AI Summary of Town Council Meeting March 23, 2026

AI can make mistakes. Review for accuracy.

Key takeaways

- Public appearances were restored to the agenda after initial proposal to remove them
- Town Manager position (formerly Town Clerk) job description approved; recruitment to begin with goal of hiring before June 30th when current clerk resigns
- 2026 Annual Town Election scheduled for May 9th, 10am-1pm; Town Meeting at 2pm
- FY2027 budget reviewed with total expenses approximately $1,222,600 (increased by $70,000 after meeting adjustments)
- Hall sprinkler system installation ongoing; pendants on order; target completion for April 25th event
- Playground grant of $250,000 from state confirmed; full expenditure planned for FY2027
- Property tax rate decreasing from 0.2270 to 0.2214 per $100 assessed valuation
- Public utility operating property tax rate increased from $0.70 to $0.80 per $100

Discussed topics

Agenda modifications and public appearances

Council debated removing public appearances from the agenda for this budget work session. Barbara objected, stating the public has a right to comment. The agenda as originally circulated to the town included public appearances.

- **Details**
  - John: Proposed eliminating public appearances to focus on budget work session; concerned about extending meeting length
  - Barbara: Objected to removal; stated it's inappropriate to eliminate public appearances and people may have come specifically for that purpose
  - Robert: Seconded Barbara's motion to restore public appearances
- **Conclusion**
  - Motion to restore public appearances passed 5-0 with one abstention (Chris)

Hall sprinkler system update

Chris provided update on ongoing sprinkler installation work that began last Wednesday.

- **Details**
    - Chris: Large pipe installation mostly complete; smaller branches and uprights installed; dry pendants special-ordered and awaiting delivery (1-2 weeks)
    - Chris: Flow test initially failed when done from Grove Ave; passed when redone in pump room; system design required no changes
    - Chris: Nitrogen system box delivered; planning placement in pump room
    - Chris: Purchased lumber and stain for old council room ceiling replacement; preparing materials in advance
- **Conclusion**
    - Target date for partial hall restoration is April 25th event
    - Pod outside hall will be moved to stage ceiling pieces inside once accessible

Town Manager position hiring

Committee presented job description for new Town Manager position (title changed from Town Clerk).

- **Details**
    - Barbara: Committee of Peter, Mary, John, and Jean met 4-5 times; changed title to Town Manager; beefed up responsibilities including program oversight and regulatory compliance
    - Barbara: Plan to advertise through International City Managers Association and National Association of Counties
    - John: Position expanded beyond traditional clerk duties; manager title suggests more elevated function
    - Chris: Asked about timeline; Kathy's resignation effective June 30th with possibility to extend for overlap
    - Barbara: Requested job description be forwarded to full council
- **Conclusion**
    - Council approved job description without objection
    - Recruitment to begin immediately with targeted advertising
    - Goal to hire with overlap before June 30th

2026 Annual Town Election and Town Meeting scheduling

Council set times for May 9th election and town meeting, exercising authority granted by charter amendment.

- **Details**
  - John: Proposed election 10am-1pm with one-hour gap for ballot counting, then town meeting at 2pm or 3pm
  - Barbara: Moved for election 10am-1pm and meeting starting at 2pm until completion
  - Mary: Seconded the motion
- **Conclusion**
  - Approved 6-0: Election May 9th 10am-1pm; Town Meeting 2pm until completion

FY2027 Budget - Revenue

Jean presented revenue projections and rate changes.

- **Details**
  - Jean: Property tax rate decreasing from 0.2270 to 0.2214 per $100 assessed valuation (county recommendation)
  - Jean: Dwelling tax covers Casella trash/recycling; commercial corner invoiced for 6 units
  - Jean: Public utility operating property tax unchanged since 2015 at $0.70 per $100; proposed increase to $0.80
  - John: Recommended increase after 11 years; utilities should share burden of town costs
  - Jean: Income tax projection $168,850 (conservative estimate); cable franchise fees $5,000 proposed to pass through to Montgomery Municipal Cable
  - John: MMC facing declining revenues; requesting municipalities donate individual franchise fees; town receives valuable services from MMC
  - Peter: Agreed it's the right thing to do with the money
- **Conclusion**
  - Public utility tax rate increased to $0.80 per $100
  - Cable franchise fees ($5,000) to be donated to Montgomery Municipal Cable
  - Income tax and other revenue projections accepted as presented

FY2027 Budget - Executive expenses

Discussion of town clerk/manager salary and related costs.

