

Workshop - Attainable Housing Task Force Report: Part Two

Date of Meeting: Monday, December 15, 2025

Location: Council Chambers, Easton Town Office, 14 S Harrison Street, 4:32 p.m.

Attendees:

- Present were: Mayor Megan Cook, President Don Abbatiello, Councilmembers Maureen Curry, Robert Rankin, David Montgomery, Rev. Elmer Davis. Also, present were the Town Manager Andy Kitzrow, Town Attorney Sharon VanEmburch, Town Clerk Kathy Ruf, Director of Planning & Zoning Miguel Salinas, Town Planner Lynn Thomas. Also in attendance from the Planning Commission were Michael Ports and Paul Weber.
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Main Topics Discussed

1. Background & Overarching Purpose

- The Task Force's overall charge is to address housing availability for the "missing middle":
 - Renters: 60–80% AMI (Area Median Income)
 - Buyers: 80–100% AMI
 - The focus is on those not well-served by federal/state subsidies, aiming to fill the service gap in the town's housing spectrum.
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2. Pillar Two: Regulatory Environment Supporting Housing Diversity

Overview

- Goal: Foster a regulatory environment that supports a **diversity of housing options** without requiring significant public expenditure.
- Key recommendations:
 - Remove dimensional requirements and setbacks that limit development flexibility.
 - Permit a broader range of housing types (e.g., duplexes, triplexes, junior ADUs).

Notable Details

- **Junior ADU:** Newly proposed, up to 500 sq. ft., within an existing home's footprint, to provide affordable rental options by right (easier process).
- **Regular ADU:** Capped at 800 sq. ft. to ensure affordability.
- Emphasis on internal town processes—initiatives can be advanced by town staff and planning commission without needing external partnerships.

Zoning Discussions:

- **Form-Based Zoning:**
 - Recent influx of public inquiry; clarification provided.

- Allows multi-family structures (e.g., duplexes, triplexes) within single-family neighborhoods if they meet design/form standards.
 - Typically, more graphic/visual than use-based zoning, easier for public and developers to interpret.
 - Potential for overlay districts or targeted application (e.g., areas of new annexation, pilot projects).
 - Hybrid approaches favored: combines form and use restrictions.
 - **Missing Middle Housing:**
 - Discussion about whether changes apply across all R10A zones or only in designated overlays.
 - Overlay districts considered as an option—allow pilot projects to demonstrate feasibility and desirability.
 - **Commercial Mixed-Use & Downtown Conversion:**
 - Advocacy for policies facilitating residential conversion of underutilized upper-story downtown properties.
 - Need to address impact and hookup fees, particularly with entities like Eastern Utilities, to incentivize conversion.
 - Town's only pure mixed-use zone is MXW (Easton Point); much of the current commercial zoning doesn't allow mixed-use.
 - **Existing Subdivisions and PUDs (Planned Unit Developments):**
 - Existing built-out subdivisions with PUDs would be exempt from new standards.
 - New standards would apply prospectively to new development.
 - **Economic Feasibility Concerns:**
 - Acknowledgement that encouraging commercial-residential integration may not always be feasible—no mandates anticipated, but flexibility is recommended.
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3. Pillar Three: Zoning Diagnostics, Communication & Community Buy-In

Main Recommendations

- **Zoning Diagnostic:** Conduct thorough review of current zoning districts to identify dimensional standards impeding missing middle housing (e.g., townhomes).
- **Form-Based Code Implementation:**
 - Consider consultant-developed code with strong community input and illustrative design guides.
 - Hybrid form-based models recommended.
 - Examples cited:
 - Easton Village (pattern book as a design guide)

- Experiences from Cambridge, Denton, Queen Anne's (mixed success; feedback requested).
- **Community Education/Outreach:**
 - Make information publicly available about what affordable/attainable housing entails.
 - Use town meetings and subject-matter experts to clarify and dispel misconceptions (e.g., concerns about Section 8, inclusionary zoning).
 - Potential to partner with external organizations (e.g., Maryland Board of Realtors) to broaden reach and reduce town staff burden.

