

Minutes of the County Commissioners of Worcester County, Maryland

May 11, 2021

Budget Work Session

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

The Commissioners met with Chief Administrative Officer Harold Higgins, Budget Officer Kathy Whited, incoming Budget Officer Candace Savage, and Finance Officer Phil Thompson to discuss issues pertaining to the FY22 Requested Operating Budget. The Commissioners deliberated on the projected revenues and requested expenditures in the Committee Reviewed FY22 Operating Budget, which currently reflects estimated revenues of \$213,210,813 and requested general fund operating expenditures of \$215,878,666, which leaves a shortfall of \$2,668,053.

Commissioner Church was absent from the meeting.

A motion by Commissioner Bertino to reschedule their June 15, 2021 meeting to June 22 to accommodate Commissioner Nordstrom and County staff who will be attending the Hurricane Conference June 14-17 in New Orleans, Louisiana failed 3-3, with Commissioners Bertino, Nordstrom, and Purnell voting in favor of the motion and Commissioners Bunting, Elder, and Mitrecic voting in opposition.

The Commissioners declined a constituent request to host a special meeting in late May to discuss issuing a proclamation recognizing Worcester County as a sanctuary for the Second Amendment.

Mr. Higgins reviewed additional information requested by the Commissioners at the budget work session in April and other information that has come to light since presenting the May 4, 2021 public hearing on the requested FY22 Operating Budget, which includes the following: increasing commission and boards compensation, Girdletree Fire Department, Shock Trauma Center grant request, Wor-Wic Community College Maintenance and Repair Plan for FY22 approval request, Board of Education (BOE) Maintenance of Effort, Town of Snow Hill letter requesting an increase in the County grant of \$26,000 to cover this year's loan repayment for the Black Eyed Susan, Town of Ocean City letter.

In response to a question by Commissioner Mitrecic, Mr. Higgins advised that this budget does not include the \$1,006,000 in additional fire and emergency medical services requests to be discussed when reviewing the fire department budgets.

Upon a motion by Commissioner Bunting, the Commissioners unanimously agreed to

increase board compensation from \$50 to \$100 per meeting.

Upon a motion by Commissioner Bertino, the Commissioners unanimously denied the grant request from R Adams Cowley Shock Trauma, which was received after the FY22 grant request deadline, and to send a letter outlining the application process.

Upon a motion by Commissioner Bertino, the Commissioners voted unanimously to deny the additional grant request of \$26,000 from the Town of Snow Hill for the FY22 Black Eyed Susan loan payment.

In response to questions by the Commissioners, Recreation, Parks, Tourism, and Economic Development Director Tom Perlozzo confirmed that, since requesting a County grant of \$26,000, the Town of Snow Hill has secured a riverboat operator and been awarded a \$100,000 grant from the Maryland Department of Housing and Community Development to operate the riverboat.

In response to a request by Commissioner Mitrecic, Mr. Thompson provided an update on property taxes and the State Department of Assessment and Taxation reassessment cycle, noting that the County is seeing steady growth in the assessment cycles based on the current market.

The Commissioners met with Human Resources Officer Stacey Norton to review requested FY22 promotions, reclassifications, and new positions for General Fund employees.

Upon a motion by Commissioner Bertino, the Commissioners unanimously approved FY22 requested budget promotions totaling \$91,431 for 38 general fund employees who obtain certifications and/or licenses to operate equipment, pass probationary periods, or are tied to a designated time in their positions.

A motion by Commissioner Elder to deny a request to add four 911 Call Taker positions within Emergency Services failed for lack of a second. Upon a subsequent motion by Commissioner Bertino, the Commissioners voted 5-1, with Commissioner Elder voting in opposition, to add four 911 Call Taker positions within Emergency Services at (G10S/S2), with annual salaries each of \$31,803, at an overall cost of \$190,824 annually for salaries, benefits, and operating expenses.

Upon a motion by Commissioner Nordstrom, the Commissioners unanimously agreed to reclassify the starting salary of the Marketing Assistant position in the Library from (G10/S1), at \$14.22 per hour, to (G12/S1), at \$15.68 per hour.

Upon a motion by Commissioner Bertino, the Commissioners unanimously agreed to reclassify the starting salary of the following positions from Step 1 to Step 5 based on years of experience, which will impact 33 current positions for a total cost of \$99,732: full-time Deputy Sheriff (9) and Deputy Sheriff First Class (2) and part-time Deputy Sheriff (6), Court Deputy (13), Deputy Investigator (6), and School Resource Officer (7).

