

Town of Easton Council Meeting Summary

Date: May 4, 2026 **Location:** Easton Town Council Chambers, Easton Town Office, 14 S Harrison Street.

Attendees: Present were: Mayor Megan J.M. Cook, Town Manager Andy Kitzrow, Council President Don Abbatiello, Councilmembers Ms. Curry, Mr. Rankin, Dr. Montgomery, Rev. Davis, Assistant Town Attorney Will Chapman, Town Clerk Kathy Ruf, Chief of Police Alan Lowrey and Deputy Greg Wright.

I. Opening & Administrative Business

- At 5:30 p.m., President Abbatiello called the meeting to order and shared a Closed Session summary from April 20, 2026, noting a meeting regarding a business/industrial proposal with no action taken.

A. Invocation & Pledge of Allegiance

- Mr. Rankin delivered the opening prayer, and led those present in the Pledge of Allegiance.

B. Approval of Minutes

Upon motion by Ms. Curry, seconded by Mr. Rankin and carried unanimously, the minutes from the Code Revision Workshop, the regular April 20, 2026 meeting and the Closed Session meeting minutes were approved.

II. Main Topics Discussed

1. Fire Board (EVFD) Report

a. Chief JR Dobson gave 2026 First Quarter Statistics

- Total incidents: 249
 - Notable incidents: 1 aircraft emergency, 52 fire alarms, 24 MVA, 19 structure fires, 91 medical assists, 2 hazmat calls.
- April 2026: 64 fire incidents

b. Volunteer Achievements & Events

- Multiple awards at Cordova Volunteer Firemen's Assoc. 100th Anniversary Parade
- Recent major fire at Dependable Sand and Gravel required mutual aid and ongoing monitoring by Maryland State Forestry
- 3 fire prevention events hosted this quarter
- Donation from Eastern Rotary "Flags for Heroes" program for a new forcible entry door prop at the new training campus
- Participation in upcoming Maryland State Fireman's Association Parade (June 20, 2026, in Berlin)

c. Ongoing Needs & Recruitment

- Continued call for volunteers; interested parties can contact the EVFD via their website or call 410-822-4848
- Commendation for Captain Justin Jones' recent leadership at a large-scale fire

2. Town Manager Updates (Andy Kitzrow)

a. Event Permits Approved

- First Responders Month Kickoff:

- Location: Corner of Dover St. & West St.
- Date/Time: May 14, 2026, 10:00–11:30 a.m.
- Anticipated guests: 50–150 (Governor expected to attend)
- Logistics: Requires parking signs, barricades, council invited.

Upon motion by Ms. Curry, seconded by Rev. Davis and carried unanimously, the First Responders Month Kickoff was approved.

• Academy Art Museum Juneteenth Celebration:

- Date/Time: June 20, 2026, 9:00 a.m.–5:00 p.m.
- Location: South between Harrison St. & Talbot Lane (closed 8:30 a.m.–6:00 p.m.)
- Anticipated guests: ~150, sound amplification, managed by on-duty officers.

Upon motion by Mr. Rankin, seconded by Rev. Davis and carried unanimously, the Juneteenth Celebration was approved.

• Hummingbird Inn Noise Ordinance Extension:

- Date: June 13, 2026 (in conjunction with Pride Festival)
- Noise extension: 90 minutes to 10:00 p.m.–11:30 p.m.
- Anticipated guests: ~150 (approved as in previous year, no issues reported previously)

Upon motion by Ms. Curry, seconded by Rev. Davis and carried unanimously, the Noise Ordinance Extension was approved.

3. Mayor’s Announcements & Updates (Mayor Megan J.M. Cook)

a. Personnel and Project Updates

- Welcome to John Burnett (new mechanic/technician from PennDOT).
- Walkway project along north side of the building underway (4-week construction timeline; safety cautioned)

b. Community Engagement & Achievements

- Final hospital charrette development scenarios and presentation posted on Engage Easton site.
- Arbor Day tree planted in honor of retired Superintendent of Public Works Mike Dickerson.
- Congratulations to Easton EDC on successful Taste of Easton event and Golf Disc Golf tournament.
- Governor and President Abbatiello (Council President) to speak at First Responders event (May 14).

c. Historic District Commission Appointments

- Kurt Gant (replacing Michael Stuart): Experienced in construction
- Jim Carr: Reappointment for another 3-year term

Upon motion by Rev. Davis, seconded by Dr. Montgomery and carried unanimously, the appointments as recommended by Mayor Cook were confirmed.

