

Town Council & Planning Commission Joint Meeting on East End Small Area Plan

Date: December 8, 2025, 4:30 p.m. **Location:** Town of Easton Council Chambers, 14 S. Harrison Street, Easton MD **Topic:** Joint Meeting with Planning Commission regarding East End Small Area Plan.

Attendees

Mayor Megan Cook, Town Manager Andrew Kitzrow, Pres. of Council Don Abbatiello, Council members Ms. Curry, Mr. Rankin, Dr. Montgomery, Town Engineer Rick VanEmburch, Planning and Zoning Director Miguel Salinas, Town Planner Lynn Thomas and Town Staff. Members of the Planning and Zoning Commission present were Tom Klein, Michael Ports (Co-Chair) and Philip Toussaint (Chair).

Rev. Davis was excused.

1. Opening Remarks

- The meeting began with an acknowledgment from Council President Abbatiello and request for support for Andy Coleman, a town employee injured in a car accident and being treated at University of Maryland Shock Trauma.
 - Mr. Salinas opened the session, clarified the meeting's purpose: a detailed presentation and discussion of the East End Small Area Plan Final Report, jointly with the Town Council and Planning Commission.
 - Consultants present: Seth Eric (Lead Consultant), David Egger (Co-Consultant), and Howard Cohn (Market Assessment Specialist). All had substantial involvement throughout the process: pre-charrette, charrette, and post-charrette.
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2. Main Topics Discussed

A. Overview of the East End Small Area Plan Process

i. Structure & Phases

- **Three-stage process:**
 1. **Pre-Charrette:** Background research, market analysis, site assessments, policy context review (notably the Town's Comprehensive Plan).
 2. **Charrette (4-day workshop):** Intensive, iterative public engagement including daily pin-up sessions, active design, and feedback loops.
 3. **Post-Charrette:** Synthesis and documentation of findings, crafting actionable recommendations and strategies aligned with community input.

ii. Goals & Objectives

- **Key objectives included:**
 - Establishing Dover Street as an inviting, innovative corridor supporting small business.

- Developing the corridor as a community destination with improved pedestrian and cyclist access.
- Building on East End’s diversity by identifying redevelopment opportunities for legacy industrial parcels, especially along rails-to-trails corridors.

B. Background and Existing Conditions

i. Study Area Context

- Very large and complex—multiple zoning and overlay districts (e.g., Arts & Entertainment, historic overlays).
- The intersection of “Rails and Trails” and Dover Street identified as the plan's central node and focus.

ii. Prior Studies and Market Analysis

- Referenced studies span ~20 years: e.g., 2010 Comp Plan, Hill in Crisis report, East End Group Plan, and Howard Cohn’s extensive market studies.
- Noted remarkable consistency in policy direction across studies, reinforced through community participation.

iii. Community Engagement (Outreach)

- **Kickoff meeting:** October 5, 2023 (Waterfowl Building).
- **Community walk:** October 12, 2024—detailed in report appendices.
- Consultants and staff gathered input firsthand by walking, biking, and driving the area multiple times.
- Extensive iterative community input through multi-day charrette; table exercises, pin-ups, and interactive workshops.

C. Charrette Highlights and Key Themes

i. Planning Principles Established

- Compact, walkable, mixed-use, multi-generational community vision.
- Emphasis on housing diversity, environmental and socioeconomic benefits, and opportunities for "park once and walk" lifestyles.

ii. Community Input Outcomes

- Support for infill development.
- Strong desire for improved pedestrian safety and affordable housing.
- Reinforcement of the Hill District’s historical and cultural importance.

iii. Key Design Concepts Discussed

- **Triangle Green:** Reconfiguration around Dover Street and rails/trails crossroad as a civic and gathering space.
- **Incremental Intensification:** Encouragement of infill and small-scale, market-driven development along the corridor.

- **Health department property:** Several adaptive reuse scenarios, including potential for a community center, expanded open space, or a combination thereof.
- **Hill District:** Emphasis on housing opportunities, cultural/museum initiatives, and enhancements to historic street elements.
- **‘Bring Downtown East’:** Gradually extending the successful urban design features of Easton's downtown along the Dover corridor (wider sidewalks, slower traffic, higher-quality frontages).

iv. Visualizations and Sketches

- Multiple conceptual sketches were shown: before-and-after comparisons, phased redevelopment of shopping centers, incremental civic improvements, and street-level enhancements.
- Approaches for pedestrian crossing simplification, consolidated parking behind buildings, and creation of liner “incubator” retail spaces.

v. Incremental Implementation Philosophy

- Emphasized tactical, low-bar interventions (planters, street furniture) to “test” concepts, demonstrate potential, and generate momentum without significant up-front capital.
- Noted examples from other communities (notably Frederick, MD and Havre de Grace) where such approaches catalyzed broader redevelopment.

