

Minutes of the County Commissioners of Worcester County, Maryland

May 6, 2025

Theodore J. Elder, president
Eric J. Fiori, vice president
Caryn G. Abbott
Anthony W. Bertino, Jr.
Madison J. Bunting, Jr.
Joseph M. Mitrecic
Diana Purnell

Following a motion by Commissioner Fiori, seconded by Commissioner Purnell, with Commissioners Bertino and Bunting out of the room, 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 Weston Young, Deputy Chief Administrative Officer Candace Savage, County Attorney Roscoe Leslie, Public Information Officer Kim Moses, Human Resources Director Stacey Norton and Deputy Director Pat Walls, Public Works Director Dallas Baker, and Environmental Programs Director Bob Mitchell. Topics discussed and actions taken included the following: personnel update, hiring Molli Spicer as an intern within Human Resources, Keith Hoffman as a technician within Information Technology, Jeremy Cannon and Adriana Piroli as communications specialists within Emergency Services, and Denesha Dale as a correctional officer trainee within the County Jail; promoting Corporal Norman Edwards, III to sergeant; negotiating a proposal strategy; receiving legal advice from counsel; and performing administrative functions, including discussing potential board appointments.

Following a motion by Commissioner Mitrecic, seconded by Commissioner Purnell, the commissioners unanimously voted to adjourn their closed session at 9:43 a.m.

After the closed session, the commissioners reconvened in open session. Commissioner Elder called the meeting to order, and following a morning prayer by Reverend George Patterson 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 April 1, 2025 meeting as presented and April 8 work session as amended.

The commissioners presented a proclamation to Worcester County Department of Social Services (DSS) Director Roberta Baldwin and other staff members along with foster parent Krystle Meehan recognizing May as National Foster Care Month and thanking area foster parents for their efforts to house youth in foster care and help them recognize their intrinsic value. Ms. Baldwin stated that DSS has 23 children in foster care; however, there are only 10 foster homes in Worcester County, which is not enough to meet the needs. She called on

residents to get involved by becoming foster parents or by assisting with many other services, like respite support, that help to keep families together.

In a related matter, the commissioners also presented a commendation to Ms. Meehan recognizing her and William Luffman for being named the 2025 Worcester County Foster Parents of the Year by DSS for their willingness to serve foster children living in crisis in the community.

The commissioners presented a commendation to Stephen Decatur High School senior Evan Todd for serving as Worcester County's Page to the 2025 Maryland General Assembly.

The commissioners presented a proclamation recognizing the week of May 4-10, 2025 as National Correctional Officers and Employees Week May 4-10, 2025 to Warden Tim Mulligan, Deputy Warden Shytina Drummond, Sergeant Nathan Bratten, and Private First-Class Karen Jones of the Worcester County Jail. The commissioners recognized the contributions of the County Jail's team of highly qualified and experienced corrections professionals who safeguard area citizens by providing safe, secure, and humane incarceration for offenders within their custody, and in the course of performing their duties, offer offenders direction, hope, and a new focus while assisting with reentry and life outside corrections.

In a related matter, the commissioners commended PFC Jones for being named the 2025 Worcester County Correctional Officer of the Year by the Maryland Correctional Administrators Association.

Upon a motion by Commissioner Mitrecic, the commissioners unanimously approved by consent agenda item numbers 2-20 as follows: FY26 grant applications for the Sheriff's Office, including the Gun Violence Reduction Grant application for \$33,405, Maryland Criminal Intelligence Network/Overdose and Drug Awareness Coordinator Grant application for \$84,789, Police Recruitment and Retention Grant for \$65,695, and Warrant Apprehension and Absconding Grant for \$45,500; accepting a Maryland Agricultural Fair Board grant of \$4,600 for Recreation and Parks to use for the 2025 Worcester County Fair, August 8-10 at John Walter Smith Park; purchasing cybersecurity solution from Arctic for \$63,779.85 for use by Information Technology; accepting proposals from Due East to complete a Needs Assessment and from Education Solutions and Community Strategies to complete a Training Project for the Local Management Board; accepting the proposal from Wraparound Maryland to provide Adult Mental Health Targeted Case Management Services through the Local Behavioral Health Authority; awarding the lowest responsive bid to repave the Ocean Pines Library parking lot to Mike Houck Construction for \$75,000, with an additional \$95 per parking bumper that may break upon removal; awarding the lowest responsive bid for the Snow Hill Commission on Aging parking lot expansion, sidewalk, curbing, and connection to the service road to HCE, LLC for \$65,183.50; accepting a contract from Behind the Line, Inc. to provide a wellness program to 911 specialists and a contract from Carousel Industries of North America, LLC for a one-time cost of \$112,945 and recurring annual costs of \$272,945 to implement a redundant and resilient administrative telephone system for the 911 Center within Emergency Services; signing the Certificate of FY 2025 Assessment List for County Tax Ditches – Public Drainage Associations; declaring certain County-owned vehicles, equipment, and miscellaneous items to be surplus property and scheduling a hearing to receive public comments on the proposed sale of said

