

Code Workshop

Date: August 17, 2026, 4:30 p.m. **Location:** Council Chambers, Easton Town Office, 14 S Harrison Street, Easton.

Attendees: Present were: Council President Don Abbatiello, Councilmembers Ms. Maureen Curry, Mr. Robert Rankin, Dr. David Montgomery, and Rev. Davis. Also, present were the Town Attorney Sharon VanEmburch, Town Manager Andy Kitzrow, Chief of Police Alan Lowrey, Town Planner Lynn Thomas, and Town Clerk Kathy Ruf.

1) Compensation Updates for Mayor and Council

- Town Attorney Sharon VanEmburch reviewed proposed Code changes affecting mayoral and council salaries.
- The draft placed the salary increase at roughly double the existing amount, described as bringing 1999 figures up to present-day values and rounded to the nearest thousand.
- Councilmembers discussed whether the increase should take effect immediately or after the next election cycle.
- Several members raised concerns about transparency, future automatic increases, and the awkwardness of voting on their own pay.
- Councilmembers emphasized public awareness for any pay raise and suggested a mechanism for periodic reevaluation.
- Town Manager Kitzrow noted that if changes are phased in, they would apply only to the next term rather than allowing annual self-awarded increases.
- Councilmember Rankin expressed support for updating compensation but opposed automatic annual increases because they would complicate administration and could create situations where council compensation exceeds that of the council president or mayor.
- Dr. Montgomery abstained because the matter affected them personally.

2) Boards, Commissions, Committees, and Task Forces

- Proposed revisions would allow non-town residents to serve on boards, commissions, committees, and task forces if they have needed qualifications or expertise.
- The draft also set a 2/3 non-residency threshold for these bodies, based on the workshop direction, though the attorney later clarified the language should likely read that the bodies may have non-resident members rather than calling non-residents “members” of boards in a way that could be read awkwardly.
- Compensation was generally removed from these positions, with the Easton Utilities Commission noted as an exception because it already receives compensation.
- The council also reviewed absentee-ballot language so that ballots postmarked on Election Day could still be counted if received by 4:00 p.m. the following day, consistent with the town’s absentee-ballot counting process.

3) Fire Code / Incinerators / Combustible Materials

- The Town Attorney reviewed revisions to the fire code relating to burning combustible materials, adding language that the burn must not create noxious or excessive smoke or odor detrimental to neighboring property.
- An incinerator definition was added, but the council spent time discussing whether incinerators should be allowed as standalone units, portable roll-off units, or only built-in fixtures.
- Councilmembers debated the safety and appropriateness of permanent incinerators in residential neighborhoods.

- Town Manager Kitzrow and Chief Lowrey pointed out that the issue may be better handled through permitting or zoning rather than only in the Fire chapter.
- The general concern was to avoid backyard burn piles while still allowing enclosed, controlled disposal methods.

4) Trash Placement and Trash Fee Appeals

- The draft updated wording so residential trash receptacles are placed at the edge of property along a public street or another town-designated location, rather than only “at the curb.”
- The council also discussed trash-fee appeals.
- The process would start with the Town Engineer’s decision, and if a resident disagreed, the appeal would go to the Board of Zoning Appeals.
- Council wanted to be copied on such appeals even though the Board of Zoning Appeals remains the formal appellate body.

5) Short-Term Housing and Voter ID / Election Issues

- The draft changed short-term housing from four months or less to three months or less, which was presented as helpful for traveling nurses.
- The council revisited unresolved election issues, especially voter identification.
- Town Attorney VanEmburch explained that state ID is required for voter registration but not necessarily at the polling place, and municipalities are not directly controlled by the state in the same way as state elections.
- Councilmembers discussed whether the town could require a photo ID for municipal elections and what exceptions would be necessary.
- President Abbatiello raised concern about possible legal challenges under the 24th Amendment if requiring a voter ID could be interpreted as imposing a fee or burden to vote.
- Councilmember Rev. Davis cautioned that additional requirements might discourage turnout in municipal elections.
- Others supported further research, and the Town Attorney said she would gather information for the next workshop.

6) False Alarm Enforcement

- The Town Attorney brought forward county false-alarm legislation to see whether it addressed council concerns or whether Easton should add its own local rules.
- The discussion centered on whether the town should impose fines or leave enforcement to the county/department reporting process.
- Councilmembers noted that repeated false alarms strain police and fire resources, but they also recognized that malfunctioning detectors are different from recurring misuse or careless behavior.
- The county model appears to allow a department to file a complaint after repeated nuisance alarms in a calendar year.
- Council members discussed whether two false alarms are too few before penalty and whether a threshold like four repeated calls in a short period would be more appropriate.
- The Town Manager and attorney indicated that staff would continue reviewing whether Easton needs a stricter local approach.

