

Code Revision Workshop

Date: June 1, 2026 **Time:** 4:30 PM followed by a scheduled meeting at 5:30 p.m. **Location:** Council Chambers, Easton Town Office, 14 S Harrison Street, Easton

Attendees: Present were: Mayor Megan JM Cook, President Don Abbatiello, Councilmembers Ms. Maureen Curry, Mr. Robert Rankin, Dr. David Montgomery and Rev. Elmer Davis. Also, present were the Town Attorney Ms. Sharon VanEmburch, Town Engineer Mr. Rick VanEmburch and Town Clerk Ms. Kathy Ruf.

The Town Attorney Ms. VanEmburch outlined the following:

1. Code Revisions and Ordinance Updates

1.1 Major Code Chapters Reviewed: Chapters 22 - 30

- Chapter 22 (Easton Utilities): No current updates due to pending state (MDE/COMAR) revisions regarding sanitary sewers. Anticipated updates once state changes are finalized; Doug Abbott to monitor.
- Chapter 23 (Coal Dealers): Proposed for deletion due to obsolescence.
- Chapter 24 (Street and Sidewalk Provisions):
 - Old provisions on paving costs and allocations (including outdated cost splits: e.g., former 40/60 splits) to be removed or updated.
 - Town no longer charges adjacent property owners for paving, but sidewalk maintenance cost sharing updated to 50/50 (when neither Town nor owner at fault).
 - Clarifications on property lines, snow/ice removal (costs can be imposed on property owners if the Town has to clear).
 - Outdated technical requirements (e.g., widths, grade requirements from 1907) to be modernized or referred to standard specifications.
 - Modern ADA and technical compliance handled through standard specs rather than code.
 - Addressing and house numbering protocols to be coordinated with county's new standard procedures.
 - Article 3 (Trees): Need review for state law compliance; name standardization (DPW).
 - Small Cells: Reference changes; possibility of additional updates pending manual review.
 - Chapter 25 (Subdivisions): No changes; previously overhauled.
- Chapter 26 (Taxation):
 - Comprehensive modernization; elimination of inapplicable procedures (e.g., local board of assessors, motor vehicle taxes, obsolete parking tax districts).
 - Addition of new Article permitting unpaid municipal charges to be added to tax bills; authority remains with mayor.
- Chapter 27/28: No changes.
- Chapter 29 (Impact Fees):
 - Clarified that non-residential-to-non-residential use changes (without area increase) are exempt from new fees; residential conversions are not.
 - Offline ordinances found updating impact fee provisions to be incorporated.
 - Open question: Should impact fees account for past use/fee payment ("credit" or "offset" when converting use)? Example: If converting from non-residential (\$3,000) to residential (\$3,500), should only the delta (\$500) be charged?

- Some Council consensus: Only prior paid fees should count toward any credit; “grandfathered” status should not yield future credits.
- Staff to circulate language from other jurisdictions (Anne Arundel, Frederick counties).
- Noted importance given current pressure for affordable/upper story redevelopment.

1.2 Potential New/Increased Regulatory Areas Discussed

- Noise/Nuisance Ordinances:
 - Construction noise enforcement (by hours, not decibels) preferred for practicality, e.g., no construction after set times, with reasonable exemptions for public safety/emergency work.
 - Discussion on setting hour limits, with comparative examples from other towns (proposed ranges: 6am-10pm on varying days, with 7am/8am more typical).
 - Consideration: Should maintenance (e.g., early lawn mowing) be included under the same provision; how to handle.
 - Barking dogs and other nuisances: Suggestion to draft a nuisance ordinance (not currently present) so as to address repeated noise/odor/other issues; not full consensus, may defer to HOAs.
 - Interest in a future discussion and examples of nuisance regulations from elsewhere.
- Stormwater Utility Fee:
 - Introduced as a topic for possible future investigation (not immediate).
 - Salisbury example: \$30 per residential unit/year, fund for stormwater-related infrastructure.
 - Not an immediate priority ("not in next 12 months") but a potential long-term consideration.

At 5:24 p.m., President Abbatiello adjourned the workshop and recessed until the regularly scheduled meeting.

Town Council Meeting

Date: June 1, 2026, **Time:** 5:30 p.m., **Location:** Council Chambers, Easton Town Office, 14 S Harrison Street, Easton.

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

I. Opening Proceedings

- **Call to order:** At 5:30 p.m., President Abbatiello called the regularly scheduled meeting to order.
- **Opening remarks:** Meeting opened with remarks and the Pledge of Allegiance by Councilmember Rev. Davis.

II. Approval of Previous Meeting Minutes

- Upon motion by Dr. Montgomery, seconded by Ms. Curry and carried unanimously, minutes of the May 18, 2026 meeting were approved as written.

