

Minutes of the County Commissioners of Worcester County, Maryland

March 17, 2020

Joseph M. Mitrecic, President
Theodore J. Elder, Vice President
Anthony W. Bertino, Jr.
Madison J. Bunting, Jr.
James C. Church
Joshua C. Nordstrom
Diana Purnell

Following a motion by Commissioner Bertino, seconded by Commissioner Bunting, the Commissioners unanimously voted to meet in closed session at 9:00 a.m. in the Commissioners' Conference Room to discuss legal and personnel matters permitted under the provisions of Section 3-305(b)(1) and (7) of the General Provisions (GP) Article of the Annotated Code of Maryland and to perform administrative functions, permitted under the provisions of Section GP 3-104. Also present at the closed session were Chief Administrative Officer Harold L. Higgins, Assistant Chief Administrative Officer Kelly Shannahan, County Attorney Roscoe Leslie, Public Information Officer Kim Moses, Human Resources Director Stacey Norton; Health Officer Becky Jones, Warden Donna Bounds, and Assistant Warden Fulton Holland. Topics discussed and actions taken included: discussing an employee disciplinary action; hiring Stephanie Bright, William James, and Nick Cargiulo as Correctional Officer Trainees within the County Jail, Kerric Hickman as a Grounds Worker II and Jamie Page as a Carpenter/Maintenance Worker III in the Maintenance Division, and Walter "Denny" Price and Frank Campbell as part-time temporary Roads Workers in the Roads Division of Public Works, Elwood "Chris" Hokanson as a Plumbing and Gas Inspector III for Environmental Programs; promoting Jessica Wilson from Enterprise Fund Controller to Assistant Finance Officer; receiving legal advice from counsel; and performing administrative functions, including: reviewing FY21 benefits recommendations; scheduling the annual breakfast meeting with Maryland Association of Counties (MACo) officials for June 30, 2020; and reviewing recommendations to correct improperly installed wiring at the Pocomoke Little League fields at Newtown Park in Pocomoke.

Following a motion by Commissioner Bertino, seconded by Commissioner Bunting, the Commissioners unanimously voted to adjourn their closed session at 9:56 a.m.

After the closed session, the Commissioners reconvened in open session. Commissioner Mitrecic called the meeting to order, and following a morning prayer by Father Michael Moyer of St. Paul's Episcopal Church in Berlin and pledge of allegiance, announced the topics discussed during the morning closed session.

The Commissioners reviewed and approved the open and closed session minutes of their March 3, 2019 meeting as presented.

The agenda before the Commissioners today, March 17, 2020 was modified to postpone

or suspend certain public presentations and public hearings in accordance with Maryland Governor Larry Hogan's executive orders regarding social distancing and limiting gatherings to no more than 50 people to prevent the spread of the novel coronavirus (COVID-19).

The Commissioners presented a proclamation recognizing April as Census 2020 Awareness Month to Kelly Henry, the Technical Services Division Manager within Development Review and Permitting (DRP) and the Complete Count Committee Coordinator, and urged County residents to participate in the 2020 Census. Ms. Henry stated that the Census takes about 10 minutes to complete, can be filled out online at <https://2020census.gov>, and every Marylander counted results in federal funding of \$18,250 over a 10-year period for vital services.

The Commissioners reviewed a letter from Superintendent of Schools Lou Taylor advising that the requested FY21 Board of Education (BOE) Operating Budget does not include any nonrecurring expenses. The Commissioners accepted the letter regarding nonrecurring costs.

The Commissioners reviewed a letter from Mr. Taylor advising that the BOE Maintenance of Effort (MOE) calculation reflects an increase of \$2,963,717 in County funding from FY20 to FY21 funding. The Commissioners are required to fund the MOE budget, unless they apply for and are granted a waiver from the Maryland State Department of Education (MSDE). The Commissioners concurred with the MOE increase as required.

