

Minutes of the County Commissioners of Worcester County, Maryland

March 21, 2023

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

Following a motion by Commissioner Bunting, seconded by Commissioner Abbott, 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, Human Resources Deputy Director Pat Walls, Warden Fulton Holland, Major Paul House. Topics discussed and actions taken included the following: receiving a personnel update, hiring Collin Terlizzi as a maintenance worker within the Maintenance Division and John Simmons as a plant operator trainee within the Water and Wastewater Division of Public Works, and discussing certain personnel matters; receiving legal advice from counsel; and performing administrative functions, including discussing Emergency Services operations and Jail personnel schedules.

Following a motion by Commissioner Mitrecic, seconded by Commissioner Elder, the commissioners unanimously voted to adjourn their closed session at 10:01 a.m.

After the closed session, the commissioners reconvened in open session. Commissioner Bertino called the meeting to order, and following a morning prayer by Reverend Mary Haggard of the Newark-Snow Hill United Methodist Church Circuit 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 7, 2023 meeting as presented.

The commissioners presented a years-of-service commendation to Maintenance Worker II Dale Shockley Evans who is retiring following 21 years of service to the Water and Wastewater Division of Public Works.

Upon a motion by Commissioner Mitrecic, the commissioners unanimously approved by consent agenda item numbers 2-15 as follows: accepting the low bid of \$34,395 from Poseidon Plumbing & Home Services to renovate a house in Pocomoke; FY23 Governor's Office of Crime Control and Prevention grant application for funding of \$52,133.45 for the grant-funded position

of Heroin Coordinator within the Sheriff's Office; FY24 Police Accountability, Community, and Transparency grant application for funding of \$382,566 to offset the second installment payment of the body-worn camera program contract; Maryland Heritage Areas Authority grant application for funding of \$7,936 for educational activities during the 2023 Harbor Day festival at the West Ocean City commercial harbor; Memorandum of Understanding for security goods and services up to \$100,000 between the Administrative Office of the Courts and the County Commissioners for courthouse security; a request to retain a 2012 Chevy Tahoe within the Fire Marshal's Office following the purchase of a replacement vehicle; bid specifications to purchase a hands-free batting cage system for use within Recreation and Parks; bid specifications for contracting with an attorney and/or law firm to provide legal services to the Board of Zoning Appeals; a proposal of \$53,625 from JW Salm Engineering to design the water service interconnection between the Mystic Harbour and Riddle Farm Sanitary Service Areas (SSA); a proposal of \$30,820 from GMB to conduct a feasibility study to connect the Mystic Harbour Wastewater Treatment Plan (WWTP) effluent disposal system to the Riddle Farm WWTP effluent holding lagoon; a Small Project Agreement for the Sea Oaks Village II project to extend water and sewer service via the Mystic Harbour SSA to serve 76 single-family homes in the community; County funding of approximately \$83,940 for the proposed 2023 Mosquito Control budget; scheduling a public hearing to receive objections on the proposed disposal of surplus County vehicles, equipment, and miscellaneous items no longer used by the County, by auctioning these items on GovDeals.com; and a letter from Superintendent of Schools Louis H. Taylor advising that the FY24 Board of Education budget will not include any non-recurring items.

Pursuant to the request of Tourism and Economic Development Director Melanie Pursel and upon a motion by Commissioner Mitreic, the commissioners unanimously agreed to modify the Rural Maryland Grant through the Tri-County Council for the Lower Eastern Shore to bring the project manager and scope of work for the Greenways/Bikeways Study under the umbrella of the County. Ms. Pursel stated that this will allow staff to apply for additional grant funding and develop a Master Bikeways plan for the County.

Pursuant to the request of Procurement Officer Nick Rice and upon a motion by Commissioner Bunting, the commissioners unanimously agreed to schedule a public hearing to receive comments on the proposed disposal of two County properties: the former Liquor Control warehouse and the former Tourism and Economic Development Office.

Pursuant to the request of Mr. Rice and upon a motion by Commissioner Bunting, the commissioners unanimously approved the purchase of new playground equipment for the Newark and Bishopville Parks.

Pursuant to the request of Public Works Director Dallas Baker and upon a motion by Commissioner Elder, the commissioners unanimously agreed to increase the cost of driveway pipe installations performed by the Roads Division of Public Works to reflect the actual cost to the County for pipe, stone bedding, and County salaries and benefits.

Chief Administrative Officer Weston Young advised that the budget review session for

the FY24 Enterprise Fund Operating Budgets will take place March 28, with the public hearings on each enterprise fund budget to take place June 6.

Pursuant to the request of Environmental Programs Director Bob Mitchell and upon a motion by Commissioner Elder, the commissioners unanimously agreed to send a letter to Anastasiya Kononova, chief of the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers Technical Assistance Branch Planning Division, requesting for the COE, along with state and federal Eastern Shore representatives, attend an upcoming commissioners' meeting to discuss the COE's decision to cancel planned improvements slated to begin in May 2023 designed to address shoaling in the Ocean City Inlet. Mr. Mitchell stated that the COE had determined that the scheduled improvements, were too costly and would only reduce needed dredging by 50%.

