



TALBOT COUNTY, MARYLAND

County Council

MINUTES

February 24, 2026

Present – President, Chuck Callahan, Vice President Pete Leshner, Keasha N. Haythe, Lynn L. Mielke, Dave Stepp, County Manager Clay Stamp, and County Attorney, Patrick Thomas.

- I. Agenda – The Agenda for Tuesday, February 24, 2026, was brought forward for approval. Mr. Stepp made a motion to amend the agenda to remove *Item VII. Presentation of Planning Commission’s Recommendations on Release of Reserve Land Agreement or Reservation of Development Rights Agreement*; and to add an emergency agenda item to the County Manager’s Report for a letter in opposition of Senate Bill 791. At Ms. Mielke’s request, the items were brought forward separately for consideration. Mr. Stepp’s motion to amend the agenda to remove Item VII was again brought forward; the motion was seconded by Ms. Haythe, and the Council approved the motion by voting 5 – 0 as follows:

Mr. Callahan – Aye
Mr. Stepp – Aye
Mr. Leshner – Aye
Ms. Mielke – Aye
Ms. Haythe – Aye

Mr. Stepp then made a motion to add an agenda item to the County Manager’s Report to forward an emergency letter to the State Legislature in opposition to Senate Bill 791; the motion was seconded by Ms. Mielke, and the Council approved the motion by voting 5- 0 as follows:

Mr. Callahan - Aye
Mr. Stepp – Aye
Mr. Leshner – Aye
Ms. Mielke – Aye
Ms. Haythe - Aye

- II. Minutes – Mr. Callahan requested and received unanimous consent for approval of the Minutes of Tuesday, February 10, 2026.
- III. Disbursements – Mr. Callahan requested and received unanimous consent for approval of the Disbursements of Tuesday, February 17, 2026, and Tuesday, February 24, 2026.
- IV. Presentation of FY25 Annual Comprehensive Financial Report – Chris Lehman, Partner, SB & Company, LLC; Martha Sparks, Talbot County Finance Officer – Prior to Mr. Lehman’s presentation, Ms. Sparks highlighted several components of, and various terminology used in, the Annual Comprehensive Financial Report (ACFR). Mr. Lehman utilized a PowerPoint presentation to outline the procedures for the audit, the scope of services provided and the responsibilities of the County and the auditors in preparing the audit. He provided a summary of the results of the audit which included the issuance of a clean or

unmodified opinion on the County’s financial statements. Council discussion ensued with Mr. Lehman and Ms. Sparks as various facets of the presentation were brought forward. Council members expressed their appreciation to Mr. Lehman and his team, and to County staff for all their hard work to complete the audit. The FY25 Annual Comprehensive Financial Report for fiscal year ending June 30, 2025, may be found on the County website at: <http://talbotcountymd.gov/acfr>.

V. Introduction of Administrative Resolution:

An ADMINISTRATIVE RESOLUTION CHANGING THE DESIGNATED RESIDENT AGENT FOR TALBOT COUNTY, MARYLAND, was read into the record and brought forward for introduction. Prior to introduction, County Attorney, Patrick Thomas, stated that under Maryland State law, each county is required to designate a resident agent for the purposes of accepting service on behalf of the County. He stated that the administrative resolution before the Council for consideration updates the resident agent named in the administrative resolution approved in 2016, from former County Manager, Andy Hollis, to the current County Manager and provides Council the flexibility to update the resident agent in the future, as needed, without having to adopt another administrative resolution. The administrative resolution was introduced by Mr. Callahan, Ms. Haythe, Mr. Leshner, Ms. Mielke, and Mr. Stepp. The Council approved the Administrative Resolution by voting 5 – 0 as follows:

Mr. Callahan – Aye
Mr. Stepp – Aye
Mr. Leshner – Aye
Ms. Mielke – Aye
Ms. Haythe – Aye

VI. Presentation of Planning Commission’s Recommendations on release of Reserved Land Agreement or Reservation of Development Rights Agreement had previously been removed from the agenda.

