



# TALBOT COUNTY, MARYLAND

County Council

MINUTES

December 16, 2025

## ***SPECIAL LEGISLATIVE DAY***

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

- I. Agenda – Mr. Callahan requested and received unanimous consent for approval of the Agenda of Tuesday, December 16, 2025.
- II. Minutes – Mr. Callahan requested and received unanimous consent for approval of the Minutes of Tuesday, December 9, 2025.
- III. Disbursements – Mr. Callahan requested and received unanimous consent for approval of the Disbursements of Tuesday, December 16, 2025.
- IV. Update from University of Maryland Shore Regional Health Project – Ken Kozel, MBA, VACHE, President, Shore Regional Health; Lara Wilson, Director of External Affairs and Community Liaison, Shore Regional Health – Mr. Kozel utilized a PowerPoint presentation to outline various factors currently affecting healthcare in rural areas throughout the country. He stated that since 2005, 191 rural hospitals have closed, another 700 are at risk of closure, and others have reduced services such as obstetrical care, primarily due to financial pressures. He stated that half of all rural hospitals are currently operating at negative margins. He then outlined how the State of Maryland is advancing healthcare throughout the state and how it is focusing on the future of rural health in the Mid-Shore region, stating that Maryland has signed a 10-year agreement to extend its agreement with the federal government for the new AHEAD model (Achieving Healthcare Efficiency through Accountable Design); the goal of the new model is to increase investment in primary care, provide financial stability for hospitals, support connections to community resources in order to curb the growth of healthcare costs, improve the health of the population and to promote healthier living. Mr. Kozel stated that federal funding in the sum of \$50 billion has been allocated for rural healthcare; all 50 states can apply, and the first half will be distributed over a 5-year timeframe; each state will receive \$100 million a year for five years; the states will also be required to apply for the remaining \$25 billion at a later date if certain criteria is met. Mr. Kozel stated that the goal of distribution of the funding is to support workforce development by strengthening recruitment and retention of healthcare providers in rural communities, and to use technology and innovation to advance the health of those communities. He provided statistical information on coverage of healthcare services by the University of Maryland Medical System in Maryland and the approximate number of individuals served (172,000) in the five counties of the Mid-Shore region. He stated that approximately 54% of the individuals served in the five-county area receive either Medicare or Medicaid services, and that the number becomes even more important when taking into consideration possible cuts Medicare payments and changes to qualifications for Medicaid which would result in uncompensated care. He stated that the vision of UMMS Shore Regional Health over the last 15 years has been for each of the five counties to have local access to primary care, specialists, diagnostic testing within their home community and to have an acute care hospital

in the five-county region. He stated that construction of the new regional medical center is proceeding on schedule: the second floor is being added, the drilling of the on-site geothermal wells is in progress, and work on the ingress and egress from U.S. Rt. 50 to the regional medical center site and the Talbot County Community Center is ongoing. Mr. Kozel stated that it is anticipated that the new facility, which will have 147 beds, will be open to seeing its first patients in mid-2028; the number of beds is an increase of 29 from the 118 originally requested. Ms. Wilson provided FY25 statistical information for UMMS Shore Regional Health, stating that there were over 7,500 hospital admissions, 71,000 Emergency Room visits, 118,553 primary care visits, and over 1,300 members of the community were reached through cancer outreach events. She stated that Shore Regional Health maintains partnerships with the health departments in the five-county region, Talbot County Emergency Services, behavioral health providers, and continues to focus on improving access and workforce development in rural health. She stated that UMMS Shore Regional Health had added 21 new providers in FY25 which included six primary care providers and 15 specialists. She stated that the urgent care facility in Easton had 13,727 visits and stated that Shore Regional Health is working with Talbot County Department of Emergency Services on an “alternate destination program” whereby Emergency Services personnel transporting individuals in an ambulance will be able to connect live with providers to determine whether the Emergency Room or another level of care is what is most needed – the goal is to alleviate crowding in the Emergency Room. Ms. Wilson stated that Shore Regional Health continues to focus on its partnerships with behavioral health providers to meet the unique challenges of those patients and with the Talbot County Department of Emergency Services on the Mobile Integrated Health program which provides pharmacy support, home assessments and various resources to individuals in their homes to assist them with getting the services they need. She outlined outreach events in which Shore Regional Health participates, including blood pressure screenings, its partnership with Chesapeake College for nursing, surgical, laboratory, and radiology technicians as well as phlebotomists, and the Introduction to Careers in Healthcare (ITCH) program for students in middle and high school who are interested in the healthcare professions. Council discussion ensued with Mr. Kozel and Ms. Wilson as various facets of the presentation were brought forward. Mr. Kozel will continue to update the Council on a regular or as-needed basis.

