

Town of Easton Council Meeting Summary

Date: May 18, 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, Town Attorney Sharon VanEmburch, Town Clerk Kathy Ruf, Chief of Police Alan Lowrey and Deputy Chief Greg Wright.

1. Opening and Administrative Business

- Opening Prayer and Pledge: Led by Dr. Montgomery.
- Approval of Previous Minutes:
 - Upon motion by Dr. Montgomery, seconded by Rev. Davis and carried unanimously, the minutes of the May 4, 2026 meeting were approved.

2. Items by Mayor Cook

A. Municipal Reports and Announcements

1. Grants Awarded & Town Projects

- New Grants:
 - *American Trails Capacity Program Grant* – Funds for trail traffic counters on the rail trail.
 - *Highway Safety Information Improvement Grant* – Funding rapid rectangular flashing beacons for mid-block crossings (targeted locations: YMCA, middle school, post office, Rise Up Coffee).
- Upcoming Workshop:
 - Complete Streets Workshop slated for Thursday at the fire hall; focus on street improvements and manual development (presentation by Mr. VanEmburch, Town Engineer, aiming for completion by July 1, 2026).
- Infrastructure Updates:
 - Sidewalk construction on target, with brief delays expected due to rain and upcoming holiday.
 - Efforts focused on the corners of Washington & Harrison and later Washington & Goldsboro, with subsequent work in Melton Park to extend the rail trail.
- Recognition:
 - Easton named one of “10 Small Towns Perfect for a Summer Trip” by Travel and Leisure magazine.

2. Cultural & Recreational Events

- Avalon Theatre Summer Street Concert Series:
 - Opening June 6, 2026, with “Saved By Zero” at 7pm, Harrison Street.
- Outdoor Movie Nights:
 - Series planned, including movies at John Ford Park and Spanish-language films for Hispanic Heritage Month.
- Softball Tournaments at North Easton Park:
 - June 13–14, 2026; All-Star tournament July 7–12, 2026.

3. Board Appointments

- Affordable Housing Board:
 - Upon motion by Rev. Davis, seconded by Ms. Curry and carried unanimously, Mr. Otis Sampson and Mr. Roy Cowdery were reappointed for three years.
- Easton Economic Development Corporation Board:
 - Upon motion by Mr. Rankin, seconded by Dr. Montgomery, Councilmember Curry was reappointed for one year.
- Talbot County Economic Development Commission:

- Upon motion by Ms. Curry, seconded by Mr. Rankin and carried unanimously, Dr. Montgomery was reappointed for three years.

B. Public Safety Update - Chief Lowrey's 1st Quarter Police Report

1. Law Enforcement Officer Memorial Day Recognition

- May 15 acknowledged as National Law Enforcement Officer Memorial Day.
- EPD Honor Guard participated in D.C. vigil, where 363 officer names (109 from 2020) were added to the memorial.
- The memorial now has 24,775 names.

2. EPD Staffing and Activities

- 5,631 calls for service/activities in Q1 2026.
- Staffing: Authorized at 48; currently 44 hired, but effective operational strength is 37 due to injuries, academy enrollment, and active deployments (3 injured, 2 deployed overseas, 1 scheduled to deploy).
- Impact: Operationally down nearly 20% despite progress in hiring.

3. Community Programs & School Resource Officers

- School Resource Officers:
 - SRO at Saints Peter & Paul HS (Corporal Ashleigh Ostrowski), lauded for community engagement and thorough incident response (notably on recent car break-ins).
 - OFC Cordero, elementary school SRO, nominated for "SRO of the Year" nationally.
- Community Police Academy:
 - 8-session program, eight nights over two months, combining educational content and practical law enforcement experience, with positive attendee feedback and increasing interest.
 - One participant in final stages of police academy application.
- Police Cadet Program:
 - Funded by grant; cadet progressing to academy in July.
 - Lateral hire from Vermont starting in July.

4. Special Programs

- CQD Youth Hero Program:
 - Partnership with Close Quarters Defense for empowerment and positive law enforcement interaction for at-risk youth.
 - Activities include simulated missions, helicopter demos.
 - Program funded via grants, with future grant applications planned.

