



COMMUNITY REDEVELOPMENT AGENCY  
SPECIAL SESSION  
MINUTES  
JANUARY 22, 2019  
6:00 P.M.

**PRESENT:** **Chairman** Theo Washington, **Vice Chairman**, Rodney Daniels, **Director** Eddie Cole, **Director**, Marilyn Davis-Sconions, (**arrived at 6:10 PM**) **Director**, Tarus Mack, **Director**, Brent Gardner; and **Director** Clarese Hopkins.

**Also, in attendance:** **CRA Attorney** Greg Jackson, Cathlene Williams, **Town Clerk**, and **CRA Director**, James Benderson.

**Chairman Washington** called the Special Session CRA Meeting to order at 6:05 PM, followed by Silent Moment of Prayer and the Pledge of Allegiance.

- I. CALL TO ORDER**
- II. INVOCATION AND PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE**
- III. ROLL CALL**

**A. New Business**

**i. TOECRA Executive Director Employment-** Chairman Washington did not recognize Director Clarese Hopkins in attendance for this meeting, he is referencing Resolution #2018-22, as approved by Town Council on August 21, 2018 removing Ms. Hopkins from the Board unless someone has a court order, not a Florida Statute that supersedes, Resolution #2018-22, so I will not recognize Ms. Hopkins on the board at this meeting. Director Cole stated that two (2) meetings ago, Board member Hopkins attended, and was recognized during this meeting, and participated as a member. Attorney Jackson stated there is a question regarding the Resolution that appointed Ms. Hopkins to the Board and its validity pursuant to Florida Law. Chairman Washington stated as the new Chairperson of the CRA Board, you can work with people or you can't, as the Mayor stated on the Town Council side, he was going in a new direction, as the new Chairman of the CRA, I am going in a new direction. I feel we are not

reaching the peak in the CRA that we should, as the Chair, if this board chooses to, to remove Mr. Benderson as the CRA Director, I am the Chairman and I would like that person to work with me and not behind me, I asked for several things, Mr. Benderson never responded back to me; I want to get someone I can work with. Director Gardner stated that we are putting the cart before the horse, in his contract it says that if he has any deficiencies, and the Board has known about it, he should have received a performance letter indicated where he is falling short, if he did not achieve that, we need to move forward on what we need to do. Director Mack asked Mr. Benderson to name five (5) significant projects that he has completed to ensure the Town is moving in a very prosperous direction. Mr. Benderson replied; we have demolished two (2) structures that have been around for over 15 years; we have residents that have demolished their property voluntarily; liens on property have been recorded, this has never been done; we purchased two (2) tracks of land, the CRA has never done this; we have a repaving project in the works; we have conducted training on the process for development. Director Mack states that he wants to know what always goes on in the Community; infrastructure that will last in Eatonville; bringing development here; you are the planner on the Towns side. I just think you need to be a little more attentive on what's going on in Eatonville. Director Sconions stated that the CRA and the Town are two (2) different entities, although the Town Council is on this Board we really shouldn't be, I think, that tells us what they want it should be residents, of the Town this way the Council wouldn't have to get involved. There are some people in the audience, and some that came to me, and asked me to work on getting the CRA Board to comprise of all Eatonville residents; I don't think the Town Council should have any part of it. I think what we need to go is go back and see what has been done; when Mr. Benderson was first hired there were things, I suggested to him to do; he said no to them. Now looking back a few months later, he agreed this is what they should be. He has brought to this Board a Resolution that should have had a contract with it, as a CRA Director he should know this. Some of the projects that he has done, were already in place. Chairman Washington stated he is in favor of turning the CRA Board back to the residents, I will make this recommendation to the Board, and as I Chair of the CRA Board, I want to go in a different direction. Chairman Washington made a motion that the Board of Directors terminate the employment agreement between James Benderson per the employment agreement terms without cause as the TOE CRA Director in compliance with all provisions of Section 5-C of the Executive Director Employment Agreement and provide a sixty (60) day written notice as such and placing James Benderson on Administrative Leave for sixty (60) days; effective 1/23/2019 until 3/23/19 notice period with termination effective 3/3/2019, the motion was seconded by Director Sconions; call for the question by Director Cole; do we know how much this will cost us and is this being done correctly? Attorney Jackson stated there should be a

written notice if there is no cause for termination. Roll Call Vote: **NAYE:** Director Gardner, Director Daniels, Director Cole, and Director Hopkins; **AYE:** Chairman Washington, Director Mack and Director Sconions; **MOTION FAILS.**

- i. **TOECRA Attorney Employment- TABLED**
- ii. **Board Authorization for the Chairman- TABLED**

## **VI. Board of Directors Report**

**Director Gardner-** I hope we are not here to attack Mr. Benderson, we have all done things that weren't right, I would hope as this board sits here, we will give him the opportunity by writing him up and telling him his deficiencies, and give him the opportunity to straighten this out, grant him that opportunity not just as an employee but as a person.

