

Town Council Meeting

Date: August 3, 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 Ms. Maureen Curry, Mr. Robert Rankin, Dr. David Montgomery, and Rev. Davis. Also, present were the Assistant Town Attorney Mr. Will Chapman, Town Manager Andy Kitzrow, Chief of Police Alan Lowrey, Deputy Chief Greg Wright, Town Planner Lynn Thomas, Manager of Construction Division, Public Works, Dustin Otto 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 Rev. Elmer Davis

Main Topics Discussed

II. Agenda Changes

- Council President Abbatiello announced that **Ordinance 862** — the Planned Unit Development Amendment for **Lowe's Home Centers LLC** — would be **pushed to the next meeting**.
- He also noted that **Resolution 6221**, the **Comprehensive Plan**, remained under review and was still an active town priority even if not on the evening's agenda.
- **Approval of Previous Meeting Minutes:**
- **Motion:** Upon motion by Ms. Curry, seconded by Rev. Davis and carried unanimously, the minutes as written were approved.

III. Municipal Reports

- **Mayor Megan J.M. Cook** reported that:
 - **Traffic light work** scheduled for evening hours was postponed because of rain and would continue the following week.
 - Work through **Moton Park on the rail-to-trail** corridor was progressing and would be paved after the annual paving schedule, likely in the fall.
 - **Mary Moyer** retired after **27 years** with the **Easton Police Department**; the Mayor Cook expressed appreciation for her service.
 - The **Park and Rec Department**, with partners, continued its **walk and run groups**:
 - Wednesdays at **6:00 PM** near the **Idlewild Park tennis courts**
 - Saturdays at **9:00 AM** near the **Board of Education**
- **Town Manager Andy Kitzrow** had no report.

- **Assistant Town Attorney Mr. Chapman** had no report and was standing in for **Town Attorney Sharon VanEmburch**.

IV. Proposed Data Center Moratorium

- Council President Abbatiello raised a proactive policy concern and asked the council to consider a **12-month moratorium on new large-scale data centers** within the Town of Easton.
- He explained the purpose of the moratorium would be to study potential impacts before any application is filed, including:
 - land use
 - utility infrastructure
 - electricity demand
 - water consumption
 - cost implications
 - overall quality of life
- President Abbatiello also suggested collaboration with **Talbot County government**, other municipalities, and **Easton Utilities** to create a coordinated regional approach.
- **Requested follow-up:** Mr. Chapman was asked to work with Ms. VanEmburch and include Easton Utilities in developing a moratorium proposal.

V. Easton Volunteer Fire Department Report

- **Fire Chief JR Dobson** presented the **second-quarter statistics** for the **Easton Volunteer Fire Department**:
 - **214 total incidents**
 - **2 aircraft emergencies**
 - **38 fire alarm activations**
 - **6 false alarms**
 - **11 good intent calls**
 - **19 hazardous conditions**
 - **9 miscellaneous incidents**
 - **14 outside fires**
 - **56 motor vehicle collisions**
 - **5 standbys to other fire stations**
 - **13 structure fires**
 - **6 vehicle fires**
 - **31 assists to Talbot County Department of Emergency Services**
- Additional figures:
 - **118 calls in July**
 - **581 year-to-date**
- Upcoming fire department events announced:
 - **Annual golf tournament:** September 12 at **Hogneck Golf Course**
 - **Hot Rods and Hose fundraiser:** October 3, 9:00 AM–2:00 PM at the **Easton Firehouse Main Station**

- Chief Dobson also answered a citizen-safety question about what to do when encountering a vehicle fire before responders arrive, advising people to stay back unless they are trained and confident, and noting that electric vehicles may present additional hazards.

VI. Fire Department Fundraising / Maryland 50/50

- **Mr. Russell Miles** explained a new fundraising effort tied to the statewide **Maryland 50/50** program.
- Key details shared with council and the public:
 - It is **fully online**.
 - Purchases made under **Easton Volunteer Fire Department** return **35%** of ticket sales to the department.
 - The effort is legitimate and not a scam.
 - The drawing schedule had changed from **weekly to monthly**.
 - The department planned to keep participating for at least **6 months** to evaluate results.
- Councilmembers asked clarifying questions about participation, public access, and the drawing schedule.