equipment through Gov Deals, an online government surplus auction site; sending letters to the County's federal representatives seeking their support for maintaining the federal tax exemption on municipal bonds, which counties use to fund major projects; sending a letter supporting efforts by Davis Strategic to obtain a Project UPLIFT grant through the Department of Housing and Community Development to build affordable, workforce housing in Pocomoke; scheduling a public hearing on a Community Development Block Grant Amendment for funds of \$54,879 for Diakonia and \$24,478 for Samaritan Ministries; and an over-expenditure to add a seasonal intern within Human Resources for \$4,322 annually.

Information Technology Director Brian Jones provided an update on projects that have already been completed as well as those currently underway by County partners, Choptank and Talkie, to extend the availability of broadband to unserved and underserved areas of the County, as well as the status of the state and federal grants used to fund the projects. In response to questions by Commissioner Mitrecic, Mr. Jones advised that 60-70% of residents in the newly served areas have signed up to receive service.

The commissioners conducted a public hearing to receive comments regarding the recent implementation of parking restrictions in Snug Harbor and Bayside Landings. Public Works Director Dallas Baker advised that the County recently learned that the groups that spearheaded the recent changes were not authorized representatives of either of the homeowners associations or the communities at large. He advised that the County has no formal policy regarding the creation of no parking areas, and the public hearing today is to determine the positions of both of the communities with regard to the recent changes. In response to a question by Commissioner Bertino, Mr. Baker advised that representatives of Snug Harbor would like to eliminate on-street parking, while representatives of Bayside Landings would like to restrict parking to just one side of the road.

Commissioner Elder opened the floor to receive public comment.

Sara Gorfinkel of Hidden Bay Drive in Bayside Landings stated that driving in her community is like traveling the wild, wild west, and she submitted a petition signed by 50 community residents who support limiting parking to one side of the road in the Landings to improve public safety.

Bill Romeo, of Snug Harbor Road and a Snug Harbor Civic Association member, stated that the roads are only 19 feet wide, with no curbs and no sidewalks, which poses a public safety hazard. He stated that 20 mailboxes have been struck to date, and 96% of those who responded to a community survey support banning roadside parking in Snug Harbor.

Charlie Crawford, of Coastal Marsh Drive in the Landings, urged the commissioners to limit parking to one side of the road in the Landings to improve public safety.

Casey McGraff, of Snug Harbor Road, opposed eliminating roadside parking in Snug Harbor, stating that it is needed at least on a temporary basis to provide adequate visitor parking. He also noted that he could support installing speed bumps or limiting parking to one side of the road.

Joan Carpenter of Landings Boulevard in the Landings and owner of lot seven in Snug Harbor supported the elimination of roadside parking in Snug Harbor and limiting parking to one side of the road in the Landings.

Josh Willet of Hidden Bay Drive thanked Commissioner Fiori for meeting with him on

this issue, and he requested the County redesign some of the roads, remove the pond, and install sidewalks to improve public safety throughout the subdivision.

Ida Engleman of Hidden Bay Drive asked the County to implement common-sense safety measures, to include installing signs informing motorists not to park within 20 feet of a fire hydrant or intersection.

Ryan Site, of Coastal Marsh in the Landings, stated that safety is his first priority, and he supported limiting parking to one side of the street. Commissioner Bunting stated that he did not see how limiting parking to one side of the street would address the public safety issues that exist in the community and questioned how the community would reach a consensus on which side of the road to allow on-street parking.

Vito Tonelli of Newton Drive supported the findings of the parking committee to limit parking to one side of the street in the Landings, which would address both parking and public safety issues.

Andrew McBride of Snug Harbor Road stated that Snug Harbor does not have enough parking for its residents, so he opposed eliminating roadside parking. He stated that speed, not roadside parking, is the number one issue impeding public safety, and he called on residents to slow down when driving in the neighborhood.