**Director Mack-** Director Mack stated he makes decisions based on what he sees performance related, I will always give the benefit of the doubt, I know there are a lot of times we sit here and base our opinion on what and how we see things, I have had people come to me complaining about things not getting done, I replied to them to give you the benefit of the doubt. I feel early on you did do a great job and was very attentive to everything that you were doing. Eatonville is trying to move in a different/better direction, we need to develop and to improve our infrastructure. Moving forward we need to be a little more forthcoming when giving information for everyone up here.

**Vice Chairman Daniels-** I apologize for where we are today, my deal breaker was when Mr. Benderson moved to Eatonville, he could have moved anywhere, he feels everything that we feel. At first Mr. Benderson and I didn't hit it off, but as we talked, I realized we both had the same goal; the love of Eatonville, we want to progress as a black people as a race.

**Director Cole-** we did 14 individual facade grants, and you didn't have to be a senior citizen, just to help them on something they are doing on their own; that's major for the Town. The West Kennedy piece of property by Ponchos could end up being a major property for the Town, whom ever buys the 17 acres may need this property. The Special need lock box for our senior citizens, if something happens to them, the fire department can open the house with a special key. There is change in Eatonville, we aren't doing things like we used to, it is not going to go on like it used to; people do see that we are changing. I appreciate everyone attending the meeting tonight, there are some people of the past that do not want to see a future of Eatonville, let not the board be apart of someone that doesn't care. I have never called Director Sconions a snake and never will.

**Director Sconions-** listening to board members Daniels, and Cole, I think a lot of time is respect for all the board members sitting here. I have been called a snake, and a crab tonight, I do not do that to my board members, if I have something to say, I am going to say it. When you talked about the Boys & Girls Club, yes, they are doing the Boys and Girls Club, but Director Cole when it was time to vote to do the basketball court, you voted NAYE. With the lock boxes, Mr. Benderson did not bring this to the Town, I did, we approved the funding under the CRA, this was brought up because of my illness of not being able to get out, one of my therapists told me about it, I appreciate it being approved, but this wasn't something Mr. Benderson did; Mr. Benderson concurred. This audience tonight is very disrespectful. No matter who does what, whether it turns out good or not, this board will get the credit for it, but we keep calling people snakes, crabs, you need to be careful about what you say. If I get mad about something board member Cole has said, the only person that I will vent to is Mrs. Filmore; and she will tell me whether I am right or wrong; this is what we don't want to listen to sometimes. There are a lot of people in here that talk about Anthony Grant like he is a devil with a tail; some of us have asked him for things, he gave it to us, and never asked for it back. I have asked you board member Cole on the Town side to do a retreat, there are other things that bother me that I would not bring out to this audience, it will affect different people and our Council members and their families. I work for the Town of Eatonville, not one particular person up here, if we don't stop it will get out and it will not be pleasant, board member Cole you need to take care of some things, some members up here have done some things that should not have been done, I do not have to say who you are.

**Director Hopkins-** in the short time I have been on the board, I have seen a lot of disrespect, lack of cooperation, do we have integrity, its soundness, being able to make sound decisions. Its not saying one thing, and then doing something else, we all want to obey and do what we are supposed to do, we want to follow the Town Ordinances.

**Chairman Washington- N/A**

### **Citizens Comments-**

**Tim Hudson-** when I heard that you all wanted to get rid of Mr. Benderson and the Attorney, I was shocked, I just want to appeal to all of us in here to take our responsibilities seriously, we must work things out for the residents.

**Angie Gardner-** we say we have a lot of passion for this Town, but you can have all the passion in the world, but if I don't have compassion for people and the people that work with us, then what good is passion. If the CRA Board does not have a strategic plan, or a comprehensive plan, we don't know where the Town is going, both sides of the board need to come together.

**Michelle Fort-** what I heard tonight was not about the Town, I did not hear anyone say; where is our Chief Administrative Officer, how can we hold this man accountable, there is no administrator to take our Town where it needs to go, who is making sure deadlines are being met. Right now, the citizens are being neglected, we must learn how to work together.

**Amy Jones Filmore-** tonight you are our leaders, and you are sitting here getting rid of people just to prove a point to our Mayor. Have a retreat, we love Eatonville, but you all need to work together, you need to show us you care.

**Jennal Ross-** one of the roles of the CRA Director is to promote and grow businesses in Eatonville, the community grows when businesses grow.

**7. ADJOURNMENT- Meeting adjourned at 7:37 PM.**

**RESPECTFULLY SUBMITTED BY**

**Cathlene Williams, Town Clerk**