

## **Minutes of the County Commissioners of Worcester County, Maryland**

July 2, 2024

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 Abbott, seconded by Commissioner Fiori, 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 Human Resources Deputy Director Pat Walls. Topics discussed and actions taken included the following: hiring Adam Elliott as a general laborer/maintenance worker I within the Water and Wastewater Division, Gerald Brooks as a building, housing, and zoning inspector I within Development Review and Permitting, and receiving other personnel updates; receiving legal advice from counsel; and performing administrative functions, including discussing potential board appointments.

Following a motion by Commissioner Bunting, seconded by Commissioner Abbott, the commissioners unanimously voted to adjourn their closed session at 9:41 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 Eugene Nichols of Elsey United Methodist Church 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 June 18, 2024 meeting as presented.

The commissioners presented a proclamation to Recreation and Parks Director Kelly Rados and others recognizing July as Park and Recreation Month and July 19 at Park and Recreation Professionals Day in Worcester County. The commissioners commended Ms. Rados for the extensive programs offered at county parks and playgrounds, noting that 57,812 area residents took part in activities hosted by the recreation center from July 1, 2023 to June 30, 2024.

Upon a motion by Commissioner Abbott, the commissioners unanimously approved by consent agenda item numbers 2-5 and 7-9 as follows: a letter supporting the grant application from Beach to Bay Heritage Area to the Rural Maryland Council for a grant of \$18,400 to redevelop the self-guided Beach to Bay Indian Trail; accepting the proposal from Modern Controls, Inc. of \$229,280 for building automation system upgrades to various locations; awarding the contract for the Berlin Homeowners Convenience Center bulkhead repair, design, and technical services to EA Engineering for \$36,130; accepting the proposals for Health Department medical assistance transportation services to Taxi, Taxi, Life Star Response of Maryland, Essential Care, LLC, and Eastern Transport, LLC; accepting the contract from Centripetal for \$37,978.60 per year for additional cyber security software; a Utility Easement agreement between Ocean City Market Place, LLC (Grantor) and the County Commissioners (Grantees) for the installation of utility lines for a hotel expansion in West Ocean City; and local sponsor statement of No Objection to a proposed Atlantic Tackle dredging project.

Wicomico County Executive Julie Giordano and Salisbury (SBY) Airport Director Anthony Rudy met with the commissioners to discuss their efforts to secure pledges and letters of support from private and public partners along with a federal grant to recruit a low-cost air carrier to the Salisbury Airport to provide direct service to and from Florida, the most popular destination among those living in the airport's catchment area, which includes Worcester County. Currently, area residents must drive two or more hours to access flights to Florida, so offering this service locally would meet a community need and make the airport more competitive. Mr. Rudy advised that SBY Airport is applying for an \$800,000 Small Community Air Service Development Program Grant through the U.S. Department of Transportation, and seeking pledges for \$200,000 matching funds. If awarded, the grant will serve as a minimum revenue guarantee to be negotiated with said airline. Match funds would be used to provide additional local assistance of up to \$100,000 a year, make space available in the terminal building and waive landing fees for the first two years to help the airline become firmly established.

In response to a question by Commissioner Bertino, Mr. Rudy advised that they have secured eight private pledges totaling \$60,000 to date. He confirmed that an airline has committed to sending a letter of support for the grant, but has not yet committed to contracting with the airport. If the grant is approved, grant funds would be awarded in October 2024, and the airline would likely begin operating new Airbus 220 jets in early 2025. Commissioner Mitrecic stated that direct flights to and from Florida would be a huge benefit to area residents. In response to questions by Commissioner Mitrecic, Mr. Rudy stated that they will meet with the Wicomico County Council tonight to request a pledge of \$50,000. He explained that multiple airports are competing for the same service, and airlines are often looking for the best support available from a community when determining whether to agree to operate out of an airport.

In response to questions by Commissioner Elder, Mr. Rudy confirmed that pledges would be returned proportionally if all of the match funds are not expended. Commissioner Fiori clarified that the grant is to assure the airline does not lose money in its first years of operation, which would give the airport a competitive edge. In response to comments by Commissioner Abbott, Tourism and Economic Development Director Melanie Pursel confirmed that airfare to and from Florida would benefit Wallops Flight Facility, Hardwire, and other businesses that

depend on contractors. It would be a recruitment tool for private sector business expansion and for attracting meeting and convention business in Ocean City. In response to concerns raised by Commissioner Bunting, Ocean City Chamber of Commerce Director Amy Thompson stated that an airline would have to spend hundreds of thousands of dollars up front to get up and running, so the grant would help that entity be viable. She stated that the chamber has solicited \$25,000 in pledges from private sponsors. In response to additional questions by Commissioner Elder, Ms. Thompson stated that the chamber will solicit a pledge from the Town of Ocean City next Tuesday.

Following some discussion and upon a motion by Commissioner Mitrecic, the commissioners voted 6-1, with Commissioner Bunting voting in opposition, to pledge funds up to \$50,000 to equal the match to be provided by Wicomico County.

