

Town Council Meeting

Date: February 2, 2026 **Time:** 5:30 p.m. **Location:** Council Chambers, Easton Town Office, 14 S Harrison Street (with virtual participation from Ms. Curry).

Attendees: Present were: Mayor Megan JM Cook, President Don Abbatiello, Councilmembers Mr. Robert Rankin, Dr. David Montgomery, Rev. Elmer Davis and Ms. Maureen Curry (virtually). Also, present were the Town Attorney Ms. Sharon VanEmburch, Chief of Police Alan Lowrey, Town Engineer Rick VanEmburch and Town Clerk Ms. Kathy Ruf as well as members of the Easton Volunteer Fire Department.

1. Opening Proceedings

- **Opening remarks:** In recognition of Black History Month, President Abbatiello began with a Martin Luther King, Jr. quote on the value of service in recognition of Black History Month.
- **Pledge of Allegiance:** Led by President Abbatiello

2. Approval of Previous Minutes:

Upon motion by Dr. Montgomery, seconded by Rev. Davis and carried unanimously, minutes of the January 20, 2026 meeting were approved as written.

Municipal Official Items:

1. Items by Mayor Cook

- **Event Update:** The February 10th Golton Park ribbon cutting canceled due to snow/ice—will be rescheduled.
- **Next Meeting:** February 16th at 4:30 PM; first workshop on the Town of Easton Code update.
- **Recognition:**
 - Honored Mike Dickerson for over 40 years of service with Public Works and the fire department.
 - Banner with his image to be displayed.

2. Utility Bill Relief & Support

Presenter: Paula Taylor, Director of Customer Experience, Easton Utilities

- **High Electric Bills:**
 - Noted significant bills due to prolonged freezing temperatures in December and January.
- **Energy Relief:**
 - Maryland Legislative Energy Relief Fund credit (~\$40/customer) will appear on February bills; second credit issued (first was August 2025).
- **Assistance Programs:**
 - Payment arrangements and “budget billing.”
 - Partnerships with Neighborhood Service Center and St. Vincent DePaul for those needing further aid.
 - New “Change for Change” program lets customers round up bills to donate to struggling neighbors; also accepts fixed or one-time donations.
- **Proactive Outreach:**
 - Collections department partners with local agencies to preempt shut-offs.
- **Communication:**
 - Newsletters, email, social media for conservation tips and resources.
- **Council Discussion:**
 - Encouragement to residents to use resources.
 - The “Change for Change” program promoted to council and public.

Action Items:

- Easton Utilities to continue outreach and communication about relief programs.
- Residents encouraged to reach out proactively if needing help.

3. Items by Town Manager: Nothing at this time.

4. Items by Town Attorney: Nothing at this time.

5. Fire Department Annual Report and Leadership Updates

Presenters: Chief JR Dobson and President Russel Miles

- **2025 Incident Summary:**
 - Total incidents: 943 (quarterly breakdown: ~70-74 per month Q4)
 - Major categories:
 - Aircraft emergency: 1
 - Automatic fire alarms: 209
 - Medical assists: 223
 - Structure fires: 87
 - Vehicle fires: 19
 - Motor vehicle crashes: 178
 - Hazmat/hazardous conditions: 97
 - Natural cover/outside fires: 30
 - Misc./good intent: 66
- **Personnel & Volunteerism:**
 - 7,717 incident hours; 11,313 hours for non-incident/administrative activities.
 - 8 new active members; 3 new part-time members.
- **Upcoming Events:**
 - Annual banquet: Saturday (imminent).
 - “Stews and Brews” event: February 21, noon–4pm at Station 60 (Leonard Rick Dr.).
- **Recognition:**
 - Introduction of line officers and trustees for 2026.
 - Councilmembers expressed appreciation and shared personal experiences.

Action Items:

- Continued efforts in recruitment and public engagement.
- Enhanced marketing for upcoming fire department events.

6. Affordable Housing Program Update

Presenter: Jim Bent, Chairperson

- **Fund Summary:**
 - Total revenue: \$2,486+ (current cycle; ongoing).
 - New source: “Gannon’s Range”—31 permits at \$3,000 each so far; 172 permits/\$516,000 anticipated.
 - Home Purchase Assistance Grants:
 - \$6,000 granted to Easton Utilities employee 4–5 months ago (and is now promoted).
 - \$6,000 recently awarded to Easton Police officer; second grant executed last week.
- **Renovation Program:**
 - Since 2014: 59 completed (49 grants, 9 deferred/zero interest, 1 low-interest loan).
 - Only 1 project ongoing—first time activity is this low.
 - Renovation fund (initially \$250,000) increased by \$400,000; \$172,000 remains.
- **Home Purchase Assistance Program Changes:**
 - Board proposes grant amount increase to *up to* \$10,000 (from \$6,000); some lenders limit what can be used—grant will match borrower closing needs.
 - Council consensus to approve update.
- **Marketing & Outreach:**

- Plans to enhance program visibility (via HR departments, volunteer fire department, and local lender/broker channels; monthly newsletter for realtors).
- Target is to process applications at least 30 days prior to closing.
- **Policy Statement for Developers:**
 - Board drafting a clear, consistent position statement for developers rather than handling each individually.
- **Exploring Rental Property Renovation Assistance:**
 - Focus on small landlords lacking resources to improve properties, to enhance tenant quality of life.
- **Council Questions:**
 - Doverbrook project status: Awaiting final tallies from Mr. Bibb.
 - Ongoing: Awaiting Attainable Housing Task Force plan decisions.

