AI Summary of Town Council Zoom Meeting November 9, 2026

Note 1: AI content should always be checked for accuracy….!

Note 2: John Compton means the Council Room audio

Key Takeaways

- Officer Melanie Romano (Community Services Officer, 6th Precinct, Montgomery County Police) presented on vehicle break-ins and theft trends, recommending surveillance cameras, license plate readers (LPRs), neighborhood watch programs, and signage as primary deterrents.
- The Treasurer reported the annual audit is complete (unqualified), and ARPA funds are on track to be fully spent by December 31, avoiding any required return of funds.
- Evan Whalen, a Washington Grove resident and landscape architect, presented a detailed native planting design for the Center Street bioswale and submerged gravel wetland; the Council voted to engage him as project manager.
- The Council discussed improving parliamentary debate procedures ahead of a Saturday training session with parliamentarian Michael Swift.
- A motion regarding stop signs at the intersection of Macaulay and Grove Road was amended to gather public input before the December meeting.
- Several volunteer kudos were recognized, including for Halloween events, Ann's Folly restoration, meadow planting, road cleanup, and woods invasive removal.

Discussed Topics

1. Technical Setup and Pre-Meeting Logistics

The meeting opened with extended technical difficulties involving Zoom, microphone placement, printing issues, and document sharing. Co-host access was granted to Georgette to assist with admitting participants.

- **Details**
  - John: Struggled with Zoom connectivity, microphone direction, and document printing throughout the pre-meeting period.
  - Georgette: Confirmed co-host status and assisted with admitting participants.

- **Conclusion**
    - Technical issues were eventually resolved; the microphone was repositioned to better capture audio for remote participants.

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2. Agenda Approval

John presented a slightly earlier version of the agenda due to a technical issue preventing the latest version from displaying. He verbally described the additions.

- **Details**
    - John: Noted additions included extra kudos, a placeholder statement, a website update item regarding search function, an item titled "Effective Council Debate," and new business regarding stop sign placement at Macaulay and Grove Road.
    - John: Moved to approve the amended agenda.
- **Conclusion**
    - Agenda approved unanimously.

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3. Guest Presentation – Officer Melanie Romano: Community Safety and Vehicle Crime

Officer Melanie Romano, Community Services Officer with the 6th Precinct of Montgomery County Police, presented crime statistics and safety recommendations for Washington Grove.

- **Details**
    - Melanie's iPhone (Officer Romano): Apologized for late arrival due to browser compatibility issues.
    - Melanie's iPhone: Reviewed a crime analyst spreadsheet covering January through October of the current year. March showed the highest activity with 12 calls for service, including vehicle break-ins, 3 stolen vehicles, 2 attempted vehicle thefts, and an indecent exposure case.
    - Melanie's iPhone: Identified a likely group of juveniles (ages 15–25) targeting multiple communities including Washington Grove, Towncrest, and parts of Flower Hill.
    - Melanie's iPhone: Recommended personal vehicle safeguards: removing valuables, locking vehicles, setting alarms, and using steering wheel locks.

    - Melanie's iPhone: Highlighted Kia and Hyundai vehicles as particularly targeted due to a viral method for starting them without a key; noted Hondas are also seeing an uptick.
    - Melanie's iPhone: Strongly recommended surveillance cameras as the most impactful deterrent, noting the police department has facial recognition software that can assist in identifying suspects from footage.
    - Melanie's iPhone: Mentioned a camera rebate program ($150–$250) available to residents who register cameras with the county via Moco Connect and allow police access upon request.
    - Melanie's iPhone: Discussed the option of hiring off-duty officers for community patrol, estimating approximately $100/hour; a 4-day/week schedule would cost roughly $1,600/week.
    - Melanie's iPhone: Noted the department has only 9 officers covering 500 square miles per evening shift, making dedicated patrols in Washington Grove unfeasible.
    - Melanie's iPhone: Confirmed that stolen vehicles are fingerprinted; however, juveniles are not typically fingerprinted until arrested.
    - Melanie's iPhone: Acknowledged limitations of facial recognition software, particularly regarding accuracy with varying skin tones, and emphasized the need for high-quality footage.
    - John Porter: Thanked Officer Romano and noted the discussion should shift focus to what the community can do rather than relying solely on police.
    - John: Asked about the practicality of reviewing camera footage and whether LPR data would be useful even if plates belong to stolen vehicles.
    - Melanie's iPhone: Confirmed LPR data is still useful as it can help trace stolen vehicles and link suspects across incidents.
    - Barbara: Raised concerns about facial recognition accuracy across different skin tones.
    - Melanie's iPhone: Acknowledged the concern, noting the process is painstaking and officers must be extremely careful to avoid misidentification.
    - John: Referenced a prior presentation proposing a $25,000 enclosed server-based camera system for the town.
- **Conclusion**
    - Primary recommendation: Install surveillance cameras (stationary or mobile) with accompanying signage.

