

Minutes of the County Commissioners of Worcester County, Maryland

February 15, 2022

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 Nordstrom, seconded by Commissioner Bertino, 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 Joe Parker, County Attorney Roscoe Leslie, Public Information Officer Kim Moses, Human Resources Director Stacey Norton, and Attorney Joe Moore. Topics discussed and actions taken included the following: strategy or contents of a bid proposal; personnel update and certain personnel matters; acquiring real property for a public purpose; receiving legal advice from counsel; and performing administrative functions, including receiving FY22 monthly financial update.

Following a motion by Commissioner Nordstrom, seconded by Commissioner Bertino, the commissioners unanimously voted to adjourn their closed session at 10:02 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 Pastor George Tasker of Abundant Life Apostolic Church of Pocomoke 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 February 1, 2022 meeting as presented.

The commissioners presented a retirement commendation to Corporal Lynn Parsons Massey who contributed 10 years of service to the Worcester County Jail.

Upon a motion by Commissioner Bertino, the commissioners unanimously approved by consent agenda item numbers 2-6 as follows: a \$12,000 Youth and Amateur Sports Grant through the Maryland Sports Office within the Maryland Stadium Authority to offset bid fees for the USSSA World Series 2021 event; a special event application from Phil Houck, owner of Crab Alley, to use the West Ocean City commercial harbor parking lot and boat ramp for the Ocean City Power Boat Brand Prix from May 13015, 2022; authorizing Recreation and Parks to apply for a mini grant from the Worcester County Arts Council; accepting a Recreation and

Parks Maintenance and Repair Grant of \$5,000 for general maintenance and repairs at County boat landings; and approving construction of a walking trail at the Berlin Branch Library with Worcester County Library Foundation, Inc. funding of \$5,000.

Atlantic General Hospital (AGH) Board Chairman Greg Shockley and other AGH staff provided an annual update to the commissioners outlining the hospital's community partnerships, FY20-21 financials, partnerships, challenges, new providers, and accomplishments during the past year. Challenges included ongoing physician and nursing shortages, reduced staffing, search for a new chief executive officer, suspension of elective surgeries during the height of the pandemic, and medical liability in Maryland. Accomplishments included opening the AGH Behavioral Health Crisis Center, Mobile Patient Experience App, new technology and equipment purchases, ambient technology, and integrated behavioral health program. Mr. Shockley advised that construction of the new ambulatory center will begin next month and take 18-20 months to complete. He thanked the commissioners for meeting with them and urged them to support the FY23 AGH grant request.

The commissioners reviewed a request from the Board of Education to reallocate \$124,086.69 in funding for the Pocomoke Middle School (PMS) roof replacement project. Deputy Chief Administrative Officer Joe Parker explained that the actual amount of remaining funding from this project is \$113,942, which would result in an over-expenditure of \$10,114.

Upon a motion by Commissioner Bertino, the commissioners unanimously agreed to reallocate available funding of \$113,942 to replace all PMS HVAC rooftop unit gas lines and fund a PMS playground structure.

Commissioner Mitreic advised that the request for reclassification of the Ayres Creek Family Farm, LLC property has been pulled from the agenda at the request of Attorney Hugh Cropper and will be rescheduled for a future meeting.

Pursuant to the written request of Berlin Mayor Zack Tyndall and upon a motion by Commissioner Purnell, the commissioners conceptually agreed to transfer a 3.4-acre, County-owned property on Flower Street in Berlin, and more specifically identified on Tax Map 301 as Parcel 854, to the Town of Berlin for a community center and agreed to schedule a hearing to receive objections and other public comments on the proposed disposal of this property, which is not being used by the County.

Pursuant to the recommendation of Public Works Director Dallas Baker and upon a motion by Commissioner Nordstrom, the commissioners unanimously approved the use of \$425,000 within the Assigned Fund Balance to complete repairs and improvements to the Fire Marshal's Office, which is located on the third floor of the Worcester County Government Center in Snow Hill.

Pursuant to the recommendation of Mr. Parker and the written request of Delegate Jefferson L. Ghrist of District 36 and upon a motion by Commissioner Nordstrom, the commissioners unanimously agreed to sign a letter of support for House Bill 633 requiring the Kirwan Commission Accountability and Implementation Board (AIB) to implement geographic

diversity in membership by including representatives from the Eastern Shore, with at least one Worcester County representative.