D. Policy, Zoning, and Implementation Strategies

i. Policy Recommendations

- Improved interagency coordination.
- Traffic calming, enhanced connectivity, and walkability.
- Zoning and regulatory alignment to facilitate small-scale, innovative, and work-live development—removal of prohibitive barriers.
- Expansion of Arts & Entertainment overlay, adaptive reuse of legacy industrial structures.
- Support for workforce/affordable housing.

ii. Implementation Approaches

- Introduction of design guidelines.
- Coordination with public works and technical town departments for items such as on-street parking.
- Identification of short-term tactical interventions that can be started immediately (e.g., temporary enlargement of Triangle Green).

iii. Incentives and Support

- Consideration of tax incentives, grants, loans, and small business support programs to encourage desired developments.
- Marketing and branding of corridor improvements to drive private investment and increase confidence in the area.

E. Market and Economic Viability Discussion

- Howard Cohn provided active market analysis:
 - East End and Talbot County possess strong fundamentals.
 - Modern retailing and small business dynamics (e.g., rise of incubator space, impact of Amazon/Etsy).
 - Incremental approach allows for manageable absorption—viable market size for several dozen new small-scale businesses.
 - High turnover in incubator spaces is both normal and healthy, leading to entrepreneurial dynamism.
 - Noted tie between physical/town investment and resultant private investment.

F. Town’s Role and Pathways to Implementation

- Discussions around how the town can “drive the train”:
 - Town can set the regulatory and physical framework, invest in civic spaces and streetscape, and provide incentives.
 - Actual redevelopment relies on incremental action by private property owners and developers.
 - Importance of public-private partnerships, town-owned or influenced properties (e.g., parking lots), and active engagement with local stakeholders.
 - A focus on maintaining and supporting existing businesses during transitions.

G. Concerns/Questions from Council and Planning Commission

- **Prioritization of Recommendations:** With many recommendations, there was a request to structure/phase/prioritize based on impact, feasibility, and stakeholder interest.
 - Triangle Green improvements and the Dover Street corridor identified as near-term, high-impact candidates.
- **Housing Affordability & Gentrification:** Concern over potential price increases as area redevelops; consultants recommend facilitating more diverse and smaller units, plus innovative work-live spaces to help offset.
- **Traffic and Mobility:** Concerns about increased development impacting traffic on Dover Street and Route 50; proposals include increasing connectivity, parallel routes, and local traffic separation.
- **Regulatory Barriers:** Repeated emphasis on reviewing/adjusting the zoning code to permit intended uses (e.g., work-live, maker spaces).
- **Community Input Moving Forward:** Ensuring consistent and broad resident participation via Engage Easton website, public hearings, written comments, and outreach.

3. Action Items

- **Dissemination of Final Report:**
 - Provide final report digital link to all council members and planning commission. Hard copies (11x17) available upon request.

- **Immediate Tactical Implementation:**
 - Explore and potentially install temporary improvements to Triangle Green (e.g., planters, seating) to test concepts and enhance civic space.
 - Begin close work with public works/technical teams on feasibility of on-street parking and other streetscape enhancements.
 - **Comprehensive Plan Integration:**
 - Schedule public hearings with Planning Commission to formally adopt the East End Small Area Plan as an element/subset of the Comprehensive Plan.
 - Once the broader Comprehensive Plan is adopted, amend/attach the Small Area Plan via council resolution.
 - **Community Engagement:**
 - Continue promoting Engage Easton for ongoing feedback; encourage community submissions and attendance at public meetings/hearings.
 - Maintain and update email group for project updates and meeting notices.
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4. Follow-up Points

- **Prioritization Roadmap:** Staff/consultants to consider formalizing a phased/prioritized list of recommendations (“what can be done first/next”) to help the town and stakeholders navigate the breadth of action items.
 - **Regulatory Review:** Initiate review of zoning and other town ordinances to detect impediments to intended uses (especially work-live units, incubator retail, and incremental infill).
 - **Traffic Modeling:** Suggestion for a future town-wide transportation model to assess impacts of all anticipated development, including issues of stack-up at Route 50.
 - **Next Meetings:**
 - Public hearing at Planning Commission on adoption of the Small Area Plan.
 - Followed by Town Council hearing(s) and vote on resolution for adoption.
 - Continued community updates on Engage Easton and via email notifications.
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5. Adjournment

- 6:04 p.m. Meeting concluded with thanks to consultants, planning commission, attending residents, and a reminder that the Historic District Commission meeting would commence next.

Respectfully submitted,

Kathy M. Ruf, Town Clerk (approved 12/15/25)