Upon a motion by Commissioner Bertino, the Commissioners voted 4-2, with Commissioners Bunting and Elder voting in opposition, to approve the request for 18 new and reclassified employee positions for General Fund employees for FY22 at a cost of \$1,425,413 minus \$117,000 for three vehicles, which will be considered separately.

Upon a motion by Commissioner Purnell, the Commissioners unanimously approved FY22 requested Enterprise Fund budget reclassifications totaling \$52,830, which includes \$4,866 for three Solid Waste Division employees and \$47,964 for 22 Water and Wastewater

Division employees who obtain certifications and/or licenses to operate equipment, pass probationary periods, or are tied to a designated time in their positions.

Upon a motion by Commissioner Elder, the Commissioners unanimously approved FY22 budget requests totaling \$82,660 to reclassify positions within the Water and Wastewater Division ranging from Plant Operator Trainee – Plant Operator IV by one grade, and to eliminate three Maintenance Mechanic II positions, with annual salaries totaling \$95,472, for an overall savings of \$12,812.

Following a motion by Commissioner Nordstrom, seconded by Commissioner Bertino, the Commissioners unanimously voted to meet in closed session at 10:18 a.m. in the Commissioners' Meeting Room to discuss legal and personnel matters permitted under the provisions of Section 3-305(b)(1) and (8) 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 Weston Young, County Attorney Roscoe Leslie, Public Information Officer Kim Moses, Budget Officer Kathy Whited, incoming Budget Officer Candace Savage, and Human Resources Director Stacey Norton. Topics discussed and actions taken included discussing individual personnel matters and salaries for the FY22 Operating Budget.

Following a motion by Commissioner Nordstrom, seconded by Commissioner Bertino, the Commissioners unanimously voted to adjourn their closed session at 11:02 a.m.

The Commissioners resumed their review of proposed expenditures for each department and agency within the requested operating budget.

The Commissioners concurred with the Committee Reviewed FY22 operating budgets, which reflect earlier personnel decisions, as follows: County Administration budget of \$1,049,434; Circuit Court budget of \$1,334,987; Orphan's Court budget of \$28,900; State's Attorney's Office budget of \$1,711,470; Treasurer's Office budget of \$1,237,130; Elections Office budget of \$1,225,156; Human Resources budget of \$463,944; Development Review and Permitting budget of \$1,885,424; Environmental Programs budget of \$1,514,758; Information Technology budget of \$557,387; Other General Government budget of \$3,312,509; Sheriff's Office budget of \$9,283,371; Emergency Services budget of \$3,815,705; Jail budget of \$9,568,071; Fire Marshal's Office budget of \$575,855; Maintenance Division budget of \$1,368,005; Roads Division budget of \$3,525,930; Public Works budget of \$500,275; Boat Landings budget of \$387,155; Homeowner Convenience Centers budget of \$793,550; Recycling budget of \$858,479; Health Department budget of \$5,676,975; Mosquito Control budget of \$225,083; and Commission on Aging budget of \$1,603,783.

With regard to the Committee Reviewed FY22 Other Social Services budget, the Commissioners made the following approvals, denials, and adjustments:

A motion by Commissioner Bertino to eliminate funding to Account No. 7100.010 County Grants to Atlantic General Hospital (AGH) of \$200,000, failed with Commissioners Bertino, Bunting, and Elder voting in favor of the motion and Commissioners Mitrecic, Nordstrom, and Purnell voting in opposition.

Upon a motion by Commissioner Bertino, the Commissioners unanimously approved funding to Account No. 7100.010 County Grants to Atlantic General Hospital (AGH) of \$100,000.

Upon a motion by Commissioner Bertino, the Commissioners unanimously approved funding to Account No. 7100.017 County Grants to Big Brothers/Big Sisters for \$1,000.

Upon a motion by Commissioner Bertino, the Commissioners unanimously approved funding to Account No. 7100.020 County Grants to BRAVE Program for \$3,500.

Upon a motion by Commissioner Bertino, the Commissioners unanimously denied the Committee Reviewed budget for Account No. 7100.021 County Grants to Chesapeake Housing Missions of \$5,000.

Upon a motion by Commissioner Bertino, the Commissioners unanimously approved funding to Account No. 7100.022 County Grants to Coastal Hospice at the Ocean for \$10,000.