Finance Officer Phil Thompson advised that County staff members are working with Davenport and Company, LLC, the County's financial advisor, to determine whether current market conditions warrant refunding the Correctional Officers Retirement System Pension Contribution Refunding Bonds 2013 Series (\$4,870,000, taxable), Consolidated Public Improvement Bonds 2014 Series (\$33,590,000), and Consolidated Public Improvement Bonds 2015 Serie (\$11,115,000). Mr. Thompson stated that obtaining a more favorable rate should result in a one-time County savings of \$1 million.

Following some discussion, Commissioners Bertino, Bunting, Church, Elder, Mitrecic, Nordstrom, and Purnell introduced the three Refunding Bills and agreed to schedule concurrent hearings to obtain public comment on the proposed refunding.

Mr. Thompson met with the commissioners to discuss proposed bond bills and an official intent resolution to use proceeds of general obligation bonds to fund the following Capital Improvement Plan (CIP) projects that are scheduled to be completed in the near term: \$10,024,184 for the Stephen Decatur Middle School addition; \$2,004,000 for the Snow Hill Middle School and Cedar Chapel Special School roof replacement; \$11,198,830 for the sports complex design and development; \$3,050,000 for the public safety logistical storage facility design and development; \$10,995,670 for County Jail Phase 2 improvements; and \$3,550,000 for a belt filter press water and wastewater project in the Ocean Pines Sanitary Service Area.

Commissioner Bertino stated that he could not support the request, as the proposed sports complex has not been vetted, the County has not conducted a hearing to receive public comment on the project, and there has been no land partnership. Commissioner Bunting concurred, noting that the costs and how such a project might be served by water and sewer are still unknown.

Commissioner Church supported moving forward with funding for a future sports complex. Commissioner Purnell concurred.

A motion by Commissioner Bertino to move forward with scheduling a public hearing on the proposed bond bills and official intent resolution, minus the sports complex, failed 3-4, with Commissioners Bertino, Bunting, and Elder voting in favor and Commissioners Church, Mitrecic, Nordstrom, and Purnell voting in opposition.

Upon a motion by Commissioner Nordstrom, the commissioners voted 4-3, with Commissioners Church, Mitrecic, Nordstrom, and Purnell voting in favor and Commissioners Bertino, Bunting, and Elder voting in opposition, to schedule concurrent public hearings to obtain public comment on the proposed general obligation bonds as outlined.

The commissioners met with Deputy Chief Administrative Officer Joe Parker to discuss the automatic increase in salaries and allowances for the county commissioners for the 2022-2026 term, which will increase by 8.5% to reflect the cost of living allowance (COLA) increase awarded to County employees from 2018-2022.

Upon a motion by Commissioner Purnell, the commissioners voted 6-1, with Commissioner Mitrecic voting in opposition, to move forward with the automatic salary and allowance increase as outlined.

Pursuant to the request of Public Works Director Dallas Baker and upon a motion by Commissioner Bertino, the commissioners unanimously agreed to schedule a public hearing on the estimated cost of the belt filter press project at the Ocean Pines Wastewater Treatment Plant (WWTP). Mr. Baker advised that the preliminary engineering study estimated a project cost of \$4.6 million, which will result in an increase of \$7.51 per equivalent dwelling unit (EDU) per quarter. In response to a question by Commissioner Bertino, Mr. Baker confirmed that the County previously estimated a project cost of only \$3.5 million; however, that estimate does not account for inflation or design costs of \$300,000.

The commissioners discussed potential costs associated with leasing space for the State's Attorney's Office in the new Hal Adkins Public Works facility in Ocean City.

Commissioner Purnell recognized the lifetime service of volunteer and community activist Fanny Birkhead, who passed away recently.

The commissioners answered questions from the press.

Following a motion by Commissioner Josh N, seconded by Commissioner CB, the commissioners unanimously voted to meet in closed session at 11:10 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 Joe Parker, County Attorney Roscoe Leslie, Public Information Officer Kim Moses, and Human Resources Director Stacey Norton. Topics discussed and actions taken included acquiring real property for a public purpose and receiving legal advice from counsel.

After the closed session, the commissioners adjourned to meet again on March 1, 2022.