5. Crime and Public Safety Trends

- Theft:
 - Motor vehicle and from-vehicle thefts ongoing but abating into Q2; started late 2025.
 - Retail theft increased moderately, attributed to Easton's role as local commercial hub.
- Traffic:
 - Persistent issue; 107 traffic enforcement assignments Q1 2026.
 - Focus on behavioral complaints, especially around school zones (Idlewild Ave, Matthewstown Road/Rt. 328 noted for concerns).

6. Child Sex Abuse Enforcement

- Noted as an ongoing concern in the region; EPD engaged with FBI's Internet Crimes Against Children Task Force and pursuing active arrest campaigns.

7. Special Olympics and Community Engagement

- Participation in Maryland State Police Polar Plunge (January; highlighted as “extremely cold”).
- Promotion of Special Olympics Maryland Torch Run with luncheon event for athletes and families.

8. E-Bikes & Open Space Enforcement

- Enforcement and community feedback ongoing re: e-bikes on sidewalks/rail trails.
- EPD collaborating with Talbot Thrive; survey active on Engage Easton (several hundred responses).
- Goal: Develop model, behavior-based legislation for council consideration.

C. Holly DeKarske, Easton Economic Development Corporation (EEDC) Quarterly Update

1. Governance & Staffing

- Annual meeting: Scheduled for July 22, 2026.
- Board: Three new directors to join in summer, possible fourth in fall.
- Risk Assessment: Organization currently conducting risk evaluation.
- Professional Development:
 - Lance Horns attending MITA’s economic development course in July.
 - Ms. DeKarske (presenter) pursuing one-year IEDC certification.
 - Summer intern (Kasey Wright) to aid in video and digital design.

2. Economic/Business Initiatives

- Project Restore Grants:
 - Dover Station completed.
 - 4 North Washington St. project will host Frederick Douglass Museum, opening soon.

3. Mayor’s Roundtables

- Small Businesses:
 - Cohort roundtables this summer for feedback on improving business climate.
- Larger Businesses:
 - Second cohort planned for fall.

4. Visitor Center & Downtown Improvements

- Construction and Signage:
 - Lobby improvements, new Easton Visitor Center sign (blade sign), mural, window treatments.
- Marketing:
 - Summer campaign targeting Annapolis, Brandywine Valley, day-trippers.
 - Video content to spotlight businesses and free recreation.
 - “Avoid the traffic” messaging and promotion of weekdays for visits.

5. Community Events

- Outdoor Movie Nights:
 - Expanded schedule, including new locations, adult-themed nights, and a Spanish-language movie for Hispanic Heritage Month.
- Second Saturdays:
 - New sustainable/vintage market program launching July.
- Taste of Easton:
 - First restaurant fundraising event highly successful (17 restaurants, 250+ attendees, sold out, positive feedback, plans to expand in 2027).

6. Main Street Accreditation & Business Openings

- Main Street Status:
 - National and state-accredited; reporting requirements met.
 - Maryland now tiers: 29 designated, 8 aspiring, 7 connected.
- Downtown businesses:
 - Urban Country Designs opening summer 2026 (Harrison St.).
 - Neighborhood Exchange (pop-up, benefits Neighborhood Service Center).
 - Frugalicious, Portals Games and Comics, Array – all expanding or relocating.
 - Bluepoint’s “The Flower Shop” bakery opening June.

D. Public Hearings

1. 2026 Comprehensive Plan Update

At 6:09 p.m., President Abbatiello brought the Comprehensive Plan Public Hearing to the floor.

- Status: Hearing remains open; community encouraged to comment via public input or email.
- Key Public Comment (Tom Alspach, Preservation Alliance):
 - Growth Rate: Plan appears inconsistent—references to a 1% annual growth target are contradicted and unclear.
 - Capacity: Town already has enough approved developments (over 900 units) to cover growth for 10 years; new annexation unnecessary.
 - Recommendations:
 - Plan should focus on how to *maintain* the 1% growth, not exceed it.
 - Legal and zoning options should be explored to sustain small-town character.
 - Suggests looking to other successful small towns for precedent.

There being no further comments, at 6:16 p.m., President Abbatiello stated that the Comprehensive Plan Public Hearing would remain open.

2. FY 2026–2027 Budget

At 6:16 p.m., President Abbatiello brought the Budget Public Hearing to the floor.