Upon a motion by Commissioner Bertino, the Commissioners voted 4-2, with Commissioners Bunting and Elder voting in opposition, to approve funding to Account No. 7100.023 County Grants to the Cricket Center for \$200,000, rather than the Committee Reviewed budget of \$275,000.

Upon a motion by Commissioner Bertino, the Commissioners unanimously denied the Committee Reviewed budget for Account No. 7100.024 County Grants to the Child and Family Foundation, Inc. for \$15,000.

Upon a motion by Commissioner Nordstrom, the Commissioners unanimously approved funding to Account No. 7100.030 County Grants to the Worcester County Developmental Center (WCDC) for \$219,497.

Upon a motion by Commissioner Bunting, the Commissioners unanimously approved funding to Account No. 7100.035 County Grants to Diakonia for \$45,000, rather than the Committee Reviewed budget of \$50,000.

Upon a motion by Commissioner Bertino, the Commissioners unanimously approved funding to Account No. 7100.040 County Grants to Drug and Alcohol Abuse Council for \$9,000.

Upon a motion by Commissioner Bertino, the Commissioners unanimously denied the Committee Reviewed budget for Account No. 7100.074 County Grants to the Hope4Recovery for \$89,400.

Upon a motion by Commissioner Purnell, the Commissioners unanimously approved funding to Account No. 7100.077 County Grants to Jesse Klump Memorial Fund, Inc. for \$1,000.

Upon a motion by Commissioner Bunting, the Commissioners unanimously approved funding to Account No. 7100.085 County Grants to the Life Crisis Center for \$8,500.

Upon a motion by Commissioner Bunting, the Commissioners unanimously approved funding to Account No. 7100.100 County Grants to Maryland Food Bank of \$8,000, rather than the Committee Reviewed budget of \$10,000.

Upon a motion by Commissioner Bertino, the Commissioners unanimously approved funding to Account No. 7100.120 County Grants to Oasis Ministries for \$9,000.

Upon a motion by Commissioner Bunting, the Commissioners unanimously approved funding to Account No. 7100.160 County Grants to the Samaritan Shelter for \$20,000, rather than the Committee Reviewed budget of \$30,000.

Upon a motion by Commissioner Purnell, the Commissioners unanimously approved funding to Account No. 7100.175 County Grants to Social Services for \$15,000.

Upon a motion by Commissioner Purnell, the Commissioners unanimously approved funding to Account No. 7100.202 County Grants to Worcester County 4H & FFA Fair for \$10,000.

Upon a motion by Commissioner Bunting, the Commissioners unanimously approved funding to Account No. 7100.210 County Grants to Worcester County GOLD (Giving Other Lives Dignity) for \$15,000.

Upon a motion by Commissioner Elder, the Commissioners unanimously approved funding to Account No. 7100.220 County Grants to Worcester Youth and Family Counseling for \$91,710, rather than the Committee Reviewed budget of \$95,000.

Upon a motion by Commissioner Bertino, the Commissioners unanimously approved funding to Account No. 7130.005 County Matching Grants to DHMH Development Disabilities Administration (DDA) for \$28,871.

With regard to Wor-Wic Community College (WWCC), upon a motion by Commissioner Bertino, the Commissioners unanimously approved funding to Account No. 7120.040 Other Non-Matching Exp. Appropriation for WWCC for \$2,530,242.

With regard to the Board of Education (BOE), upon a motion by Commissioner Bertino, the Commissioners unanimously approved the Committee Reviewed budget for funding to the Board of Education of \$97,002,196. In response to a question by Commissioner Bertino, Budget Officer Kathy Whited advised that the MOE escalator, which is included in the BOE budget, could potentially be amended by the State.

The Commissioners adjourned for lunch.

The Commissioners resumed their review of proposed expenditures for each department and agency within the requested operating budget.

Upon a motion by Commissioner Bertino, the Commissioners unanimously approved Maintenance and Repair Plan of \$357,500 for FY22 within the WWCC budget.

The Commissioners concurred with the Committee Reviewed FY22 operating budgets, which reflect earlier personnel decisions, as follows: Recreation budget of \$2,317,732; Parks budget of \$1,109,981; Library budget of \$2,794,287.

Commissioner Bertino requested more information about a Black Lives Matter grant for a youth reading program being promoted by the Library.

With regard to Other Recreation and Culture, the Commissioners made the following adjustments:

Upon a motion by Commissioner Bertino, the Commissioners unanimously denied the Committee Reviewed budget for Account No. 7100.015 County Grants to Berlin Heritage Foundation of \$10,000.