Extended Discussion

- Emphasis on need for clear communication with residents to bridge gap between perceived and actual housing needs/strategies.
 - Frustration voiced over lack of tangible progress for lowest-income residents; suggestion that community education efforts are insufficient without policy action.
 - Acknowledgement that the task force's scope is limited to "attainable" rather than deeply affordable housing, leading to some ongoing dissatisfaction among council members representing the least-served constituencies.
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4. Pillar Four: Financial Incentives & Resource Investments

Key Points

- **Financial Incentives Considered:**
 - PILOT (Payment In Lieu Of Taxes) or tax abatements for projects incorporating affordable components—could be targeted or town-wide.
 - Recognition of the need to carefully assess fiscal impact ("every dollar of tax not collected is a dollar to be paid by others").
 - Opportunity cost rationale: some underutilized parcels might eventually generate higher long-term revenue post-redevelopment.
- **Development Review Modernization:**
 - Software solutions (currently reviewing vendors, presentations ongoing) intended to streamline permitting, cut cost and delays.
- **Housing Coordinator Position:**
 - Consider creating a staff role dedicated to overseeing affordable housing efforts (can share position with county).
 - County currently has a full-time housing coordinator, primarily acting as a resource/referral person.

Extended Concerns

- Council members express the need for full disclosure of benefits/trade-offs to taxpayers.
- Clarity sought about how incentives coincide with potential inclusionary zoning requirements and whether they create added fiscal liabilities for the town.

- The modernized review is advancing quickly and is set for upcoming budget discussions.
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5. Pillar Five: Inclusionary Zoning

Overview

- Proposal: Require developers to set aside a percentage of units in new developments as affordable (e.g., 15% at 80–100% AMI for ownership, up to 60% for rentals).
- Links to draft ordinance already submitted and recommended by Planning Commission.

Ordinance Specifics Discussed:

- Set at 15% affordable set aside (initially at 10%, raised to 15%).
- Provides for density bonuses and some flexibility on dimensional standards (e.g., setback reduction) in return for affordability.
- In-lieu fees permitted only for redevelopment/fractional units; fees calculated based on affordability gap, not a fixed (often too-low) rate.
- Requires staff oversight/enforcement (possibly by the proposed housing coordinator).
- Housing Board would need increased staffing and support for effective program administration.

Extended Council Commentary

- Some council members flag possible conflicts in existing draft ordinance, especially regarding compatibility with efforts to allow multifamily and missing middle housing.
 - Desire expressed for flexibility/amendment to the draft, rather than rigid adoption.
 - Efficiency and feasibility of inclusionary requirements versus direct incentives are questioned and anticipated to be debated further when inclusionary zoning is formally on the agenda.
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Action Items

- **Regulatory & Code Update Drafting:**
 - Direct staff to begin drafting regulatory changes discussed (e.g., ADU adjustments, overlay/zoning changes for missing middle housing).
- **Form-Based/Hybrid Zoning Feedback & Research:**
 - Solicit input and case studies from Denton, Cambridge, Queen Anne's, and others about form-based code implementation.
- **Community Outreach / Education:**
 - Develop and distribute materials to clarify affordable housing plans and counter misconceptions.
 - Consider partnerships (e.g., Board of Realtors) to support education efforts.
- **Public-Private Partnerships:**

- If interested in public-private housing on county land, schedule a joint workshop with county officials.
 - For town land, schedule internal workshops to explore pilot or demonstration projects.
 - **Development Review Modernization:**
 - Continue software vendor review for permitting/plan review modernization and prepare budget allocation requests for next cycle.
 - **Housing Coordinator Position:**
 - Determine feasibility for town- or county-shared position and address in upcoming budget discussions.
 - **Consideration of Financial Incentives:**
 - Evaluate options for PILOTs/tax abatement and the impacts on the town budget; include as potential budget line items.
 - **Inclusionary Zoning Next Steps:**
 - Schedule council hearing on the draft ordinance; collect feedback on specific points of concern and possible amendments before passage.
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Follow-Up

- Revisit and possibly amend the draft inclusionary zoning ordinance to address concerns about compatibility and design standards.
 - Compile and review external feedback/examples on form-based code from various nearby towns and counties (to be provided by Ms. Van Amber and others).
 - Ensure subject-matter experts attend town hall meetings for real-time community Q&A.
 - Schedule additional public workshops as needed on both regulatory changes and potential pilot projects.
 - Prepare final recommendations for council action based on tonight's extended discussion on pillars two through five.
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Next Meeting - Regularly Scheduled Council Meeting

- Next session set to reconvene after a brief break to continue town business.
 - No specific date set for continuing discussion on affordable housing or inclusionary zoning, but expectation established for council hearing and community workshops in early 2026.
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Acknowledgments

- Strong appreciation expressed to Mr. Weber, Mr. Ports, and Mr. Salinas for their extensive work and return to discuss remaining pillars.

