

Town of Easton Meeting Summary

Date of Meeting:

 January 5, 2026 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, and Dr. David Montgomery. Also, present were the Town Manager Mr. Andrew Kitzrow, Town Attorney Ms. Sharon VanEmburch, Chief of Police Alan Lowrey and Town Clerk Mrs. Kathy Ruf.

Rev. Elmer Davis was excused.

1. Opening and Administrative Items

- Invocation & Pledge:

 Led by President Abbatiello due to Reverend Davis’s absence.
- Approval of Minutes:

 - Dec. 15 Attainable Task Force report meeting (Report Meeting #2)
 - Dec. 15 Council Meeting

Upon motion by Dr. Montgomery, seconded by Ms. Curry and carried unanimously, minutes of the December 15, 2025 meetings were approved as written.

2. Main Topics Discussed

A. Municipal Official Items and Announcements

- Mayor Cook:

 - Extended Happy New Year wishes.
 - Crab Drop

 (New Year celebration): Well attended at both 9pm and midnight.
 - Public Works

 acknowledged for holiday lights and decorations; positive feedback received.
 - Decorations began to be taken down on Jan 5; plans for next year are in progress.
 - Christmas tree pickup by Public Works for coming two weeks (leave trees by sidewalk/curb).
- Train Station Roof Replacement:

 Project began this week; expected completion by end of January.
- Planning Commission:

 No meeting this month, but workshop scheduled for Wednesday (comments review only).
- MLK Basketball Tournament:

 January 19, 2026. Doors open at 8:30am, first game at 9:00am.
- Next Council Meeting:

 Moved to Tuesday, January 20th (due to MLK Day holiday).
- Easton Volunteer Fire Department:

 - Chief Re-election Request:

 Mayor Cook requested approval for James R. Dobson’s re-appointment as Chief (2026).

Upon motion by Ms. Curry, seconded by Mr. Rankin an carried unanimously, approval of the re-election of Chief JR Dobson was approved.

B. Assembly Permit Request: 2026 Farmers Market

- Town Manager:

- Assembly permit request for Farmers Market, Lot 5 (Harrison St.).
- *Dates*: Began January 3, 2026 (confirmed as already started), continuing through end of June.
- Approximately 500 attendees per event.
- *Crossing Guards*: Rate at \$65/hour, present for 2 hours each Saturday (39 Saturdays = \$5,070 for season). No reported complaints about coverage.
- *Seasonal Note*: Winter months usually have a smaller market; market expands April onward.
- *Council/Staff Discussion*:
 - Satisfactory operation last year.

Upon motion by Ms. Curry, seconded by Dr. Montgomery and carried unanimously, the Farmer's Market was approved.

C. Austin Lane Tree Clearing

- **Issue Raised by Council:**
 - Ongoing tree/vegetation clearing on Austin Lane for over a month. Residents complain about piles of debris.
 - Council asked Mr. Kitchrow and Pres. Abbatiello to follow up with property owner and seek removal/timeline.

D. Public Hearings

i. Ordinances 850 & 851 – Zoning Code Amendments

Ordinance 850:

- *Scope*: Amendments to Chapter 28 (Zoning) and one amendment to Chapter 25 (Subdivision)
- *Nature*: Primarily “housekeeping”/clarification, with several notable changes after earlier workshop:
 1. Addressing “automotive repair garage” use in CB zoning—restores possibility by special exception.
 2. Adds a definition for “private spa.”
 3. Introduces lighting requirements for donation bins.
- *History*:
 - Two-year amendment process; divided into three “tiers.”
 - Higher impact changes: Awaiting comp plan approval.
 - Housing-related: To follow release of Attainable Housing Task Force report (now complete).
 - Remaining clarifications: Included here.

Ordinance 851:

- *Scope*:
 - Amends Zoning Code regarding Planned Redevelopment Overlay District (PRD/PROD).
 - *Clarifies process*: Creates thresholds for levels of review (administrative, planning commission, council).
 - *Key Point*: Projects with >20 dwelling units must proceed under a different process (e.g., PUD infill) and come before Council.
- **Council Q&A Highlights:**

- *Historic District/Height Concerns*: Mr. Minarick and Council discuss use of “stacked four plexes” in R7A; staff confirms additional hurdles (height, design guidelines).
- *Open Space Standards*: Community concern about distance to parks (e.g., quarter mile may be far for children); and whether rail trails count as permanent open space.
- *Process & Notification*: 400-foot notification radius discussed; suggestion to expand to capture more affected neighbors. No action tonight.
- *Staff Confirmation*: These amendments do not retroactively apply to existing structures/vegetation.

Public Comment (Ords 850/851):

- Questions about application of visibility triangles.
- Concerns about process for approving denser residential buildings in historic/established neighborhoods.
- Suggestions for stricter open space or design requirements and improved public notification.

ii. Ordinance 848 & Resolution 6215 – Parking Revisions

Scope:

- *Ordinance 848*: Revises parking provisions in the code.
- *Resolution 6215*: Updates license/permit/inspection/application/fee schedule (parking-related only).