The Commissioners met with Human Resources Director and Health Benefits Committee (HBC) representative Stacey Norton to review the FY21 benefits recommendations from the Health Benefits Committee and PSA Insurance and Financial Services, the County's benefits broker. Other HBC members in attendance included Assistant Chief Administrative Officer Kelly Shannahan, Finance Officer Phil Thompson, Budget Officer Kathy Whited, and Gary McCabe and Beth Shockley-Lynch of the Worcester County Teachers Association (WCTA). HBC recommendations for FY21 include the following: stay with Carefirst for dental and offer employees the choice of a \$1,000 or \$1,500 plan at a slightly higher premium; stay with VSP for vision with a 16% rate decrease resulting in \$50,637 savings annually with a four-year rate guarantee; stay with Carefirst for medical, reducing the emergency room copay from \$200 to \$100 and including some compliance services; staying with Carefirst/CVS/Care Mark for pharmacy and adding a voluntary maintenance retail wrap choice (which allows 90-day prescription refills at retail pharmacies other than CVS for two copays); staying with Guardian for life and disability coverage, which will increase from \$116,471 to \$144,048 or 23.7% based on the actual County claims and experience rating. Ms. Norton thanked the Commissioners for allowing PSA to solicit proposals for medical, dental, vision, pharmacy benefit manager benefits, which resulted in an overall 10.47% decrease in the cost of health benefits for the County and Board of Education for a total savings of \$3,981,044.

Commissioner Bertino thanked the members of the HBC for their successful efforts to reduce the cost of benefits. Commissioner Nordstrom thanked them as well for expanding the pharmacy options. Following some discussion and upon a motion by Commissioner Bertino, the Commissioners voted 5-2, with Commissioners Bunting and Elder voting in opposition, to adopt the FY21 benefit recommendations as presented.

Upon a nomination by Commissioner Elder, the Commissioners unanimously agreed to submit the name of Captain Robert Bruce Wooten to Governor Larry Hogan for his consideration and appointment as an alternate on the Worcester County Property Tax Assessment Appeal Board to replace Gary M. Flater who resigned.

Pursuant to the request of Housing Program Administrator Jo Ellen Bynum and upon a motion by Commissioner Nordstrom, the Commissioners unanimously awarded the low bid for the general rehabilitation of a single family home in the Pocomoke City area to Three Guys Construction of Westover, Maryland at a cost of \$12,575.

Pursuant to the request of Senior Budget Accountant Kim Reynolds and the Diakonia Board and upon a motion by Commissioner Nordstrom, the Commissioners voted 6-0-1, with Commissioner Church abstaining due to a potential conflict of interests, to award the three low bids for the Diakonia shelter project as follows: East Coast Contracting in the amount of \$62,340.49 for building one and two, railings/decking, and kitchenettes; Spicer Brothers in the amount of \$26,240 for building two roof; and OC Floor Gallery in the amount of \$6,500 for building two flooring.

Pursuant to the recommendation of Tom Perlozzo, Director of Recreation, Parks, Tourism, and Economic Development, and upon a motion by Commissioner Purnell, the Commissioners unanimously agreed to utilize remaining funds totaling \$68,500, which represents the remaining balance from two expiring grants, 2017 (\$59,000) and 2018 (\$23,500), to help fund the parking lot, grading, and boardwalk construction along the proposed fingers piers included in phase two of the Public Landing project.

The Commissioners met with Mr. Perlozzo to discuss his recommendation to resolve the improper installation of electrical cable as part of the Pocomoke Little League (PLL) field lighting project at Newtown Park which was not buried to the proper depth of at least 24-inches. In response to a recommendation by Mr. Perlozzo and upon a motion by Commissioner Bertino, the Commissioners unanimously directed County staff to disconnect the lighting at Newtown Park until the wiring is brought into compliance and installed to the County's satisfaction. Commissioner Nordstrom stated that he wanted the lights to stay on for the kids, but that he was in agreement with his colleagues that this step is necessary to correct this error and protect public safety.

