

Town of Easton Council Meeting Summary

Date of Meeting: November 3, 2025, 5:30 p.m. **Location:** Town of Easton Council Chambers. **Presiding:** Council President Don Abbatiello **Attendees Noted:** Mayor Megan Cook, Council Members Ms. Curry, Mr. Rankin, Dr. Montgomery, Rev. Davis, Town Manager Andy Kitzrow, Town Attorney Sharon VanEmburch, Chief of Police Alan Lowrey, Town Clerk Kathy Ruf, Assistant EVFD Chief Caldwell, community organization representatives.

1. Opening Proceedings

- **Call to Order:** Council President Abbatiello opened the meeting.
 - **Moment of Silence:** Led by Rev. Davis, with reflection on national and local hardships.
 - **Pledge of Allegiance:** Led by council member Rev. Davis.
 - **Approval of Minutes:** Upon motion by Mr. Rankin, seconded by Rev. Davis, and carried unanimously, the minutes were approved from the October 20, 2025 meeting and the October 23, 2025 Legislative Priorities meeting.
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2. Main Topics Discussed

A. Municipal Updates – Mayor Cook

1. Event & Facility Updates

- **October 25:** Ribbon cutting for Easton Volunteer Fire Department—acknowledged as a great event and facility.
- **Upcoming Events:**
 - **November 5:** Toe Jam Town of Easton Annual Joint Meeting
 - **November 17:** Housing Task Force Workshop
 - **December 1:** Downtown Parking Workshop
 - **December 9:** Public Hearing on the Comprehensive Plan

2. Storm Drain Project

- **East AV Storm Drain:** 1,980 feet installed; on schedule for completion by year-end.

3. Operation Green Light/ Veterans Support

- **Nov 4–11:** Operation Green Light to recognize veterans. New veteran appreciation banners (a collaboration with multiple local organizations).
- **Social Media Efforts:** Videos featuring veterans to be posted throughout the week.

4. Legislative & Grant Activity

- **Legislative Breakfast:** Presentation of top five projects and legislative asks to the state delegation.

- **Grant Application:** Submitted to Governor Moore’s capital budget for Woodland Park.

5. Community Recognition

- **Ms. Payne’s 104th Birthday:** Honored local WWII nurse and her advocacy for safety improvements (stop signs).

6. SNAP Funding Crisis

- **Impact of Government Shutdown:** Residents worried about food services due to SNAP cuts.
- **Introduction of Community Panelists:** Kathryn Poe (Hunger Coalition), Kate Mansfield (St. Vincent de Paul), Andy Hunter Hollis (Neighborhood Service Center) presented on hunger and food insecurity.

B. Addressing Food Insecurity: Community Organization Presentations

1. Kathryn Poe, Talbot Hunger Coalition

- **Statistics:**
 - Coalition includes 9 pantries, 3 meal providers, and care pack program; collectively feed 3,000 people weekly.
 - **SNAP Recipients:** 3,700 adults (1,400 children among them) in the county.
 - Food pantries are seeing increased demand; some ran out of their annual budget by October 1.
- **Financial Overview:**
 - Large pantries spend \$6,000–\$9,000/month.
 - Empty Bowls fundraiser in previous year raised \$42,000 (most to date).
- **Causes of Food Insecurity:**
 - **Low Wages:** \$15/hour wages do not cover the county’s living cost (\$40,600 for an individual; \$92,200 for a family of four).
 - **Seniors:** 30% of county’s population are seniors; 25% live solely on Social Security (\$24,080/year).
- **Challenges with SNAP:**
 - Federal government (Trump administration) releasing only part of emergency SNAP funds; unclear disbursement timeline.
- **Accessibility:**
 - List of food pantries and hours provided (including efforts to expand evening and Saturday hours, plus possible pop-up pantries).
 - Online info available at healthytalbot.org and feedtalbot.org
 - Mixed requirements for ID at pantries; most try to minimize barriers.

2. Kate Mansfield, St. Vincent de Paul

- **Volunteerism:**
 - Strong volunteer pool: 110 food pantry volunteers, 300 in the entire organization.
 - Programs involving high school students for service learning.
 - Emphasis on ongoing, not event-based, volunteer needs.
- **Operations and Data:**
 - Approximately 4,545 distinct individuals served over 12 months (FY ending Sept 30).
 - 25% year-to-year increase in individuals served on Saturdays.
 - 53% of pantry-serving families have children.
 - Rising grocery costs cited as primary reason for increased food pantry usage.
 - Major funding from the thrift store and charitable donations; no government funding received.
- **Future Plans:**
 - New 2,400 sq ft food pantry constructed and operational.
 - Additional evening hours planned.
 - Continuous need for donations (monetary, food), especially milk, eggs, cereal, toilet paper.

3. Andy Hunter Hollis, Neighborhood Service Center

- **Trends Noted:**
 - Households served rose from 87 to 174 (YoY, October 2024–2025); individuals served rose from 192 to 428 in the same period.
 - Food insecurity has been steadily escalating, with need expected to continue even with restoration of SNAP benefits.
- **Accessibility:**
 - Open five days per week, 9:00 am to 4:00 pm straight through; expanding with an evening pantry to serve working poor.
- **Community Engagement:**
 - Calls for volunteerism and donations.
 - Emphasis on treating clients with dignity and a hospitality approach.
- **Special Challenges:**
 - Many seeking help are working two jobs; not necessarily at/below poverty level but affected by rising inflation and costs.