VII. State Highway Administration Emergency Repair: Bay Street

- **Bob Rager**, Maryland State Highway Administration District 2 Community Relations Manager, delivered a detailed presentation on the **emergency repair work on Bay Street**, specifically the segment between **322 Easton Parkway and Hammond Street**.
- He described:
 - significant **undermining beneath the roadway** caused by stormwater and heavy rain
 - damage to a **terracotta drainage pipe** tied to an inlet/manhole system
 - voids and erosion extending approximately **10 feet underneath Bay Street**
- The project was declared an **emergency priority project** after accelerated damage was identified on **Friday, July 24**.
- Investigation methods included **ground penetrating radar (GPR)** using both tow-behind and walk-behind units.
- Repair options considered:
 1. Temporary patch/sleeve and fill
 2. **Remove and abandon the damaged terracotta pipe, replace drainage infrastructure, and tie into a box near Hammond Street** — this was the selected option
 3. Reroute drainage across Bay Street and back, which was rejected due to utility conflicts, cost, and time
- Mr. Rager emphasized several reasons for urgency:
 - risk of further roadway collapse
 - risk of undermining nearby utilities
 - potential sediment discharge into **Tanyard Branch**
 - protection of the adjacent cemetery and historic resources

- Cultural and historical sensitivity was a major concern because the work area borders **Richards Memorial Park**, an African-American cemetery dating at least to the **mid-1800s**.
 - An **archaeologist** will monitor all phases of excavation.
 - The goal is to **avoid disturbing artifacts or graves**.
 - If anything sensitive is found, excavation will stop for further review.
- Public impacts discussed:
 - no exact start date yet, but work was expected **near the end of August**
 - the project will require **lane closures and flagging operations**
 - the standard work window would be **9:00 AM to 3:00 PM**, though an extended workday was being considered
 - Bay Street is a primary **emergency response route** for Talbot County Emergency Services
- Local access concerns and outreach were discussed at length:
 - the dental office near Hammond Street was already contacted
 - the town and SHA planned public messaging via press releases and social media
 - council members suggested **door-to-door flyers** and neighborhood outreach for the **Hammond town** area
 - **Talbot County Public Schools** was also suggested as a notice recipient because school would begin around **August 24**
- Councilmember Curry and others also asked for coordinated communication with the town's social media/public information channels.

VIII. Route 50 Roadwork and Safety Improvements

- Bob Rager also provided an update on **Route 50** construction:
 - the project runs from **Dutchman's to Lomax**, now extending toward **Norris Taylor**
 - the work was in **Phase 1**
 - swale work near **Bartlett Avenue** had been delayed
 - sidewalk construction was moving forward on the **westbound side between Dover Road and Matthewstown Road**
- Traffic management details:
 - daytime lane closures would be used, generally **9:00 AM to 3:00 PM**
 - westbound work would occur **Tuesday through Friday**
 - eastbound work would occur **Monday through Thursday**
 - the project would avoid eastbound Fridays and westbound Mondays
- The discussion emphasized safety concerns about night work and the high speeds drivers often reach when roads are open overnight.
- Councilmembers raised issues about:
 - **entrances to Beechwood, Holly, and Woodridge Drives** on the south end of Route 50
 - the need for safer turning movements and clearer notices to smaller neighborhoods without homeowners' associations
 - use of **door hangers** or a **blanket mailer** with a website link for broad outreach

- coordination with earlier public outreach approaches used on other projects, including reference to the **PEL study** process

IX. Matthewstown Road / Route 328 Safety Concerns

- Councilmember Rankin raised concerns about **Route 328 / Matthewstown Road** after several recent accidents, including a severe crash the previous week.
- He urged the State Highway Administration to move faster on safety improvements and traffic calming measures, especially given new housing development and increased traffic volume.
- Rager responded that SHA is trying to identify **smaller breakout projects** from larger PEL studies for **Routes 328, 404/Caroline, and Route 18** instead of waiting for full project funding.