Mr. Perlozzo advised that Phil Houck, owner of Crab Alley, had informed him that he Power Boat Races scheduled for September 25-27, 2020 in Ocean City have been cancelled, as the race organizer chose to relocate to Solomon's Island after that jurisdiction paid \$85,000 to host the event.

Pursuant to the recommendation of Environmental Programs Director Bob Mitchell and upon a motion by Commissioner Purnell, the Commissioners voted 5-2, with Commissioners Bunting and Elder voting in opposition, to authorize Commission President Mitrecic to sign the Agreement of Sale between Truitts Landing Farm, LLC (Seller) and the County Commissioners of Worcester County, Maryland (Buyer) for the purchase of a Rural Legacy Area easement for

\$207,500 to be funded by FY17 Coastal Bays Rural Legacy Area (RLA) easement funds at no cost to the County, on approximately 112.03 acres located on the northeast side of Truitts Landing Road, and more specifically identified on Tax Map 72 as Parcel 11. Mr. Mitchell stated that this property is located around large blocks of contiguously protected land in the Coastal Bays watershed, and the owner has given up all sub-division and development rights, save construction of one residence. Farming will continue, but the owner must abide by impervious surface limits, which include no confined animal feeding operations (CAFOs), and limits will be placed on agricultural buildings.

The Commissioners met with Mr. Mitchell to schedule a public hearing to receive public comment on a Sanitary Service Area (SSA) expansion application submitted by John E. Shook, Jr., President of the St. Martins by the Bay Homeowner Association (applicant), to expand the Ocean Pines Sanitary Service Area (SSA) to provide public water service to the existing St. Martins by the Bay community to serve 58 parcels that consist of 28 single-family homes, 26 townhouses, four undeveloped lots, and a community pool located on the northern side of Beauchamp Road directly north of the Ocean Pines community and more specifically identified on Tax Map 16 as Parcels 6, 86, 87, 88, 91 and 95. Mr. Mitchell stated that the property is currently being served by private water and sewer, and if approved the community will need to construct an extension to connect to an appropriate location within the Ocean Pines water distribution system. In response to a question by Commissioner Bertino, Mr. Mitchell stated that the County would apply for a combination of grant and low-interest loan funds through the United States Department of Agriculture for this project, if approved.

Upon a motion by Commissioner Bertino, the Commissioners unanimously agreed to schedule a future public hearing to receive public comment on the proposed expansion of the Ocean Pines SSA for the extension of public water service to St. Martins by the Bay.

Pursuant to the request of Public Works Director John Tustin and upon a motion by Commissioner Bertino, the Commissioners unanimously agreed to schedule a future public hearing to receive public comments on a proposal to extend public sewer service to the Gum Point Road Area of the Greater Ocean Pines Service Area. Mr. Tustin stated that the County has received a developer agreement to serve the Hershey property as well as proposals from J. W. Salm Engineering and Russell T. Hammond Surveying for engineering and surveying services for this project, but he recommended the Commissioners postpone executing any of these proposals until after the required public hearing. Mr. Tustin further advised that the total customer count has been reduced by 10 equivalent dwelling units (EDUs), since three properties are not buildable and seven EDUs are being served under the recently approved Vanderhackett LLC extension, bringing the cost per EDU to approximately \$21,886. In response to a question by Commissioner Bertino, Mr. Mitchell stated that property owners will not be required to abandon functioning septic systems and connect to public sewer; however, they will be required to connect in the future if their systems fail or if they seek to modify or expand the structures on their properties.

Pursuant to the recommendation of Mr. Tustin and upon a motion by Commissioner Elder, the Commissioners unanimously awarded the low bid to Asphalt Paving Systems, Inc. of Hammonton, NJ for slurry seal surfacing of approximately six miles of County roadways at a

cost of \$2.49 per square yard for an estimated total cost of \$191,411.28. Mr. Tustin advised that remaining funding of \$215,312.30 from the spring tar and chip project will be used to fund this project.

