

Town Council Meeting

Date: April 6, 2026 **Time:** 5:30 p.m. **Location:** Council Chambers, Easton Town Office, 14 S Harrison Street.

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

Councilmember Mr. Robert Rankin was excused.

I. Opening Proceedings

- At 5:30 p.m., President Abbatiello called the meeting to order.
- Reverend Davis led the meeting with an opening prayer followed by the Pledge of Allegiance.

II. Closed Session Summary (March 2, 2026) read by President Abbatiello.

- Held at 6:38–7:07 p.m. on March 2, concerning Article 3-305B4: business/industrial proposals for location/expansion in Easton.
- Attendees: Mayor, Council, Clerk, Attorney, Town Manager.
- No formal action taken; discussed future business expansion opportunities.

III. Approval of Minutes

- Meeting minutes approved for meetings on:
- March 2, 2026 Audit Review Meeting
- March 2, 2026 Regular Meeting
- March 2, 2026 Closed Session
- March 23, 2026 Code Revision Workshop
- March 25, 2026 Budget Workshop
- March 26, 2026 Budget Workshop

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

IV. Main Topics Discussed

A. Mayor Cook's Report

1. Budget Workshops & State Grant Submissions

- Budget workshops wrapped up last week; budget is balanced, no changes to property tax rates proposed.
- Budget presentation scheduled for May 4, 2026.
- Grant applications for Woodland Park and Dover Triangle were denied by the Maryland state budget, but efforts will continue.

2. Public Works Updates

- Train Station roof and punch list completed; Maryland Historic Trust grant covered \$34,000 of the \$68,000 total cost.
- Commerce Drive flooding mitigated: replaced 250 feet of pipe with larger 36" polypropylene pipe for increased flow.
- Traffic light upgrades at Harrison & Washington—signal and LED signal installation; construction to last approximately four weeks.
- Rail to Trail project: tree removal for storm drain; 55 trees (deciduous and evergreen) to be planted over the next month.

3. Parks & Community Events

- March 28, 2026: Opening day for Little League (baseball/softball); new scoreboard ribbon-cutting.
- Upcoming:

- April 10: Softball opening day at North Easton Park.
- April 11: Tidy Up Talbot event (7:30 a.m., Magnolia St. near Board of Ed) for Rail to Trail/John Ford Park.
- April 15: Launch of Run Walk group at Idlewild Park (collaboration with local organizations).
- April 22: Kickball league at Idlewild Park.
- April 19–23: "Charrette" for the current hospital site (community planning and design event; opening presentation April 19 at 6:00 p.m., final presentation April 23, at the Family Life Center, Easton Church of God).
- April 11: Community walkabout (11:00 a.m., parking lot across from Eastern Shore Land Conservancy).

- Car break-ins reported—residents urged to lock vehicles, per last week's police advisory.

4. St. Patrick's Day Parade Winners (Presented by Ms. Curry)

- Best Non-Marching Group: Chesapeake Multicultural Resource Center (CHESS MRC) Afterschool Program.
- Best Marching Group: Choptank Elementary School.
- Best Decorated Golf Cart: Chris Jordan Exteriors.

B. Parks & Recreation: Disc Golf Proposal (John Ford Park)

- Town Manager Andy Kitzrow Introduced Lorraine Gould, Parks and Recreation Director. Present also was Matt Proventure and Jason Beverage.
- Overview of disc golf: low-cost, environmentally friendly, high community impact—promotes stewardship, outdoor activity, and overall wellness.
- Proposed Installation:

- Potential for 9 to 18-hole course (with plans for future expansion up to 36 baskets/72 playable holes).
- Cost estimate: under \$50,000 for a premier course; minimal maintenance (community organizes clean-ups).
- Value to Easton: promotes health, reduces vandalism, provides tournament/event economic impact, highly inclusive sport.

- Safety and Community Concerns:

- Emphasis on course layout in under-utilized areas to minimize conflict with other park activities.
- Temporary course setup for upcoming tournament to solicit feedback and adjust as needed.

- Upcoming Events:

- April 26, 2026 (10am–2pm): Free disc golf clinic and Q&A at John Ford Park.
- May 2–3, 2026: Test tournament; \$35/day entry (funds to support permanent installation).

- Council questions raised about cost, layout, potential park usage conflicts; general support with suggestions for robust community feedback.

C. Public Assembly/Event Permits

1. Talbot County 250th Celebration: Ice Cream Social (April 26, 2026)

- Street closure: West St. (Dover to Federal), Dover St. (West to Lot 10), 5–7 p.m., ~300 attendees expected.

Upon motion by Rev. Davis, seconded by Ms. Curry, the Public Assembly Event was approved.

2. Delmarva Pride Festival (June 13, 2026)

- Road closure with hard-stop barriers required.
- Anticipated attendance: approx. 4,000.

Upon motion by Rev. Davis, seconded by Ms. Curry, the Delmarva Pride Festival was approved with Dr. Montgomery voting no. Dr. Montgomery made a statement that he voted against approving the Festival as it is incompatible with his values as a Catholic.

3. Storm Drain Lining Proposal (Pleasants Construction Inc.)

- Location: South Washington Street at Paper Mill, near rail trail; \$109,572.95 in FY26 budget (out of \$160,000 allocated).

Upon motion by Ms. Curry, seconded by Dr. Montgomery and carried unanimously, the proposal from Pleasants Construction, Inc. in the amount of \$109,572.95 was approved.

D. Public Hearing: 2026 Comprehensive Plan Update

- At 6:08 p.m., President Abbatiello opened the 5:35 p.m. scheduled Public Hearing.
- Lead-in summary by Planning staff (Lynn Thomas), emphasizing that the Comprehensive Plan:

- Is a long-term vision, not law.
- Guides zoning, grant applications, facility locations, and growth management.