Tim Fields of Hidden Bay Drive opposed eliminating on-street parking in Snug Harbor.

There being no further public comment, Commissioner Elder closed the hearing.

In response to questions by Commissioner Fiori, Development Review and Permitting Director Jennifer Keener stated that Snug Harbor was platted before zoning existed; however, anytime a new home is constructed they are required to provide two off street parking spaces. Fire Marshal Matt Owens advised that the turning radius of large fire trucks and other public safety apparatus is an important consideration in this conversation, and he agreed that roadside parking should be eliminated within Snug Harbor.

Following some discussion and upon a motion by Commissioner Fiori, the commissioners unanimously agreed to uphold the prior change that eliminated roadside parking in Snug Harbor Road and to look into limiting parking in the Landings to one side of the road to assure that public safety vehicles have the room needed to access both communities.

Commissioner Abbott left the meeting.

The commissioners conducted a public hearing to receive comments on an application submitted by Keith Iott on behalf of Kathleen Clark to establish a Residential Planned Community (RPC) on property located on the southerly side of MD Route 707 (Old Bridge Road), west of Greenridge Lane and more specifically identified on Tax Map 26 as Parcel 157. County Attorney Roscoe Leslie swore in those individuals who planned to give testimony during the hearing. Zoning Administrator Kristen Tremblay reviewed the application, which received a favorable recommendation from the Planning Commission

Commissioner Elder opened the floor to receive public comment.

Hugh Cropper, representing Ms. Clark, reviewed the proposed RPC. He concurred with the Planning Commission's findings and asked the commissioners to accept the findings as his testimony as well.

Curtis Pendleton of Old Bridge Road supported the project. In response to questions by Mr. Pendleton, Ms. Keener advised that a floating zone does not change underlying zoning, but

rather it provides flexibility in design for setbacks.

There being no further public comment, Commissioner Elder closed the hearing.

Upon a motion by Commissioner Mitrecic, the commissioners unanimously approved the establishment of the Crepe Myrtle Court RPC as presented.

The commissioners conducted a public hearing to receive public comments on a proposal to dispose of surplus real property on Bank Street by quitclaiming a 7,211 square-foot parcel and a 2,437 square-foot parcel of land located in the Town of Snow Hill on the northeasterly side of Bank Street and the southwesterly side of Bank Street to the Town of Snow Hill for zero consideration. Mr. Leslie reviewed the proposal and stated that the Library has asked the commissioners not to release the title to the real estate until funds from the town are available to make the proposed improvements.

Commissioner Elder opened the floor to receive public comment.

Snow Hill Economic Development Director Lorissa McCallister reviewed plans for the real estate, which will be part of the Bank Street project to create a corridor that connects the town to the river, and she urged the commissioners to support the proposed quitclaim as presented.

Olga DeShields, of East Hartman Street and a member of the Bank Street design team, urged the commissioners to support the proposed quitclaim.

Robert Hendricks, of Village Trail and the Main Street Organization, supported the Bank Street project and urged the commissioners to give the town the green light to make this project a reality.

Snow Hill Councilman Edward Lee voiced his support for the Bank Street project.

There being no further public comment, Commissioner Elder closed the hearing.

Upon a motion by Commissioner Mitrecic, the commissioners unanimously approved the proposed quitclaim, with the title to be transferred upon the availability of project funding.

Pursuant to the request of Procurement Officer Nicholas Rice and upon a motion by Commissioner Bertino, the commissioners unanimously accepted the proposal from WHP Training Towers to purchase a new, four-story fire training tower for \$1,441,351.21 to be located at the Fire Training Center in Newark.

Pursuant to the request of Ms. Keener and upon a motion by Commissioner Mitrecic, the commissioners unanimously adopted Resolution No. 25-09 naming private lanes off of Samuel Bowen Boulevard in Berlin as Zike and Brader Lanes.

Pursuant to the recommendation of Recreation and Parks Director Kelly Rados and upon a motion by Commissioner Bertino, the commissioners unanimously approved the request from the Town of Ocean City to use the Isle of Wight Park during the 2025 Ocean City Air Show on June 14 and 15, 2025.

Pursuant to the request of Mr. Rice and upon a motion by Commissioner Mitrecic, the commissioners unanimously awarded the lowest responsive bid to replace the Ocean Pines Wastewater Treatment Plant treatment unit 4 tank cleaning project to Miller Environmental Group at a total cost of \$124,157.97, as an authorized over-expenditure.