7) Meadow Definition / Property Maintenance Code

- The council reviewed a change to the definition of a “meadow” in the Property Maintenance Code, specifically tied to weeds and exceptions.
- The revised language required the area to stay out of the public right-of-way, be set back at least 10 feet from adjacent property lines, be clearly delineated from maintained lawn, and remain free of invasive plants and prohibited noxious weeds.
- The purpose was largely to align with sample language from the International Property Maintenance Code, but council recognized it would have direct effects on Easton Club and similar properties.
- Town Manager Kitzrow raised practical concerns about whether the 10-foot setback would eliminate meadow treatment for smaller in-town lots.

Town Council Meeting

I. Opening Proceedings

- **Call to Order:** At 5:30 p.m., President Abbatiello called the regularly scheduled meeting to order.
- **Opening remarks:** Councilmember Curry delivered the opening prayer, and the Pledge of Allegiance followed.

- Upon motion by Dr. Montgomery, seconded by Rev. Davis, minutes from the August 3, 2026 regular meeting were approved as written.
- Town Manager Kitzrow then provided administrative updates and the agenda moved into municipal items.

II. Easton Club / Easton Club East / MHC Concerns

- Town Manager Kitzrow reported that the town had received multiple emails concerning ongoing issues affecting Easton Club East residents, and he said staff was actively reviewing code enforcement options.
- Mr. Kitzrow said the town would reach out to both Easton Club and the adjacent property owner, MHC, and that he would serve as the point of contact for future resident communications.
- Later, Councilmember Montgomery thanked the Town Manager and attorney for taking on the ongoing mowing, meadow, and stormwater issues affecting Easton Club East and MHC.
- The town’s approach was framed as a single point of contact and a consistent response to neighborhood concerns.

III. Proclamation for 2026 Maryland Junior League State Champions

- Councilmember Rankin read a proclamation honoring the Talbot Baseball All-Stars, representing Easton, as 2026 Maryland Junior League State Champions.
- The Proclamation praised the team, head coach Brian Plustchak, and coaches Jason Smith and Buddy Callahan for their successful season and their run through the region tournament in DuBois, Pennsylvania.
- The council and community congratulated the team, and a photo was taken afterward.

IV. Police Department Quarterly Report

- Chief Lowrey reported that the department had a very busy second quarter, with more than 1,000 patrol and neighborhood checks and roughly 5,000 calls for service over three months.
- He noted staffing challenges, including medical leave, deployments, vacancies, and a roughly 20% shortfall at one point.

- The department had several personnel on light duty, but some had returned to full duty.
- The department had also been active in community engagement, including Coffee with a Cop and active violence response training with allied agencies at Easton Middle School.
- On the investigative side, the department closed significant cases, including a home invasion investigation that led to search warrants in multiple Maryland jurisdictions and the capture of a fugitive in Ohio.
- Lowrey also reported arrests in firearms-related incidents, including one where a person was injured and another involving a prohibited person who made threats with a firearm.
- The department closed out its grants for the year and received two new grants, one for additional training and one continuation grant for the CQD HERO youth program.
- He described the CQD HERO program as a confidence-building, youth-focused program that exposes participants to mission-based scenarios with police and allied-agency support.

V. School Start, Crossing Guards, and Flock Cameras

- President Abbatiello asked whether all crossing guard positions were filled ahead of the school year; Chief Lowrey said yes, with more applications still in the queue.
- President Abbatiello also asked whether the Easton Police Department uses Flock cameras in town; Lowrey said it does not contract with or use Flock cameras.
- Councilmember Rev. Davis asked whether there were any neighborhoods experiencing crime trends residents should know about.
- Chief Lowrey said the county has seen a lot of fraud, including online and telephone scams, and the department has been doing fraud-education outreach in several neighborhoods.
- He also discussed theft from vehicles and car break-ins, explaining that many incidents involve unlocked cars and are hard to solve unless there is a witness or camera footage.
- He encouraged residents to lock vehicles, remove valuables, and use their own security systems if possible.

VI. Ordinance 861 — Accessory Dwelling Units (ADUs)

- At 5:47 p.m., President Abbatiello opened the public hearing on Ordinance 861 which addresses amendments to Chapter 28 of the Zoning Code to align Easton’s ADU rules with state law.
- Mr. Thomas, Town Planner, explained that the ordinance was needed to comply with 2025 state legislation, specifically House Bill 1466 and the related Senate bill.
- The proposed ordinance would:

- change ADUs from a special exception to a permitted use,
- replace the term “granny flat” with “accessory dwelling unit,”
- adopt the state definition of ADU,
- allow the owner to occupy either the ADU or the principal dwelling,
- require the ADU floor area to be no more than 75% of the primary dwelling’s gross floor area,
- limit ADUs to two bedrooms, and
- require separate exterior access unless administratively waived if the entrance does not go through the primary dwelling.

