

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

March 4, 2025

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

Following a motion by Commissioner Purnell, 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, and Human Resources Director Stacey Norton and Deputy Director Pat Walls. Topics discussed and actions taken included the following: hiring Cassie Mayo as a communications specialist trainee in Emergency Services and Gary Carter as a roads worker II within the Roads Division; receiving legal advice from counsel; and performing administrative functions, including discussing potential board appointments.

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

After the closed session, the commissioners reconvened in open session. Commissioner Elder called the meeting to order, and following a morning prayer by Reverend Davida Washington of Liberty Church on the Rock in Snow Hill 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 18, 2025 meeting as presented.

Chief Administrative Officer Weston Young advised that the following items were pulled from the agenda and will be rescheduled for later dates: 12 - Diakonia Grant Request and 14 – Emergency Bill 25-01 Marine Uses and Public Utility Operation Center.

The commissioners presented a proclamation to Commission on Aging Director Brandy Trader recognizing March for Meals Month and urged all to support the Congregate Meals and Meals on Wheels programs.

The Commissioners presented a proclamation to Commission for Women Chair Coleen Colson recognizing March as Women's History Month to honor the countless women of

Worcester whose contributions are helping to shape the County's history.

Upon a motion by Commissioner Mitrecic, the commissioners unanimously approved by consent agenda item numbers 2-6 as follows: a letter of support for HB 1001 State Designations – State Cocktail – Original Maryland Orange Crush; scheduling a public hearing for a Comprehensive Water and Sewer Plan amendment for the addition of certain capital projects and planned interconnection projects for the Mystic Harbour and Riddle Farm Sanitary Service Areas; scheduling a public hearing for the Ocean Downs Casino water and sewer plan; a contract with Modern Controls for \$66,583 for the purchase and installation of a new air conditioning system in the Circuit Courthouse; and a modified Memorandum of Understanding for security in the Circuit Court.

The commissioners met with representatives from the towns of Pocomoke, Berlin, Snow Hill, and Ocean City, and the Ocean Pines Association (OPA) to review their FY26 grant requests from the County.

Pocomoke City Manager John C. Barkley requested County grant funding totaling \$2,555,430 for FY26.

Berlin Mayor Zack Tyndal requested County grant funding totaling \$3,324,676 for FY26.

Snow Hill Manager Rick Pollitt and Economic Development Director Lorissa McAllister and Town Council member Eddie Lee requested County grant funding totaling \$2,726,540 for FY26.

Ocean City Mayor Rick Meehan and Town Manager Terry McGean requested County funding totaling \$12,455,167 for FY26, which includes \$2,413,773 to cover the actual cost of providing ambulance service to West Ocean City.

Ocean Pines Association Vice President Rick Farr and General Manager John Viola requested County funding totaling \$2,469,281 for FY26.

Pursuant to the request of Public Works Director Dallas Baker and upon a motion by Commissioner Bertino, the commissioners unanimously approved the 2025 Consolidated Transportation Program letter to the Maryland Department of Transportation, which includes dualizing MD Rt. 90 and MD Rt. 589, a new U.S. Rt. 50 drawbridge entering Ocean City, signalizing the intersections at MD Rt. 611 and MD Rt. 376 in the Berlin/West Ocean City area, at MD Rt. 367 and MD Rt. 368 in Bishopville, at US Rt. 13 and MD Rt. 366 in Pocomoke, and US Rt. 50 and MD Rt. 610 in Berlin, construction projects to eliminate flooding, improve pedestrian safety, and increase traffic flow, and other small projects.

Pursuant to the request of Tourism and Economic Development Director Melanie Pursel and upon a motion by Commissioner Mitrecic, the commissioners unanimously adopted Resolution No. 25-04 acknowledging the re-designation of the Berlin Arts and Entertainment District.

The commissioners met with Environmental Programs Director Bob Mitchell to review a request from the City of Fruitland for a Letter of No Objection to expedite a Sewage Sludge Utilization permit to haul sludge from the Fruitland Wastewater Treatment Plant (WWTP) to the Pocomoke City WWTP. Fruitland currently has an emergency authorization from the Maryland

Department of the Environment for 30 days and is seeking an ongoing permit. Commissioner Bertino made a motion to approve the request, which he later amended and then withdrew.

Commissioner Abbott stated that she could not support the request until Pocomoke City officials provide information about capacity at the Pocomoke City WWTP. She advised that the County is working to bring new homes and businesses to the area, so capacity must be available to serve these projects. Commissioner Fiori concurred. In response to questions from various commissioners, Mr. Mitchell stated that the plant is rated for 147 million gallons per day and appears to have 600,000 gallons of capacity available, the Fruitland WWTP is self-sufficient most of the year, and the requested permit would be good for approximately five years when the drying beds at the Fruitland WWTP can be upgraded to operate in wet, winter weather.

