



# HISTORIC TOWN OF EATONVILLE, FLORIDA

## COMMUNITY REDEVELOPMENT AGENCY

### EMERGENCY MEETING MINUTES

Monday, March 16, 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.**

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**CALL TO ORDER** – Vice Chair Theo Washington called the meeting to order at 6:30 p.m.

**ROLL CALL** – Quorum was established through roll call by ShaKeila Jones.

**PRESENT:** (6) Vice Chair Theo Washington, Director Wanda Randolph, Director Donovan Williams, Director Tarus Mack, Director LaDwyana Jordan, Director Ruthi Critton (via Zoom). **Absent:** Chair Angie Gardner

**STAFF:** (3) Greg Jackson, **Attorney;** Michael Johnson (via Zoom), **CRA Executive Director;** Shakeila Jones, **CRA**

#### INVOCATION AND PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE

Vice Chair Washington led the invocation through a Moment of Silence followed by the Pledge of Allegiance.

#### PRESENTATIONS:

Attorney Greg Jackson clarified to the Board why the emergency meeting was called. He stated that tonight's meeting was scheduled in regard to actions taken by the mayor of the Town of Eatonville against an employee of the Community Redevelopment Agency. The meeting will focus on whether or not those actions were authorized by the CRA Board. If the actions taken by the mayor were not authorized, then those actions should be reversed.

#### CITIZEN PARTICIPATION:

Joyce Irby – Ms. Irby asked a question about the resignation of Vice Chair Washington and Director Randolph. She continued by stating that the CRA has been a mess forever. For the past two years, there are things that are not happening because funding is being withheld by the person in charge.

Michelle Fort – We are trying to determine if the CRA Board can make a reversal to what the mayor did. From my understanding, the CRA employees are employed by the Town of Eatonville. For example, when we apply for grants, they are under the Town because the CRA does not have their own financial principles. They do not have any policies or procedures. The last time I looked at the bylaws, Mr. Johnson is a Town employee. If the mayor did any actions, it should be up to the Town Council to make that decision. Who called the emergency meeting? The Board responded that they all did. Ms. Fort continues by stating that if Mr. Johnson had a problem by the actions taken, there is a policy in the Town for which he could work through. Moving forward, it is important that we follow procedures.

Ryan Novak – Eatonville has been a part of the CRA for 29 years. What has transpired recently, I am in favor of it. For the past 29 years, I do not think this Town can honestly say that 29 years of funding has been given to the Town, and the CRA has done its job of what they have used the money for. I look around and I do not see 29 years' worth of investment into this community. Is that going to fall on the shoulders on one individual, or the many Boards that have come and gone over the years? Absolutely not. However, I can look recently into

what we have had happen, which is not much of anything. A personnel change is warranted. I do not believe that this CRA has been operating in the manner it is supposed to revitalize and beautify this community. I hope this personnel change can revitalize not only this Board, but the community as a whole.

## **BOARD DISCUSSION/DECISION:**

Unauthorized Evaluation and Suspension of Executive Director – Before discussion, Attorney Jackson addressed a few public comments. He stated that there is a quorum tonight because the resignations of Randolph and Washington are not in effect until 11:59 p.m. tonight. Moreover, according to the Florida Statutes, each commissioner shall hold office until his or her successor has been appointed and has qualified, which will not happen until tomorrow night's Council meeting when new members are sworn in. Attorney Jackson also clarified that the CRA takes money from the municipality or local governing body, such as Orange County, and not from the state of Florida. As for the work of the CRA, he stated that there have been more projects initiated and completed within the past two years than at any other time he has been involved with the CRA. In addition, CRA employees are not Town employees. Attorney Jackson referenced section 3.8 of the TOECRA bylaws which states unless otherwise noted, TOECRA employees will be considered to be Town of Eatonville employees. The Executive Director of the TOECRA may hire, retain, and engage such employees, agents, consultants, etc., as deemed necessary. The bylaws state that the TOECRA employs the Executive Director, but the Town Charter gives the mayor authority of the Executive Director, which Attorney Jackson disagreed with. The mayor can suspend or remove all town employees and appoint administrative officers, but the TOECRA Executive Director is not a Town employee. The TOECRA is an independent, legal separate entity and distinct from the governing body of the county or municipality. I did send an email and recommend to the board meetings to call a meeting because something of concern had happened that possibly put this agency at risk. I did not ask the Town Clerk to call the Board meeting. The meeting was set by the Executive Director of the TOECRA. The mayor suspended the Executive Director without any direction or input from this Board based on performance evaluation that was not vetted by the Board. It was important that the Board be made aware of that. Attorney Jackson explained to the Board the timeline of events and how they got to the situation they are in now. He discussed conversations with the mayor and Town attorney. Attorney Jackson went over the performance evaluation initiated by the mayor on Executive Director Johnson. Executive Director Johnson spoke to the progress of CRA projects including the Senior Wellness Center, Affordable Housing, and Club Eaton. Attorney Jackson continued going through the performance evaluation. Executive Director shared his qualifications and training he attends 3-4 times annually. Attorney Jackson continues. After the evaluation, Mr. Johnson was delivered a letter by police officers on March 13<sup>th</sup> indicating that he was suspended for 5 days without pay. I immediately sent an email to this Board stating that I had concerns about the employee rights of Mr. Johnson. I am even more concerned because as of today, Mr. Johnson was terminated from his position and this Board has not had any say in the decision. This is a violation of your policies and procedures which opens you up for litigation. The suspension by the mayor was neither authorized nor appropriate. The only way Mr. Johnson can be terminated or suspended, is based on evaluations by the CRA Board. Attorney Jackson opened up the discussion for questions from the Board. Vice Chair Washington – Any actions taken against any Executive Director comes from this Board. I am upset that we are here because this is an eyesore to the agency. This Board has always made the choice to hire and terminate a staff person. Director Mack – Thank you, Attorney Jackson, for the summary. Chair Gardner was completely out of control when she made all of these different notions and decisions. It is ethically wrong. In my ten years up here, I have never encountered the behavior that I have seen from a chair that oversees this Board. You cannot make decisions on your own. It is disrespectful to disregard this Board. We need to fix this as soon as possible. My position is to appoint Mr. Johnson back into his position as Executive Director. Director Jordan – Thank you, Attorney Jackson, for clearing up a lot of things. It was always my understanding that the Executive Director fell under the TOECRA, so it seems to me that everything is out of line. Director Williams – I wanted to thank Attorney Jackson as well. Also, when the Executive Director came back, Chair Gardner wanted to put safeguards in place so he could not go through what is happening right now. She is on record saying that she wanted to protect him from this kind of situation. She forgot and it is unfortunate that this community has to