- Dr. Montgomery strongly objected to removing the special-exception process, arguing that neighbors should have a voice and that a check-box process would not be enough community notice.

- Councilmember Rankin also had concerns about the special-exception change but viewed ADUs as one tool in a broader housing strategy and noted possible flexibility for aging residents and family arrangements.
- Councilmember Rev. Davis argued that ADUs could help families and allow homeowners to remain in their neighborhoods, but he also did not want projects to proceed without notifying neighbors.
- Councilmember Dr. Montgomery suggested that keeping the special exception would address many concerns and stated that zoning exists to balance property rights and community needs.
- Curry summarized that there appeared to be consensus around preserving a special-exception approach and asked staff to provide the exact requirements of House Bill 1466 and relevant Maryland Department of Planning guidance before the next meeting.
- Public commenters included residents who supported a simple compliance path and others, like Easton Club East representatives, who worried that the state’s 75% size standard might not fit small lots and suggested a footprint-based standard.
- The hearing remained open for additional public input at the next meeting.

VII. Resolution 6226 — Neighborhood Service Center Tax and Fee Abatements

- Resolution 6226 would authorize the finance officer to make abatements for the Neighborhood Service Center.
- Town Manager Kitzrow explained that the mayor, serving on the board, was not taking a position and wanted council to decide the request.
- The resolution involved three items, including a tax abatement for 6 South Street and a possible abatement of solid waste/recycling fees.
- Mr. Kitzrow noted that Easton Volunteer Fire Department is already exempt from waste fees and that Easton Utilities also does not pay trash service fees.
- Councilmember Rankin clarified that the Neighborhood Service Center has recently experienced federal funding cuts and might be seeking relief to offset those losses.
- Councilmember Montgomery objected to tax abatements as a policy issue, warning against granting exemptions without a broader town discussion about whether Easton intends to subsidize low-income housing or related causes through tax relief.
- He argued that this type of support should be evaluated as policy rather than as a series of case-by-case exceptions.
- Mr. Rankin later supported the organization but said more information was needed about precedent and other possible requests.
- President Abbatiello stated that the town has granted abatements before, especially for Habitat for Humanity during construction, but that those abatements were temporary and not renewed after completion.
- Ms. Curry stated she strongly objected to the suggestion that the request was coming through the “back door” and defended the Neighborhood Service Center as a long-standing community partner.
- After continued discussion, it was agreed that there would not be a motion on Resolution 6226 that evening; staff indicated the item could be withdrawn or brought back later with a broader, policy-based framework.

VIII. Ordinance 862 — Lowe’s Home Centers Planned Unit Development Amendment

- Ordinance 862 granted Lowe’s Home Centers LLC’s application for a planned unit development amendment.

- Todd Barkoff, Senior Construction Manager for Lowe’s, explained the amendment would allow outdoor sales and display of trailers and sheds in a specific area near the store’s lumberyard/loading area.
- The council reviewed maps and renderings showing screening plantings, including new arborvitae, between the outdoor display area and the nearby road/adjacent properties.
- Mr. Barkoff said the change would not affect the function of existing buildings or improvements and would only convert about 10 parking spaces into an outdoor sales/display area.
- The trailers would be tail-in so they can be hooked up and driven away, and the sheds would be display units only.
- Council members asked about circulation, parking impacts, and whether the current arrangement would reduce customer access; Barkoff said it would not disrupt circulation and that the area is largely used by contractors and professionals rather than retail customers.
- Discussion occurred about Flock cameras at the Lowe’s site because residents had raised concerns, and Barkoff said he could connect the town with Lowe’s asset protection staff to discuss the cameras.
- Mr. Barkoff explained that the cameras read license plates and can notify police if there is a warrant hit.
- Upon motion by Dr. Montgomery, seconded by Mr. Rankin and carried unanimously, Ordinance No. 862 was approved.

IX. Ordinances 863 and 864 — Data Center Moratorium and Data Center Use Definition

- The council introduced Ordinance 863, a 12-month temporary moratorium on applications, construction, expansion, processing, or building permits for data centers in Easton while zoning provisions are reconsidered.
- The council also introduced Ordinance 864, which would create a data center use in the zoning ordinance and establish supplemental standards.
- Town Attorney VanEmburch said the earliest public hearing would be at the September 8 meeting, and there was enough time to advertise it.
- The Planning Commission would review the ordinance later that week and forward a recommendation.
- During public comment, a resident supporting the moratorium said data centers can bring large heat and noise impacts because of cooling and processing demands, and that those effects can reduce neighborhood quality of life.

X. Adjourn

- At 6:48 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