- Recognition of task force efforts and ongoing challenges faced in balancing community expectations, resource limitations, and the complexity of affordable housing provision.

Adjourn

Respectfully submitted,

Kathy M. Ruf Town Clerk (approved 1/5/2026)

Town of Easton Meeting Summary

Date of Meeting: December 15, 2025, 5:30 p.m.

Location: Council Chambers, Easton Town Office, 14 S. Harrison Street, Time: 5:30 p.m.

Attendees: Present were: Mayor Megan JM Cook, President Don Abbatiello, Councilmembers Ms. Maureen Curry, Mr. Robert Rankin, Dr. David Montgomery, Rev. Elmer Davis. Also, present were the Town Manager Mr. Andy Kitzrow, Town Attorney Ms. Sharon VanEmburch, Chief of Police Alan Lowrey and Town Clerk Mrs. Kathy Ruf.

Opening remarks and Pledge of Allegiance by Councilmember Dr. Montgomery.

Approval of Minutes.

Meeting Summary from 12/1/25 Council Meeting.

Meeting Summary from 12/8/25 East End Small Area Plan Workshop.

Upon motion by Dr. Montgomery seconded by Rev. Davis and carried unanimously, meeting minutes were approved as written.

Municipal Official Items.

Presented by Mayor Cook

Mayor Cook congratulated Shore Leadership graduates from the Town of Easton and Easton Utilities. Mayor Cook recognized employees that celebrated years of service.

Holly DeKarske, Executive Director, Easton Economic Development to distribute awards for Christmas Parade Winners.

- Best Commercial: Mid-Shore Veterinary
- Best Non-Profit: Neighborhood Service Center
- Best Marching Group: Easton Middle School

Main Topics Discussed

1. Infrastructure Updates & Recognitions

- **Paving & Striping:** Recent improvements at Chapel Road and Route 50 completed by Easton's public works team.
- **Employee Service Awards:**
 - **10 Years:** Joey Faulkner, Rick VanEmburch, Joey Shinault, Chris Westerfield, Bev Williamson
 - **20 Years:** Lorraine Gould, Jill Sherwood, Andre McGee
 - **40 Years:** Mike Dickerson
- **Hanukkah Celebration:** Attended by Mayor Cook and Dr. Montgomery; gratitude expressed to Rabbi Jordan for the inclusive event and participation in tree lighting.

2. Comprehensive Plan Public Hearing

- Last week's hearing concluded, but **public written comment remains open until** Wednesday, December 17.
- Additional written comments received through Thursday.
- Planning Commission workshop on the Comprehensive Plan to be scheduled; to be communicated once determined.

3. Community Events & Awards

- **Holiday Celebration & Parade Recognition:**
 - **Judges' Parade Winners:**
 - Best Commercial: Midshore Veterinary (2nd consecutive year)

- Best Nonprofit: Neighborhood Service Center
- Best Marching Band: Easton Middle School (repeat winner)
- Smile Award: Easton High School (to be awarded later)
- **Statistics:** ~6,500 attendees; over 66 participants, slight reduction due to last-minute dropouts.

4. Town Manager

Upcoming Event: First Night Talbot – New Year’s Eve

- **Public Assembly Permit Approved:** Event from December 31, 2025, 7:00pm–12:30am (includes street closures on South Harrison St. 5:00pm-12:30am)
- **Anticipated Attendance:** 2,000 (weather permitting)
- **Street closure:** South Harrison Street (Dover to Goldsboro)

Upon motion by Dr. Montgomery seconded by Ms. Curry and carried unanimously, Public Assembly Event: First Night Talbot, 12/31/25 was approved.

5. Items by Town Attorney.

- Zoning Pack Amendments: PR District January 5, Public Hearing
- Annexation Request

Read into record by President Abbatiello:

Res. No. 6216, "A RESOLUTION TO ANNEX A PARCEL OF LAND OWNED BY NORRIS E. TAYLOR CONTRACTORS, INC., JEFFREY H. GOODMAN, LOCATED ON THE EAST SIDE OF OCEAN GATEWAY/U.S. ROUTE 50 ADJACENT TO EAST KENNEDY STREET, REGAN DRIVE AND NIXON DRIVE, CONSISTING OF 36.520 ACRES OF LAND, MORE OR LESS, INTO THE TOWN OF EASTON AND TO PROVIDE FOR THE TERMS AND CONDITIONS OF THE ANNEXATION."