County Attorney Roscoe Leslie reviewed a written request from Attorney John B. Robins, IV, on behalf of Pat and Dawn Reese, for the commissioners to quitclaim any interest that the County may have in real property owned by James and April Reese located on the southeast corner of the West Ocean City commercial harbor. Mr. Leslie advised that U.S. Wind, Inc. has requested the quitclaim deed as part of a contract to purchase the Reese parcel, and a quitclaim deed would have no effect on County interests in the area. Commissioner Elder stated that the County has no deed to the property, so the commissioners should not take any action on the request.

Following some discussion and upon a motion by Commissioner Elder, the commissioners voted 4-3, with Commissioners Bunting, Elder, Mitrecic and Purnell voting in favor and Commissioners Bertino, Fiori, and Abbott voting in opposition, not to move forward with the requested quitclaim.

Pursuant to the recommendation of Human Resources Officer Stacey Norton and upon a motion by Commissioner Bunting, the commissioners unanimously approved the following five FY23 benefits recommendations: CareFirst Dental – no plan changes and a 5.46% increase or \$69,188 increase (fully funded by employees); VSP Vision – no plan or rate changes (fully funded by employees); Guardian Life and Disability – no plan or rate changes; CareFirst Medical and CVS Caremark Pharmacy – no plan changes for active members and retirees under age 65; and utilize \$1 million from the Rate Stabilization Reserve Fund to buy down the medical and pharmacy rate increase for FY24.

The commissioners received an update on the Worcester County Fire and EMS Strategic Planning Committee's progress to date to identify future needs from members Commissioners Bunting, Elder, and Mitrecic, Chief Administrative Officer Weston Young, and Finance Officer Phil Thompson. Mr. Young stated that these recurring meetings have been useful. Commissioner Mitrecic, who chairs the committee, concurred, noting that they are drilling down on actual EMS costs and considering funding options. Following some discussion, the commissioners thanked the members for the update and asked them to keep them updated on future progress.

Mr. Young updated the commissioners on the impacts of County EMS crews providing services in Sussex County, Delaware. He advised that, during a recent Fire and EMS Planning Committee Meeting, they were advised that the Bishopville Volunteer Fire Department (BVFD)

is frequently and increasingly being dispatched into Sussex County for EMS calls, which impacts response times within the County, while not being properly reimbursed for these services by the State of Delaware. Commissioner Bunting and Mr. Weston advised that data from the last three calendar years indicates that the BVFD provided EMS services to Sussex County 21 times in 2020, with no records of a Delaware company responding into Bishopville, 30 times in 2021, with only two instances of a Delaware company responding into Bishopville; and 47 times in 2022, with only three instances of a Delaware company responding into Bishopville. It was noted that there are similar concerns, though to lesser degrees, with County EMS responding to emergencies in Somerset County, Maryland and Accomack County, Virginia. Mr. Young advised that this is an unsustainable trend that is pulling critical units outside of Worcester to make up for the lack of response in neighboring counties. Commissioner Mitrecic stated that these costs are not sustainable. He recalled that Ocean City previously advised the County that the municipality could not continue to respond to emergencies in West Ocean City without proper reimbursement, and the County had rectified the situation. Thus, he urged the commissioners to follow a similar course of action with Delaware. Following some discussion and upon a motion by Commissioner Elder, the commissioners unanimously agreed to send letters requesting to meet with officials from Sussex, Somerset, and Accomack Counties to discuss the impact and possible remedies regarding EMS responses to their jurisdictions on Worcester County fire and ambulance companies.

In response to the receipt of a number of emails from Pocomoke residents, Commissioner Bertino confirmed that the commissioners are very much in favor of constructing a new facility to house the Pocomoke Branch Library; however, they are waiting for additional information from the library director regarding construction plans before the project can advance.

Commissioner Bertino advised that the commissioners' April 4, 2023 meeting has been cancelled. The next regular session of the commissioners will take place April 18.

The commissioners answered questions from the press, after which they adjourned to meet in closed session.

Following a motion by Commissioner Elder, seconded by Commissioner Abbott, the commissioners unanimously voted to meet in closed session at 10:41 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, Recreation and Parks Director Kelly Rados, Parks Superintendent Jacob Stephens, Sheriff Matthew Crisafulli, and Chief Deputy Nate Passwaters. Topics discussed and actions taken included the following: other personnel matters; considering the acquisition of real property for a public purpose; receiving legal advice from counsel; and performing administrative functions, including an operational update from the Sheriff's Office.

After their closed session, the commissioners adjourned to meet again for a budget work session on April 11, 2023.