VII. Council Discussion of Proposed Text Amendment to Chapter 190 Concerning Short-Term Rental Licenses and Short-Term Rental Review Board – County Attorney, Patrick Thomas, stated that the request for a text amendment was made by Mr. Stepp. He stated that the proposed text amendment would amend sections 190.63.2.G.2a(iii) and 190.63.A.4a(iii) of the Talbot County Code to provide that applicants for new and renewal of short-term rental licenses provide notice to the 50 properties nearest to the short-term rental dwelling, or owners of all properties with a property line within 1,000 feet, including line of sight within 1,000 feet across waterways, whichever is less. He stated that the Code currently requires that notices be sent to owners of all properties with a property line within 1,000 feet, including line of sight within 1,000 feet across waterways. Mr. Stepp stated that the intent of the request for the proposed text amendment is to make the process less onerous for both new and renewal applications. Council discussion ensued. Upon motion by Mr. Stepp, seconded by Ms. Haythe, the Council approved forwarding the proposed text amendment to the Planning Commission for review and recommendation by voting 3 – 2 as follows:

Mr. Callahan – Aye
Mr. Stepp – Aye
Mr. Leshner – Nay
Ms. Mielke – Nay
Ms. Haythe – Aye

Once a recommendation has been received from the Planning Commission, the Council can decide whether to introduce legislation.

VIII. Council Discussion of Proposed Text Amendment to Chapter 190 Concerning Signs – County Attorney, Patrick Thomas stated that the proposed text amendment was requested by Attorney Zach Smith on behalf of his client, Preston Automotive, who recently purchased the Toyota dealership on U.S. Rt. 50 in Easton. Mr. Thomas stated that Preston Automotive would like to display a flag with their frog logo on it, which represents their non-profit entity, but which is also associated with the business, and is currently prohibited under the County’s current zoning code. Mr. Thomas stated that the proposed text amendment would permit use of a flag by Preston Automotive and other similar businesses. Council discussion ensued with Mr. Smith who outlined reasons for the request and various facets related to same, including zoning regulations within the town of Easton. Upon motion by Mr. Stepp, seconded by Ms. Haythe, the Council approved forwarding the proposed text amendment to the Planning Commission for review and recommendation by voting 5 – 0 as follows:

- Mr. Callahan – Aye
- Mr. Stepp – Aye
- Mr. Leshner – Aye
- Ms. Mielke – Aye
- Ms. Haythe – Aye

IX. County Manager’s Report:

A. Talbot County Agricultural Land Preservation Advisory Board – Requested Council approval for the reappointment of John Swaine, III to a five-year term on the Agricultural Land Preservation Advisory Board; said term will expire on March 13, 2031. Upon motion by Mr. Stepp, seconded by Ms. Haythe, the Council approved the reappointment by voting 5 – 0 as follows

- Mr. Callahan - Aye
- Mr. Stepp – Aye
- Mr. Leshner - Aye
- Ms. Mielke – Aye
- Ms. Haythe – Aye

B. Talbot County Commission on the Aging – Requested Council approval for the reappointment of the following individuals to three-year terms on the Commission on the Aging: Jenna Marchi (Home Instead); Rachael Smith (Londonderry on the Tred Avon); Carrie Ottey, RN, BSN (Talbot County Health Department); Rachel Cox (Department of Emergency Services); Wendy Palmer (citizen); and Veda Gibson (Asbury Place); said terms will expire on April 1, 2029. Upon motion by Ms. Mielke, seconded by Mr. Stepp, the Council approved the reappointments by voting 5 – 0 as follows:

- Mr. Callahan - Aye
- Mr. Stepp – Aye
- Mr. Leshner – Aye
- Ms. Mielke – Aye
- Ms. Haythe - Aye

- C. Frederick Douglass Park on the Tuckahoe Committee – Requested Council approval for the reappointment of Richard Marks to a five-year term on the Frederick Douglass Park on the Tuckahoe Committee as a citizen representative; said term will expire on November 1, 2030. Upon motion by Ms. Haythe, seconded by Ms. Mielke, the Council approved the reappointment by voting 5 – 0 as follows:

Mr. Callahan - Aye
Mr. Stepp – Aye
Mr. Leshner – Aye
Ms. Mielke – Aye
Ms. Haythe - Aye

- D. Talbot County Parks & Recreation Advisory Board – Requested Council approval of the appointment of Sean O’Connor to a four-year term on the Parks & Recreation Advisory Board as a representative of the Trappe District; said term will expire July 1, 2029; and requested the appointment of Michael Brophy to the Parks & Recreation Advisory Board as the Town of Easton’s representative; said term will complete the unexpired term of Mr. Thomas Klein which will expire on July 1, 2027. Upon motion by Mr. Stepp, seconded by Ms. Haythe, the Council approved the appointments by voting 5 – 0 as follows:

Mr. Callahan - Aye
Mr. Stepp – Aye
Mr. Leshner – Aye
Ms. Mielke – Aye
Ms. Haythe - Aye