Ord. 849, "AN ORDINANCE OF THE TOWN OF EASTON AMENDING THE OFFICIAL ZONING MAP OF THE TOWN OF EASTON TO APPLY THE INDUSTRIAL (I) ZONING DISTRICT TO CERTAIN LOTS OR PARCELS OF LAND ANNEXED TO THE TOWN OF EASTON BY RESOLUTION NO. 6216 LOCATED TO THE EAST OF OCEAN GATEWAY/U.S. ROUTE 50 AND ADJACENT TO EAST KENNEDY STREET, REGAN DRIVE AND NIXON DRIVE, CONSISTING OF 36.520 ACRES OF LAND, MORE OR LESS."

Zoning and Legislative Review

- **Zoning Ordinance Amendments:**
 - Planning Commission sent recommendations for the PR District and full zoning amendment packet.
 - **Decision:** Schedule public hearing for January 5, 2026 instead of holding an additional workshop—consensus that there has been ample prior discussion.
- **Annexation Request (Resolution 6216 and Ordinance 849):**
 - Public hearing set for January 20, 2026 concerning annexation of a 36.52-acre parcel on Ocean Gateway US Route 50 by Norris E. Taylor Contractors Inc. and Jeffrey H. Goodman; proposal to zone annexed land as industrial.
 - Legislation read into record; advertising underway; copies available for the public.

6. Downtown Parking Ordinances & Public Hearing

a. Ordinance 847: Revising Residential Parking District 1 (to include Talbot Lane from South St. to Talbot St.)

- **Public hearing held:** No public comments received (in-person or by email).
- **Vote held:** Upon motion by Rev. Davis, seconded by Dr. Montgomery and carried unanimously, Ord. 847 passed unanimously.

b. Ordinance 848 & Resolution 6215: Revising Parking Provisions & Fee Schedules (parking fees/fines only)

- **Active, Extended Public Hearing:** Numerous comments from residents and business owners; significant engagement with detailed testimony focused on:
 - **Concerns about Reducing Free Parking Limit:** Proposal to reduce from 3 hours to 2 hours raised concerns from business owners and residents about negative impact on downtown commerce, deterring longer stays, and lack of alignment with visitor habits (shopping, dining, events).
 - **Complexity & Usability:** Many comments against implementation of mobile/QR code-based parking systems, especially for locals and elderly; concerns about accessibility, technology limitations, unclear signage, and negative customer experience.
 - **Appropriateness and Need:** Several stakeholders questioned whether a parking problem objectively exists—some business owners claimed no customer complaints about parking availability.
 - **Economic Impact:** Fears that added cost and friction will harm local businesses, citing examples from other towns (e.g., Ellicott City).
 - **Fee Justification:** Inquiry about the purpose of revenue generated; town clarified intent is to partially fund parking lot maintenance and enforcement rather than general revenue.
 - **Alternative Proposals:** Calls for improved parking enforcement rather than technological overhauls; suggestion to hire additional part-time enforcement officers.
 - **Historical Perspective:** Reference to Easton's history of free parking (since ~1953), with some residents presenting evidence and urging preservation of free or minimally restricted parking.
 - **Decision:** Public hearing left open, to be continued into the January 5, 2026 meeting; residents encouraged to submit additional comments by email or in person.

7. Shore Regional Health – Community Healthcare & Hospital Redevelopment Update

Presented by Ken Kozel (President) & Laura Wilson (Director of External Affairs)

- **National Rural Healthcare Trends:**
 - Rural hospitals facing closure (nearly 200 since 2005; 36 in last 5 years).
 - Rising operating costs, service cuts, and many running at negative margins.
- **Maryland Healthcare Payment Model:**
 - Unique, cost-control-focused 10-year extension (2026–2035); signed with federal government.
 - New focus on health/wellness, primary care, and community-based prevention.
- **Federal Rural Healthcare Support:**
 - Application to a \$50B Federal Rural Health Transformation Program.

