

Town Council Meeting

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

Attendees: Present were: Mayor JM Cook, President Don Abbatiello, Councilmembers 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.

Ms. Curry was excused.

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 Mr. Rankin.
- **Approval of Previous Meeting Minutes:**
- Motion: Upon motion by Rev. Davis, seconded by Mr. Rankin and carried unanimously, the minutes from the regularly scheduled June 18, 2026 meeting minutes were approved.

II. Main Topics Discussed

2. Mayor's Announcements

- **Thanks to event contributors** (Knights of Columbus, VFW, emergency services) for a successful 4th of July carnival.
- **Finance & IT Teams:** Distributed 7,156 bills in ~6 hours.
- **Ribbon-cutting:** Frampton Funeral Home's renovations at Goldsboro & Harrison Streets.
- **Easton Train Station Gardens:** \$20,000 grant; thanks to Talbot County Garden Club & Davey Tree contributions.
- **Public reminders:**
 - July is Parks & Rec Month.
 - Introduction of two summer interns (engineering and planning/Zoning).
 - Town phone system transition; temporary issues expected.
- **Facility updates:** Alley project (awaiting fencing), continued repainting of public spaces.
- **Police Department:** Welcome to new Officers Lytle and Fletcher.

3. Town Manager's Report

a. Public Event Permitting

- **Joe White Street Block Party & Bike Rodeo:** Scheduled July 21, 2026, 12:30–4:00pm. Upon motion by Rev. Davis, seconded by Mr. Rankin and carried unanimously, the Block Park & Bike Rodeo was approved.

b. Recycling Contract

- **FY27–FY29 Award:** Republic Services, \$2,001,429 (three-year contract).

- **Cost increases:** ~10% first year, then 4% year over year.
- **Discussion:** Single bid received; previous vendor retained.
- **Potential future impact:** May affect waste collection pricing if costs rise.

Upon motion by Rev. Davis, seconded by Mr. Rankin and carried unanimously, the recycling contract as recommended by staff was approved.

c. Planning Commission Annual Report

- Provided for review; no discussion/action.

4. Presentations & Extended Discussions

a. Eagle Scout Project: Rail Trail Interpretive Signs (Nicholas Leshner)

- Two historical signs about Easton rail travel to be installed between Aurora and Hanson Streets.
- Topics: railroad history, local segregation/Jim Crow laws, notable incidents (blizzard, train derailment).

Upon motion by Rev. Davis, seconded by Mr. Rankin and carried unanimously, approval was granted for the Eagle Scout Project as presented by Nicholas Leshner.

b. Talbot County Senior Task Force: Preliminary Findings

- **Presenter:** Nancy Andrew, Director of the Talbot Family Network, Office of Community Partnerships.
- **Key Issues:**
 - Talbot County's aging demographic (~30% age 60+), faster than state average.
 - Long waitlists for senior housing (1–7 years; St. Mark's Village: 6–7 years).
 - Many seniors "cost-burdened": affordable rent (e.g., \$1,000–\$1,100/month) still exceeds most fixed incomes (e.g., \$1,400 Social Security).
 - No low-barrier shelter for immediate crisis response; \$110,000+ spent last year by partners for motel stays.
 - Fragmented service navigation and transportation issues.
- **Potential Strategies:**
 - Prevention: Improved service navigation, support for aging in place, grants/repairs.
 - Crisis Response: Study for a 24/7 low barrier or senior-specific shelter; rapid rehousing/transitional housing options.
 - Permanent Housing: New construction, accessory dwelling units, home-sharing, master leasing models, dedicated set-asides.
- **Next Steps:** Task force to draft RFP for feasibility study on crisis response housing (24/7 shelter).
- **Council Input:** Interest in reviewing feasibility, coordination with existing town affordable housing supports.

c. Complete Streets Manual Update

- **Presenters:** Town Engineer & Larry Marcus (Forward Progress, consultant)
- **Project Status:** Manual near completion, public release and designer circulation expected end of July 2026.
- **Objective:** Safer, more equitable streets for all users (vehicles, bikes, pedestrians, emergency, school buses).
- **Guiding Principles:**
 - Comprehensive design process emphasizing safety, community character, sustainable features, and integration with town's comprehensive plan.
 - Sub-zone approach for ROW: sidewalks, buffers, bike lanes, parking, medians.
 - Adaptive to street function (arterial, collector, local, town center, etc.)
 - Emphasis on intersections; special considerations for school zones, historic districts, festival streets.
 - Updated guidance on ADA/PROWAG accessibility; recent staff training with ongoing opportunities.
- **Next Step:** Finalize, publish, and apply to both new and retrofit projects; create street-type mapping with Planning & Zoning; ongoing modifications expected.