- Key public concerns raised:

- Poplar Hill Farm: Extent of commercial development allowed; suggestions to restrict language to strictly residential/governmental use.
- Tristan Drive extension: Concerns about cut-through traffic creating new bottleneck (Oxford Road).
- Easton Club open space: Land use designations; representation of open space and community rights.

- Council President Mr. Abbatiello reassurances:

- No vote planned tonight; process is ongoing; council will host public ward meetings (targeted first half of May 2026). President Abbatiello stated the Public Hearing would be continued and left open for public comment.
- Input will be fully considered; additional town halls planned.

• Resident Comments (summarized):

- Nupur Nagar, Maryland Health Clubs representative: Concerns over regulatory "taking" if private club land is re-designated as open space.
- Ron Frey, Easton Club discussed the 1% growth rate and suggested keeping open space.
- Tom Alspach, 295 Bay Street stated substantial work needs to be done with the municipal growth rate which is inadequate.
- Tom Ledvina, 7585 Polly Hill's Lane congratulated the Planning Commission. He asked them to deal with Tristan Drive. He emphasized open space preservation, managing growth to 1%, objecting to Poplar Hill commercial/residential proposals, concerns over actual plan implementation and need for annual/regular growth impact assessments with actionable triggers.
- Sally Nash, Easton Club stated she is glad the Planning Department and Council are not rushing to enact the Comprehensive Plan.
- Disc golf concerns: Potential conflicts with current park uses, risk to safety for walkers/dogs.
- General consensus that more time and community engagement is needed before adopting the plan.

E. Affordable Housing Task Force Recommendations

- President Abbatiello opened the discussion about the Affordable Housing Task Force recommendations by discussing the five pillars.

1. Housing Development & Public Land Partnerships (pilot project proposals).
2. Zoning/Regulatory Reform (to enable "missing middle" housing: duplexes, ADUs, etc.).
3. Community Education on affordable housing.
4. Staffing, tech, and financial tools to reduce development costs.
5. Inclusionary Zoning (requiring a percentage of affordable units in larger developments).

• Council Feedback:

- General support for public land partnerships and pilot projects.
- Regulatory reforms and "missing middle" housing to be incorporated into longer-term zoning updates.
- Caution on increased staff hiring; more support for cloud-based permitting systems.
- Emphasis on piloting successful public-private partnerships, advancing education/outreach on what constitutes "affordable."
- Clarifications requested for ADU vs. junior ADU.

F. Legislation Read into Record (No Votes This Meeting)

1. Ordinance 852: Adopts accessibility guidelines for pedestrian facilities in the public right-of-way (making federal ADA guidelines mandatory; allows local design manual). The Town Attorney Ms. VanEmburch discussed the legislation.

2. Ordinance 853: Authorizes Easton Utilities to borrow for Lead Service Line inventory project (\$140k forgivable loan, \$46.75k loan)—federal mandate, no known lead lines, 3,000 locations yet to check. John Horner, President and CEO, Easton Utilities was present to discuss the borrowing. He stated that they have secured funds with MDE in the amount of \$200,000.

- Vote scheduled for next meeting.

G. Other Legislation (Eligible for Vote)

1. Resolution 6217: Extends mobile food truck pilot program through summer (due to renewed seasonal interest). Discussion on modifiers such as food trucks for private events to bypass 300-foot restaurant setback. Changes to be incorporated for next meeting.
2. Resolution 6218: Authorizes subrecipient agreement with Foundation of Hope, Inc. for housing grant.

Upon motion by Ms. Curry, seconded by Rev. Davis and carried unanimously, Resolution No. 6218 was approved.

3. Resolution 6219: License agreement allowing encroachment (parking spaces) at 521 August Street—council postponed vote pending further clarity/inspection.
4. Resolution 6220: Subrecipient agreement for Blake Blackston American Legion grant (strategic demolition fund).

Upon motion by Ms. Curry, seconded by Rev. Davis and carried unanimously, Resolution No. 6220 was approved.

5. Resolution 6221: Adoption of the 2026 Comprehensive Plan (no action, pending continued public hearing).

H. Financial Approvals

- Invoices for February 1–28, 2026, totaling \$1,410,526.16.

Upon motion by Ms. Curry, seconded by Rev. Davis and carried unanimously, invoices totaling \$1,410,526.16 were approved.

V. Public Comment

- Mr. Lance Simon, Ashby Commons, expressed concerns regarding the disc golf course's impact and need for thorough evaluation.
- Tina Jones, Pride Center Co-founder gave thanks and expressed support of Delmarva Pride Festival—emphasis on positive economic and social impact for Easton.
- Additional events announced: Taste of Easton (April 26), Restaurant Week following.

VI. Committee Reports

- Ms. Curry gave praise for successful Discover Easton Easter Egg Hunt.
- Upcoming local events and support for downtown businesses.
- Talbot County Economic Development Commission review of county transportation plan (Dr. Montgomery participated; notes process is ongoing).

VII. Final Council Member Remarks

- Dr. Montgomery and Reverend Davis commended President Abbatiello for process management and emphasis on transparency and community engagement in the Comprehensive Plan process.

- Council member ward representatives reminded constituents to provide Comprehensive Plan input via email.
- Mayor and council reiterated the importance of safety, crime prevention, and neighborhood solidarity.
- Town hall dates for ward meetings: Tentatively scheduled for May 6, 11, 12, and 13.

VIII. Action Items / Follow-up

IX. Adjournment

Upon motion by Rev. Davis, seconded by Ms. Curry and carried unanimously, the meeting was adjourned at 7:25 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Kathy M. Ruf, Town Clerk