**FY27 Budget Presentation (Mayor Cook) — *Comprehensive, Detailed Discussion (45 min)*

a. Budget Philosophy & Process

- Theme: “How all the pieces fit together”—each department/service is a “piece” forming the collective vision of Easton.

- Process began December 2025; includes extensive review with department heads and council workshops.

b. Achievements & Current Position

- Major renovations, extended outreach, successful leadership transition (including interim town manager)
- Town described as in a “position of strength” with disciplined growth and stable tax rates since 2008.

c. Core Values & Strategic Focus

- **Safety:** Priority across police, fire, infrastructure, and employee training.
- **Service:** Maintenance, responsiveness, amenities.
- **Amenities/Quality of Life:** Parks, programming, public spaces.
- **Fiscal Discipline:** Investments made while keeping tax rates low and services stable.

d. Public Safety Investment

- Enhanced police retirement benefits and starting salaries, new equipment
- Noted police performance: 22,000+ calls, 476 arrests (down Y/Y), 0 homicides, 0 traffic fatalities, decline in opioid incidents
- Cadet program re-established; first cadet in 50 years (Kirsten Vistakis), on track for Academy July 2026.
- Emphasis on community policing and outreach (SROs, Coffee with a Cop, fraud prevention, charitable drives)
- Continued support for EVFD: Equipment, training, land donation, planning for new/upgraded station

e. Infrastructure & Maintenance

- FY26: 2,000 ft. sidewalks, traffic/intersection upgrades, stormwater improvements, 7.5 lane-miles repaved.
- FY27 Plans: Expanded pedestrian safety, finishing traffic signal conversion (with ARPA funds), road and rail trail expansions.
- Stormwater: Large capacity upgrades, replacing 100+ year-old pipes.

f. Internal Improvements/Employee Safety

- Heat Illness Prevention Plan, expanded CPR/AED training, new Risk Manager (Mike Young), mass casualty exercise

g. Community Engagement (Engage Easton)

- Public engagement platform launched
- Used for comprehensive planning, small area plans, affordable housing task force, and major charrettes

h. Easton Utilities Collaboration

- Noted as a unique town asset; close partnership on permits, coordination, long-term planning
- “Connect Talbot” broadband: Talbot County first with 100% connectivity in MD

i. Capital & Parks Investment

- Capital budget includes new equipment for Public Works, storm drain lining, park improvements (North Easton Sports Complex, Idlewild tennis courts, disc golf course)
- 300+ acres of parks, 5 miles of trails, planning Woodland Park (~200 acres)
- New Civic Rec website for park reservations and program registration
- Expanded events and recreation (MLK basketball, kickball, health fairs)

j. Economic Development & EDC

- EDC manages Main Street, Arts/Entertainment districts, grant funding support, and major events (“Taste of Easton,” parades/festivals)
- Mistletoe Hall business/commercial park: 6 out of 13 lots sold since 2018; several projects have broken ground

k. Budget Figures, Fiscal Health, and Awards

- Budget up from FY26—capital funding increased for infrastructure, safety gear, and master plans
- Proportionate shift towards capital/operating expenses, reduced share for salaries
- Tax rate to remain at \$0.52/\$100 (one of the region's lowest)
- High national ratings for financial management (Fitch: AA, Moody’s: Aa2)
- National/statewide recognition as a top small town

l. Future Projects

- Continuing work: Woodland Park, Easton Point waterfront park, rail trail extensions, Dover Triangle Park, sidewalk/bike lane expansions
- Emphasis on responsible, sustainable growth and flexibility for future decisions

Councilmembers and public commended the presentation as the "best budget presentation" ever seen for the town.

5. Public Hearings

a. At 6:24 p.m., President Abbatiello opened the Public Hearing on the Comprehensive Plan 2026 Update (Continued)

- Comments read from residents in favor of Dr. Montgomery's extensive proposed edits (notably on land use, PUD growth rate, and annexation)
- Public Town Halls and continued public comment encouraged
- Discussion on Poplar Hill Farm & Tristan Drive extension: Consensus to revise references, per resident and council input.

b. FY26–27 Budget

- At 6:27 p.m., President Abbatiello opened the Public Hearing on the FY2026/2027 Budget. Public comment period remains open; budget fully available online and at the Town Hall for review