- E. Talbot County Tourism Board – Requested Council approval for the appointment of Jennifer Brown to the Tourism Board as a representative of the short-term rental sector; said term will expire on July 1, 2028. Upon motion by Ms. Haythe, seconded by Mr. Stepp, the Council approved the appointment by voting 4 - 1 as follows:

Mr. Callahan - Aye
Mr. Stepp – Aye
Mr. Leshner – Aye
Ms. Mielke – Nay
Ms. Haythe - Aye

- F. Request for Letter of Support – Requested Council approval for a letter in support of Waterfowl Festival, Inc.’s application for Congressionally Directed Spending Program funding in the sum of \$1.7 million; if approved, the funding will be used for restoration of the Waterfowl Building in Easton (the historic Easton Armory); no County funding is required. Council discussion ensued with Deena Kilmon, Executive Director, Waterfowl Festival, Inc. Upon motion by Mr. Leshner, seconded by Ms. Haythe, the Council approved the letter of support by voting 5 – 0 as follows:

Mr. Callahan - Aye
Mr. Stepp – Aye
Mr. Leshner – Aye

Ms. Mielke – Aye

Ms. Haythe – Aye

- G. Request from Easton Airport – Requested Council approval to have Easton Airport apply for and accept Airport Improvement Plan (AIP) Grant funding from the Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) in a sum of up to \$10 million; if approved, the funding will be utilized to continue the construction of the new Runway 4/22 at Easton Airport. Council discussion ensued with Micah Risher, Manager, Easton Airport, who outlined various aspects of the current on-going project and stated that funding for airport projects is derived from airline ticket sales, fuel taxes, etc.; no taxpayer revenue is used. He stated that \$27 million is needed to complete the Easton Airport project; the FAA has committed \$6.7 million for this year, then \$5 million per year through 2031. Upon motion by Ms. Mielke, seconded by Mr. Stepp, the Council approved the request by voting 5 - 0 as follows:

Mr. Callahan – Aye

Mr. Stepp – Aye

Mr. Leshner – Aye

Ms. Mielke – Aye

Ms. Haythe – Aye

- H. Request from Easton Airport – Requested Council approval to have Easton Airport Apply for FY27 Congressional Community Project Funding in a sum not to exceed \$27 million; if approved, the funding will be utilized to complete Construction Package 3 of the Airport’s Airfield Modernization Program. Council discussion ensued with Micah Risher, Easton Airport Manager. Upon motion by Ms. Haythe, seconded by Ms. Mielke, the Council approved submittal of the application for funding as outlined by voting 5 – 0 as follows:

Mr. Callahan – Aye

Mr. Stepp – Aye

Mr. Leshner – Aye

Ms. Mielke – Aye

Ms. Haythe – Aye

- I. Request from Department of Public Works – Requested Council approval to purchase a 30-foot-wide drainage and utility easement from the owners of property located at 9811 Hailem School Road in the proposed sum of \$15,000 for the purpose of providing water to the Regional Medical Center site. Ray Clarke, County Engineer, provided a brief history of the reason for the request, and the amount offered. He stated that Easton Utilities determined that an electrical easement was also needed and has offered the property owners an additional \$7,500 for the acquisition of an electrical easement. Mr. Clarke stated that both costs are incorporated in the easement purchase. Council discussion ensued with Mr. Clarke. Upon motion by Mr. Leshner, seconded by Ms. Mielke, the Council approved moving forward with the offer as outlined by voting 5 – 0 as follows:

Mr. Callahan – Aye

Mr. Stepp – Aye

Mr. Leshner – Aye

Ms. Mielke – Aye

Ms. Haythe – Aye

- J. Request from Department of Public Works – Requested Council approval to have the County enter into a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) with Easton Utilities Commission, and James Edward Parker and Byron Antonio Wilson, owners of the property located at 9811 Hailem School Road, Easton, Maryland, for the purchase of a 30-foot-wide water and electrical easement on the subject property to serve the Regional Medical Center site. Upon motion by Mr. Stepp, seconded by Ms. Haythe, the Council approved entering into the MOU by voting 5 – 0 as follows:

Mr. Callahan – Aye

Mr. Stepp – Aye

Mr. Leshner – Aye

Ms. Mielke – Aye

Ms. Haythe – Aye

- K. Council Consideration of Maryland Senate Bill 791 (SB791), *Correctional Services and Public Safety - Immigration Enforcement – Prohibitions (Community Trust Act)* – County Attorney, Patrick Thomas, read a summary of the legislation as outlined in the fiscal note for same. He stated that SB791, as it would apply to Talbot County specifically, would prohibit the Detention Center employees from communicating with the federal government regarding certain individuals subject to a detainer, and if they were to violate that, then that individual could bring an action against the County or the employee for actual damages, punitive damages, and injunctive relief. Council discussion ensued with Mr. Thomas. Mr. Stamp inquired of Council if they wished to take a position on the legislation and forward that position to the Legislature. Mr. Stepp made a motion to forward a letter in opposition to SB791 to the Legislature tomorrow morning (February 25th); the public hearing on SB791 is scheduled for 1:00 p.m.; Ms. Mielke seconded the motion and the Council approved forwarding a letter in opposition to the legislation as outlined by Mr. Stepp by voting 5 – 0 as follows:

Mr. Callahan – Aye

Mr. Stepp – Aye

Mr. Leshner – Aye

Ms. Mielke – Aye

Ms. Haythe – Aye

- X. Public Comments: There were no public comments.

XI. Council Comments:

Mr. Stepp - No comments.

Mr. Leshner - No comments.

Ms. Mielke - Ms. Mielke reminded everyone that the Commission on Aging's February Senior Supply Drive will be concluding in the near future and encouraged members of the community to donate. Individuals interested in donating

should contact the Commission on the Aging for more information on how to donate the much-needed supplies.

Ms. Haythe - No comments.

Mr. Callahan - Mr. Callahan expressed his appreciation to the Roads Department and other County staff for their work over the previous weekend taking care of the roads during the latest snow event.

Upon motion by Ms. Haythe seconded by Mr. Stepp, the Council voted to reconvene on Thursday, February 26, 2026, and Thursday, March 5, 2026, at 4:30 p.m. via Zoom with Providence Strategies for a briefing on the Maryland General Assembly legislative session - the meeting is open to the public; to reconvene on Tuesday, March 3, 2026, at 4:00 p.m. for a work session on the FY27 Budget and Thursday, March 5, 2026, at 5:00 p.m. for a work session on the FY27 Budget; to reconvene on Tuesday, March 10, 2026, at 2:00 p.m. for a work session on the FY27 Budget, and at 4:00 p.m. in Open Session, then adjourn into Closed Session as listed on the statement for closing that meeting, and for the regularly scheduled meeting at 5:00 p.m. by voting 5 – 0 as follows:

Mr. Callahan - Aye

Mr. Stepp – Aye

Mr. Leshner - Aye

Ms. Mielke – Aye

Ms. Haythe - Aye

The meeting ended at 5:56 p.m.

The transcript of the Tuesday, February 24, 2026, County Council meeting is available for review in the Office of the Talbot County Manager during regular office hours.

- XII. Work Session with Department of Economic Development and Tourism on Draft Strategic Plan – Dan Gundersen, FM, HLM, Senior Vice President, Camoin Associates; Lindsay Ortiz, Director of Strategic Planning, Camoin Associates; Debbie Walsworth, Chairperson, Economic Development Commission; Cassandra Vanhooser, Director, Department of Economic Development and Tourism – The Council held a work session with representatives of consultant, Camoin Associates on Tuesday, February 24, 2026 at 3:00 p.m. in the Bradley Meeting Room, South Wing, Talbot County Courthouse, 11 North Washington Street, Easton, Maryland. Prior to the presentation by Camoin and Associates, Ms. Vanhooser stated that the draft Strategic Plan is the culmination of approximately two years of work by the Department of Economic Development and Tourism and a year of work with Camoin and Associates. Ms. Walsworth stated that not only is she personally invested in Talbot County, but as the owner of an accounting firm with approximately 4,000 clients, she has her pulse on the economics of the community. She stated that over the last 18 months, she had been involved in all the meetings to gather input from businesses and members of the public and that the sentiment most expressed by the community was that the Strategic Plan should sustain the culture, economy and way of life in the county that its residents and visitors have come to appreciate and want to see carried into the future. She stated that, in her opinion, the draft Strategic Plan is focused, practical, builds on things that currently exist and strives to make improvements where possible, and aligns the workforce with industry. Mr. Gundersen and Ms. Ortiz utilized a PowerPoint presentation to brief the Council on the approach used to develop the draft Strategic Plan using the guiding principles of: collaboration across communities and within the entrepreneurial ecosystem unique to Talbot County; well-planned growth; agriculture as the

lifeblood of the county’s economic vitality; and the long-term opportunities the new University of Maryland Shore Regional Medical Center will provide. Mr. Gundersen outlined what each principle specifically meant with regard to the development of a strategic plan for Talbot County. Ms. Ortiz then briefed the Council on the number of stakeholders, open houses and focus groups (education, finance/real estate, manufacturing, nonprofits, tourism, innovation) engaged during the process of development of the draft Strategic Plan and Mr. Gundersen outlined and detailed the framework for development of the Strategic Plan utilizing the following themes: building on regional innovation anchors, strengthening business services, cultivating the region’s small business ecosystem, growing and sustaining a tourism economy built on excellence and supporting a more resilient workforce, expounding on the various facets within each theme. Council discussion ensued with Mr. Gundersen and Ms. Ortiz as each facet was brought forward. Council will continue to review the draft Strategic Plan; once finalized, the Strategic Plan will be brought forward for Council approval. The draft Strategic Plan may be found on the County website at: talbotworks.org/strategic-plan/.

