

Candidate Questionnaire

Candidate Name: Dave Stepp

Talbot County

1. Housing affordability, growth limits, and essential workers

Easton's proposed 2026 Comprehensive Plan emphasizes infill development, limits annexation to special circumstances, and includes a strict 1% growth cap. Some believe that no new projects should be approved for the next 10+ years. At the same time, affordable housing remains a concern for teachers, first responders, service workers, and other essential employees.

Question: How would you address the lack of housing affordability in Talbot County, especially for essential workers, knowing that housing growth may be stifled in Easton? What role should the county play in supporting new construction, and do you believe the county should consider waiving some fees or taxes to help reduce housing costs?

Answer: May I first go on record in saying that I believe every worker's job is essential to them and their families. I also believe that "affordable housing" means something different to every person and family – it is numerical in nature, unique to everyone, and trusted Realtors are thankfully a key part in helping prospective buyers find that balance. Any growth in Talbot County should follow the county's Comprehensive Plan. That plan has been carefully designed, with citizen feedback throughout, to properly address growth while still maintaining our rural character. Talbot County currently addresses a portion of this question with a \$7,000 closing/down payment grant for county employees who purchase a primary residence within the county. The Town of Easton, for first-time homebuyers in the town of Easton, offers a similar grant at \$6,000 for its employees and also includes volunteer firefighters in the benefit. Talbot County should continue to do several things that would allow those mentioned above to be homeowners in Talbot County – keep property low, keep income taxes low, and keep fees low. I now have a proven track record as a Talbot County Councilman of fighting to keep all taxes and fees low.

2. Data centers

Talbot County is adopting a one-year moratorium on new data centers in its unincorporated areas while officials develop zoning and other regulations.

Question: What type of data center protections would you support, and what county standards should apply before a project is approved?

Answer: I will begin with stating that I believe data centers DO NOT belong in Talbot County. I understand that this can be a conflicting statement with being a property rights advocate, but these operations are very unique in nature. Like many residents, I have severe concerns with the strain that data centers put on our environmental, water, and energy resources. I believe the few benefits that a data center could bring would be severely overshadowed by negative consequences. I would not support any sort of data center protections which naturally would lend itself to not even needing standards for an approval pathway. Data centers are currently not permitted in Talbot County and I will continue to see to it that it remains that way.

3. Short-term rentals

Talbot County already has one of the most comprehensive short-term rental frameworks in Maryland, and recent discussions have considered even tighter rules. Consider that there have been very few reported complaints thus far and no measurable increase in the number of STRs over the past 9 years.

Question: Do you support stricter short-term rental regulations, or do you think the current system is sufficient?

Answer: I do not support stricter STR regulations in Talbot County. As stated correctly in the question, Talbot County does have one of the most comprehensive STR frameworks in Maryland and very few complaints have ever been reported throughout its existence. In short, the existing process is working. As an existing Councilman, I have voted against and opposed the multiple attempts at broad-stroke, over-reaching STR legislation. It is simply not needed. To the contrary, I have legislation being introduced on September 8th 2026 that will lessen the burden on both new and renewal STR applications. This legislation will keep the neighbor notification limits at 1000' (for waterfront purposes) but add a notification stipulation of "or the closest 50 properties" to help with the costly notification process STR owners currently face (typically in town settings).

4. Property rights and oversight

The Realtor Association is one of the few organizations consistently advocating for property rights, and preserving those rights is essential to good governance.

Question: How do you balance legitimate government oversight, such as zoning, safety, and code enforcement, with the need to protect private property rights?

Answer: I mentioned our Comprehensive Plan in a previous response. Good governance refers to that plan as it is driven by citizen feedback and that plan is what the Planning Commission makes recommendations against. Citizens' property rights should be honored, but should be in alignment with the Comprehensive plan so that everyone can benefit. I will acknowledge that Talbot County Planning Commission decisions often become a heated debate, but the County Council (being an elected body) has the final say. In my opinion, common sense should judge that final say. I'd like to again call out the importance of trusted Realtors here – helping guide prospective buyers along the way so that property rights conflicts stay at a minimum in Talbot County.

