



Planning Commission MEETING AGENDA

Thursday, February 20, 2025 - 12:00 PM
Council Chambers, Easton Town Office
14 S Harrison Street

1. Call to Order

2. Draft Chapter Review

- a. Draft review of the following chapter: Parks, Rec & Open Space.

3. Discussion

- a. This meeting will be conducted as a workshop. As such, it will be informal in nature and there is no scheduled opportunity for public comment. Written public feedback may be forwarded to the Planning and Zoning Department at planningandzoning@eastonmd.gov.

4. Adjournment

Topics for February 20, 2025
Planning Commission Comprehensive Plan Workshop

The intended focus of the second Planning Commission Workshop on the second set of Draft Comprehensive Plan chapters in their initial Draft format, will be the group of topic-specific chapters immediately following the Municipal Growth Element. More specifically, these chapters are: Historic and Cultural Resource; Sensitive Areas; Water Resources; Parks, Recreation, and Open Space; and Sustainability. The following is a list of potential questions/issues/talking points on which to center discussion at this Workshop:

1. The Parks, Recreation and Open Space Chapter makes the case that following the Easton Woodlands Park addition during this current Planning cycle, we are now on track to meet or exceed the State recommended per-capita acreages for parks. This certainly does not preclude the possibility of going even farther beyond such minimum standards though. To that end, do you have any recommendations (general or specific) regarding the need for future parks? One specific area of need described is for a larger-scale park(s) on the east side of Town. The current Plan just describes the area somewhat generally. Do you want to maintain that description, or would you like to begin to drill-down and get a bit more specific? Either way, do you have thoughts on whether this should be one or multiple parks to serve the projected growth on the East side of Town?
2. At the bottom of page 12 in the Draft, a Green Infrastructure project first identified in the AKRF Plan for the Redevelopment of Downtown Easton is described. Specifically, the following passage is highlighted: **Two of the more significant projects proposed in that plan involve the day-lighting of Tanyard Branch and the development of a "green ring" of heavily treed streets and open spaces around downtown.** What is the Commission's opinion regarding whether or not this reference should continue in this Comprehensive Plan? The Downtown Plan is certainly dated enough that omitting this now can be justified. On the other hand, if you deem it a worthy project (e.g., you might expect it to be continued or readdressed in an Update to the Downtown Plan), it seems important to continue to include it here.
3. Do you have any suggested revisions to the Goals and Objectives for the Parks, Recreation, and Open Space chapter?

PARKS, RECREATION, AND OPEN SPACE

INTRODUCTION

One of the most critical components in maintaining and enhancing a community's quality of life is its system of parks, recreation, and open space. The careful location of parks and open space areas and preservation of the Town's natural resources as a complement to existing development can be a useful tool in guiding the Town's development into a logical, orderly and environmentally sensitive pattern. In addition to recreational and aesthetic benefits, open spaces provide a framework for various land uses. Properly located, they become boundaries and buffers between conflicting uses of land and a nucleus for building neighborhood areas. Natural features can be preserved as valuable scenic and environmental attributes of the Town. A park system and recreational program can also go a long way toward resolving the age-old problem of a community offering nothing for young people "to do."

This chapter examines the current state of Easton's Parks and Recreation system and proposes methods by which it might be improved. It also calls for the advancement of a Town-wide system of "green infrastructure." This refers to the parks and open space areas, as well as the paths and corridors that link these areas. It also proposes areas for new parks to be developed in the future as the Growth Area becomes developed.

BACKGROUND

The Municipal Growth Element analyzed the adequacy of the Town's overall parks from a acres per capita perspective, based on a State-suggested ratio. It found that the current park system meets this standard and that we would continue to exceed the threshold throughout the buildout of the Growth Area by merely relying upon the open space requirements of the Town's Subdivision Regulations. With that as background, this chapter looks more closely at the state of Easton's Parks and

Recreation system overall and makes recommendations for improving and enhancing it so as to further sustain and improve the quality of life for Town residents and visitors.

Table 12 represents an inventory of existing Town parks and open space areas. One of the most notable points is that there are a fairly large number of parks (30) in Easton. This is even more significant in that when this Table was originally created for the 1997 Plan, there were 14 entries on this Table. Clearly the expansion and development of our Park system has been a significant achievement over the last three decades. Such improvements include enhancements at Idlewild and Moton Parks, two Rail-Trail extensions, the addition of Easton Point Park, and the development of North Easton Park into a first class sports complex, to the degree that it has since hosted a number of State and Regional Championship Tournaments. More recently, even during the drafting of this Plan, the Town has opened its first Dog Park in Downtown (Brewers Lane), opened a new Skate Park/Pump Track at the North Easton Sports Complex, and acquired, Easton Woodland Park, a large (197 acres) tract of land dominated by mature forest that will preserve this land for passive recreation.