6. Legislation Introductions by President Abbatiello

- **Ordinance 854:** “AN ORDINANCE OF THE TOWN OF EASTON ESTABLISHING THE TOWN BUDGET FOR FISCAL YEAR FY2026/2027” (no action taken)
- **Ordinance 855:** “AN ORDINANCE TO PROVIDE FOR THE RAISING BY TAXATION THE AMOUNT NECESSARY TO PAY THE ORDINARY EXPENSES

OF THE TOWN OF EASTON AND TO PROVIDE FOR THE PAYMENT OF INTEREST ON THE VARIOUS BOND ISSUES AND THE REDUCTION OF CERTAIN BONDS AND NOTES FOR THE PERIOD OF TWELVE MONTHS AND SETTING THE INTEREST AND PENALTY FOR DELINQUENT BILLS” was read into the record - aligns with Ordinance 854 (no action yet)

- **Resolution 6222:** “A RESOLUTION OF THE TOWN OF EASTON REVISING THE TOWNS LICENSE, APPLICATION, PERMITS, INSPECTIONS, CERTIFICATE AND OTHER FEES.” President Abbatiello read Resolution No. 6222 into the record and set the public hearing for June 1 for review of license, permits, inspections, and fee schedules
- **Resolution 6221:** “A RESOLUTION OF THE TOWN OF EASTON ADOPTING THE TOWN OF EASTON 2026 COMPREHENSIVE PLAN.” President Abbatiello stated that there are concerns and discussion with proposed edits are ongoing. In particular, **Poplar Hill Farm & Tristan Dr. Extension:**

- Consensus to delete controversial language and clarify road extension as only for parking/limited access (not a bypass).
- Council and public voiced repeated opposition to detailed development language.

- **Growth Rate Policy:**

- Discussion of 1% annual growth metric.
- General support for stricter language, but concern about enforcement tools (especially for by-right development and challenges on in-town redevelopment exceeding 1%).
- Council will seek legal/technical input from attorney and staff on regulatory options.

- **Annexation Policy:**

- Strong lean towards extremely limited/no residential annexations for the next decade, but preference not to make absolute legal commitments so as to retain future council flexibility (esp. for major employer or community benefit projects).
- Criteria for exceptional consideration to be reviewed for clarity and flexibility.

- **Form-Based Codes:**

- General support for exploring adoption, but desire for more information/examples and caution about overcommitting to timelines or exclusive methods.
- Miguel Salinas to provide further guidance and clarify practical implications.

8. Public Comments

- **Cindy Orban (Talbot 250 Commission):** Publicly commended Easton PD (especially Corporal Brian Carroll) for professionalism and cooperation at Talbot Day. Urged recognition of staff going above and beyond.
- **Lance Simon (Ashby Commons/ “Mother Nature”):** Spoke against recent mowing for Disc Golf at John Ford Park, citing environmental impact, lack of inclusivity, and alternative site options. Called for the town to reconsider the project and highlighted the passive park’s value to the north end.
- **Additional Council Comment:** Councilmembers echoed Simon’s and Orban’s park/PW notes; several opposed disc golf plan for that site and called it “heartbreaking.”

9. Council Reports & Announcements

- **Event/Service Reminders:**

- Golton Park ribbon cutting: May 5, 11:00 a.m.
- Multicultural Festival, Cordova VFD 100th Anniversary Parade (recognition of partnerships/volunteers)

- Upcoming ward-specific Town Halls on budget & Comprehensive Plan: May 6 Ward 4 (Rev. Davis), May 11 Ward 1 (Ms. Curry), May 12 Ward 2 (Mr. Rankin), May 13 Ward 3 (Dr. Montgomery), all at 7:00 p.m. at the EVFD
- First Responders event: May 14, 10–11:30 a.m. (Governor and President Abbatiello speaking)

- **Committee Reports:**

- Ms. Curry discussed John Ford Park use for Disc Golf, passive/active space balance
- Ms. Curry gave reminders that yard waste/bulk trash pickup need to be scheduled with Public Works.
- Mr. Rankin stated that pickup can be scheduled online as well. He stated that Golton Park ribbon cutting will occur May 5. He discussed Cordova Fire Department’s 100th Anniversary and congratulated Easton Middle School’s band.
- Dr. Montgomery discussed his opposition to the mowing of the field at John Ford Park for disc golf. Dr. Montgomery thanked EPD for their recent investigation success.
- Rev. Davis celebrated the recent Multi-Cultural Day. He reminded those listening about Ward 4’s Town Hall meeting on May 6.

III. Adjournment

At 7:35 p.m., 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