

Minutes of the County Commissioners of Worcester County, Maryland

May 20, 2025

Budget Work Session

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

The commissioners met with Budget Officer Kim Reynolds at 11:40 a.m. to review the proposed FY 26 budget. President Ted Elder said the commissioners would review budget changes provided by Sheriff Matt Crisafulli first. Sheriff Crisafulli told the commissioners his department had reduced its budget request by \$1,000,603.85, primarily by making changes to personnel services. Commissioner Abbott made a motion, which was later withdrawn, to conceptually approve the amended budget request of \$19,255,387.

At the request of Commissioner Bertino, Sheriff Crisafulli described the department's efforts to assist in investigations in Pocomoke and the challenges of keeping overtime down when the department was down 10 officers between vacancies and injuries. Several commissioners said they did not want to see the department's initial budget request reduced, at which time Commissioner Bertino made a motion to approve the sheriff's initial budget request minus \$40,000 for a pneumatic breach tool, \$50,000 for a forensic camera and \$10,000 for consulting services. When Deputy Chief Administrative Officer Candace Savage pointed out the original budget request included a \$4,000 cost-of-living adjustment, Commissioner Bertino said that was not his intent because the commissioners at their last work session decided to provide employees a \$2,000 adjustment. Following much discussion among the commissioners, Bertino withdrew his motion and made a new motion to approve the \$19,255,387 request presented at the start of the meeting. The commissioners voted 4-3, with Commissioners Fiori, Mitrecic and Purnell in opposition, to conceptually approve Sheriff Crisafulli's amended budget request of \$19,255,387.

Enterprise Fund Controller Quinn Dittrich presented solid waste budget adjustments made since the last work session, which related to personnel services and included a reduction of \$5,634 in expenditures and the subsequent increase to reserves of \$5,634.

Mr. Dittrich presented the Edgewater Acres adjustment and explained that proposed rates were elevated because of a one-time capital improvement, which would have led to higher rates in future years that could have produced a surplus. He said the new proposal was to slightly reduce the rates and seek an intergovernmental loan from the general fund for \$140,000 to smooth out rates going forward. The new rates will include a \$40 base fee, \$220 for a water flat fee and \$190 for a sewer flat fee.

Mr. Dittrich went on to present the proposed water wastewater proposed budget and adjustments. He said there would be revenues and expenditures of \$21,691,317 with a grant from the general fund of \$1,757,395 to cover budgeted deficits as well as operating grants for Bridgetown and Riddle Farm and a \$140,000 loan from the general fund for the Edgewater Acres capital expenditure. Mr. Dittrich said another public hearing was recommended for water and wastewater because rates had changed since the original advertisement. Upon a motion by Commissioner Fiori, the commissioners voted unanimously to set a public hearing on the proposed rates for June 17.

Ms. Reynolds told the commissioners the table included in the meeting packet showed the \$286,835,734 in expenditures originally requested by all county departments, which left a \$2.2 million deficit, as well as committee adjustments to that proposed budget, which left a \$1.1 million surplus. The third column on the table shows the FY 26 proposed budget after commissioner adjustments made May 13, which left the county with a surplus of \$6,309,681. She said the surplus included \$1.6 million savings in personnel salaries and benefits, \$3.6 million savings in the Board of Education, \$321,572 in nonprofit grant changes and a \$835,657 change in reserve. With the amended budget for the Sheriff's Office approved, Ms. Savage said the current surplus was \$7,460,376. Chief Administrative Officer Weston Young said whatever the final budget amount was, 15% of that would go into the county's reserves.

A motion by Commissioner Mitrecic to approve the requested grants to towns failed 3-4, with Commissioners Mitrecic, Purnell and Fiori voting in support and Commissioners Abbott, Bertino, Bunting and Elder voting in opposition. Upon a motion by Commissioner Bunting, the commissioners agreed to keep funding to towns flat. The motion passed 4-3, with Commissioners Fiori, Mitrecic and Purnell opposed.

Upon a motion by Commissioner Abbott, the commissioners voted unanimously to approve proposed fee increases from Development Review and Permitting, Environmental Programs and Recreation and Parks.

Ms. Reynolds presented a variety of potential adjustments to homestead, income and property tax rates. In response to a question from Commissioner Bertino, staff confirmed that the county would continue to put a quarter of a percent of income tax toward OPEB for the Board of Education to ensure the liability improves each year. Upon a motion by Commissioner Mitrecic, the commissioners voted unanimously to reduce the homestead tax cap to 0 as soon as possible and to reduce the income tax by .25%.

When Ms. Savage said staff would like direction on the surplus, which following the work session changes totaled \$7,850,000, Commissioner Mitrecic said he wanted to revisit the Board of Education budget, as education officials had advised Commissioner Elder of a potential \$1,650,000 decrease. Commissioner Mitrecic made a motion to grant the Board of Education's requested budget minus \$1,650,000 and to provide across-the-board \$4,000 cost-of-living adjustments. Upon concerns from various commissioners, Mitrecic withdrew his motion.

Commissioner Fiori made a motion, which he later withdrew, to have staff review a potential new grade for the Sheriff's Office and to set up a second budget meeting with the

Board of Education. Commissioner Fiori made a new motion to set up an additional work session with the Board of Education to discuss the budget. Fiori's motion to schedule another work session on Wednesday, May 28, at noon, passed unanimously. Fiori then made a motion to review what would be associated with setting up an additional grade for the Sheriff's Office. The motion failed, with Fiori, Mitrecic and Purnell voting in support and Commissioners Abbott, Bertino, Bunting and Elder voting in opposition.

Following a motion by Commissioner Bertino, seconded by Commissioner Bunting, the commissioners unanimously voted to adjourn the meeting at 2:09 p.m.