Pursuant to the request of Public Works Director Dallas Baker and upon a motion by Commissioner Mitrecic, the commissioners unanimously approved an over-expenditure to complete repairs totaling \$107,084.40 to the Ocean Pines Wastewater Treatment Plant.

Pursuant to the recommendation of Mr. Rice and upon a motion by Commissioner Mitrecic, the commissioners unanimously awarded the five-year contract totaling \$485,450 for Independent Auditing Services to CliftonLarsonAllen, LLP.

The commissioners reviewed and discussed various board appointments.

Upon a nomination by Commissioner Fiori, the commissioners unanimously agreed to appoint Alex Cederbaum to the Mystic Harbor water and wastewater board.

The commissioners discussed their differing viewpoints concerning issues related to the Water and Wastewater Enterprise Fund debt.

The commissioners answered questions from the press, after which they adjourned until 6:00 p.m. for a public hearing on the requested FY26 General Fund Operating Budget and the FY26 Solid Waste and Water and Wastewater Operating Budgets.

The commissioners conducted a public hearing at 6:00 p.m. in the Commissioners' Meeting Room in the Worcester County Government Center on the FY26 Requested County General Fund Operating Budget and the FY26 Solid Waste and Water and Wastewater (WWW) Operating Budgets. Commission President Elder called the meeting to order and welcomed those in attendance. Chief Administrative Officer Weston Young presented PowerPoint presentations outlining the FY26 Requested Operating Budget. He explained that the requested budget reflects estimated revenues of \$284,579,909 and requested expenditures of \$286,835,734, leaving a shortfall of \$2,260,825, which must be reconciled either with reductions in expenditures, additional revenues, or a combination of the two. He also reviewed the FY26 Solid Waste Operating Budget, with revenues and expenditures totaling \$5,383,068, and the FY26 WWW Operating Budget, with revenues and expenditures totaling \$21,651,259. Budget work sessions will take place May 13 at 9 a.m. and May 20 at 1 p.m. The commissioners will adopt the FY26 General Fund Operating Budget and Tax Rates on June 3 and the Enterprise Fund Operating Budgets on June 17.

In response to questions from Commissioner Bertino regarding the use of Option 3 to reconcile revenues and expenses in the WWW budget by spreading the deficit across the sanitary service areas, Mr. Young confirmed that Option 3 is not feasible and is off the table.

Commissioner Elder opened the floor to receive public comments.

George Berrue, of Meadow Drive in Berlin, stated that the road he lives on is constantly flooding and does not drain, so he urged the commissioners to fix these issues.

Michael Valerio, a resident of Ocean City and member of the Fraternal Order of Police, urged the commissioners to fully fund the Worcester County Sheriff's Office's requested budget, including the salary package, so that deputies can afford to live in the county they are sworn to protect.

Debbie Lambertson of Stockton spoke on behalf of Cedar Chapel Special School and urged the commissioners to adopt the requested FY26 Board of Education Operating Budget to provide online instruction and competitive salaries in Worcester County Public Schools (WCPS).

BOE Superintendent of Schools Lou Taylor outlined the BOE's FY26 funding priorities to attract and retain highly qualified teachers, support staff, and bus contractors, to maintain small class sizes, and to expand mental and behavioral health services. He concluded by asking the commissioners to fully fund the requested BOE budget.

Shaneka Nichols of Flower Street in Berlin asked the commissioners to fully fund the FY26 WCPS budget, so that they can attract the best teachers and staff, maintain small class sizes, and afford technology upgrades.

Emily Gelman of Charleston Road in Ocean Pines spoke in favor of fully funding the proposed FY26 WCPS budget to maintain small class sizes and offer competitive salaries.

Dr. Darlene Jackson-Bowen of Groton Road in Pocomoke strongly encouraged the commissioners to fully fund the requested BOE budget. She stated that parents and teachers are counting on their support.

Deberah Fisher-Reynolds of Ocean Parkway in Ocean Pines spoke in favor of the WCPS budget to give students the best educational opportunities.

Kim Galloway of Cresthaven Drive in Ocean Pines spoke on behalf of Worcester Technical High School's needs and advocated for fully funding the FY26 BOE budget.

Kimberly Jackson of Sheppard's Crossing Road in Whaleyville asked the commissioners to fully fund the requested BOE budget to assure student success and to attract and retain quality teachers and staff.

Tom Simon of Baker Street in Berlin stated that budgeting is about setting priorities and asked the commissioners to make fully funding the FY26 BOE budget the priority at the top of their list, even if it means using budget stabilization funds to do so.