- Residents with existing cameras (e.g., Ring) are encouraged to register them via Moco Connect.
- The Council will discuss camera investment and other deterrent options at a future meeting.
- Hiring off-duty officers is a viable but costly option.
- Community vigilance and neighborhood watch behavior are strongly encouraged.

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4. Treasurer's Report

The Treasurer (treas) presented the October financial report.

- **Details**
  - treas: Confirmed the annual audit has been completed and received an unqualified opinion; the final copy will be presented for Council approval at the December meeting.
  - treas: Reported ARPA funds are down to approximately $176,000 through September billing; with the October bill (~$80,000) and November/December bills, both John and the Treasurer are confident all ARPA funds will be spent by December 31.
  - treas: Noted the remainder of the stormwater project will be funded through a Maryland state grant.
  - treas: Explained that the commercial corner is now invoiced for trash and recycling pickup, and payments have been prompt.
  - treas: Highlighted a new line item called "lease fee" for Action Hauling's use of town property ($2,000/year, payable quarterly with a $25 late fee); noted Action Hauling is traditionally late in paying.
  - John: Asked whether the lease with Action Hauling is at-will and whether the town could terminate it.
  - treas: Confirmed the legal aspects are outside her purview.
  - John: Clarified the lease is at-will with a notice requirement on both sides.
- **Conclusion**
  - Treasurer's report accepted unanimously.
  - The lease arrangement with Action Hauling will be reviewed by John.

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5. Mayor's Report – Kudos and Town Updates

Kudos

- **Details**
    - John: Recognized the Recreation Committee for organizing the Halloween event at the London Gazebo.
    - John: Recognized volunteers who refurbished Ann's Folly (the tennis shed), originally conceived by former Mayor Anne Briggs and built in 1999. Special mention to Terry Arnold (woodworking), Meredith Horan (coordination), and Bruce Dagey (organization).
    - John: Recognized Meadows volunteer committee members who planted 350 native wildflowers and grasses and conducted invasive species removal. Named volunteers: Bob and Peggy Boer, Bruce Dagey, Chris Christian, Ernie Kawasaki, Paul Bugizzi, Saffron, David Stopak, and Anne Vincent.
    - John: Recognized the Gateway Committee for a road cleanup with 14 volunteers collecting 109 pounds of trash. Noted Jonathan Dale personally sorts recyclables from collected trash.
    - John: Recognized Woods Committee volunteers for removing invasive plants (Japanese barberry, wineberry, English ivy, honeysuckle) in Westwoods near Maple Spring.
- **Conclusion**
    - All kudos noted for inclusion in the December bulletin.

Stormwater Management Project Update

- **Details**
    - John: Current work is on Center Street; pavement has been removed and bioswale installation is underway, extending from Chestnut Road past Chestnut Avenue, including a new pipe.
    - John: Culverts at Center and Hickory will be replaced next, followed by work on the submerged gravel wetlands at the end of Center Street.
    - John: The intersection of Hutch's Way and Chestnut Avenue work will resume soon; final work will include regrading Chestnut Avenue between Oak and Hutchins Way.
    - John: ARPA funds must be spent by December 31; state stormwater management funds will cover the remainder, with project completion expected into next year.

- **Conclusion**
    - Project is progressing; ARPA spending is on track.

Other Administrative Updates

- **Details**
    - John: Parliamentary procedure training scheduled for Saturday with Michael Swift.
    - John: Path walkway lights outside the council room have been relocated to a safer position by RJ and Steve.
    - John: Town archives are now accessible online via Past Perfect software through the virtual museum page on the town website.
- **Conclusion**
    - Updates noted; no further action required at this time.

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6. Administrative Matters

Email Communications and Sign-Up Forms

- **Details**
    - John: Explained two separate email lists exist — one for the town bulletin and one for official notices. Anna has created online sign-up/address management forms accessible from the town website's front page.
    - John: Existing subscribers will remain on the lists; the forms allow residents to update email addresses.
- **Conclusion**
    - Residents encouraged to use the new online forms to manage their subscriptions.