Multiple entities are responsible in some way for Easton's overall Park System. The Planning and Zoning Commission obtains land for parks through the subdivision process as one of the requirements for subdivision is the provision of 1,200 square feet of parkland per dwelling unit. The Commission also is involved in the specifics of where the parks should be located, how many there should be, etc... for a subdivision during the review process.

Once the land is obtained, it becomes the responsibility of the Easton Park Advisory Board to recommend how that parkland should be improved. This group operates with the assistance of a full-time Parks and Recreation Director who also is responsible for Easton's parks and recreation plans, programs and activities.

The ongoing maintenance of Town parks is the responsibility of the Department of Public Works, providing trash pick-up, grass cutting, landscaping, and installation and maintenance of equipment, furniture, etc... With a growing system of parks, this area of responsibility grows proportionally as well.

Finally, the Mayor and Town Council have the important role of prioritizing the development of the Town's park system, primarily through the budget process. They determine which improvements are implemented (and when) and occasionally also approve funds for the acquisition of park land. These tend to be the larger, regional-scale parks as opposed to the smaller neighborhood parks that are more customarily obtained by the Planning and Zoning Commission through the subdivision process.

TABLE 12 EXISTING PARKS AND OPEN SPACES

TYPES AND AREAS	SIZE (ACRES)	OWNERSHIP	FACILITIES
Passive Parks			
Train Station Park 46 Pennsylvania Avenue	0.540	Town	Drinking fountain Benches
Memorial Walk 100 W. Dover Street	1.07	Town	Memorial Bricks
Thompson Park 30 W. Dover Street	0.316	Town	Benches Fountain
Easton Woodland Park	197	Town	Planned trails and conservation area.
Neighborhood Parks			
Hunters Mill Park 8633 Camac Street	1.78	Town	Playground Benches
Ian "Mac" Morrell Park (Chapel East) 29452 Zinnia Court	1.9	Town	Playground Pavilion
Matthewstown Run Park 29650 Aldan Street	4.11	Town	Playground Picnic Area and Table Baseball/Softball Field Open Space Little Free Library
Stoney Ridge Park 29288 Corbin Parkway	19.8	Town	Playground Picnic Area Open Space Benches
Golton Park 29416 Golton Drive	0.791	Town	Playground

Mulberry Station Park 8764 Mulberry Drive	3.169	Town	Playground Open Space Benches
Spur Lane Park 8688 Spur Lane	0.783	Town	Open Space
Waylands Park 29667 Penny Lane	0.859	Town	Playground Picnic Area Benches
Bretridge Park 29593 Country Lane Way	2.76	Town	Open Space
Vickers Park (Easton Village)	8.839	Town	Canoe/Kayak Launch & Storage Bocce Ball Area Pavilion
Community Parks			
Idlewild Park 116 Idlewild Avenue	12.0	Town	Restrooms AED station (2) Softball Fields Track Picnic Area, Barbecue Grills & Tables (3) Tennis Courts Basketball Court Football Field Playground Children's Park Area Ornamental Fountain/Garden Areas Gazebo/Pavilion Little Free Library
Moton Park 501 Port Street	12.2	Town	Restrooms Track Picnic Tables, Barbecue Grills & Pavilion Playground Basketball Court Soccer Field Volleyball Area Benches Little Free Library

Easton Point Park 672 W. Glenwood Avenue 801 Port Street	13.021	Town	Kayak launch Planned Boat Ramp and associated parking Drinking Fountains Benches
John F. Ford Park 100 Plum Street	58.0	Town	Restrooms AED station Playground Track Exercise Stations/Equipment Open Space Drinking Fountains
Rails-To-Trails	2.75 miles (north/south) 0.90 miles (east/west)	Town	Drinking fountains Walking/Bicycling Path Benches Frederick Douglass Mural
Special Park Areas			
A James Clark North Easton Sports Complex 1078 N. Washington Street	26.2	Town	Restrooms AED stations Concession stands (4) Baseball Fields Playgrounds (4) Football/Soccer/Lacrosse/Field Hockey Fields Field Lights Picnic Area Gazebo/Pavilion Batting Cages Bounce Back Wall Skate Park/Pump Track
Easton Dog Park 109 Brewers Lane	0.507	Town	Restrooms Gated Small & Large Areas for off-leash play Drinking Fountains Benches