Pursuant to the request of Mr. Tustin and upon a motion by Commissioner Nordstrom, the Commissioners unanimously approved bid specifications for the Bayside Road Bridge replacement project in Public Landing. He stated that bids will be due at the end of April, with the project to begin in September 2020. In response to a question by Commissioner Nordstrom, Mr. Tustin stated that Delmarva Power has obtained the necessary wetlands permits to relocate the power lines from overhead to under ground prior to the start of this project. He further stated that Comcast has the same ability as Delmarva Power to bore under the creek to install cable and internet lines; however, they will not be permitted to connect utilities to the bridge.

Assistant Chief Administrative Officer Kelly Shannahan met with the Commissioners with regard to the status of local amendments to the Maryland Building Performance Standards. Mr. Shannahan stated that, while adoption of local amendments to these standards is an option for local jurisdictions, adoption of the State Building Code is not optional. Therefore, given that the County failed to adopt local amendments to the current Maryland Building Code Performance Standards, all provisions of the State Building Code will be in effect as of March 25, 2020. As a result, several of the current local amendments will be eliminated that same date, and the following new provisions will apply: the State Building Code will apply to all residential accessory structures larger than 200 square feet, as opposed to the 500 square feet; building permits will expire after 180 days rather than after three years; and all construction must be elevated an additional one-foot above the base flood elevation, just to name a few. Therefore, Mr. Shannahan strongly encouraged the Commissioners to reconsider their prior decision and adopt the proposed local amendments.

In response to a question by Commissioner Elder, Development Review and Permitting Director Ed Tudor advised that State law allows local amendments at any time to address the unique needs of the jurisdiction; however, the Commissioners cannot pass any local amendments that would weaken the International Energy Conservation Code (IECC) or the sprinkler requirements.

Following some discussion and upon a motion by Commissioner Bunting, the Commissioners unanimously adopted Resolution No. 20-4 establishing local amendments to the Maryland Building Performance Standards for Worcester County, Maryland, effective March 25, 2020.

Pursuant to the request of Mr. Tudor and upon a motion by Commissioner Bertino, the Commissioners unanimously adopted Resolution No. 20-5, approving a proposal for an approved private road for Evergreen Village, LLC to be constructed to the County standards. Mr. Tudor stated that the County received this request from Carpenter Engineering, LLC on behalf of their client, Evergreen Village, LLC, to develop a 5,492-foot long single-loop road to be known as Windmill Creek Lane to serve the 90-lot subdivision off of Beauchamp Road. He further advised that the Planning Commission granted a favorable recommendation to the request, and the Commissioners are not required to hold a public hearing on this matter.

Pursuant to the recommendation of Emergency Services Director Billy Birch and upon a motion by Commissioner Bertino, the Commissioners unanimously approved the request to change the name of a private road that serves a 33.76-acre property identified on Tax Map 15 as Parcel 256, Lot 5 from Katelyn Lane to Brooklyn Lane.

Pursuant to the request of Mr. Birch and upon a motion by Commissioner Purnell, the Commissioners unanimously approved Emergency Number Systems Board (ENSB) project number 20-130 in the amount of \$5,250 to purchase an additional Emergency Dispatch Protocol Aqua license, and project number 20-148 in the amount of \$234.50 for the purchase of 911 public education materials for a total cost of \$5,484.50. Mr. Birch advised that the ENSB will reimburse the County for these costs.

Mr. Birch updated the Commissioners on past, current, and pending changes to the Public Safety Answering Point (PSAP), also known as the 911 Center, the future Next Generation 911 changes, and the impact of Carl Henn's Law (House Bill 397 of the 2019 legislative session), which enhances and alters the regulatory framework that governs the 911 system. Mr. Birch stated that the bill expands ENSB responsibilities, increases the State 911 fee, and authorizes local governments to increase fees by \$0.75 per phone line under certain specified circumstances, specifically pertaining to the increased demand for services due to text to 911 and additional phone and electronic device contacts. Mr. Birch stated that the County experienced a 15% increase in call volumes last year, which does not include text to 911 and additional phone and electronic device contacts, and, thus, will meet the requirements to increase fees by an additional \$0.75 per phone line. He stated that the County will need to be prepared for these changes which will impact the FY21 budget.