deal with this. We, as a Board, need to make this right. I commend Mr. Johnson for his work and he is always keeping me informed. Director Mack – I do recall Chair Gardner wanting to protect the position. I want to make sure that we are protecting all of our employees, but he is not an employee of the Town, he is a CRA employee. We are an independent Board. I commend Mr. Johnson because he loves his job and he is fighting this because he is from this community. Let's do the right thing and bring Mr. Johnson back with the pay that he has lost. Director Randolph – I may not be in favor of how Mr. Johnson goes about doing certain things, but he does make an effort. Attorney Jackson, thank you for all of the information. This matter has not been handled correctly and this is not how you treat employees. I do not believe he deserves any of this. This is another instance of Mayor Gardner taking action without coming to Council or this Board. It is disrespectful to this Board. The TOECRA Board needs to establish its own evaluation process for the Executive Director. **Director Randolph MOTIONS to rescind the disciplinary action taken against Executive Director Michael Johnson by Mayor (Chair) Gardner and restore any pay, benefits, and administrative access that he has lost; moved by Vice Chair Washington, second by Director Mack.**

Director Randolph discussed entertaining a motion for Executive Director Michael Johnson to receive a letter of apology from Mayor Gardner. Director Mack – That is an opinionated request. I cannot force anyone to do anything of that magnitude. I cannot force an apology, but we can tell her to hire him back. Attorney Jackson – There is also the issue of if Mayor (Chair) Gardner has placed any adverse evaluations or information in the employment file of Mr. Johnson. Those need to be removed. Ms. Jones asked for clarification on the passed motion. Director Randolph restated the motion. Director Jordan – Who is responsible for making sure that everything is restored? Attorney Jackson – I will draft a letter to Chair Gardner stating that this Board has seemed that it is appropriate that Mr. Johnson return. In the event that she does not perform what was passed in the motion, Mr. Johnson does have the right to proceed against her legally. Attorney Jackson stated that there was a motion recommending that any adverse documentation to Mr. Johnson's employment be expunged and removed immediately. Director Mack **moved** and Director Williams **seconded**. **AYE: ALL, 5/0. Note: There was not a previous motion, therefore the vote was improper.**

Attorney Jackson – I wanted to let the Board know that I have done a lot of work over the past several months and my invoice is six weeks delayed. Mr. Johnson has provided the information to the finance department and for some reason, I am not getting paid. Director Mack stated that Attorney Jackson as well as CRA employees should be getting paid immediately. Director Critton – I want to make sure that it is reflected on the record that I am in attendance for tonight's meeting and cannot vote via proxy.

**ADJOURNMENT** Vice Chair Washington **MOTIONS** for Adjournment of Meeting (**MOVED** by Director Mack, **SECOND** by Director Randolph; **AYE: ALL, MOTION PASSES.**) **Meeting Adjourned at 9:30 P.M.**

**HANDOUTS:** 2025 Florida Statutes; Requests and Responses regarding Executive Director Michael Johnson

**Respectfully Submitted by: Marissa Bellenger**

**ATTEST**

 Signed by:  
Veronica King  
72EBDE7143BE4AC...  
**Veronica L King, Town Clerk**

**APPROVED**

Signed by:  
Ruthi Critton  
B7C21BB6095E4AA...  
**Ruthi Critton, Director**