Website Updates

- **Details**
    - John: Requests for website updates should now be directed to both Anna and John, following Christine Dibble's resignation.
    - John: John Porter has been working with developer Marcus Trapp to improve the website's search function by integrating a third-party search engine.
- **Conclusion**
    - Website update process streamlined; search function improvement in progress.

Playground Update

- **Details**
  - Oscar: The playground committee selected LabSet as the design vendor. Initial feedback has been sent; a rep (David Flanagan) will provide an updated design within approximately two weeks, including existing equipment and actual layout.
  - Oscar: The committee chose not to share the initial concept with the broader community to avoid confusion; the next version will be closer to a final draft, at which point public feedback will be collected.
- **Conclusion**
  - Awaiting updated design from LabSet; public feedback process to follow.

Tree Pruning and Removal Policy

- **Details**
  - John: Two separate policies exist — one from the Forestry and Beautification Committee and one from the Woods Committee. Both should be combined into a single document for clarity and accessibility.
  - John: Asked both committees to review and consolidate their policies into a single document for Council approval as a resolution.
- **Conclusion**
  - Forestry and Beautification Committee and Woods Committee tasked with consolidating tree policies.

Effective Council Debate / Parliamentary Procedure

- **Details**
  - John: Raised the topic of improving debate discipline within Council meetings.
  - Chris: Noted that at the previous meeting, a vote was called before all members had a chance to speak, which is inconsistent with Robert's Rules of Order. Under Robert's Rules, every participant has the right to speak once before any member may speak a second time.
  - John: Agreed that the Council often does not follow proper debate order — members speak out of turn, no hands are raised, and time limits are not observed.
  - Chris: Suggested this topic be addressed at Saturday's parliamentary procedure training with Michael Swift.
- **Conclusion**

- The parliamentary procedure training on Saturday will specifically address debate order and time limits.
- Council members encouraged to apply Robert's Rules more consistently going forward.

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7. Bioswale and Submerged Gravel Wetland Landscaping – Evan Whalen Presentation

Evan Whalen, a Washington Grove resident with a Master's in Landscape Architecture, presented a native planting design for the Center Street bioswale and submerged gravel wetland.

- **Details**
  - John: Introduced Evan Whalen and provided context — the bioswale construction phase is nearing completion; the next phase is planting design and installation oversight.
  - Evan Whalen: Described his background — 6 years of ecological planning and green infrastructure design, former private garden design business owner, MLA in green infrastructure, member of the Sustainability Committee, and use of GIS and USGS Soil Survey tools.
  - Evan Whalen: Explained the two facilities — the bioswale on Center Street and the submerged gravel wetland — are green infrastructure micro-facilities governed by Maryland Department of the Environment ESD (Environmental Site Design) requirements.
  - Evan Whalen: Proposed using all native plants, specifically wetland species (facultative and obligate), planted in a dense matrix (10–12 inches on center) to minimize maintenance, suppress weeds, and promote percolation.
  - Evan Whalen: Described the bioswale as approximately 276 feet long with a 12-inch wide channel, divided into a shaded woodland section (near Sylvie Favre's residence) and a sunnier section.
  - Evan Whalen: Proposed planting in phases: structural layer (20%), ground covers (50%, ~1,600 plants), seasonal themes (25%, ~830 plants), and fillers/ephemerals (5%).
  - Evan Whalen: Recommended a 4x4 grid planting layout for ease of construction administration.