Upon a motion by Commissioner Nordstrom, the Commissioners voted 5-1, with Commissioner Bertino voting in opposition to approve the Committee Reviewed budget for Account No. 7100.050 Furnace Town for \$40,000.

A motion by Commissioner Nordstrom to approve the Committee Reviewed budget for Account No. 7100.095 Marva Theatre for \$20,000 failed 2-4, with Commissioners Nordstrom

and Purnell voting in favor and Commissioners Bertino, Bunting, Elder, and Mitrecic voting in opposition. Upon a subsequent motion by Commissioner Bunting, the Commissioners unanimously approved funding to Account No. 7100.095 Marva Theatre for \$15,000.

A motion by Commissioner Nordstrom to approve funding of \$20,000 to Account No. 7100.135 Delmarva Discovery Museum (DDM), rather than the Committee Reviewed budget of \$30,000, failed 3-3, with Commissioners Mitrecic, Nordstrom, and Purnell voting in favor and Commissioners Bertino, Bunting, and Elder voting in opposition. Upon a subsequent motion by Commissioner Purnell, the Commissioners unanimously approved funding to the DDM of \$15,000.

The Commissioners concurred with the Committee Reviewed FY22 operating budgets, which reflect earlier personnel decisions, as follows: Extension Services budget of \$206,217; Other Natural Resources budget of \$510,254; Economic Development budget of \$362,927; Tourism budget of \$1,298,131; and Taxes Shared with Towns budget of \$2,642,357.

With regard to Grants to Towns, the Commissioners made the following adjustments:

Upon a motion by Commissioner Nordstrom, the Commissioners voted 5-1, with Commissioner Bunting voting in opposition, to approve the Committee Reviewed FY22 Grants to the Town of Pocomoke in the amount of \$1,666,938, which includes an infrastructure grant.

Upon a motion by Commissioner Elder, the Commissioners voted 4-2, with Commissioners Bertino and Bunting voting in opposition, to approve the Committee Reviewed FY22 Grants to the Town of Snow Hill in the amount of \$1,915,830, which reflects a reduction of \$26,000 for the January 2022 loan payment for the Black Eyed Susan riverboat.

Upon a motion by Commissioner Bunting, the Commissioners agreed to table discussions regarding the Committee Reviewed FY22 Grants to the Town of Berlin in the amount of \$2,301,868 until after considering the fire and emergency medical services grant requests.

Upon a motion by Commissioner Bertino, the Commissioners voted 5-1, with Commissioner Mitrecic voting in opposition, to approve the Committee Reviewed FY22 Grants to the Town of Ocean City in the amount of \$8,206,024, which reflects the elimination of the \$100,000 Tourism Marketing increase.

Upon a motion by Commissioner Bertino, the Commissioners voted 5-1, with Commissioner Mitrecic voting in opposition to approve the Committee Reviewed FY22 Grants to the Ocean Pines Association (OPA) in the amount of \$1,442,051.

The Commissioners recessed for 10 minutes.

The Commissioners concurred with the Committee Reviewed FY22 operating budgets, which reflect earlier personnel decisions, as follows: Benefits and Insurance budget of \$23,047,280; and Debt Service budget of \$13,687,931.

With regard to Fire and Emergency Medical Services (EMS) funding, the Commissioners approved the Committee Reviewed FY22 budget of \$8,362,935, along with additional supplemental funding of approximately \$1 million.

A motion by Commissioner Purnell to approve the Committee Reviewed FY22 Grant to Berlin of \$2,301,868 failed 2-4, with Commissioners Nordstrom and Purnell voting in favor and

Commissioners Bertino, Bunting, Elder, and Mitrecic voting in opposition. Upon a subsequent motion by Commissioner Bunting, the Commissioners voted 5-1, with Commissioner Nordstrom voting in opposition, to reduce the unrestricted grant of \$465,000 to the Town of Berlin by \$115,000 and to apply that funding to the Berlin Fire Company to cover EMS operating costs.

The Commissioners concurred with the Committee Reviewed FY22 Salary Increase for County employees of \$1,062,364, which includes a 3.5% cost of living adjustment (COLA) for classified and non-classified employees and longevity for eligible employees.

Commissioner Bertino discussed concerns regarding public comments made regarding the Commissioners' May 4, 2021 proclamation reaffirming their oath of office, noting that there is no place in public discourse for name calling among the Commissioners.

The Commissioners answered questions from the press, after which they adjourned to meet again on May 18, 2021.