

Minutes of the County Commissioners of Worcester County, Maryland

March 29, 2022

Budget Work Session

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

The commissioners met at 9:00 a.m. with Chief Administrative Officer Weston Young, Budget Officer Candace Savage, and Finance Officer Phil Thompson to conduct a second work session to review the Worcester County Departmental Operating Budget Requests for FY23, as presented to the commissioners during their March 15, 2022 meeting. The requested FY23 Operating Budget currently reflects estimated revenues of \$218,040,884, and requested general fund operating expenditures of \$229,285,111, which leaves a shortfall of \$11,244,227 that must be reconciled by either reductions in expenditures, additional revenues, or a combination of the two.

Commissioner Mitrecic announced the topics discussed during the March 22, 2022 afternoon closed session statement.

The commissioners met with Superintendent of Schools Lou Taylor and Chief Financial Officer Vince Tolbert to review and discuss the Board of Education's (BOE) proposed FY23 Operating Budget of \$100,983,605 (or 81.43% in County appropriations for the FY23 proposed budget of \$124,268,259). This reflects an increase of \$3,981,384 or 4.1% over the current year adopted budget. The requested BOE budget includes payroll increases of \$4,025,396 to provide for a Step and a 4% Cost of Living Adjustment (COLA) for certificated employees and a Step and a 4.5% COLA for support staff employees (0.5% of COLA not included in proposed FY23 increases to County – funded internally), and includes an increase of \$159,414 for five new positions, annual board member allowance increase to \$7,000 and president increase to \$7,500; an increase of \$247,876 for bus contractors to increase the hourly rate from \$22.58 to \$25 per hour, the mileage rate from \$1.60 to \$1.62, and the PVA rate for new buses from \$20,115 to \$20,920; State restricted expenditure transfers of \$833,333 for mental health coordinator, \$45,000 for disabled transportation, \$360,077 for special education, \$138,463 for summer school, \$32,909 for trauma and behavioral health, \$670,520 for student tutoring program, and \$165,478 for teacher salary incentive grant; capital expenditure increases of \$205,000, which includes \$125,000 for a Buckingham Elementary School feasibility study (the next major school construction project), and \$80,000 for roof replacement design fees for Snow Hill Middle School and Cedar Chapel Special School; and \$50,000 for the Pocomoke Middle School After School program grant.

In response to concerns raised by Commissioner Elder, Mr. Tolbert advised that the BOE meets with the bus contractors and compares the rates they are paid with surrounding counties to remain competitive. In response to a question by Commissioner Mitrecic, Mr. Tolbert advised that the BOE reviews fuel costs every 30 days and contractors for the month of March are being reimbursed at a rate of \$1.74 per mile for \$8.07 per gallon.

Bus Contractor Lori Thompson, acting secretary for the School Bus Contractors Association (SBCA), who discussed fuel compensation, PVA, and retirement savings concerns.

The commissioners met with Public Works Director Dallas Baker to review and discuss the proposed FY23 Public Works Administration/Fleet Maintenance Operating Budget of \$995,511, representing an increase of \$473,478 or 90%. Mr. Baker then reviewed the requested FY23 Operating Budget of \$4,698,398 for the Roads Division of Public Works, representing an increase of \$1,112,405 or 30.9%; Maintenance Division budget of \$1,533,278, representing an increase of \$117,891 or 8.3%; and Mosquito Control budget of \$157,946, representing a decrease of (\$71,007) or -31%.

The commissioners recessed for 10 minutes.

The Commissioners met with State's Attorney Kris Heiser to review and discuss the proposed FY23 State's Attorney's Office Operating Budget of \$2,619,551, representing an increase of \$856,388 or 48.6%.

The commissioners met with Tourism and Economic Development Director Melanie Pursel to review and discuss the proposed FY23 Economic Development Operating Budget of \$443,150, representing an increase of \$76,198 or 20.8; and Tourism Operating Budget of \$1,359,429, representing an increase of \$51,784 or 4%.

The commissioners met with Incoming Fire Marshal Matt Owens to review and discuss the proposed FY23 Operating Budget of \$661,470 for the Fire Marshal's Office, representing an increase of \$73,785 or 12.6%; and the Fire Training Center budget request of \$119,148, representing an increase of \$82,044 or 221.1.

The commissioners met with Chief Administrative Officer Weston Young to review and discuss the proposed FY23 Operating Budget of \$1,152,345 for County Administration, representing an increase of \$103,788 or 9.9%; \$3,351,842 for Other General Government, representing an increase of \$39,333 or 1.2%; \$2,644,157 for Taxes Shared with Towns, representing an increase of \$1,800 or 0.1%; \$7,013,867 for Grants to Towns, representing an increase of \$739,776 or 11.8%; \$2,530,242 for Wor-Wic Community College, representing a flat budget; and \$24,790,008 for Benefits and Insurance, representing an increase of \$2,776,554 or 12.6%.

The Commissioners met with Ocean City Fire Chief Richard Bowers to review and discuss the proposed FY23 Volunteer Fire and Ambulance Funding Budget of \$9,609,321, representing an increase of \$267,527, representing an increase of 2.9%.

The commissioners met with Mr. Young to review and discuss the proposed FY23 Operating Budget of \$838,368 for Other Social Services, representing an increase of \$43,290 or 5.4%, as outlined in the requests from the County nonprofit organizations; \$242,439 for Other Recreation and Culture, representing an increase of \$172,439 or 246.3%; and \$242,678 for University of Maryland Extension Agency, representing an increase of \$36,461 or 17.7%, representing certain staffing and salary increases.

The commissioners answered questions from the press, after which they adjourned to meet again on April 5, 2022.