5. For incumbents: Past accomplishments and future priorities

Voters are evaluating both past performance and future priorities.

Question: What legislation or major policy action from your time in office are you most proud of, and what legislation would you most like to see passed in the next four years?

Answer: If I had to narrow down my top legislation/policy actions as a Talbot County Councilman, I'd have to say they would be:

- Repealing both COVID-19 resolutions put in place by the previous County Council, stripping the authority of the Talbot Co. Health Dept. to levy fines and shut down Talbot County businesses
- Creation of Talbot Day – a day to celebrate God and everything that makes Talbot County great
- Repealing of both Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) resolutions put in place by the previous County Council, saving Talbot County \$46.8M in federal airport renovation funding

Relative to this questionnaire, I'd have to say though that my aforementioned actions and upcoming legislation regarding STR's show my commitment to the real estate market, property rights, and common sense. In the next 4 years, I'd like to continue to advance common-sense legislation and policy actions that keep Talbot County a great place to live, work, and play - and that align with what I call my 5 F's – Faith, Family, Freedom, Fiscal Responsibility, and Fighting for you!

6. For new candidates: Past policy and future agenda

New candidates often bring a different perspective on prior council decisions and future direction.

Question: What past county legislation or policy would you have changed, and what are your top priorities for the next four years if elected?

Answer: n/a

7. For all candidates: Qualifications and experience

Voters want to understand what distinguishes each candidate beyond party, endorsements, or familiarity.

Question: What qualifications and experience do you have that distinguish you from the other candidates? How do they enhance your potential as an effective Council Member? Why should voters choose you?

Answer: What qualifies and distinguishes me from the other candidates is my existing Councilman experience and deep-rooted history of volunteerism and service throughout Talbot County. To expound, having a solid voting record of fiscal responsibility, protecting rights and freedoms, and standing tough throughout my tenure further shows that existing experience matters. In short, those are the primary reasons why voters should cast their ballot for me this November.

A full resume of my qualifications, copied directly from my website, is as follows:

Dave and his family are all lifelong Marylanders. Dave has been a leader, coach, and volunteer in Talbot County for the last 16 years. Dave has close, well-established community relationships and has the desire to continue to serve all of Talbot County as a member of the Talbot County Council.

In the community, Dave is passionate about community safety, youth sports, and mentoring and that shows in his volunteerism and responsibilities throughout Talbot County. In addition to his regular Council duties, Dave is currently the Council Liaison to the Emergency Services Advisory Board, Parks and Rec Board, Local Emergency Planning Committee, Local Drug and Alcohol Abuse Committee, and the Weed Control Board. He is also the Chartered Organization

Representative of St. Michael's Boy Scout Troop 741 (where he previously served as Co-Scoutmaster) and is the current President of the Ingleton Association.

Previously, Dave has also been a Coach, Vice President, and Board Member at Easton Little League – as well as Coach, Vice President, and Founding Board Member of Talbot Softball Little League. Dave has also been the Assistant Coach of the Saints Peter and Paul Varsity baseball team and was the Committee Chair and Founding Board Member of Easton Boy Scout Troop 1091. Dave has volunteered as both a Character Counts Coach and Destination Imagination Coach at St. Michael's Elementary School, served as a Fishing Derby volunteer at the Waterfowl Festival, coached T-Ball at the Easton YMCA, helped out with the Easton Icehawks youth hockey organization, and was the Chairman for the annual Jim Bob Ryan 3-Club Classic golf tournament benefitting Ryan's Avengers held at Hog Neck Golf Course.

Professionally, Dave has worked in the telecommunications industry for the last 27 years, holding various sales and management positions. Dave has also been a proud small business owner since 2003. Dave has earned his Associates Degree from Anne Arundel Community College, Bachelor's Degree from the University of Maryland, and his MBA from the University of Maryland where he graduated with honors and gained entry into the Phi Kappa Phi Honor Society.