The Commissioners met with Electrical Board members Kenneth Lambertson and Mike Patchet to discuss a request from Kyle Pilchard for an amendment to the County Electrical Standards which were revised by Bill 17-5 (Electrical Standards - Licensing Requirements for Homeowners) to reinstate the ability of a person who is the owner and occupant of a single-family dwelling to perform electrical work on a private home. The passage of Bill 17-5 on June 20, 2017 repealed and reenacted the following sections of the Electrical Standards Subtitle: Section BR 2-207(f)(2) which previously provided that the licensing provisions of the Electrical Standards do not apply to any person doing minor electrical work, as defined in the Electrical Standards Subtitle, on a single-family dwelling which they own and occupy and for which they personally purchase all materials and perform all minor electrical work among other revisions. The purpose for Bill 17-5 arose from concerns by the Board of Electrical Examiners that often the work done under these permits was not being completed by the homeowner, but by unlicensed contractors. Mr. Lambertson stated that the Board of Electrical Examiners has unanimously requested that no changes be made to the Electrical Standards, noting that at the time Bill 17-5 was first requested most of the individuals pulling these permits, claimed that they were going to do the work, but either lacked the knowledge to complete the task safely or hired unlicensed individuals to do it for them, and then failed to have the work inspected. He stated that it takes four years of working under a licensed electrician to be certified as a general electrician and seven years to become a master electrician. He stated that 90% of all changes in the National Electric Code (NEC) that governs wiring deals with residential wiring, thus a

layman cannot keep up with changes.

Mr. Pilchard thanked the Commissioners for meeting with him. He stated that only 6% of the permits in 2017 prior to the adoption of Bill 17-5 were pulled by homeowners. Furthermore, he advised that information provided by the Worcester County Fire Marshal's Office states that maybe only 10 of the 197 house fires last year were electrical fires, and he requested the Commissioners conduct an investigation to determine if any of these electrical fires occurred in homes where homeowners pulled their own electrical permits. He further stated that even if one or two of those fires occurred at residences where homeowners conducted their own repairs, such figures do not support the need to disallow capable residents to complete minor electrical work, and he urged them to introduce a bill to restore the language to allow homeowners to perform their own electrical work as he had proposed.

Commissioner Nordstrom thanked Mr. Pilchard for meeting with them, but noted that he was satisfied with the findings of the Board of Electrical Examiners. Commissioner Elder concurred. Commissioner Mitrecic stated that he is very concerned, as a builder, by some of the electrical work that was completed by homeowners, and even one fatality that may result from a change to the existing law would be too many.

Following some discussion, the Commissioners declined to introduce the proposed legislation requested by Mr. Pilchard.

The Commissioners viewed Governor Larry Hogan's 11:00 a.m. press conference at which he announced expanded social distancing requirements to reduce the number of individuals permitted at public gatherings from 50 to 10, postponed the April 28, 2020 primary elections to June 2, 2020, with the exception of a special election to be conducted by mail in the seventh district, and other executive decrees in response to the threat to public health from the novel coronavirus (COVID-19).

The Commissioners met in legislative session.

The Commissioners met with Mr. Tudor to review a text amendment submitted by Mark S. Cropper, seeking to amend the Resource Protection (RP) District regulations to allow special events to be held on a farm by special exception. Mr. Tudor stated that, specifically, the proposed bill seeks to renumber subsection ZS 1-215(c)(15) as ZS 1-215(c)(16) and add a new subsection ZS 1-215(c)(15) to allow special events in the RP zoning district. He concluded that the new language mirrors that for the A-1 and A-2 Agricultural Districts and the E-1 Estate District, and the Planning Commission gave a favorable recommendation to the amendment in a split 4-3 vote.