Pursuant to the request of Procurement Officer Nicholas Rice and upon a motion by Commissioner Abbott, the commissioners unanimously accepted the contract from Daktronics, Inc. for \$43,855 for the purchase and installation of a new scoreboard at the Northern Worcester Athletic Complex in Berlin.

Public Works Director Dallas Baker met with the commissioners to request authorization to implement a Snipe Sign Removal Pilot Program to assist the State in removing off-premises signs that are tacked, nailed, posted, pasted, glued, or otherwise attached to trees, poles, stakes, fences, or other objects from within State Highway Administration (SHA) right-of-ways (ROW). In response to questions by Commissioner Bertino, Mr. Baker discussed options for issuing fines to those responsible for posting the signs. Commissioner Bunting suggested the pilot program be expanded to include County roads.

Following some discussion and upon a motion by Commissioner Mitrecic, the commissioners unanimously approved the proposed pilot program and directed staff to develop a pilot program for County roads for their consideration at a future meeting.

The commissioners conducted a public hearing on Bill 24-05 (Natural Resources – Critical Area Law), which was introduced by Commissioners Abbott, Bertino, Bunting, Elder, Fiori, Mitrecic, and Purnell on May 21, 2024. Environmental Programs Director Bob Mitchell reviewed the bill, which combines the Chesapeake and Atlantic Coastal Bays Codes into one, single Code and incorporates changes in State law. Natural Resources Administrator Brian Soper reviewed the updates to growth allocation, habitat protection areas, water dependent facilities, and adding enabling language to section 2.

Commissioner Bertino opened the floor to receive public comment.

There being no public comment, Commissioner Bertino closed the floor.

Upon a motion by Commissioner Fiori, the commissioners unanimously adopted Bill 24-05.

Recreation and Parks Director Kelly Rados provided an update on plans for the 2024 Worcester County Fair, which will take place August 9-11, 2024. The fair will cap off Agriculture Week in Worcester County, which runs August 3-11.

Upon a motion by Commissioner Mitrecic, the commissioners voted 6-0-1, with Commissioner Fiori abstaining, to allow the sale of alcohol at the fair on August 9 and 10.

Pursuant to the request of Library Director Jennifer Ranck and upon a motion by Commissioner Elder, the commissioners unanimously approved a lease to temporarily secure space in the renovated firehouse at 5 5<sup>th</sup> Street in Pocomoke. This will allow the Pocomoke Branch Library to continue operating throughout the demolition and construction of a new library facility.

In a related matter and upon a motion by Commissioner Elder, the commissioners unanimously approved acceptance of a \$63,276 grant from the Maryland State Library for the Berlin Branch Library that had never been processed for to cover those costs and further approved utilizing a portion of those funds to cover the cost of a proposal from Gipe Associates, Inc. for \$23,625 for design services of the IT and AV systems for the new Pocomoke Branch Library.

Pursuant to the request of Fire Marshal Matt Owens and upon a motion by Commissioner Elder, the commissioners unanimously adopted Resolution No. 24-12 naming a private lane off of South Point Road in Berlin as Autumn Grove Lane.

In a related matter, Commissioner Mitrecic advised that Osprey Lane residents have been told to relocate their wells for a road-widening project. Public Works Director Dallas Baker advised that this is a private lane, so the County would not be involved in plans to widen it. However, he agreed to investigate the matter and advise the commissioners of his findings.

In response to a request from Commission on Aging (COA) Director John Dorrough and upon a motion by Commissioner Abbott, the commissioners unanimously approved an over expenditure of \$5,000 to cover the cost of excessively high water bills for the COA facility in Pocomoke, which resulted from a watermain break under the building that went undetected until April 2024.

The commissioners met with County Attorney Roscoe Leslie to discuss a request from property owners who reside at 2605 Pine Ridge Court to purchase 0.13-acre of County-owned property to their north on Groton Road at the fair market value of \$2,000. At the request of Commissioner Fiori, Public Works Director Dallas Baker advised that a 10-foot buffer from the County fence to the new property line would be sufficient to allow for mowing and maintenance of the fence; therefore, staff has no concerns with this request. In response to a question by Commissioner Bertino, Mr. Baker advised that this request was prompted when the property owners discovered that a shed they had installed was found to be on County property. Commissioner Abbott stated that at the time of purchase the property owners were advised that this area was part of their property, and they installed a shed and constructed raised beds on that section of property. Following some discussion and upon a motion by Commissioner Mitrecic, the commissioners granted conceptual approval to begin the process required by the Code to transfer this land from County to personal property.

With regard to concerns raised earlier in the meeting by Commissioner Mitrecic, Mr. Baker confirmed that the Roads Division did not issue letters to Osprey Lane residents advising of a road expansion project that could require them to relocate their private wells. Commissioner Mitrecic advised that he will obtain a copy of the letter for staff to further investigate.

The commissioners reviewed and discussed various board appointments.

Upon a nomination by Commissioner Mitrecic, the commissioners unanimously agreed to reappoint Bill Paul to the Building Code of Appeals Board.

The commissioners answered questions from the press, after which they adjourned to meet again on July 16, 2024.