X. Oxford Road Speed Limit Concern

- Dr. Montgomery also asked about the speed limit on **Oxford Road**, near the entrance from **Cook's Hope** to **Oxford Road**, saying drivers regularly travel too fast near a less-than-ideal curve and that a reduction from **50 mph to 40 mph** might improve safety.
- Rager said the agency would **look into it**.

XI. Ordinance 859: Mobile Food Trucks / Zoning Text Amendment

- The council opened a public hearing on **Ordinance 859**, which proposed amendments to **Chapter 28 of the Town Code** to regulate **mobile food trucks** consistent with the prior pilot program.
- **Town Planner, Lynn Thomas** explained the ordinance was intended to codify the pilot program and included two major revisions from Planning Commission review:
 - clarify locational requirements, including the spacing from existing restaurants
 - prevent more than one mobile food use at a time, unless it is part of a **temporary special event permit**
 - clarify that mobile food uses cannot remain in one location for more than **24 hours** unless consistent with the permit application
- Council discussion focused on whether the ordinance should restrict multiple vendors on one parcel:
 - concern was raised about whether a hospital, store, or employer could host multiple trucks for staff or customers without a special permit
 - Mr. Thomas clarified that multiple vendors would require a **temporary use special event request**
 - Councilmembers questioned whether the restriction was necessary, noting the property owner's discretion and the limited number of food truck applications received so far
 - Mr. Thomas said the office had received about **8 to 10 applications**, typically from **3 to 4 operators** with multiple locations
 - a fee concern was also mentioned by applicants
- The council voted to **strike the multi-truck restriction language** from the ordinance.

- Upon motion by Mr. Montgomery, seconded by Ms. Curry and carried unanimously following a roll call vote, Ord. 859 was approved.
- A clarification was made that the **application fee** issue would need to be addressed through the separate **Schedule of Fees** process, not this ordinance.

XII. Ordinance 860: Land Transfer for Easton Woodland Park Access Road

- The council then considered **Ordinance 860**, authorizing the Town of Easton to **accept land from Talbot County** to build an **access road to Easton Woodland Park**.
- Mayor Cook explained the parcel is approximately **1.56 to 1.6 acres** and would extend **Tristan Drive**, allowing access and a small parking lot.
- A key benefit would be avoiding reliance on an access point from **Oxford Road**.
- Dr. Montgomery noted that Ward 3 residents were grateful for the solution.
- Upon motion by Ms. Curry, seconded by Mr. Rankin and carried unanimously, Ord. 860 was approved following a roll call vote.

XIII. Comprehensive Plan and Growth / PUD Discussion in Public Comment

- During public participation, **Tom Alspach** of the **Talbot Preservation Alliance** returned to the issue of the **Comprehensive Plan** and the town's planned **1% annual growth rate**.
- He argued that the town has already approved or could approve enough housing to exceed the 1% growth rate over the next decade.
- He explained the tension between allowing by-right residential development and keeping growth in line with the comprehensive plan.
- He suggested a broader zoning reform approach that would effectively require residential zoning to be processed through a **PUD-like framework**, so larger projects would be reviewed against Comprehensive Plan goals, including growth-rate limits.
- He said this would also bring the **Town Council** into review of larger projects, which he viewed as beneficial for significant developments.
- Ms. Curry responded positively and said the concept deserved further exploration.

XIV. Committee Reports and Council Comments

- **Ms. Curry** praised the **Easton Economic Development Corporation** for an outstanding strategic planning session a few weeks earlier, commending **Tom Klein** and the executive committee.
- During member comments, **Mr. Rankin** thanked **Rev. Davis's family** for including the Town Council in Rev. Davis's birthday celebration over the weekend.
- **Rev. Davis** thanked the **Easton Police Department** for its follow-up work leading to an arrest related to an incident in town.
- Councilmembers also thanked police and fire personnel for their response to recent incidents, including a house fire and a fatal crash.
- Council President Abbatiello specifically praised **Chief Dobson** and **Assistant Chief Caldwell** for handling difficult fire and crash incidents safely and effectively.

XV. Adjournment

- At 6:39 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