- \$25B for all-state allocations (Maryland could receive ~\$500M over 5 years if approved by December 31, 2025).
 - \$25B for targeted grants.
 - Focus on community integration, workforce retention, innovation, and tech.
 - **Shore Regional Health System:**
 - Covers 5 counties; serves 172,000 across 2,000 sq miles.
 - **Medicare/Medicaid:** 54% of population; changes in Medicaid impact financial health.
 - Multiple access points (urgent care, specialist clinics, diagnostics).
 - **Regional Medical Center Build:**
 - Ground broken; pillars and geothermal well construction underway (1,400 wells expected to finish by mid-2026).
 - On schedule for opening mid-to-late 2028.
 - Will have 147 beds (including 25 observation beds co-located with the ER) – flexible design to better match modern healthcare trends.
 - Beds in obstetrics, pediatrics, and rehab are reduced based on utilization.
 - **Community Services & Staffing:**
 - **FY 2025:** 7,500 admissions, 71,000 ER visits, 45,000 urgent care visits, 1,300+ for cancer outreach.
 - **Workforce:** 21 new providers (6 primary care, 15 specialists); use of nurse practitioners due to physician shortage.
 - **EMS Partnerships:** Alternate ambulance destinations to avoid unnecessary ER visits; rapid assessment triage zone implemented.
 - **Community Health:** Mobile integrated health program partnerships; ongoing blood pressure clinics, advance directive assistance, senior outreach.
 - **Workforce Pipeline:** Partnership with Chesapeake College and others; rural medical school slot expansion incentivized to attract and retain providers.
 - **Travel Nurse Use:** About 75 out of 550–600; efforts to reduce via local hiring and international recruitment by 2027.
 - **Existing (Old) Hospital Redevelopment:**
 - **Process:** CBRE handling marketing/sale; proposals due December 7, 2025.
 - **Community Involvement:** Mayor and council request deep involvement and transparency; plan for public charrette in Spring 2026 to gather community input on redevelopment vision.
 - **Next Steps:** CBRE sifting through 10–12 offers, engagement with town to ensure alignment; proposals likely broader than just healthcare use; zoning implications carefully considered.
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Action Items

1. Comprehensive Plan:

- Public comments accepted through December 17, 2025.

- Planning Commission workshop date to be determined and communicated.
2. **First Night Talbot Event:**
 - Finalize logistics for street closure and crowd management on December 31, 2025.
 - Confirm anticipated attendance (~2,000) and communicate road closure plans.
 3. **Parking Ordinance and Fee Reforms:**
 - Continue public hearing (Ordinance 848 & Resolution 6215) at January 5, 2026 council meeting.
 - Encourage further written or in-person comments from stakeholders.
 4. **Trash Fee Auditing:**
 - Individual case (Mr. Mangassarian) to be addressed via scheduled meeting between President Abatiello, town manager, and the resident.
 - Broader audit of trash billing/fee structure downtown—findings to be presented for possible revision in upcoming months.
 5. **Hospital Redevelopment:**
 - Maintain close communication between hospital system, Mayor, town council, and community regarding offers and redevelopment plans.
 - Plan public charrette for community vision input in Spring 2026.
 6. **Next Council Session:**
 - Schedule public hearing for zoning amendments on January 5, 2026.
 - Keep public hearing for parking changes open and actively solicit feedback.
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Follow-Up/Upcoming Meetings

- **January 5, 2026:** Public hearings (zoning amendments, parking ordinances).
- **January 20, 2026:** Public hearing for annexation (Resolution 6216/Ordinance 849).
- **Spring 2026:** Community charrette for hospital property redevelopment.
- **Comp Plan Workshop:** To be scheduled as determined by planning commission.

Other Notable Points and Discussions

Community & Council Communications

- **Parade:** High community turnout and participation; gratitude extended to organizers, volunteers, and police.
- **Condolences:** Acknowledgment of recent tragedies (Hanukkah murders in Sydney, Brown University shooting); moment of silence held.

- **Council Member Remarks:** Emphasis on the importance of inclusivity, compassion, and community involvement.

Committee Reports & Administrative Items

- **Invoices:** Upon motion by Ms. Curry, seconded by Mr. Montgomery and carried unanimously, approval of invoices totaling \$732,809.18 for period of November 5–26, 2025 were approved.
- **No scheduled council workshop on January 5 unless otherwise notified.**

Public Participation

- **Trash Collection Fees:** Mr. Steve Mangassarian complaint about longstanding billing for a dumpster that does not exist; audit process under review, specific case to be handled.
- **Parking Issues:** Review and response to raised community concerns about parking system changes underway.

Adjournment

At 7:08 p.m., upon motion by Rev. Davis, seconded by Mr. Montgomery and carried unanimously, President Abbatiello adjourned the regularly scheduled meeting.

Respectfully submitted,

Kathy M. Ruf, Town Clerk (approved 1/5/2026)