Following some discussion, Commissioners Church, Mitrecic, Nordstrom, and Purnell introduced the aforementioned text amendment as Bill 20-2 (Zoning - Special Events in the RP Resource Protection District) and directed staff to schedule a public hearing on the bill for a future meeting.

Commissioner Mitrecic closed the legislative session.

Commissioner Mitrecic requested that staff develop revised procedures for the approval of special events for the Commissioners consideration. He suggested that the revised procedures could be similar to the Town of Ocean City which has one staff person assigned as the point person to oversee the special event approval process.

Pursuant to the request of Public Information Officer Kim Moses and Recycling Manager Mike McClung and upon a motion by Commissioner Bertino, the Commissioners unanimously authorized Commission President Mitrecic to sign the contract with Clear Channel Outdoor to lease two prominently-placed billboards on U.S. Rt. 50 in Berlin and U.S. Rt. 113 in Bishopville at a total cost of \$11,900 as part of the Keep Worcester Clean campaign.

The Commissioners met with Public Works Director John Tustin to review and discuss the Mosquito Control Program budget for the 2020 season, as outlined in a letter to the County from Brian Prendergast, Maryland Department of Agriculture (MDA) Mosquito Control Program Manager. Mr. Tustin stated that the proposed budget requires County funding of \$83,940 for the Mosquito Control Program in Worcester County, with State funding of \$82,260 and community funding of \$240,300 for a total budget of \$406,500. Mr. Tustin stated that staff is recommending no changes to last year's program.

Upon a motion by Commissioner Purnell, the Commissioners unanimously approved the proposed budget for Worcester County Mosquito Control for Calendar Year 2020 between MDA and the County Commissioners. Mr. Tustin advised that, like last year, area residents who participate in the program would be required to pay the \$65 fee per residential household up front to cover a portion of the cost of spraying.

The Commissioners reviewed and concurred with the proposed budget adoption schedule for the FY21 Enterprise Fund Operating Budgets, which includes reviewing the Liquor Control, Solid Waste, and Water and Wastewater Operating Budgets during an upcoming work session, and conducting public hearings on these budgets on June 2, with adoption of the budgets to take place on June 16, 2020.

The Commissioners reviewed the requested FY21 County Operating Budget. Mr. Higgins provided a summary of the requested operating budget, and stressed that this is only the requested budget. He stated that the estimated general fund revenues based on current tax rates are estimated to be \$209,931,786, which is an increase of \$8,646,234 or 4% more than the current year. He stated that the requested general fund operating expenditures total \$221,258,000, which leaves a shortfall of \$11,326,214 that must be reconciled by either reductions in expenditures, additional revenues or a combination of the two. Mr. Higgins advised that the COVID-19 pandemic will likely have significant impact on estimated revenues, and the County should monitor the situation over the next 30 to 60 days to determine what the financial implications may be for the County.

In response to a question by Commissioner Bertino who recommended a flat budget for FY21, Mr. Higgins stated that the Board of Education (BOE) has negotiated a Step and a cost of living adjustment (COLA) for teachers and BOE staff, and a flat budget would not provide the same increase for County employees. Commissioner Bertino stated that the budget is a product of certainty, based on what they will spend in the coming year, and he would prefer to reduce the expectations on the Commissioners, county government and the taxpayers, since the proposed budget doesn't take into account the COVID-19 emergency currently facing the County. In response to a question by Commissioner Church, Mr. Higgins stated that he would prefer to go through the process with the current proposed budget and allow staff to identify necessary cuts

based on a better understanding of projected FY21 revenues in the coming weeks. Commissioner Mitrecic stated that the Commissioners should budget for needs, not numbers. He stated that the Commissioners made cuts that went too far last year, but all those needs are still there, so hemming themselves into a number today would do a disservice to the employees and citizens of the County.