III. Main Topics Discussed

A. Budget, Taxes, and Fee Schedule

1. Annual Budget and Taxation

- **FY 2026–2027 Budget:**
 - \$30M budget approved. General satisfaction, though concerns raised:
 - Fund surpluses (over-collection of tax revenue relative to expenditures): Suggestion to consider lowering future tax rates or “rebate” surpluses.
 - Salary increases: Some worry about >3% raises for some staff, call for merit-based/incremental increases, and review of pay scale inequities.
 - Large capital expenditures: Creation of a capital reserve fund as a dedicated set-aside for future vehicles/equipment/buildings.

- **Budget Ordinances:**

Ord. No. 855, “AN ORDINANCE OF THE TOWN OF EASTON ESTABLISHING THE TOWN BUDGET FOR FISCAL YEAR 2026/2027.”

Ms. Curry read a statement stating she was not against Disc Golf, just not in John Ford Park.

Dr. Montgomery suggested a lower tax rate.

Rev. Davis stated he is concerned about salaries and the town should exercise fiscal responsibility.

Upon motion by Ms. Curry, seconded by Dr. Montgomery and carried unanimously, Ord. No. 855 was passed unanimously.

Ord. No. 856, “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 BONDS AND NOTES FOR THE PERIOD OF TWELVE MONTHS AND SETTING THE INTEREST AND PENALTY FOR DELINQUENT BILLS COMMENCING ON JULY 1, 2026 AND ENDING JUNE 30, 2027.”

Upon motion by Rev. Davis, seconded by Ms. Curry and carried unanimously, Ord. No. 856 was approved.

Ord. No. 858, “AN ORDINANCE OF THE TOWN OF EASTON TO CARRY FORWARD CERTAIN CAPITAL FUND EXPENDITURES INTO FISCAL YEAR 2027.”

Upon motion by Mr. Rankin, seconded by Ms. Curry and carried unanimously, Ord. No. 858 was approved.

- **Reserve Fund Policy:**

- Updated to authorize creation/funding of a capital investment fund once core reserves ("three months' ops") are satisfied.

Res. No. 6223, “AUTHORIZING REVISIONS TO THE CURRENT TOWN OF EASTON RESERVE FUNDS POLICY.”

Upon motion by Dr. Montgomery, seconded by Ms. Curry and carried unanimously, Res. No. 6223 was passed.

2. Fee Schedule

- **Fee Schedule: Resolution 6222:**

Res. No. 6222, “A RESOLUTION OF THE TOWN OF EASTON REVISING THE TOWNS LICENSE, APPLICATION, PERMITS, INSPECTIONS, CERTIFICATE AND OTHER FEES.”

Upon motion by Ms. Curry, seconded by Mr. Rankin and carried 4 to 1 with Dr. Montgomery opposing, Res. No. 6222 was tabled. President Abbatiello set a Special Meeting for June 18 at 5:30 p.m. to address open concerns with Res. 6222.

- **Parking Fees:** Proposed doubling of lot permit annual fees was found excessive; suggested moderate increase (e.g., from \$175/yr to \$240/yr, \$300/yr to \$420/yr for premium) but ultimately decided to keep status quo until plan is finalized.
- **Trash Fees:** Current fee is \$2,000 per year per 2-cubic-yard dumpster (or equivalent in tipper cans). Concerns and proposals:
 - Disparity seen between frequent pickups (downtown, 5x/week) and less frequent pickups (non-downtown, 2x/week)—fee has not distinguished.
 - Proposals to tier fees based on number/size of containers, and to better match fee to true service level/cost (i.e., larger users pay more).
 - About 50% of users would see a fee increase if tiers implemented; Council stressed need to provide affected businesses advance notice and opportunity for public comment.
- **Parking Meter Fees:** Since meters were physically removed and no new tech/system is in place, any per-hour on-street parking fee provisions to be struck for now.
- **Parking Fines / Enforcement:** Fine schedule approved as presented; fee schedule for permits remains on hold (status quo).
- **Action:** Special meeting scheduled for June 18, 2026 at 5:30pm to finalize schedule of fees after further analysis and stakeholder input.

3. Comprehensive Plan and Zoning Issues

- **Easton Club Golf Course (Open Space vs. Development)**

- Issue: Longstanding process involving Maryland Health Groups (property owners) and the town—property designated in updated comp plan as "open space", but owners object, citing previous regulatory approvals and intent for development or functional golf use.
- Owners argued that reclassification ("open space") would have financial, legal, and community impacts, and had not been properly noticed; requested:
 - Removal of open space designation,
 - Return to "PUD" classification,
 - Receipt of all supporting documentation for the change,
 - Confirmation of specific notice/communication.
- Testimony from Duane and Nadine Hilghman and Bart Pelstring regarding easements, maintenance, and property rights around the cart path corridor; issues with maintenance responsibility and property access.