- Evan Whalen: Noted the submerged gravel wetland is approximately 3,121 square feet, requiring approximately 858 plants total.
- Evan Whalen: Recommended a deer exclusion fence during the plant establishment phase (year one); after establishment, selected plants are highly deer-resistant.
- Evan Whalen: Advised against aggressive self-seeding species; all selected plants are long-lived, deep-rooting perennials under 4 feet tall.
- Evan Whalen: Recommended a cover crop seeding in both facilities immediately to suppress weeds, loosen soil, and stabilize structure prior to formal planting.
- Evan Whalen: Proposed optimal planting timing: bioswale in spring 2027; submerged gravel wetland in fall 2027.
- Evan Whalen: Noted that per the Maryland Stormwater Act, no pesticides, herbicides, or fungicides may be used in the facilities.
- Evan Whalen: Stated the facility must achieve at least 85% vegetative cover within 3 years of construction per ESD guidelines; his design aims to achieve this in year one.
- Evan Whalen: Mentioned the design was vetted with Rainscapes and colleagues at UMD; confirmed the facility is not eligible for a Rainscapes rebate as it is in a town right-of-way.
- Evan Whalen: Proposed an educational sign and bat house at the entrance to the submerged gravel wetland for mosquito control.
- Evan Whalen: Suggested sending the build and planting grow operation out to RFP; Maryland has many nurseries specializing in high-volume green infrastructure plantings.
- Evan Whalen: Estimated approximately 7,000 plants total across both facilities; noted nurseries typically need 6 months lead time.
- Evan Whalen: Offered to administer construction, train volunteers, and assist with ongoing maintenance as a Washington Grove resident and stakeholder.
- John: Clarified the budget — the original SMI contract was $464,000; approximately $50,000 in landscaping allowances were removed from the SMI scope. The bioswale/wetland planting budget is approximately $40,000–$45,000 for materials and installation, plus approximately $5,000 (10%) for Evan Whalen's project management fee.
- Georgette: Expressed support for the proposal; noted fall planting is generally optimal for establishment and may attract new, younger volunteers.

    - Council members: Raised concerns about ongoing maintenance burden, volunteer capacity, and the need for a designated point person.
    - Evan Whalen: Responded that a dense matrix planting is the lower-maintenance option compared to sparse planting; estimated 2–3 dedicated volunteers needed for leaf blowing, irrigation in summer, and invasive species removal.
    - John: Noted that having Evan as a resident point person is a significant advantage for the first several years.
    - John Porter: Supported the motion.
- **Conclusion**
    - Motion made and seconded to engage Evan Whalen as project manager for the bioswale and submerged gravel wetland planting project.
    - Motion passed unanimously.
    - Evan Whalen will prepare an RFP for the build and planting operation, targeting completion within the next couple of weeks (by mid-November).
    - Bioswale planting targeted for spring 2027; submerged gravel wetland planting targeted for fall 2027.
    - Cover crop seeding to be implemented in both facilities in the interim.

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8. Stop Signs at Macaulay and Grove Road Intersection

John raised a safety concern about the intersection of Macaulay and Grove Road, where two roads effectively dead-end at a right angle with limited visibility.

- **Details**
    - John: Described the intersection as dangerous due to straight-projecting headlights, speeding vehicles, and poor sightlines, particularly for pedestrians.
    - John: Made a motion to place 2 stop signs at the intersection of Macaulay and Grove Road.
    - Chris: Suggested speed bumps as an alternative or addition.
    - Peter: Expressed skepticism that stop signs alone would meaningfully improve safety, suggesting a speed hump would be more effective.
    - John Porter: Suggested deferring for a month to gather public input.
    - Council: Discussed the process of public input versus immediate action; noted that buy-in from residents is important.
    - John: Amended the motion to defer to the next meeting and gather public input on safety issues at that corner via the town bulletin and website.

- **Conclusion**
    - Amended motion passed unanimously.
    - Public input will be solicited through the town bulletin (published approximately 2 weeks before the December 14 meeting) and the town website.
    - Mary and another member will begin informal outreach to residents near the intersection.

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9. Town Council Reports

EDSC – Radar Signs and Awareness Signage

- **Details**
    - John: The EDSC will push to have an awareness sign installed at the corner of Brown and Chestnut.
    - John: Rather than swapping radar signs to test for defects, the Chestnut sign will be moved to Grove Avenue, and the Brown Street sign will be repositioned.
- **Conclusion**
    - Sign repositioning plan confirmed; no swap test needed.

Catherine Hall Rental Agreement

- **Details**
    - John: The rental hall agreement has been reviewed preliminarily; a proposal to revise the fee structure and rental process will be forthcoming.
- **Conclusion**
    - Revised rental fee structure proposal to be presented at a future meeting.

Planning Commission – Work Permit Update

- **Details**
    - Peter: The public work permit has been updated to require advance notice when projects will affect town property, cause road closures, or cause traffic disruptions.
    - Peter: This stems from Petco installing three telephone poles on Ridge Road without notifying residents of the road closure date, despite having a valid permit for 5 months.
- **Conclusion**
    - Updated permit requirements now in effect.

New Poop Station

- **Details**
  - John: A new dog waste station has been installed near Steve Shannon's house; noted it was well-received in a survey of dog amenities.
- **Conclusion**
  - Installation complete; no further action needed.