Others			
YMCA of the Chesapeake (Main Facility)	10.0	Quasi-Public	Indoor Facilities (9) Tennis Courts (6) Pickleball Courts Deck Tennis
YMCA of the Chesapeake (Lynn Rich Tennis Center)		Quasi-Public	Indoor Facilities (4) Indoor Tennis/Pickleball Courts (3) Outdoor Tennis Courts
George P. Murphy Swimming Pool	2.8	County	Outdoor Swimming Pool
VFW	5.0	Quasi-Public	Baseball Field Open Space Fields
Talbot County Community Center	51.0	County	Indoor Facilities Ice Rink Curling Rink Basketball Courts Pickleball Courts Volleyball Courts Athletic Fields Playgrounds Concession Area Pavillion
Easton Point Landing	0.50	County	Boat Ramp Pier Fishing/Crabbing
Mount Pleasant	6.46	County	Open Space Fields
Ashby Commons Park (Future Neighborhood Park)		Town	

Source: *Town of Easton Parks & Recreation Annual Plan, 2024 & Easton Comprehensive Development Plan, 2010.*

* - Although listed in the inventory here, the recreational amenities are not generally available for use by the general public.

FUTURE PARKS

One area, in which it is crucial for the Planning Commission and Park Board to work together, is the planning for future park sites. The Park Board is more acutely aware of specific demands and needs in terms of our overall park system. By being aware of such needs, the Planning Commission can be proactive in addressing them through the park dedication requirements of the Subdivision process. Furthermore, special needs (e.g., a new regional-scale park) can be considered by both the Planning Commission and Town Council during the review of discretionary approvals, such as Planned Unit Developments and Annexations.

Previous iterations of The Comprehensive Plan have made a number of recommendations regarding future parks, many of which have come to fruition. Such parks included the original Rail-Trail, the expanded Rail-Trail, the development of the John F. Ford Park, and a Waterfront Park on Easton Point.

Key priorities over the course of this 2025 Plan's time span include the following:

- Build-out Easton Woodland Park, including a multi-modal accessway, parking area, conservation area, trails, and restrooms.
- Continual build-out of Easton Point Park as described in the Port Street Small Area Plan. Additional amenities to include: a new boat ramp, living shoreline, boardwalk/promenade, and parking area.
- Perpetual upgrades to existing Town parks (i.e., programs, grounds, and amenities) to enhance user experiences and increase utilization rates.
- Extension of the rail trail through Moton Park, across Rt. 322 (Easton Parkway) at Glenwood Ave., and connecting to the bridge over the Tred Avon River at Easton Point Park.
- Seek funding for the extension of the rail trail crossing Route 50 to the east side of Town in the vicinity of Chesapeake Ave. *{It is hoped that future rail*

trail extensions will eventually connect to a wider-scale County-initiated Trail System.}

- Consider creating an active community-sized park on the east side of Route 50. Explore the possibilities of requiring future developers to build or fund such a park.
- Seek funding and location for construction of a new indoor sports facility. A project of this scope and scale will likely require a location that is along or easily accessible to a major transportation corridor. Possibilities include a portion of the John F. Ford Park and/or the adjoining property to the east, or (depending on the interest of Talbot County) the Talbot Community Center site or the property the County purchased in 2024, formerly known as the Poplar Hill Farm.

The following suggestions from previous Plans have not been achieved but are still relevant today:

- The Town should work with the State of Maryland to better promote and help insure the preservation of Seth Forest. The Town should also ask the State to consider the possibility of making this property more usable by enhancing forest trails.
- (Not depicted on Future Land Use Map) In the long-range planning period (i.e. Year 2035) a new Community (or Regional) Park, on the scale of Idlewild or Moton, should be considered on the eastern side of Town, east of U.S. Route 50. This is the portion of Town anticipated to accommodate the majority of future growth and as such, a community park may be warranted. Furthermore, this area may not necessarily be provided by any one development. As an alternative, the area for the

park might be pieced together by adjoining subdivisions (i.e., Hunter's Mill Playground and Gannon Range open space).

As pointed out in the Municipal Growth Element of this Plan, State guidelines for parkland indicate that the park needs of the existing Town population are above State guidelines and that the land needed to satisfy the needs of the potential future population of the Town should be met via the subdivision process. In addition, more recreational land lies immediately adjacent to the current Town boundaries at the previously mentioned Seth Forest, Talbot County Community Center, and a public golf course (Hog Neck). These three areas represent an additional 121 acres at the Seth Demonstration Forest, X acres at the Talbot Community Center, and 265 acres at Hog Neck Golf Course.