Commissioner Bunting opposed the request. Commissioners Mitrecic and Purnell supported the request, noting that the WWTP is owned and operated by the City of Pocomoke. In response to questions by Commissioner Bunting, Mr. Mitchell stated that the two municipalities cooperate continuously, with mutual aid agreements. Commissioner Bunting stated that a mutual aid agreement should not last five years. In response to a question by Commissioner Fiori, Mr. Mitchell stated that Pocomoke City officials are responsible for the WWTP, and the commissioners can approve expansions, zoning issues, subdivisions, regulatory for forestry and the like. Furthermore, they have some regulatory input for certain permits.

City Manager John C. Barkley returned to the meeting. Commissioner Abbott stated that she has no problem with Pocomoke wanting to be a good neighbor, but that a mutual aid agreement for five years is shocking. She noted that the County is investing time and marketing to attract investors to the area, only to have them turned down because Pocomoke does not have the water and wastewater capacity. Therefore, she requested Pocomoke provide them with a comprehensive report on water and wastewater systems with capacity numbers and infrastructure before the commissioners vote on this issue. In response to a question by Commissioner Fiori, Mr. Barkley stated that plans for the Pocomoke City WWTP include building up the capacity over the next five years, noting that they upgraded all the pumping stations and are seeking FY26 funding for improvements to the WWTP.

Following some discussion, Commissioner Bertino made a motion to table taking action on the request until the commissioners receive the requested information regarding capacity at the Pocomoke City WWTP. That motion failed 3-4, with Commissioners Abbott, Bertino, and Fiori voting in favor and Commissioners Bunting, Elder, Mitrecic, and Purnell voting in opposition.

Pursuant to the request of Superintendent of Schools Louis H. Taylor and upon a motion by Commissioner Mitrecic, the commissioners unanimously approved County funding of \$1,384,624 for the Pocomoke Elementary School roof replacement project. The State will fund the remaining costs of \$1,846,166.

Pursuant to the request of Warden Tim Mulligan and upon a motion by Commissioner Abbott, the commissioners unanimously approved an over-expenditure of \$34,726 within the County Jail to cover maintenance issues.

Pursuant to the request of Senior Budget Accountant Lynn Wright and upon a motion by Commissioner Mitrecic, the commissioners unanimously authorized staff to submit

Congressionally Directed Spending (Earmark) applications for three County projects, intersection improvements at US Rt. 13 and MD Rt. 366 in Pocomoke, a water main replacement in Newark, and replacement of the Health Department and 50Plus Center Building in Pocomoke. The commissioners further authorized Commissioner President Elder to sign a letter of support for the Earmark application being submitted by the Bishopville Volunteer Fire Company for Phase 1 of a three-phase project to rebuild and remodel their main fire station.

Pursuant to the request of Deputy Chief Administrative Officer Candace Savage and upon a motion by Commissioner Abbott, the commissioners conceptually approved amendments to Section 3 – Compensation and Classification to the Worcester County Personnel Rules and Regulations to implement a compensatory time policy for non-classified employees to enhance work-life balance and employee satisfaction. The commissioners agreed to formally adopt the amendment after posting for 15 days.

In response to a question from Commissioner Bertino, Ms. Savage stated that all compensatory time would have to be approved by a department head or the chief administrative officer.

Pursuant to the request of Mr. Young and upon a motion by Commissioner Mitrecic, the commissioners unanimously approved a memorandum of Understanding with Atlantic General Hospital (AGH) to utilize space in the Health Department in Snow Hill to provide a primary healthcare provider and primary care services.

The commissioners reviewed and discussed various board appointments.

Upon a nomination by Commissioner Abbott, the commissioners unanimously agreed to appoint Michelle Goad to the Commission for Women.

Upon a nomination by Commissioner Fiori, the commissioners unanimously agreed to appoint Richard Edwards to the Water and Sewer Advisory Council for the Mystic Harbour Service Area.

Commissioner Bertino discussed concerns regarding assuring that area residents are kept informed regarding County plans for public water and sewer, as well as anticipated funding shifts from the State to the County, which could include community college retirement and the State Department of Transportation. He stated his hope that the County would be in a position to provide relief to area residents in the form of a property tax rate reduction. In response to a question from Commissioner Bertino, Ms. Savage advised that minutes from the last water and sewer committee meeting will be available later today.

Upon a motion by Commissioner Bertino, the commissioners unanimously directed staff to inform them what impact property tax rate reductions of two to five cents, as well as the constant yield, would have on the FY26 County Operating Budget.

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

Commissioner Bertino left the meeting.

Following a motion by Commissioner Fiori, seconded by Commissioner Abbott, with Commissioner Bertino absent, the commissioners unanimously voted to meet in closed session at 11:34 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 performing administrative functions, including FY26 healthcare benefits options proposed by the Health Benefits Committee.

Following a motion by Commissioner Abbott, seconded by Commissioner Purnell, with Commissioner Bertino absent, the commissioners unanimously voted to adjourn their closed session at 12:18 p.m.

The commissioners adjourned to meet again on March 18, 2025.