams, Director Jordan; NAY: Director Critton, Director Johnson. MOTION PASSES, 3/2.**

Approval of Resolution CRA-R-2026-10 Authorizing Lease Agreement for 243 W. Kennedy Blvd Ste D, Orlando, Florida 32810 (Reese Building) – **Director Critton MOTIONS to TABLE Resolution CRA-R-2026-10; moved by Director Thomas, second by Director Mack. AYE: ALL, MOTION PASSES.**

STAFF REPORTS:

CRA Attorney, Greg Jackson - No Report

BOARD REPORTS:

Director, Angela Thomas – Director Thomas began by stating that she would like to pause CRA financials and projects. Paula Bradshaw (Fiscal Coordinator) – We are obligated to pay vendors and monthly loan repayments, as well as meet grant deadlines, and subscriptions. Director Thomas requested a copy of the CRA's A.I. history. Director Williams suggested setting up a meeting with Executive Director Johnson. Director Thomas – I will need all the information at the time of the meeting. Director Jordan – I would also like transparency and updates on projects. **Director Thomas MOTIONS to halt CRA projects including financials be provided to the Board; moved by Director Thomas, second by Director Jordan. AYE: Director Thomas, Director Jordan; NAY: Director Critton, Director Mack, Director Williams. MOTION FAILS.**

Director, Donovan Williams – The Town that freedom built—that is what we stand on. We used to be self-sufficient. Director Williams commented on the current state of the Town and suggested looking at the Town

side rather than CRA. He stated that there has always been Town interference with the CRA. The Town needs to do better so we can do better. He ended his statement by saying Attorney Jackson has provided facts, but you (the Board) want to search for your own opinion.

Director, Tarus Mack – Director Mack began by thanking everyone for coming out to the meeting. He wished everyone a happy international women’s month. He also congratulated new Board members. He stated that he was glad the Board had brought Mr. Johnson back and thanked Attorney Jackson.

Director, LaDwyana Jordan – Director Jordan began her statement by thanking the residents for coming out to tonight’s meeting. She also thanked Attorney Jackson.

Director, Ruthi Critton – Director Critton began by addressing the production of documents for meetings the day of but acknowledged the recent unusual circumstances. She asked if there are items that are not ready that they be held off so the residents and Board have time to review and do due diligence. As for the Board: do not let anyone tell you all that I am not working with you. Director Critton also addressed public comments made by Ryan Novak.

ADJOURNMENT Director Critton **MOTIONS** for Adjournment of Meeting (**MOVED** by Director Thomas; **SECOND** by Director Mack; **AYE: ALL, MOTION PASSES.**) **Meeting Adjourned at 9:39 P.M.**

HANDOUTS: Supporting documents for Items 4-7; Copy of Attorney General Opinion 2000-48; 2025 Florida Statutes; Orange County Comptroller Opinion

Respectfully Submitted by: Marissa Bellenger

ATTEST

Signed by:

Veronica King

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Veronica L King, Town Clerk

APPROVED

Signed by:

Ruthi Critton

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Ruthi Critton, Director