Action Items:

- Finalize and publicize grant increase for Home Purchase Assistance.
- Step up renovation program marketing.
- Draft and circulate developer policy statement.
- Continue exploration of including small landlords in renovation grants.

Follow-up:

- Update on Doverbrook expected from Mr. Bibb (pending).
- Await updates/recommendations from Attainable Housing Task Force.

7. Cont'd Public Hearing: Annexation and Zoning for US Route 50/East Side Property

- **Subject:** 36.52 acres on east side of Ocean Gateway, abutting Nixon & Reagan Drives.
- At 6:01 p.m., President Abbatiello opened the continued public hearing on the annexation and zoning. He asked for comments.
- **Public Comments:**
 - One resident, Robert L. Roberts III, spoke in favor of the proposed annexation.
 - At 6:04 p.m. President Abbatiello closed the continued Public Hearing.
- **Next Steps:**
 - Council will compile recommendations via Town Attorney; forward to applicants for review.

Vote on Resolution 6216 and Ordinance 849 at the next council meeting, pending applicant readiness.

8. Public Participation and Comments

A. Commercial Trash Billing Concerns

Speaker: Stephen Mangasarian (business owner)

- Requests billing adjustment for trash service (charged for dumpster he does not have).
- Critiques pace on promised audit and clarity of fee application.
- Requests legal/fair resolution and future bill remedy.
- **Mr. Kitzrow Town Manager Response:**
 - Audit has been initiated; Mr. Mangasarian not alone in concern.
 - Current administration position: No retroactive adjustments; future changes will be considered for next budget/fee schedule.
 - Two-tiered system under consideration: lower rate for less capacity or non-dumpster customers.
 - Acknowledgement: Any adjustment would need to be equitable for all affected businesses.
- **Council Discussion:**
 - Consensus that equitable/fair solution is needed, but broad not singular.
 - Feedback: frustration with delay acknowledged; Mr. Mangasarian's input appreciated.

- Town Attorney tasked to review the legal aspect for clarifying language/fees.
- Commitment to communicate forthcoming proposed changes prior to next budget.
- Mr. Mangasarian indicated continued dissatisfaction, left frustrated.

B. Question on Street Camera Installation

- **Speaker:** Robert L. Roberts III
 - Questioned new box/camera on SW corner, Dover and Washington (Odd Fellows building).
- **Response:**
 - Town Engineer to investigate and follow up directly.

Committee Reports and Council Member Updates

- No formal committee reports provided.

Ms. Curry:

- Had attempted comment on trash discussion; will save remarks for next meeting.

Mr. Rankin:

- Black History Month recognition; thanks to Mike Dickerson (retirement), Chief Lowry (Copsicles plunge), Public Works, Utilities, Police, Fire for storm response.
- Noted community support for family lost home in recent fire; donations can be delivered to Mid Atlantic Tire Pros.

Dr. Montgomery:

- Commended Public Works for exceptional snow/ice clearing; applauded coverage in local media.

Reverend Davis:

- Deferred remarks to council president due to previous comments covering topics.

Mr. Abbatiello Council President:

- Extended thanks to Mike Dickerson, Public Works, utilities, Fire, EMS.
- Requested update on Mistletoe Hall Farm progress and goals.

Action Items (Consolidated)

1. **Mayor's Office & Public Works**
 - Reschedule the previously canceled ribbon cutting event.
 - Prepare update on Mistletoe Hall Farm for council.
 2. **Easton Utilities**
 - Maintain outreach and communication to residents about relief programs.
 - Publicize "Change for Change" program.
 3. **Affordable Housing Board**
 - Finalize home purchase assistance grant increase and begin extended marketing.
 - Draft policy statement for interactions with developers.
 - Continue renovations program and rental property assistance evaluation; update council.
- Follow-Ups & Future Meetings**
- **Feb. 16, 2026, 4:30 PM:** Next council meeting and scheduled code update workshop.
 - **Annexation/Zoning Vote:** Targeted for Feb. 16 meeting, pending applicant review.
 - **Affordable Housing:** Await further data on Doverbrook; continue monitoring Attainable Housing Task Force outcomes.
 - **Budget Cycle:** Commercial trash fee revisions expected for future fiscal year; update to be shared as soon as draft is ready.

9. Adjournment

Upon motion by Rev. Davis, seconded by Dr. Montgomery and carried unanimously, President Abbatiello adjourned the regularly scheduled meeting

Respectfully submitted,

Kathy M. Ruf, Town Clerk (approved 2/16/2026)