Challenges

- **Police resource constraints**: Montgomery County Police 6th District is severely understaffed, with as few as 9 officers covering 500 square miles per shift, making dedicated community patrols in Washington Grove unfeasible.
- **Facial recognition limitations**: The department's facial recognition software requires high-quality footage and must be used with extreme caution to avoid misidentification, particularly with varying skin tones.
- **Juvenile offender limitations**: Juveniles are not typically fingerprinted until arrested, and once apprehended, they cannot be questioned and are released to a guardian, limiting investigative options.
- **Bioswale maintenance burden**: Ongoing maintenance of the bioswale and submerged gravel wetland (leaf removal, irrigation, invasive species control, deer exclusion) will require dedicated volunteers or additional RJ contract costs; a formal maintenance plan has not yet been established.
- **Plant procurement lead time**: Approximately 7,000 plants are needed across both facilities; nurseries typically require 6 months lead time, and some shade-adapted species may require special sourcing.
- **Volunteer capacity**: A core group of residents handles most volunteer work in town; adding new maintenance responsibilities risks overburdening existing volunteers.
- **ARPA spending deadline**: All ARPA funds (~$176,000 remaining) must be spent by December 31 to avoid returning funds to the government.
- **Website search function**: The current integrated search engine produces too many irrelevant results; a third-party replacement is being evaluated.
- **Action Hauling lease**: Action Hauling is routinely late in paying the quarterly lease fee; ongoing follow-up is required.

Action Items

- **Officer Melanie Romano**
  - Provide any updates on detective progress and arrests related to the vehicle break-in group when available.
- **John (Mayor)**
  - Review the at-will lease agreement with Action Hauling to assess termination options.
  - Ensure the bioswale/wetland planting project update and Evan Whalen's engagement are documented in meeting minutes.
  - Publish public input request regarding safety at the Macaulay and Grove Road intersection in the town bulletin (approximately 2 weeks before December 14 meeting).
  - Post the intersection safety issue on the town website within one week.
  - Ensure kudos list (Ann's Folly volunteers) is included in the December bulletin.
  - Move the Chestnut radar sign to Grove Avenue and reposition the Brown Street radar sign.
  - Bring the revised Catherine Hall rental fee structure proposal to a future meeting.
- **Evan Whalen**
  - Prepare and submit an RFP for the bioswale and submerged gravel wetland build and planting operation (target: mid-November).
  - Coordinate with nurseries for plant procurement, accounting for 6-month lead times and fall 2027 planting for the wetland.
  - Arrange cover crop seeding for both facilities in the interim period.
  - Develop a volunteer training plan for ongoing maintenance of both facilities.
  - Finalize fee schedule and present to Council for review.
- **Anna (Town Administrator)**
  - Ensure the online email sign-up/address management forms remain accessible and functional on the town website front page.
  - Continue managing and updating the town website; coordinate with John on update requests.
  - Follow up with Action Hauling on outstanding quarterly lease payment.
- **John Porter**
  - Continue working with Marcus Trapp to finalize the third-party search engine integration for the town website.

- **Forestry and Beautification Committee / Woods Committee**
    - Review existing tree pruning and removal policies and consolidate into a single document for Council approval as a resolution.
- **Georgette**
    - Review Evan Whalen's stormwater brief in full and provide any additional feedback from the Forestry and Beautification Committee perspective.
- **Oscar**
    - Follow up with David Flanagan (LabSet rep) on the updated playground design (expected within approximately 2 weeks).
    - Share updated design with the Council and develop a public feedback process once the design is near final.
- **treas (Treasurer)**
    - Obtain the final audit copy and present it for Council approval at the December 14 meeting.
    - Continue monitoring ARPA expenditures to ensure full spend-down by December 31.
    - Send reminders to Action Hauling regarding outstanding quarterly lease payment and applicable late fee.
- **Chris**
    - Raise the topic of debate order and time limits at Saturday's parliamentary procedure training with Michael Swift; ensure the trainer emphasizes these key points.
- **Mary / Resident volunteers**
    - Begin informal outreach to residents near the Macaulay and Grove Road intersection to gauge support for safety improvements ahead of the December meeting.
- **All Council Members**
    - Attend parliamentary procedure training on Saturday with Michael Swift.
    - Residents with existing cameras (Ring or other) are encouraged to register them via Moco Connect.
    - Next meeting: December 14.