4. Hospital & Healthcare Update

Presented by Ken Kozel, President, UM Shore Regional Health

- **CMS Star Ratings:**
 - Easton Hospital: 4 stars (out of 5)
 - Chestertown Hospital: 5 stars
 - Only 12% of U.S. hospitals achieve 5 stars; 29.8% achieve 4 stars.
 - Metrics for rating: Mortality, Safety, Readmissions, Patient Experience, Timely Care (22% each for top four metrics, 12% for fifth).
 - Data reviewed spans multiple years (as far back as July 2021–June 2024 for some metrics).
- **Sale of Current Hospital Property (219 S. Washington St.):**
 - Agreement with Blue Point Living.
 - Closing expected within 60 days of relocation to the new Regional Medical Center; target date: December 31, 2028.
 - Net proceeds to benefit construction of the new Regional Medical Center.
 - National broker CBRE mentioned.
- **Construction Update: New Regional Medical Center:**
 - Geothermal field: 1,728 wells (400+ feet deep each), infrastructure nearly complete.
 - Structure: Four and five floors visible; top floors to be poured by mid-June.
 - Enclosure of building expected by end of calendar year 2026, to limit weather delays.
 - Route 50 entrance targeted to reopen by mid-late July 2026 (pending SHA approval for final asphalt/lights).
 - Governor reaffirmed \$100M state commitment, with \$71.5M philanthropy raised to date (toward \$100M goal).
- **Physician/Provider Recruitment:**
 - Continuing challenges in attracting new physicians, but active recruitment strategy ("all stops out").
 - Efforts include extensive community marketing, personal engagement, and partnership with medical schools/residency programs to foster local retention.

- Council requested assurance that attention is given both to attracting and retaining providers.
- **Patient Experience:**
 - Emphasis on ongoing patient survey response and continuous quality improvement; patient experience is a weighted CMS metric (22%).
- **Tours:** Open invitation for council to tour the new construction site.

5. Public Works, Contracts & Upcoming Events

5.1 Contracts and Awards

- **Annual Street Resurfacing:**

Upon motion by Ms. Curry, seconded by Dr. Montgomery and carried unanimously, the low bid was awarded to Asphalt Service Delaware LLC, \$323,604 (account balance \$422,000), allowing more paving than budgeted; references checked despite no previous relationship.

- **Police Dept. Security Camera Upgrade:**

Upon motion by Rev. Davis, seconded by Mr. Rankin, the contract was awarded to Safe House LLC (local business), \$97,025.17, after competitive quotes.

5.2 Upcoming Public Events

- **July 4th Celebration & Carnival:** June 24–July 4, 2026, at St. Michael's/Marlborough Road fields. Fireworks July 4 (rain date July 5); carnival open 6–11pm daily.

Upon motion by Rev. Davis, seconded by Ms. Curry and carried unanimously, the Public Assembly event was approved.

- **Hispanic Heritage Month:** September 19, 2026, ~300–400 attendees, street closure on East Ave. between Dover and August streets.

Upon motion by Dr. Montgomery, seconded by Rev. Davis and carried unanimously, the Public Assembly event was approved.

- **Frederick Douglass Parade:** September 26, 2026; parade from Easton Elementary to courthouse.

Upon motion by Ms. Curry, seconded by Mr. Rankin and carried unanimously, the Public Assembly event was approved.

5.3 Board Appointments as recommended by Mayor Cook:

- Mark Eppert: Tree Board
- Jeff Champion: Affordable Housing Board

Upon motion by Ms. Curry and seconded by Dr. Montgomery, the Board Appointments for Mark Eppert and Jeff Champion were confirmed.

5.4 Technology/Process Improvements

- **Online Development Portal ("ESDR" - Easton Staff Development Review):**
 - New web portal and dashboard for plan review submissions, internally built, live by July.
 - Intended to streamline communication, centralize applications (for engineering, planning/zoning, permitting).

6. Public Comments & Community Concerns

- **Easton Club Cart Path (Maintenance/Access Issue)**
 - Residents voicing frustration over maintenance, safety, access, and responsibility for areas near defunct golf course.
 - Debate between residents and Maryland Health Clubs as to responsibility for tree/landscaping care and physical barriers (fences); council to review legal status/possible town action.
- **Trash Collection Fee Equity:**
 - Resident Stephen Mangassarian raised issue of ongoing fee inequity (small businesses subsidizing large users); proposed higher fees for high-volume users, discounts for low.
 - Calls for adoption of a CRU (Commercial Refuse Unit)–based approach.

7. Council and Committee Reports

- **Committee Reports:**
 - Ms. Curry stated there will be a Celebration of Life scheduled for Tony Kern (June 14, Hummingbird Inn, 3–6pm).
 - Mr. Rankin stated there will be a Senior Task Force workshop re: senior homelessness/housing insecurity: June 9, 2:30pm, with Talbot County Council.
- **Recognitions:**
 - Congratulations to Police Department Award winners, Country School lacrosse teams.
 - Shoutouts to local businesses (Wilson family, carwash acquisition).
 - Recognition for banners/lights for Pride events and other diversity celebrations.
 - Graduation acknowledgments (Easton High, multiple school levels).
 - Congratulatory mentions for sports/essay contest winners and religious observances in June.

IV. Adjournment

- At 7:44 p.m., upon motion by Rev. Davis, seconded by Dr. Montgomery, President Abbatiello adjourned the regularly scheduled meeting.

Respectfully submitted,

Kathy M. Ruf, Town Clerk