- Status: Hearing remains open.
- Disc Golf Course Discussion:
 - Budget includes \$17,500 for “permanent” disc golf course (with \$7,500 expected from fundraising).
 - No explicit site specified in budget, but annual recreation plan calls for John Ford Park.
 - Competing comments:
 - Some residents raised issues about wildlife and habitat loss due to mowing meadows for disc golf.
 - Others, including disc golf advocates, highlighted fundraising accomplishments (\$8,214 raised), community engagement, desire for accessible recreation, and lack of alternative locations at present.
 - Proposal to further study a solution, including possible alternative sites or re-designs that limit impact on meadows/trails, assigned to Park Advisory Board with a report to Council at a later date.

At 6:25 p.m., President Abbatiello stated that the Budget Public Hearing would remain open.

3. Fee Schedule Updates (Resolution 6222)

At 6:45 p.m., President Abbatiello brought Resolution No. 6222 to the floor for public comments.

- Commercial Waste Collection:
 - Proposal to set \$2,000/year for up to four tipper cans or two-yard dumpsters, with new surcharges for higher usage.

- Discussion of offering a \$250 credit (\$1,750 total) for minimal users (one can), but several councilmembers and public (local business owner Steve Mangassarian) felt this may still be inequitable, as actual trash generation varies widely by business type and mixed-use properties.
- Out-of-Town User Fees for Park Rentals:
 - Non-residents to pay \$30 for pavilion rentals; Easton residents still pay \$0.
 - Discussion of prioritizing Easton residents for bookings (e.g., allowing earlier reservations) suggested, to prevent non-residents from booking prime dates.
- Parking Rate Changes:
 - Enforcement currently suspended; new rates ready to implement when plan resumes.
 - Provisions for additional hour/failure-to-activate fines to be removed.

At 6:49 p.m., President Abbatiello stated that the Public Hearing for Res. No. 6222 would remain open.

4. Ordinance 857: Sale of 125 South Locust Lane – Affordable Housing

At 6:49 p.m., President Abbatiello brought Ord. 857 to the floor to receive public comments.

- Summary:
 - Final town-owned “Hill” property purchased via 2016 grant, renovated and now under contract to a local resident (Bay Imprint employee, first-time homebuyer).
 - Hearing closed after brief comment.
 - Unanimously approved by council.

At 6:51 p.m., upon no further comment, President Abbatiello closed the Public Hearing.

E. Public Comments & Disc Golf Discussion

Disc Golf Course Proposal

1. Community Support

- Speakers:
 - Multiple residents (A, E/Paul Darry, F/Tiffany Diamond, G/Jason Beveridge, among others) voiced strong support for establishing a disc golf course, especially at John Ford Park.
 - Emphasis on disc golf’s benefits:
 - Physical health and mental wellness through regular outdoor activity.
 - Built-in sense of safety, inclusion, and community, especially for single individuals.
 - Environmentally friendly due to walkability and less car usage.
 - Appeal across age groups, including connections to school bus drivers, children, and single adults.
 - Nature appreciation (wildlife sightings, photo sharing).
 - Highlighted the welcoming and positive experiences with local disc golf advocates (notably Matt Provencher, Matt Culp, and the Beveridge family).
- Community Service:
 - Mention of disc golfers participating in park service rounds and maintenance/cleanup efforts.
- Economic/Social Impact:
 - Increased traffic to parks could help expand budgets.
 - Potential to draw visitors from outside Easton, benefiting local economy.
 - Resident (Andrew Brignall) advocated for expanding park space or making existing parks more accessible.
 - Cited need for amenities such as canoe/kayak storage at park near launch sites, especially as new housing lacks storage capacity.
 - Suggested park development behind Calvert Terrace, listing wildlife and ecological benefits.
 - Questioned whether East End is adequately served by park space.

F. Other Issues Raised

- Comprehensive Plan:
 - Dr. Montgomery made a request to ensure one clearly dated, authoritative draft available for public review.
- Park Board & Advisory Input:
 - Ongoing invitation for residents to provide feedback, especially regarding disc golf and park space planning.
- Town Hall Marketing:
 - Need for better outreach to increase awareness and attendance.

1. Public Participation

• Speakers:

- Multiple residents (A, E/Paul Darry, F/Tiffany Diamond, G/Jason Beveridge, among others) voiced strong support for establishing a disc golf course, especially at John Ford Park.
- Emphasis on disc golf's benefits:
 - Physical health and mental wellness through regular outdoor activity.
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 - Appeal across age groups, including connections to school bus drivers, children, and single adults.
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- Highlighted the welcoming and positive experiences with local disc golf advocates (notably Matt Provencher, Matt Culp, and the Beveridge family).