- **Details**
    - Jean: Budgeted top end of salary range for new town manager; included 40 hours for Kathy's contract training
    - Jean: Website maintenance increased to $15,000 for functionality improvements
    - Jean: ADA compliance increased from $2,500 to $10,000 (federal mandate)
    - Jean: Office equipment $5,000 for laptop and equipment for new manager and archivist to work remotely
    - Robert: Questioned remote work; wanted to ensure in-office presence
    - John: Clarified office hours will be maintained but flexibility needed for uninterrupted work time and meeting attendance
- **Conclusion**
    - Executive budget approved as presented with laptop for remote work capability

FY2027 Budget - Town Treasurer salary

John proposed 10% increase for Town Treasurer.

- **Details**
    - John: Jean expanded treasurer role significantly; handles HR policies, insurance requirements; performance beyond exemplary; deserves recognition
    - Peter: Agreed; noted John expanded what Jean does by recognizing her talents
    - Barbara: Requested job description be forwarded to council
    - Jean: Only received COLA for 5 years; asked for increase
- **Conclusion**
    - 10% hourly rate increase approved
    - Job description to be sent to council

FY2027 Budget - Town Attorney

Discussion of legal services budget.

- **Details**
    - Jean: Current $7,000 covers Sue Ellen's advice to mayor/council plus one-sixth of streetlight ownership negotiations
    - Barbara: Proposed increase to $10,000 given compliance discussions and new manager's unknown expertise level
    - Robert: Agreed with increase
- **Conclusion**
    - Town Attorney budget increased to $10,000

FY2027 Budget - Planning and Zoning

Peter explained increased surveying and mapping budget.

- **Details**
    - Peter: Planning Commission has had $5,000 carryover for years unused; town has outdated boundary maps not updated in 30-40 years
    - Peter: Robert Johnson working on updating maps; Railroad Street area primary concern; one section survey costs $5,000
    - John: Questioned why county can't mark their right of way
    - Peter: Suggested budgeting money and justifying to council when ready to spend
- **Conclusion**
    - Surveying and mapping budget increased to $10,000

FY2027 Budget - Sustainability

Mary explained compost program expansion request.

- **Details**
    - Jean: ICLEI membership $1,200 (lasts 5 years) added to $1,800 base = $3,000
    - Mary: Requested $800 for RJ labor (1 hour/month March-August) to help turn compost piles and add water; also materials for securing bins and aerator
    - Mary: Program successful; produced compost used by garden, F&B, and residents; expanding from 4 to 6 bins
- **Conclusion**
    - Sustainability budget increased to $3,800 (added $800 for compost program)

FY2027 Budget - Stormwater

Discussion of ARPA and Maryland grant spending timeline.

- **Details**
    - Jean: Anticipate spending all $400,000 ARPA money by end of fiscal year (must spend by December 31st calendar year)
    - Jean: Then revert to Maryland grant ($250,000 reimbursement grant)
    - Barbara: Questioned $400,000 spending by June 30th
    - Peter: Asked deadline; confirmed calendar year end
    - Peter: Asked how much spent to date; John confirmed under $100,000
- **Conclusion**
    - Stormwater budget reflects spending down ARPA funds and beginning Maryland grant drawdown

FY2027 Budget - Energy Conversion Incentives

Reduction in budget due to low uptake.

- **Details**
  - Jean: Traditionally budgeted $20,000 for 2-3 years; slow resident pickup
  - Jean: Current year only paid out $1,000 of $20,000
  - Jean: Proposed reducing to $10,000
- **Conclusion**
  - Energy Conversion Incentives reduced to $10,000

FY2027 Budget - Municipal Buildings

Review of hall maintenance and repair costs.

- **Details**
  - Jean: Utilities increasing; fire alarm monitoring and sprinkler testing costs should remain same with new system
  - Jean: McCatherin Hall maintenance $50,000 restored (was usurped by sprinkler repair this year); exterior windows need repainting, floors need redoing, locks need repair
  - Jean: Sprinkler repair budget $175,000 includes ceiling fans, lighting, deep clean, and other improvements
- **Conclusion**
  - Municipal buildings budget approved as presented

FY2027 Budget - Streets and Roadways

Discussion of resurfacing plans and asphalt prices.

- **Details**
  - John: RFP for road work coming in April; $100,000 available across two fiscal years
  - John: No glaring high-priority items left after work 2 years ago
  - John: Asphalt prices currently same as last March despite oil price increases; may recommend deferring work if prices increase
  - Jean: Snow and ice removal actual projected at $8,000 vs. $6,000 budget; proposed keeping at $6,000
- **Conclusion**
  - Resurfacing budget $50,000 maintained
  - Decision on actual road work to be made in May after RFP responses

FY2027 Budget - Tennis Courts

Major discussion of court repair vs. replacement.