Kathy Cater of Dixie Drive in Bishopville urged the commissioners to fully fund the requested FY26 BOE budget to attract and retain highly qualified teachers, maintain safe environments, and offer the programs needed for students to meet success.

Worcester County Teachers Association President Beth Shockley-Lynch of Shockley Road in Snow Hill urged the commissioners to fully fund the FY26 BOE budget to attract and retain talented teachers, keep class sizes small, and provide the programs and technology needed to equip students with the tools they need to succeed in today's world.

Rose Zollinger of Ann Drive in Berlin urged the commissioners to fully fund the FY26 BOE budget. She stated that nothing surpasses the betterment of the community than maintaining excellent public schools.

Matt Westbrook of Austin Circle in Berlin urged the commissioners to fully fund the FY26 BOE budget to restore prior cuts to instructional materials, maintain small class sizes, and retain highly qualified teachers.

Shannon Bone of Stephen Decatur High School stated that this year's BOE budget includes funding to replace lost positions, provide needed materials of instruction, and provide competitive salary and benefits packages. Therefore, she urged the commissioners to fully fund the requested budget.

Christina Hulsander of St. Luke's Road of Salisbury urged the commissioners to fully fund the BOE budget and prioritize maintaining small class sizes, offering a competitive salary package for teachers, assistants, faculty, bus contractors, and custodians. She stated that she is a

taxpayer, a voter, and it is okay to increase her taxes to support schools, though she did not think that they would need to do so this time around.

Mary Hathaway of Camelot Circle in Ocean Pines asked the commissioners to fully fund the FY26 BOE budget, not because it is a wish list, but rather it is a responsible, data-driven budget that accurately reflects the costs to educate a child in 2025.

Brittany Tignor of Tail of the Fox Drive in Ocean Pines supported fully funding the requested BOE budget to maintain high quality programs for every student and salaries to attract and retain the best and brightest teachers.

Nancy Michaelson of Ocean Pines asked the commissioners to fully fund the requested FY26 BOE budget.

Ivory Smith, of Cemetery Road in Pittsville and president of Worcester County Schools Professionals Organization, strongly urged the commissioners to fully fund the school budget, which is about the people who show up early, stay late, and make every student a success in Worcester County. He stated that many of his members are struggling to meet basic needs, and the work they do is not extra. It is essential.

The commissioners recessed for five minutes.

The commissioners resumed their public hearing.

Commissioner Elder opened the floor to receive comments on the FY26 Solid Waste and WWW Enterprise Fund Operating Budgets.

Elaine Brady, of Yacht Club Drive in Ocean Pines speaking on behalf of the Ocean Pines Association, stated that she was thrilled to find out that Option 3 is off the table, noting that residents of one service area should not be paying the debt for another service area, and she thanked the commissioners for taking the time needed to resolve these issues.

Jenny Mumford of Newark Road thanked the Public Works team, especially Director Dallas Baker and all involved in resolving the WWW budget issues, noting that the rates that had been proposed were not achievable for many of the service areas. She urged the County to fully fund the WWW budget and to step up and be transparent.

Richard Engelman of Hidden Bay Drive in the Landings opposed Option 2 and asked the commissioners to find ways to offset dramatic increases.

Jillian Beach of Hidden Bay Drive stated that many cannot afford the increases being proposed, and told the commissioners that they have to do better and find a better solution.

Erin Lovegrove, of Hidden Bay Drive and member of the Mystic Harbor Water and Sewer Advisory Board stated that \$640 a quarter is an outrageous jump. He stated the residents did not create this deficit, and his board has been working with Mr. Baker to try to fix this. He explained that the Maryland Department of the Environment already recognizes the MD Rt. 611 corridor as one corridor, everything is piped together, and it makes sense to consolidate Mystic Harbour, Assateague Point, and the Landings. He stated that doing so would make capital repairs more affordable because it would spread the costs across all three services areas. For example, the cost to repaint the water tower would be reduced from \$300 per customer to just \$3 per customer.

John Franklin Adkins of Caribbean Drive in Ocean City stated that he retired 16 years ago, lives on a fixed income, and cannot afford the taxes that come with a fully funded FY26 Operating budget, and he asked the commissioners for tax relief.

There being no further public comment, Commissioner Elder closed the hearing and thanked everyone in attendance for their participation.

The commissioners adjourned to meet again at their budget work session on May 13, 2025.