After much discussion, a motion by Commissioner Bertino for staff to prepare a flat budget for FY21 for planning purposes that includes an increase in the Board of Education (BOE) Maintenance of Effort, failed 3-4, with Commissioners Bertino, Bunting, and Elder voting in favor, and Commissioners Church, Mitrecic, Nordstrom, and Purnell voting in opposition.

The Commissioners agreed to postpone the budget work session from March 31 until at least April 7, 2020 in accordance with the State's social distancing requirements, with further latitude provided to the president to allow flexibility during the County's response to the current COVID-19 pandemic.

The Commissioners discussed a request from Mr. Higgins to allocate \$1 million out of the fund balance to be used for expenditures over the next few weeks specifically related to the Commissioner's declaration of a state of emergency on Monday, March 16, 2020 in response to the COVID-19 pandemic. Commissioner Bertino stated that the Commissioners declaration gives the President broadened powers, and he could support the request provided President Mitrecic agrees to keep the Commissioners informed on how the money is spent. Commissioner Mitrecic concurred. Commissioner Bunting thanked Commissioner Mitrecic for offering to keep the Commissioners informed of these expenses as they occur.

In response to a question by Commissioner Nordstrom, Commissioner Mitrecic stated that he will work with staff to address how the Commissioners can meet to discuss the budget and standard County business while complying with Governor Hogan's executive orders. In response to additional questions by Commissioner Nordstrom, Mr. Higgins stated that COVID-19 expenditures will be vetted through the Emergency Operations Center (EOC) and may be used to cover the cost of cleaning public school buildings or for the delivery of services, such as providing meals to students in need while schools are closed. Emergency Services Director Billy Birch stated that other expenditures will likely include N95 masks, gloves and gowns used by public safety personnel which may be reimbursed by the Maryland Emergency Management Agency (MEMA) or the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA).

Upon a motion by Commissioner Bertino, the Commissioners unanimously approved Mr. Higgins's request for special funding to be used exclusively to respond to the COVID-19 emergency.

In a related matter, the Commissioners discussed whether to limit public access to the Government Center in Snow Hill. Commissioner Bunting stated that the sky is not falling yet, and it was too soon to consider closing the building to the public. For example, builders depend on meeting with several County departments. Commissioner Bertino concurred, noting that he is hesitant to implement any action that will further impact the local economy. Commissioner Church suggested that they could limit public access by requiring the public to schedule appointments for permits, while Commissioner Purnell suggested certain functions could be

completed online. Commissioner Mitrecic stated concern for County employees, noting that keeping the Government Center open to the public could result in the introduction of the virus into the building; however, he could agree to table this discussion for now and revisit the matter in a few days. In response to comments from the Commissioners, Mr. Higgins advised that both Somerset and Wicomico County Governments have closed their offices to the public, and staff could provide them with additional information regarding what operating procedures have been instituted by other Maryland jurisdictions.

Following some discussion and upon a motion by Commissioner Bertino, the Commissioners voted unanimously that the Government Center is to remain open to the public, while implementing strict health and safety measures to protect County employees and the public and recognizing that this decision may evolve with the changing national and state guidelines and standards to address COVID-19.

Commissioner Nordstrom stated that he would like the Commissioners to reconsider a previous request from Verizon to install a cell phone tower on MD Rt. 90. Commissioners Bertino and Bunting stated that they could only support such a discussion provided that Verizon has identified a site other than the previously proposed tower at the Ocean Pines Wastewater Treatment Plant (WWTP), which the Commissioners previously denied. Commissioner Mitrecic stated that there is a need for the tower, and, perhaps, the Commissioners could send a letter to Verizon urging them to consider additional tower sites, perhaps at the County's Isle of Wight property or some other location along the MD Rt. 90 corridor, instead of only the OPWWTP location. The Commissioners directed staff to send such a letter to Verizon.

Mr. Higgins recognized Assistant Finance Officer Jennifer Swanton for her contributions to County government and wished her well in her new job. The Commissioners concurred.

The Commissioners answered questions from the press, after which they adjourned at 12:13 p.m. to meet again on April 14, 2020.