d. Bay Street Ponds Diesel Spill Remediation Update

- **Presenters:** Kurt Fuchs (External Affairs), John Hines (COO), Easton Utilities
- **Incident Recap:** On Feb 8, 2026, a 1960s-era valve failure led to 5–10 gallons of diesel spilled into Tanya Branch/Bay Street Ponds.
- **Response Actions:**
 - Immediate containment, clean-up (booms, pads, vacuum removal).
 - Extensive soil excavation & remediation (multiple phases, test wells, backfill).
 - Mechanical and electrical system updates; new controls system pending component delivery.
 - MDE inspections & oversight.
 - Enhanced fuel receiving protocols.
 - Two-year independent third-party operational review initiated.
- **Current Status:** Site cleared, native wildlife returned, ongoing vapor extraction monitoring.
- **Commitment:** Prevention, internal controls, leadership oversight (incl. CEO appointment to local conservation org).
- **Council Response:** Pres. Abbatiello thanked Mr. Fuchs and Mr. Hines for coming forward. He stated it means a lot to the residents of the community and the efforts are appreciated. Commendation for rapid and thorough clean-up, continued stewardship.

5. Public Hearings

a. 2026 Comprehensive Plan Update (Closing Public Hearing).

At 6:34 p.m., President Abbatiello opened the scheduled continued Public Hearing. He stated this has been discussed for three months.

Tom Ledvina, 7585 Polly's Lane suggested limiting the growth to 1%.

Tom Alspach, representing Talbot Present Alliance commended the Plan to have a 1% growth rate. He suggested hiring a consultant to protect the character of the town.

Nupar Nagar, owner of Maryland Health Club objected to the Open Land designation for MHC. She stated it may result in loss of revenues, taxes and it is not fair to the property owner.

Ms. Lynn Mielke, resident of Easton Club stated she is concerned about the proposal of the Open Space proposal.

- **Public Comments Centered On:**

- Need for clear, enforceable 1% residential growth cap (not only as a benchmark/tripwire, but with proactive mechanisms).
- Desire for advance measures and capacity to limit or deny projects if above 1%.
- Concerns about ambiguous or backward plan language ("wait to act until past 1%").
- Request for comprehensive, final draft visible to public before adoption.
- Concerns about zoning/land use designations for Easton Club/golf course properties.
- Support for affordable housing but need to ensure plan's growth rate mechanism does not undercut these goals.

- **Council Discussion:**

- Multiple council members voiced disappointment with draft's lack of specificity ("too much vagueness" re: growth limits).
- Recognition that backlog of already-approved projects will push town above 1% growth rate in near future.
- Suggestion that council may need to rewrite the relevant chapters themselves if further staff/commission revisions are not forthcoming.
- Concerns about legal enforceability of various mechanisms; echo of public calls for outright, up-front mechanisms.
- Town attorney advised that some legal studies and mechanisms must occur outside the Comprehensive Plan (requires further legislative action after plan's adoption), but plan can direct that those studies be done now and mechanisms implemented ASAP.

At 6:51 p.m., President Abbatiello closed the Public Hearing.

b. CDBG Public Hearing—Application for Senior Affordable Housing Project

At 6:51 p.m., President Abbatiello brought the CDBG Public Hearing to the floor.

- **Applicant:** Brian Lopez, Osprey Property Company (in partnership with St. Mark's Church)

- **Project:** 64-unit independent affordable senior housing project on Port St & bypass.
- **Rent levels:** ~\$1,000–1,300/month (subject to 50% state AMI and capped at 30% of resident income for 40 years), further reduced with grant/loan leverage.
- **Council:** Clarified details, raised concerns about how project fits with overall growth rate and Port St. development vision, but ultimately voted to support CDBG grant application.

At 6:53 p.m., President Abbatiello closed the Public Hearing.

III. Legislation

1. Resolution No. 6221: Adoption of 2026 Town Comprehensive Plan

- **Action:** No vote; further revisions and direction requested based on council and public feedback. Focus on strengthening language/mechanisms for 1% growth rate.
- Dr. Montgomery stated he is not in favor of the language. Mr. Rankin agreed on some of Dr. Montgomery's comments. Rev. Davis discussed changes regarding the growth rate.

2. Resolution No. 6224: Application for CDBG for Senior Affordable Housing

- **Action:** Upon motion by Rev. Davis, seconded by Dr. Montgomery and carried unanimously, Res. 6224 was approved.

IV. Miscellaneous Reports

- **Committee Reports:** None presented.
- **Public Comments:** There were none.
- **Announcements:**
 - Mr. Rankin visited Bailey Chase for resident updates.
 - Carnival and 4th of July events praised; next year's event location to be determined.
 - Reminder to citizens: Watch for children/youth during summer.
 - Residents encouraged to watch "Bear Me Into Freedom" documentary.
 - Mr. Abbatiello Acknowledged Comprehensive Plan writers and celebrated personal wedding anniversary.

V. Adjournment

- At 7:24 p.m., upon motion by Mr. Rankin, seconded by Dr. Montgomery and carried unanimously, President Abbatiello adjourned the regularly scheduled meeting.

Respectfully submitted,

Kathy M. Ruf, Town Clerk (approved 7/20/26)