- **Details**
    - Jean: Hard court crack repair quote $25,000; clay court maintenance combined in $30,000 supplies/repairs line
    - Peter: Questioned spending $25,000 on crack repair if planning to replace courts
    - John: Full replacement quote $120,000; lesser quote $75,000; only major cracks covered in repair quote
    - John: Repair would look great for one year then small cracks would return after winter
    - Peter: Need to decide on replacement before spending on cosmetic repairs
- **Conclusion**
    - Budget includes $30,000 for repairs
    - Decision needed on whether to budget for full replacement vs. temporary repairs

FY2027 Budget - Playground

Adjustment to reflect full grant spending in FY2027.

- **Details**
    - Jean: Original budget assumed spending $150,000 of $250,000 grant in FY2027
    - John: Recommended budgeting full $250,000 expenditure; grant not tied to fiscal year so no harm if not all spent
    - John: Grant accessible as early as June 1st; spending timeline flexible
    - Kristina: Confirmed $250,000 total, not $280,000
    - Jonathan: Raised question about demonstrating town fund contribution per fact sheet
    - John: Doesn't believe it's a problem; will resolve by town meeting
- **Conclusion**
    - Playground budget adjusted to $190,000 in FY2027 (includes $30,000 basketball court and remainder of $250,000 grant)
    - Revenue line adjusted to match $150,000 reimbursement expectation

FY2027 Budget - Parks (Tree Removal and Woods Management)

Increased tree removal budget discussed.

- **Details**

        - Jean: Proposed $10,000 increase for tree removal; many big trees aging out; budget tight every year
        - Jean: Audrey extremely frugal and on top of timing
        - Jean: Woods Management reduced by $2,500 but shared with tree waterer salaries (young people trucking water jugs to new trees)
- **Conclusion**
    - Tree removal budget increased by $10,000

FY2027 Budget - Recreation Programs

Summer in the Parks and other programs reviewed.

- **Details**
    - Jean: Summer in the Parks salaries increasing; now required 4 staff vs. traditional 3; new ratio requirements
    - Jean: Background checks and fees increased supplies line
    - Jean: Town subsidizes program approximately $26.50 per participant; fees increased from $250 to $275 residents, $350 to $375 non-residents
    - Jean: Music Weekend budget unchanged; question whether to continue given proximity to Circle Fest
- **Conclusion**
    - Recreation programs budget approved as presented

FY2027 Budget - HPC Archive Worker

Brief discussion of archival work continuation.

- **Details**
    - John: Project needs considerable effort; HPC wants to maintain budget
    - John: Not spending near budgeted amount this year but want to retain for next year
    - John: Virtually certain to engage additional or replacement archivist
    - Peter: Noted Bob gave good presentation at last council meeting
- **Conclusion**
    - Archive worker budget maintained

FY2027 Budget - Lake

New lifeguard supervisor position and porta-potty discussion.

- **Details**

    - Jean: Stephen Hansen provided detailed budget; new lifeguard supervisor position proposed to handle training, scheduling, daily supervision
    - Jean: Budget assumes maximum coverage (2 lifeguards 6 hours each daily all season); historically doesn't happen due to vacations
    - Jean: Porta-potty proposed at $2,500 for one unit with weekly service
    - Peter: One porta-potty with weekly cleaning and washing station outside
    - Mary: $2,500 reasonable for one unit
    - John: Strongly recommended daily cleaning in addition to weekly service
    - Mary: Questioned who would do daily cleaning; don't think lifeguards should
    - John: Suggested janitor or lifeguard duty options
- **Conclusion**
    - Lifeguard supervisor position added
    - Porta-potty budget increased to $3,000 to allow for daily servicing options

FY2027 Budget - RASEC

Education services budget increase.

- **Details**
    - Barbara: Leadership Montgomery proposal $5,000 if all four phases contracted together; $5,500 if separated
    - Barbara: Uncertain about signing contract for all phases at once
    - Barbara: Consulted with Paula and Patty; agreed $10,000 not necessary but $8,000 appropriate
- **Conclusion**
    - RASEC education services budget set at $8,000

FY2027 Budget - Insurance and Miscellaneous

Insurance increase and donations discussed.

- **Details**
    - Jean: Legit advised 10% increase; town was undercharged for 10 years; phasing in correction over 2 years
    - Jean: Waiting for exact number; current increase may not incorporate final bump
    - Jean: Fire department donation increased from $500 (2 years ago) to $750 (last year) to $1,000 (current year)
    - Peter: Suggested increasing fire department donation given regular training presence

    - John: Noted already doubled over 2 years
    - Jean: Cable TV franchise fee donation to MMC already discussed
    - Jean: Contingency includes Michael Swift parliamentary services if needed
- **Conclusion**
    - Insurance budget increased 10% pending exact quote
    - Fire department donation maintained at $1,000
    - Cable franchise fees to be donated to Montgomery Municipal Cable

FY2027 Budget - Health Insurance for Town Manager

Discussion of health insurance benefit for new hire.