As mentioned, since virtually all future residential development will occur to the east of the current Town boundaries, Easton should consider the merits of creating an active community-sized park to serve residents located in this area. Locations for such a park were discussed in the 2010 Plan and include the following possibilities:

- At the terminus of Seth Drive that traverses through Easton Club East on the parcel of land immediately north of that development. This land is adjacent to Seth Forest and would be in very close proximity to Chesapeake Avenue, a potential connection (or standalone) to the Town's extended Rail-Trail.
- In the general vicinity of the Waylands/Matthewstown Run/Dover Road/Black Dog Alley area.
- In the northern portion of the growth area that would be convenient to the Mulberry Station and Chapel East subdivisions as well as future growth in surrounding areas.

General locations for each of these potential parks are shown on the Future Land Use Map found in the Implementation Element of this Plan.

GREEN INFRASTRUCTURE

The concept of green infrastructure was first introduced to the Easton Comprehensive Plan in 2004 when the term was still relatively new in the field of planning. It refers to the system of parks and open spaces in a community, as well as the linkages or connections between these areas. A community's green infrastructure is important because just as the more commonly known infrastructure (i.e. roads, water, sewer, etc...) is essential to support a community's physical development, so too a community's green infrastructure supports its ecological functions. It also is important for making communities more livable.

The Conservation Fund defines green infrastructure as “the Nation's natural life support system - a strategically planned and managed network of wilderness, parks, greenways, conservation easements, and working lands with conservation value that supports native species, maintains natural ecological processes, sustains air and water resources, and contributes to the health and quality of life for America's communities and people.”

There are numerous benefits provided by a system of green infrastructure. These include both ecological and economic benefits. From an ecological perspective the benefits include:

- Ensuring plant and animal biodiversity.
- Creating pathways to allow for interchange between native plant and animal communities.
- Maintaining the health of native ecosystems and landscapes by sustaining their physical, chemical, and biological processes.
- Filtering pollutants from air, water, and soil.
- Helping to cool streams and soil through shading.
- Buffering developed areas from floodwaters.

The economic benefits include:

- Increasing property values as homes located near parks and greenways sell for more than those that are not.
- Raising the community's quality of life. Communities that have planned systems of open space, including greenways, parks and trails, generally develop the reputation of being desirable places to live. Seattle, Washington, Boulder, Colorado, Portland, Oregon and Raleigh North Carolina are examples of such places.
- Attracting businesses. The communities cited above, not coincidentally, also have had great success in attracting new businesses as oftentimes a community's quality of life is a key factor for businesses when deciding where to relocate or open a new business.
- Increasing tourism and tourism-based businesses.
- Attracting environmentally sensitive development and the developers who specialize in that niche.

Given these benefits, as well as the existence of at least a skeletal system of green infrastructure, it seems like a classic "no-brainer" for Easton to develop a more formal and planned green infrastructure system. Such a system will also further sustainability goals discussed in more detail in the Sustainability chapter of this Plan. Elements of this Green Infrastructure system are discussed in the Economic Development Chapter of this Plan where the AKRF Plan for the redevelopment of Downtown Easton is described. Two of the more significant projects proposed in that plan involve the day-lighting of Tanyard Branch and the development of a "green ring" of heavily treed streets and open spaces around downtown.

PARKS, RECREATION, AND OPEN SPACE GOALS AND OBJECTIVES

Goal: To meet the park and recreational demands of all of Easton's citizens.

Objectives:

- ✓ Continue to study and monitor the demand for various park and recreation uses (above and beyond National Standards, which the Town largely meets).
- ✓ Coordinate the work of the Planning and Zoning Commission, Park Advisory Board, and Town Council in acquiring and planning parks.
- ✓ Coordinate park planning, programs, and activities with Talbot County Parks and Recreation and other local organizations (i.e., schools and YMCA) to prevent duplication of amenities/services, pool resources and to ensure that between the various entities, all of Easton's recreational needs are being satisfied.
- ✓ Seek funding opportunities to finish the design and build-out of an eastward expansion of the Rail-Trail in the right-of-way for Chesapeake Avenue, including a grade-separated bicycle/pedestrian crossing of Route 50.
- ✓ Require future developers of land bordering Chesapeake Avenue to build (or fund the building of) a Rail-Trail within this right-of-way.
- ✓ Seek funding opportunities to continually build-out and upgrade various Town parks, particularly Easton Woodland Park and Easton Point Park.
- ✓ Seek funding opportunities to locate and build an indoor sports facility.

Goal: To provide a system of green infrastructure (see Future Land Use Map).

Objectives:

- ✓ Identify appropriate open space areas to serve as green centers or anchors and connect them through a series of pathways and green corridors.
- ✓ Plan future parks, open spaces and corridors in a manner that compliments and helps to build a green infrastructure system