V. Council Discussion and Referral of Proposed Zoning Text Amendment to Planning Commission – County Attorney, Patrick Thomas, stated that the County had received a request from attorney Zach Smith on behalf of his client, Althea Dulin. He stated that Ms. Dulin has a reserved land agreement with the County on a portion of their family property, and they wish to place the property in a MALPF (Maryland Agricultural Land Preservation Foundation) program easement; however, MALPF will not permit the property to be placed in an easement while the County agreement is in place. Mr. Thomas stated that he and Brennan Tarleton, Planning Officer, met with Mr. Smith and Ms. Dulin and suggested that they seek Council’s consideration of a text amendment. Mr. Smith stated that the language proposed for the text amendment, if approved by Council, would give the Council the authority to release land from a reserve land agreement or a reservation of development rights agreement in those circumstances when the property owner desires to participate in the MALPF program. Council discussion ensued with Mr. Smith. Upon motion by Mr. Lesher, seconded by Ms. Haythe, the Council approved forwarding the request to the Planning Commission for recommendation by voting 5 – 0 as follows:

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

VI. Eligible for Vote:

Bill No. 1623, A BILL TO AMEND CHAPTER 11 OF THE TALBOT COUNTY CODE (ALCOHOLIC BEVERAGES) FOR THE PURPOSES OF PERMITTING ON-PREMISES CONSUMPTION OF BEER, WINE, AND LIQUOR AT ALCOHOL DISPENSARY BISTROS, EXPANDING THE SEATING CAPACITY FOR ALCOHOL DISPENSARY BISTROS, EXEMPTING CLASS I LICENSES ISSUED FOR AN URBAN LOCATION FROM THE MARKET TEST SET FORTH IN § 11-8(D)(2) IF THE MUNICIPALITY IN WHICH THE URBAN LOCATION IS LOCATED DOES NOT HAVE AN EXISTING ALCOHOL DISPENSARY BISTRO HOLDING A VALID CLASS I LICENSE, AND EXEMPTING OXFORD CONSERVATION PARK FROM THE 500-FOOT DISTANCE RESTRICTION FOR NEW OFF-SALE LICENSES, was read into the record by the Clerk and brought forward for vote. The Council approved Bill No. 1623 by voting 5 – 0 as follows:

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

Bill No. 1623 will become effective as outlined in the legislation.

VII. County Manager's Report:

A. Talbot County Administrative Charging Committee – Requested Council approval for the appointment of William Belding to the Administrative Charging Committee; said term will complete the unexpired term of Ms. Constance Hope which will expire on August 1, 2026. Upon motion by Mr. Stepp, seconded by Mr. Lesher, the Council approved the appointment by voting 5 – 0 as follows:

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

B. Talbot County Local Drug and Alcohol Abuse Committee – Requested Council approval for the appointment of Council Member, Dave Stepp, to serve as the Council's liaison on the Local Drug and Alcohol Abuse Committee. Upon motion by Mr. Lesher, seconded by Ms. Haythe, the Council approved the appointment by voting 4 – 0 – 1 as follows:

Mr. Callahan – Aye  
Mr. Stepp – Abstain  
Mr. Lesher – Aye  
Ms. Mielke – Aye  
Ms. Haythe – Aye

C. Request from the Department of Parks and Recreation – Requested Council approval to have Talbot County enter into a Joint Use Agreement with the Town of Trappe and the Maryland Department of Natural Resources, acting on behalf of the State of Maryland,

for the Home Run Baker Sports Complex. Emily Gilmer, Director, Department of Parks and Recreation, stated that the Town of Trappe has applied for a Community Parks and Playgrounds Program grant for Home Run Baker Park which is located on County property and the Agreement is required by the State. Ms. Gilmer stated that if the grant funding is approved, improvements to Home Run Baker Park will include a softball field dedicated to girls' softball; the installation of electricity for the current scoreboard; and the addition of restrooms to the facility; she stated that the Parks and Recreation Advisory Board is in support of the Town of Trappe's application for grant funding. Upon motion by Mr. Lesher, seconded by Mr. Stepp, the Council approved entering into the Joint Use Agreement as outlined by voting 5 – 0 as follows:

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

D. Bid No. 25-07, REQUEST FOR PROPOSALS - REAL PROPERTY FOR TALBOT COUNTY PUBLIC SAFETY STORAGE FACILITY – Requested Council approval to award Bid No. 25-07 to El Jefe H.Q. LLC in the sum of \$1,850,000.00 for property located at 8845 Mistletoe Drive, Easton; a total of five (5) bids was received and funding for the purchase is included in the FY26 Budget. Brian LeCates, Director, Department of Emergency Services briefed the Council on the planned use of the building, located across from the new Public Safety Complex, by several County departments; Council discussion ensued with Mr. LeCates. Upon motion by Mr. Lesher, seconded by Mr. Stepp, the Council approved the award by voting 5 – 0 as follows:

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

E. Request from Department of Public Works – County Engineer, Ray Clarke, requested Council approval to utilize FY26 Capital Outlay funding for the purchase of equipment for use at the County's Biosolids Facility on Klondike Road in Easton; said equipment includes a tractor/backhoe and Gator from Atlantic Tractor at a cost of \$56,200.22 and \$14,480.44, respectively; said purchase will be made by piggybacking on a State of Maryland contract. Mr. Clarke stated that \$81,189.00 was allocated for the equipment in the FY26 Budget. Upon motion by Mr. Lesher, seconded by Ms. Mielke, the Council approved the request as outlined by voting 5 – 0 as follows:

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

F. Bid No. 25-15, TALBOT COUNTY REGION IV WWTP IMPROVEMENT PLANS

PRESERVE AT WYE MILLS, RUSTLING OAKS DRIVE, WYE MILLS, TALBOT COUNTY, MARYLAND – County Engineer, Ray Clarke, requested Council approval to award Bid No. 25-15 to the lowest responsive and responsible bidder, Premiere Service Group, LLC, in the sum of \$1,800,000, contingent upon approval of the bid by the Maryland Department of the Environment (MDE). Mr. Clarke stated that approximately 73% to 75% of the cost to upgrade the facility from a BNR (Biological Nutrient Removal) system to a state-of-the-art ENR MBR (Enhanced Nutrient Removal – Membrane Bioreactor) facility will be paid for by Bay Restoration Funding; Council discussion ensued with Mr. Clarke. Upon motion by Mr. Lesher, seconded by Mr. Stepp, the Council approved the award as outlined by voting 5 – 0 as follows:

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

G. Request from Office of Communications – Sarah Kilmon, Communications Manager, requested Council approval to apply for and accept grant funding in the sum of \$15,000 from the Maryland 250 Commission “Once in a Generation” Program. If approved, the funding will be used to promote the nation’s 250<sup>th</sup> anniversary, Talbot County’s 365<sup>th</sup> anniversary, and Talbot Day 2026. Ms. Kilmon noted several upcoming events, including: (1) a special screening of The American Revolution documentary by Ken Burns, et. al on Wednesday, January 14, 2026 at The Avalon Theatre; (2) the celebration of Native American Heritage Day on Saturday, February 21, 2026, at the Waterfowl Festival building. Specific details on these events and others may be found at: Upcoming Events — Talbot 250. Upon motion by Mr. Lesher, seconded by Ms. Mielke, the Council approved the request as outlined by voting 5 – 0 as follows:

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

H. County Offices Closed – Mr. Stamp stated that County offices will be closed on Wednesday, December 24, 2025, Thursday, December 25, 2025, and Friday, December 26, 2025, for the Christmas holiday.

XIII. Public Comments: Members of the public were afforded an opportunity to comment on matters of interest to them.

IX. Council Comments:

Mr. Stepp - Mr. Stepp wished everyone a Merry Christmas, Happy Holidays, and Happy New Year, and stated that he was looking forward to a great 2026.