2. Location and Logistics

• Key Locations Discussed:

- John Ford Park: Universally accessible, central to town, walkable from many neighborhoods.
 - Concerns regarding maintaining its natural state (trees, bird habitats) and not overwhelming the park.
- Woodland Park: Large (approx. 200 acres, purchased for \$5 million), underutilized due to lack of access (no easement, parking, or bathrooms).
 - Opportunity for master planning with nature trails and possibly disc golf, but substantial development needed.
- Easton Point Park: Considered too small for a major course; would be dominated by disc golf if chosen.
- Alternative suggestions: Park space behind Calvert Terrace, areas near retention pond (good for wildlife, close to hotels/residences).

• Barriers and Needs:

- Need for advocacy, support, and possible fundraising to develop Woodland Park or other new locations.
- John Ford Park serves as a beloved green space; concerns exist about environmental impact (reference to 1,300 trees planted in 2014).

- Discussion that the community appears broadly supportive of disc golf, with the main issue being appropriate site selection.

G. Council Comments

- Overall consensus that a disc golf course is desired (“not if but when and where”).
- Some skepticism regarding the depth of public support, with concerns voiced about organized groups generating mass feedback that may not represent wider sentiment.
- Emphasis on need for more comprehensive community engagement and careful planning.

1. Town Hall and Ward Reports

- Ward 1: Ms. Curry
 - Highest attendance; disc golf a major discussion point.
 - Expressed need for additional neighborhood parks, especially adjacent to John Ford Park.
- Ward 2: Mr. Rankin
 - May 12 Town Hall: Well attended; topics included:
 - Traffic and speeding.
 - Crosswalk signals on N. Washington (near courthouse).
 - Capital and HR items related to budget.
 - Feedback (positive and negative) on Eastern Utilities’ fiber to the home project; suggestions conveyed to EC Utilities.
 - Parking and commercial trash fee issues.
 - Street sweeper scheduling requests (for clearer advance notice, akin to leaf pickups).
 - Transportation to new hospital for seniors.
 - Comprehensive plan and form-based code comments.
 - Marketing improvements suggested for future town halls.
 - Golton Park Ribbon Cutting held May 5 recognized with appreciation for Town efforts.
 - May 14 First Responder Ceremony:

Thanks, extended to the Prager family and participating officials (including Governor Moore, Senator Malice, Delegates Adams & Hutchinson). Event was well regarded; notable attendance and recognition for emergency personnel.

- Ward 3: Dr. Montgomery
 - Principal issues: Comprehensive plan (confusion over multiple draft versions), budget.
 - Traffic a significant concern (studies, choice of consultants, impact of studies on real problems).
 - Specific delayed improvements: Dutchman’s Lane/Route 50 intersection.
 - Poplar Hill no longer in Comprehensive Plan, to residents’ relief.
- Ward 4: Reverend Davis
 - Concerns: Traffic, budget, abandoned vehicles (resolved), post-snow cleanup.
 - Rails-to-trails safety discussed:
 - Proposal for naming sections with flowers for easier location identification (to assist police and emergency services).
 - E-bike safety issues highlighted.

• Memorial Day:

- Multiple council members extended well wishes and reminders about the significance of Memorial Day.

H. Legislation

- Ord. No. 857, “AN ORDINANCE OF THE TOWN OF EASTON AUTHORIZING THE TOWN OF EASTON TO SELL 125 S LOCUST LANE IN EASTON AS PART OF THE TOWN’S AFFORDABLE HOUSING PROGRAM.”

Upon motion by Rev. Davis, seconded by Dr. Montgomery and carried unanimously, Ord. No. 857 was approved.

I. Review of Invoices

Upon motion by Ms. Curry, seconded by Dr. Montgomery and carried unanimously, invoices totaling \$1,402,859.96 were approved.

J. Closing & Adjournment

- Councilmembers closed with mutual appreciation, thanks to participants, and reminders of Memorial Day’s importance.

At 8:09 p.m., upon motion by Ms. Curry, seconded by Rev. Davis and carried unanimously, President Abbatiello adjourned the regularly scheduled council meeting.

Respectfully submitted,

Kathy M. Ruf, Town Clerk (approved 6/1/26)