- **Details**
    - Jean: One person doesn't constitute group; cannot get group health insurance
    - Jean: Can offer money for marketplace insurance or health savings account
    - Jean: Previous group health arrangement was town paid 75%, employee 25%
    - Jean: Proposed $1,000/month ($12,000/year) as maximum town willing to offer
    - John: That's what town had for Kathy
    - Barbara: Should depend on new person's needs; could have spousal coverage; use as placeholder and negotiate
    - Jean: Budget top of range like salary; whether spent depends on individual
- **Conclusion**
    - Health insurance budget set at $12,000 as maximum placeholder
    - Actual amount to be negotiated with new hire based on individual circumstances

Laurel Goldberg Playground Committee appointment

Mayor proposed appointment to replace Jane Klinger.

- **Details**
    - John: Jane Klinger resigned from Playground Committee due to time constraints
    - John: Committee spoke with Laurel Goldberg; she's familiar with playground master plan
    - Peter: Clarified committee structure; 8 voting members requiring council approval
    - John: Committee encouraged to recruit additional non-voting helpers
- **Conclusion**
    - Council unanimously approved Laurel Goldberg's appointment to Playground Committee

Town Safety Advisory Group meeting report

Mayor reported on meeting with Officer Romano.

- **Details**
    - John: Met with Officer Melanie Romano at 6th District headquarters
    - John: Received updates on vehicle vandalism/thefts and indecent exposure incidents
    - John: Sent Grove update with all information
    - John: Officer Romano willing to conduct meeting for town residents to discuss issues
    - John: She prefers Zoom but could do in-person once hall available
- **Conclusion**
    - Safety meeting with Officer Romano to be scheduled
    - Format (Zoom vs. in-person) to be determined

House Bill 1142 resolution support

Request to pass resolution supporting municipal revenue task force.

- **Details**
    - John: HB 1142 creates state task force to examine modernizing municipal revenue sources
    - John: Currently municipalities limited to property taxes and small income tax sharing
    - John: Maryland Municipal League requested resolution; provided template
    - John: Almost 40 municipalities have passed resolutions
    - John: Bill getting favorable committee treatment; likely to pass unless governor vetoes
- **Conclusion**
    - Resolution to be presented at end of meeting for council consideration

Dog waste collection expansion

Fifth collection box proposed.

- **Details**
    - Jean: Four boxes currently installed with good results
    - Jean: Committee wants fifth box; increases service costs
    - Mary: Consistently getting calls that all boxes filled before pickup; two alternatives: increase pickup frequency or add box

    - Mary: Cheaper to add box with bi-weekly collection
- **Conclusion**
    - Fifth dog waste collection box approved

Challenges

- Hall sprinkler system dry pendants on special order; timeline uncertain (1-2 weeks estimated)
- Uncertainty about meeting April 25th event deadline for hall restoration
- Tennis court decision needed: spend $25,000 on crack repairs vs. budget $75,000-$120,000 for full replacement
- Insurance exact costs pending from Legit (waiting for response on whether 10% includes final phase of undercharge correction)
- Health insurance administration for new town manager needs to be determined (HSA, subsidy, or other mechanism)
- Porta-potty daily cleaning responsibility and cost needs resolution
- Town boundary maps outdated (not updated in 30-40 years); scope and cost of updating needs definition
- Asphalt prices may increase before June road work; could affect project scope or timing

Action items

- **Jean**
    - Send town treasurer job description to council
    - Send town manager job description to council
    - Obtain exact insurance quote from Legit incorporating final undercharge correction phase
    - Finalize budget incorporating all meeting changes
    - Update capital improvement plan to reflect playground grant changes
- **John**
    - Send Grove alert about April 1st final leaf collection deadline
    - Present road resurfacing RFP to council in April meeting
    - Resolve playground grant town contribution question by town meeting
    - Present House Bill 1142 resolution for council vote
    - Coordinate scheduling of Officer Romano safety meeting
- **Barbara, Peter, Mary, Jean (Hiring Committee)**
    - Begin advertising town manager position through International City Managers Association and National Association of Counties

- **Chris**
    - Continue coordinating hall sprinkler system installation
    - Work with Steve on hall restoration timeline for April 25th event
    - Move pod contents into hall once accessible to stage ceiling pieces
- **Stephen Hansen (Lake Committee)**
    - Finalize lifeguard hiring (reached out to 5-6 former lifeguards)
    - Determine porta-potty daily cleaning solution and costs
- **Planning Commission**
    - Provide detailed justification for surveying/mapping expenditure when ready to proceed (Robert Johnson leading)
- **Council**
    - Review and consider tennis court replacement vs. repair decision
    - Consider Music Weekend continuation given proximity to Circle Fest
    - Review capital improvement plan at April meeting
    - Vote on final budget at April 13th meeting
    - Approve budget at May 9th Annual Town Meeting