



HISTORIC TOWN OF EATONVILLE, FLORIDA

COMMUNITY REDEVELOPMENT AGENCY

SPECIAL MEETING MINUTES

Monday, April 13, 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 – Chair Ruthi Critton called the meeting to order at 6:30 p.m.

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

PRESENT: (7) Chair Ruthi Critton, Vice Chair Angela Thomas; **Board Members:** Director Donovan Williams, Director Tarus Mack, Director LaDwyana Jordan, Director Wanda Randolph, Director Angela Johnson

STAFF: (7) Marissa Bellenger, **Records Coordinator;** Veronica King, **Town Clerk;** Greg Jackson, **CRA Attorney;** Clifford Shepard, **Town Attorney;** Paula Bradshaw, **CRA Fiscal Coordinator;** Marlin Daniels, **Chief Administrative Officer;** Cpl. Robert Jones, **Eatonville Police Department**

INVOCATION AND PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE

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

CITIZEN PARTICIPATION:

Joyce Irby – Ms. Bellenger read Ms. Irby's public comment sent via e-mail.

Michelle Fort – (Sue Brown, a resident yielded their time to Ms. Fort, allowing her five minutes) Ms. Fort began her comments by noting that Executive Director Michael Johnson is a Town employee and that the Town pays for his benefits. No authority was given to file a lawsuit. Johnson was insubordinate when he tried to call a special meeting. Ms. Fort stated that Johnson has shown the CRA Board disrespect. She asked who is paying for the CRA attorney. In regard to public records request, the Town staff answers promptly. Why have the CRA not given me my public records? She requested that the Mayor speak to CRA staff. Lastly, she stated that the CRA Board has allowed Executive Director Johnson to have too much power and it needs to be checked.

Ryan Novak – Mr. Novak began by asking if the CRA Board authorized Attorney Jackson to file a complaint. If not, the Board is the plaintiff. Did Attorney Jackson do this on his own? If the Board authorized him to do so, show us. Mr. Novak encouraged the Board to dismiss Attorney Jackson.

Anthony Grant – Mr. Grant began by asking the Board members if they were aware of a policy that gives them permission to direct a lawsuit? He explained how the Town is not suing itself. In regard to the questioning about the grant money his company received, Mr. Grant stated that no one questions Caucasian businesses. In terms of the CRA lawsuit, it needs to be litigated, if not, it will come back again.

NOTES: Before Board Discussion, Chair Critton recited the pledge of civility by Abraham Lincoln.

BOARD DISCUSSION/DECISIONS:

Director Williams began discussion by stating his reasoning behind calling a special meeting. Attorney Jackson addressed discourse surrounding him and the CRA. He stated that as an African American attorney, having his opinions questioned and not a white attorney's is offensive. Executive Director Johnson's rights as an employee of TOECRA have been attacked. The actions of the former Mayor were not lawful. Attorney Jackson also responded to public comments made by citizens. Jackson continued with comments on the lawsuit. He stated that he is acting under the Board's authority because they voted to reinstate Mr. Johnson. Johnson advised him to draft an emergency injunction. Attorney Shepard's March 19th presentation on CRA issues in a non-CRA meeting was a violation of Sunshine Law. He also shared CRA employee information without consent. Attorney Jackson referenced the TOE-TOECRA Interlocal Agreement and clarified that Mr. Johnson is not an employee of the Town. Mr. Johnson's salary is not included in the Town's budget. Attorney Jackson provided handouts to the Board as examples for Johnson's employment with TOECRA. He referenced the Town Charter and stated that the appointment of a CRA Executive Director is not included. In addition, there are irregularities on the Town side with accounting and the CRA. \$322k is due from the Town of Eatonville to the CRA. Attorney Jackson stated that he has to defend his professional reputation and credibility. He reiterated that Johnson is a TOECRA employee and that the Mayor has no authority over the CRA. Only the CRA Chair has the authority to suspend but cannot terminate or interfere with day-to-day duties. He stated that he got his position from Attorney Cliff Shepard in a memo sent July 2022. He ended by stating that the Town administration has taken over accounting for the CRA. Checks are being held in the CAO's office. Meetings are being missed and if bills are not paid, the agency could be in legal trouble. Chair Critton – This has never been about race; we need to stop pushing that narrative. To former Mayor Grant, I apologize for comments made about the grant you received. As for checks, they are not being held and I am working with the CRA fiscal coordinator. Chair Critton also addressed the e-signature requirements and stated that the 286 Shade Meeting needs to be addressed in front of the Board. In addition, Mr. Johnson could have addressed the Board before filing a lawsuit. Attorney Shepard walked us through on the Town side (Council) because it was an administrative action. The Board and Attorney Jackson continued discussion on the CRA by laws and distinction between TOECRA and Town of Eatonville employees. Attorney Jackson emphasized the extensive process of creating CRA by laws. Chair Critton asked Attorney Jackson if there were alternatives for the Board in regard to the lawsuit. Vice Chair Thomas inquired about Florida as a right to work state. Attorney Jackson explained what the injunction lawsuit means for the CRA. Currently, the CRA is in shambles. Vendors are not being paid and grant checklists are not being met. Injunction means restoration until the courts decide. Attorney Jackson also explained what a declaratory judgement is. Director Randolph asked what the timeline of the lawsuit would be. Attorney Jackson – The trial date is set for 2028. Director Randolph – The employee is still terminated. Does he remain out until the trial date? Attorney Jackson – The CRA Chair would become the Executive Director by resolution. He also clarified that Mr. Johnson is not terminated, but the Town is interfering. Chair Critton stated that Mr. Johnson has already been allowed to return and has done so. Director Williams – I would like for CRA business to leave Town Hall with a lease space. Director Johnson – Has a hostile work environment been determined? Attorney Jackson stated that he has already noted the harassment. Chair Critton invited Attorney Shepard to the podium. Director Williams asked Attorney Shepard to explain his 2022 memo regarding CRAs. Attorney Shepard – The Chair does not have any special authority and there is no assumption of the Mayor's authority. Mr. Johnson's tax return will show who his employer is. He is a Town employee. There has not been a W-2 with Johnson as a TOECRA employee. Mr. Johnson's became a Town of Eatonville employee when the by-laws were revised in 2025. Director Mack – I do not trust everything you say and I have not trusted some things Attorney Jackson has stated. Do you think Mr. Johnson was terminated legally? Attorney Shepard – Town employees are in the charter, therefore, yes. The former Mayor asked if she had the right to review him and she did, but Mr. Johnson did not respond so she suspended him. He is an employee of the Town of Eatonville administratively assigned to the CRA. The Mayor did not have sole authority, and I did not tell her so. Director Mack – Have you sent invoices for your legal opinion? Attorney Shepard stated that the invoices will be sent. Director Mack – Jackson is doing it for free. Chair Critton corrects Mack by stating that Jackson is being paid. Director Mack (to Attorney Shepard)