XIII. Summary of Closed Session Held on February 24, 2026:

1. Statement of the time, place, and purpose of the closed session:

Time of closed session: 4:10 p.m. End 4:30 p.m.
 Place of closed session: County Council Office
 Purpose of the closed session: To consider various matters as set forth in the statement for closing the meeting

2. Record of the vote of each member as to closing the session:

Names of members voting aye: Callahan, Leshner, Haythe, Mielke, Stepp
 Members opposed: None
 Abstaining: None
 Absent: None

3. Statutory authority to close session and listing of each topic actually discussed, persons present, and each action taken in the session:

| Topic Description | Statutory Authority | Reason for Closed Session Discussion | Persons Present | Action Taken |
|---|----------------------------|---|---|---------------------|
| To discuss appointments to various County boards and committees | GP § 3-305(b)(1)(i) | Public discussion would discourage individuals from volunteering to serve | Chuck Callahan, Pete Leshner, Keasha Haythe, Lynn Mielke, Dave Stepp, Clay Stamp Jessica Morris, Patrick Thomas | No action |



**TALBOT COUNTY, MARYLAND
WEEKLY CASH STATEMENT
2/17/2026**

OPERATING FUNDS - SHORE UNITED BANK

| | | | |
|-----------------------------|------------------|-----------|----------------------|
| OPERATING FUNDS AT | 2/10/2026 | \$ | 39,752,809.19 |
| Interest on Accounts 1/2026 | | | 198,771.60 |
| Deposits | | | 786,785.07 |
| Checks | | | (125,499.26) |
| ACH Disbursements | | | (1,054,228.96) |
| EFT's | | | (158,708.90) |
| Wire Transfers | | | (721,369.85) |
| Voided Checks | | | |

| | | | |
|---------------------------|------------------|-----------|----------------------|
| OPERATING FUNDS AT | 2/17/2026 | \$ | 38,678,558.89 |
|---------------------------|------------------|-----------|----------------------|

| | | | |
|-------------------------|--|-----------|------------------|
| PETTY CASH FUNDS | | \$ | 17,855.00 |
|-------------------------|--|-----------|------------------|

INVESTMENT FUNDS

| | | <u>Yield</u> | |
|---|-------|--------------|------------------|
| Maryland Local Government Investment Pool (MLGIP) | 3.72% | | \$ 23,982,824.99 |
| Bayvanguard Bank | 3.89% | | \$ 11,521,961.25 |
| Shore United Money Market Account | 3.64% | | \$ 64,511,509.69 |

| | | | |
|-------------------------------|--|-----------|-----------------------|
| INVESTMENT FUNDS TOTAL | | \$ | 100,034,150.93 |
|-------------------------------|--|-----------|-----------------------|

| | | | |
|--|--|-----------|-----------------------|
| <u>TOTAL ALL CASH AND INVESTMENTS</u> | | \$ | 138,712,709.82 |
|--|--|-----------|-----------------------|



**TALBOT COUNTY, MARYLAND
WEEKLY CASH STATEMENT
2/24/2026**

OPERATING FUNDS - SHORE UNITED BANK

OPERATING FUNDS AT 2/17/2026 \$ 38,678,558.89

Total ADP Payroll PPE 1/30/2026 (1,067,593.21)
Returned Paymentus Payments (1,373.70)

Deposits 768,321.62
Checks (111,993.78)
ACH Disbursements (648,470.43)

OPERATING FUNDS AT 2/24/2026 \$ 37,617,449.39

PETTY CASH FUNDS \$ 17,855.00

INVESTMENT FUNDS

Yield

Maryland Local Government Investment Pool (MLGIP) 3.73% \$ 23,982,824.99
Bayvanguard Bank 3.89% \$ 11,521,961.25
Shore United Money Market Account 3.64% \$ 64,511,509.69

INVESTMENT FUNDS TOTAL \$ 100,034,150.93

TOTAL ALL CASH AND INVESTMENTS \$ 137,651,600.32