Key Elements:

- Transition from 1970s quarter-operated meters (obsolete, unrepairable) to a QR code-based parking system. No app required, no new meter hardware.
- 2-hour limit for on-street parking (down from 3), enforcement by digital license plate tracking rather than physical meters/tire chalking.
- Proposal includes employee parking permits.
- Passed in part to address enforcement difficulties (staffing, meter issues).

Council & Staff Statements:

- Not a proposal to newly introduce paid parking—Easton has had paid parking since 1939.
- Meter infrastructure is failing; QR system minimizes up-front expense compared to meters/kiosks.
- No vote scheduled tonight; topic held open due to strong community interest and absence of Reverend Davis (whose ward most affected).
- Request made for a financial impact report/spreadsheet detailing both costs and revenue projections.

Public Comment (Parking):

All commenters were strongly opposed or concerned; important themes below:

- **Business Owners, Merchants, and Residents:**
 - Fear paid parking/2-hour limits will reduce customer foot traffic, especially for those dining *and* shopping.
 - Technology barrier: Older customers may not have smartphones/QR familiarity.
 - Privacy concerns: Objection to QR system tracking who parks/when.

- Comparisons to negative impacts in communities like Reston Town Center, VA (businesses closed, significant sales drops after paid parking; copies of news articles supplied).
- Proposal to keep street parking three hours, free, or reconsider enforcement.
- Employee parking: Suggestion for affordable annual parking permits; concern even \$10/day would be burdensome (currently, \$30/month proposed).
- Demand for clearer communication to employees, especially about the current status of meters and permits (many meters inoperable).

• **Others:**

- Request for genuine transparency: Emphasized by a community member for a “financial impact report” (detailed 7-point rationale and example spreadsheet provided in written comments).
- Suggestion to focus on improved enforcement with part-time staff, rather than changing system; skepticism about true severity of the “free rider”/all-day parker problem.
- Advocacy to retain lots near the library and West Street as permanently free for public use.
- General unease about over-complicating parking with technology or changes unpopular with Easton’s older demographic.

• **Council Response:**

- Acknowledged strong negative public feedback and committed to continuing the hearing until the January 20th meeting.
- Reiterated that all public emails and comments are considered.

3. Legislation Actions

Parking (Ord 848 & Res 6215):

- *Action:* Hearing will remain open.
- *Next Vote:* Deferred to January 20 (after more comments and addressing financial analysis request).

Zoning:

• **Ordinance 850:**

- *Upon motion by Dr. Montgomery, seconded by Mr. Rankin:* Passed (3 yes, 1 no (Ms. Curry—due to notification radius concerns), Rev Davis absent).

• **Ordinance 851:**

- *Upon motion by Dr. Montgomery, seconded by Ms. Curry and carried unanimously, Ordinance No. 851 passed.*

4. Public Participation & Comments

- *No new substantial issues raised beyond those in public hearings above.*
- *Jennifer Vaccaro* (Tree Board): Not on agenda; will return Jan 20.
- *Stephen Mangassarin:* Brief comment re. trash: dumpster and tipper cost comparisons; suggestion for cost-based fee adjustments.

5. Committee Reports

• **Discover Easton:**

- Commended for well-managed New Year’s Eve Crab Drop event.

- Special thanks to Maggie Sarfati and The Factory Arts Project for enhancing festivities.

- Council members reaffirmed appreciation for public engagement and open lines of communication, especially on the parking ordinance.

6. Action Items

Future:

- Continue collecting and considering public comment on parking through next meeting (Jan. 20, 2026).

7. Follow-Up and Next Steps

- Next Council Meeting:

- Date: Tuesday, January 20, 2026 (due to MLK Day)
- Expected Topics:
 - Continued public hearing and possible vote on Parking Ordinance/Fees (Ord 848, Res 6215); Council expects to review a detailed financial analysis.
 - Committee/board reports (including Tree Board update).

- Anticipated Deliverables for Jan. 20:

- Financial analysis spreadsheet for parking program.
- Updates on Austin Lane tree removal.
- Additional public comment rollup.

8. Additional Notes

- Easton Volunteer Fire Department:

- Chief J.R. Dobson re-approved for 2026.
- Reverend Davis re-appointed as Chaplain (despite absence at this meeting).

- Miscellaneous:

- MLK Basketball Tournament Jan. 19, 2026; Council meeting will shift to Jan. 20, 2026.
- Crab Drop and holiday celebrations successful; public works commended.
- Councilmembers expressed broad gratitude for public engagement, trust in process, and willingness to consider concerns before action.
- General consensus: Goal to keep Easton vibrant, welcoming, and inclusive to all community members and visitors.

Adjournment:

Respectfully submitted,

Kathy M. Ruf, Town Clerk (approved 1/20/2026)