– Did you speak to Attorney Jackson? Attorney Shepard – I was asked by former Mayor Gardner for an opinion. I called Attorney Jackson multiple times and did not get a return call. I also sent an email with my first opinion. I received an email from Attorney Jackson and he was upset. I asked if he read my email and he did not. We then had a text exchange.

Director Randolph MOTIONS to RATIFY the March 19th CRA Decision; moved by Director Mack, second by Director Williams. AYE: Director Williams, Director Mack, Director Jordan, Director Randolph. NAY: Director Johnson, Vice Chair Thomas, Chair Critton. MOTION PASSES, 4/3. Discussion continued:

Vice Chair Thomas – The injunction needs to be thrown out if he is being brought back. Director Johnson – Is there a need for an injunction or can the Board motion to withdraw? Attorney Jackson – That question needs to be asked in a 286 meeting which can be done now. Chair Critton – Statutory officers say otherwise. The 286 meeting needs to be approved by the Board and then publicly noticed. Can we meet individually? Attorney Jackson – yes. Director Johnson – Fiscally, I would recommend a 286 meeting. Attorney Shepard explained the steps of a shade meeting. He stated that he did not see the need for a shade meeting because both agencies are public. The Board discusses how they can move forward. Attorney Jackson dismissed the court reporter. The Board discusses changes to the bylaws. Director Johnson suggested that the next steps is to review the bylaws.

Director Johnson MOTIONS to have Executive Director Michael Johnson work out of the Denton Johnson Center; moved by Director Mack, second by Chair Critton. Discussion/comments: Attorney Jackson provides the Board with alternative options aside from the lawsuit. The Board discussed the space of Denton Johnson. Chair Critton resumes the question. AYE: Director Williams, Director Johnson, Director Mack. NAY: Director Jordan, Director Randolph, Vice Chair Thomas, Chair Critton. MOTION FAILS, 3/4.

Attorney Jackson requested that the Board have a 286 meeting. Attorney Shepard – If anything other than settlement or litigation is discussed, you would be violating Florida Sunshine law. Attorney Jackson stated that he would make public comment Thursday and give recommendation for a 286 meeting. He will touch base with Attorney Shepard on the legality. Town Clerk, Veronica King – The Board needs to determine a date and time as well as determine the participants. The Board determined that the 286 meeting would take place on Thursday, April 16, 2026, with attendees Attorney Jackson, Executive Director Michael Johnson, Court Reporter, and CRA Board.

ADJOURNMENT Director Critton **MOTIONS** for Adjournment of Meeting (**MOVED** by Director Mack; **SECOND** by Vice Chair Thomas; **AYE: ALL, MOTION PASSES.**) **Meeting Adjourned at 9:36 P.M.**

HANDOUTS: TOECRA and Town of Eatonville Interlocal Agreement; 2019 CRA budget; 2021 Attorney General Informal Opinion on Community Redevelopment Agencies; Email “\$322k due from TOE to CRA” thread; 2022 Memo Drafted by Shepard Law Firm (For Shade Meeting).

Respectfully Submitted by: Marissa Bellenger

ATTEST

APPROVED

Veronica L King, Town Clerk

Ruthi Critton, Chair