C. Town Manager's Reports

- **Project #2624: Town Railroad Station Reroofing**

- RFP went to 16 contractors; 5 responses.
- Selected Town and Country Roofing, Inc. for \$65,060 (lowest bid).
- Maryland Historical Trust grant: \$40,000 (matching funds approved).
- Anticipated completion by year-end.

Upon motion by Ms. Curry, seconded by Mr. Montgomery and carried unanimously, the Railroad Station re-roofing contract was awarded to Town and Country Roofing, Inc. as recommended by staff.

D. Town Attorney Report – Zoning Amendments

- Discussion regarding process for next steps on zoning amendments.
- Decision: Staff will further research parking-related questions before scheduling a public hearing or proposing new amendments.

E. Assistant Fire Chief Caldwell Report

- **3rd Quarter Stats:** 239 Fire/EMS runs in October; 791 year-to-date.
- **Fundraising:** Successful golf tournament.
- **New Members:** 7 new recruits in training.
- **Training Facility:** Emergency Services Training Facility operational; minor work ongoing.
- **Capital Needs:** \$5 million fundraising goal (\$4.8 million achieved, with pending pledges/donations); continued need for additional funds for unanticipated costs and equipment (e.g., gas-fed training props).

F. Main Street & Economic Development — Downtown Easton

- **Conference Recap:** Hosted DHCD and MITA conference (300+ attendees), boosting business, marketing, and downtown visibility.
- **Digital Marketing:** Initiated targeted campaigns; 9.4% increase in foot traffic (YOY, since July 1); 7.7% growth in social followers; high engagement on email newsletters (55-60% open rate).
- **Public Art & Place Making:** Launched master public art planning (started in East End); prioritized community input and low-cost immediate improvements.
- **Strategic Planning:** Upcoming business leadership forum and community perception survey. Focus on sponsorships, with several new and renewed for 2026. Participation in Giving Tuesday and increased Benevity online donations.
- **Visitor Center:** Relocated to be ADA accessible and ready for the Waterfowl Festival; open daily 9am-4pm.
- **Bikeways Grant:** Will install/upgraded bike racks in key downtown locations.

- **Banner Initiatives:** New event and history banners downtown and strategic locations to attract tourists.
 - **Upcoming Events:** Shop Small, Holiday Parade (noted higher insurance costs), Starlight Shopping, Easton Crab Drop (New Year’s Eve), Chesapeake Fire & Ice (February), Taste of Easton & Restaurant Week (April 2026).
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G. Public Hearing: Ordinance 845 — School Zone & Speed Monitoring

At 6:27 p.m., President Abbatiello opened the 5:35 p.m. scheduled Public Hearing. At 6:28 p.m., President Abbatiello closed the Public Hearing.

Purpose: Amend Town Code to establish new St. Peter & Paul High School zone and implement tiered fines for speed monitoring per 2025 Maryland HB 182.

- **Outcome:** No public comment.

Upon motion by Dr. Montgomery, seconded by Mr. Ranking and carried unanimously, Ordinance 845 passed after clarifications re: camera placement permissions and process (town, state, and county roads).

H. Committee/Council Updates

- **Affordable Housing Task Force:** Revised report circulated to task force; council workshop set for November 17.
 - **Talbot County Free Library:** Community Academy grant received (Maryland 250 Commission) for local government education series; upcoming planning with town/county participation.
 - **Senior Task Force:** First meeting Nov 13, focused on housing, food, medical access for seniors—Council to be represented.
 - **Economic Development Commission:** Draft of strategic plan to be reviewed/report forthcoming.
 - **Hospital Property Planning:** Early-stage community input process; more information forthcoming.
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I. Member Announcements & Recognitions

- **Personal Acknowledgments:**
 - Council member Curry’s nephew, Brendan Curry, commissioned in the US Navy.
 - Celebrated Mrs. Curry’s 95th birthday.
- **Community Causes & Support:**
 - Emphasized ongoing and increased need for hunger relief support—urge for volunteers and donations.
 - Foundation of Hope for Girls and Women highlighted for community leadership work—recent groundbreaking attended by dignitaries.
- **Civic Statements:**

- Dr. Montgomery made a statement denouncing antisemitism and expressing solidarity with Jewish residents.
 - Rev. Davis promoted transparency and accessibility through his town hall meetings.
 - Council urged public attendance of upcoming festivals and workshops, and made repeated calls for continued volunteerism.
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3. Closing

Adjournment: At 6:35 p.m., upon motion by Rev. Davis, seconded by Mr. Rankin, the meeting was adjourned by unanimous vote.

- **Final Remarks:** Emphasis on gratitude for community engagement and service, encouragement for safe and enjoyable festival participation, and reminders of ongoing opportunities to support local residents in need.

Respectfully submitted,

Kathy M. Ruf, Town Clerk (approved 11/17/2025)