Mr. Lesher - Mr. Lesher stated he had the privilege of attending the Winter Conference for MACo (Maryland Association of Counties) last week, and that, in his opinion, the conferences are his best opportunity for continuing education as a Council member. He stated that he had attended several sessions on changes up to now, and proposed, for the Blueprint for Maryland's Future, the State's education plan, which impacts our schools and our budget, and a session with our State legislators and other legislative leaders to look at the State's budget situation as we move into the 2026 session. He stated that he had also attended a session on Adequate Public Facilities ordinances, a topic which has been raised here and one, in his opinion, we might want to look into. He stated that the Council had previously discussed the topic in a workshop and stated that there had been some talk about how to pay for County facilities as a consequence of growth in the county.

Ms. Mielke - Ms. Mielke stated that she had the privilege of attending the lighting of the first candle for Hanukkah on Sunday at Temple B’Nai Israel. She wished everyone Merry Christmas, Happy Hanukkah and a Happy New Year.

Ms. Haythe - Ms. Haythe wished everyone a Merry Christmas, Happy New Year, and blessings and prosperity over the community in 2025 and 2026.

Mr. Callahan - Mr. Callahan wished everyone a Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year. He stated that, in his opinion, although the Council members don’t always agree on everything, they work well together to get things done for the community.

Upon motion by Ms. Haythe, seconded by Ms. Mielke, the Council voted to reconvene on Tuesday, January 13, 2026, at 2:30 p.m. for a work session with the Department of Economic Development and Tourism to discuss their strategic plan, then to 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. Lesher – Aye  
Ms. Mielke – Aye  
Ms. Haythe - Aye

The meeting ended at 6:05 p.m.

The transcript of the Tuesday, December 16, 2025, County Council meeting is available for review in the Office of the Talbot County Manager during regular office hours.

X. Summary of Closed Session Held on December 16, 2025:

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

Time of closed session: 3:30 p.m. End 4:55 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, Lesher, 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 Lesher, Keasha Haythe, Lynn Mielke, Dave Stepp, Clay Stamp, Jessica Morris	No action
To discuss legal services contract	GP § 3-305(b)(1)(i)	Discussion involves specific individual	Chuck Callahan, Pete Lesher, Keasha Haythe, Lynn Mielke, Dave Stepp, Clay Stamp, Jessica Morris	Council concurred with proposal
To consider the partnership of real property in the Town of Easton for a public purpose	GP § 3-305(b)(3)	To protect the County's bargaining position regarding the possible acquisition of real property for a public purpose	Chuck Callahan, Pete Lesher, Keasha Haythe, Lynn Mielke, Dave Stepp, Clay Stamp, Jessica Morris, Patrick Thomas	Council will not pursue partnership
For legal briefing on John Doe v Board of Education, Health Department and State of Maryland	§ 3-305 (b) (7) (8)	Attorney-client privilege regarding legal advice	Chuck Callahan, Pete Lesher, Keasha Haythe, Lynn Mielke, Dave Stepp, Clay Stamp, Jessica Morris, Patrick Thomas	No action

	<b>TALBOT COUNTY, MARYLAND</b> <b>WEEKLY CASH STATEMENT</b> <b>12/16/2025</b>	
<b>OPERATING FUNDS - SHORE UNITED BANK</b>		
<b>OPERATING FUNDS AT</b>	<b>12/9/2025</b>	<b>\$ 53,586,195.84</b>
Total ADP Payroll PPE 11/14/2025 (Holiday Bonus)		(145,651.72)
Total ADP Payroll PPE 12/05/2025		(1,028,985.91)
Returned Paymentus Payments		(11.21)
Bank Charges		(4,191.37)
Interest on Accounts 11/2025		190,323.52
Deposits		2,569,534.54
Checks		(74,301.48)
ACH Disbursements		(1,624,109.77)
EFT's		(260,055.05)
Wire Transfers		(5,335,871.02)
<b>OPERATING FUNDS AT</b>	<b>12/16/2025</b>	<b>\$ 47,872,876.37</b>
<b>PETTY CASH FUNDS</b>		\$ 18,105.00
<b>INVESTMENT FUNDS</b>		<u>Yield</u>
Maryland Local Government Investment Pool (MLGIP)	3.92%	\$ 23,828,052.93
Bayvanguard Bank	4.15%	\$ 11,445,226.89
Shore United Money Market Account	3.88%	\$ 64,107,757.60
<b>INVESTMENT FUNDS TOTAL</b>		<b>\$ 99,399,142.42</b>
<b>TOTAL ALL CASH AND INVESTMENTS</b>		<b>\$ 147,272,018.79</b>