

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

June 17, 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 Fiori, seconded by Commissioner Bunting, 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, and applicants for the position of Emergency Services director. Topics discussed and actions taken included the following: a personnel update; conducting interviews to fill the position of Emergency Services director; receiving legal advice from counsel; and performing administrative functions, including discussing potential board appointments.

Following a motion by Commissioner Bertino, seconded by Commissioner Bunting, the commissioners unanimously voted to adjourn their closed session at 10:06 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 Tara Armstrong 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 regularly scheduled meeting on June 3, 2025. Upon a motion by Commissioner Purnell, the commissioners voted 5-2, with Commissioners Abbott and Mitrecic voting in opposition, to adopt the minutes as presented.

Upon a motion by Commissioner Mitrecic, the commissioners unanimously approved by consent agenda item numbers 1-10 and 12 as follows: the County Jail's FY26 Community Criminal Justice Treatment Program grant of \$22,000 for detention center-based mental health screenings, and the FY26 State Opioid Response grant for \$4,969 for medication assisted treatment; a request for proposals for recovery support for the Pregnant/Postpartum/Women with Children Project; a Maryland Agricultural and Resource Based Industry Development Corporation grant of \$2,428.40 for Baywater Seafood for aquaculture development; a revised

MDE Delegation Agreement regarding certain duties within Environmental Programs related to water and sewer approvals and subdivisions; a letter outlining the Finding of Fact for Woodside Solar 1, LLC from the June 3, 2025 pre-application consultation; scheduling a public hearing on Rezoning Case No. 447 seeking to rezone approximately 22.86 acres of land on the easterly side of MD Rt. 589, opposite Taylorville Lane, from C-2 General Commercial District to R-3 Multi-family Residential District; the Dividing Creek Rural Legacy Agreement of Sale for a conservation easement on approximately 78.11 acres identified on Tax Map 55 as Parcel 49 at a cost of \$3,904 per acre; a contract to add 20 light duty pickup trucks within the Roads Division to the Verizon Reveal service order for GPS services; a Small Project Agreement for the Sunset Marine Park project; and a contract of \$31,541.78 from Value Carpet One to replace carpets in the Berlin and Ocean City Senior Centers.

Pursuant to the request of Procurement Officer Nick Rice and upon a motion by Commissioner Abbott, the commissioners voted 6-1, with Commissioner Mitrecic voting in opposition, to award the bid to replace the overhead doors at the Recycling Center to Hickman Overhead Door Company for \$86,780. In response to a question by Commissioner Mitrecic, Mr. Rice said that County officials were very comfortable recommending the contract be awarded to Hickman, as their representatives were the only attendees at the pre-bid meeting, and they likely had a better understanding of the project than the two higher bids from Garage Doors & Moore (\$150,000) and Evans Builders (\$123,284).

The commissioners met with Superintendent of Schools Louis H. Taylor and Becker Morgan Project Architect Allison Shockley, a former Stephen Decatur High School graduate, to review schematic designs to construct a new, two-story, 90,837-square-foot Buckingham Elementary School (BES). Ms. Shockley reviewed the project schedule, conceptual planning, schematic site and floor plans, building massing, and renderings. Plans include approximately 3,000 square feet of community-use space for a leased health suite and the Judy Center. The schematic design must be submitted to the State by June 20. State submission deadlines include design development this October 15, followed by construction documents on June 1, 2026, and approvals and bidding contracts in March 2027. Construction is scheduled to take place between May 2027 and August 2029.

Ms. Shockley said that the square footage and cost estimates remain consistent with those discussed in fall 2024. The estimated project construction cost is \$62,349,340. This includes site development, demolition, and contingencies. With additional project costs—such as furniture, technology, playground equipment, fees, and testing—the total project cost is estimated at \$71,366,505, with State funding of \$25,756,000 and County funding of \$45,610,505.

In response to questions from Commissioner Bertino, Ms. Shockley discussed proposed energy efficient materials, like higher insulated glass, that adhere to the 2021 energy code. She confirmed that engineers will complete a lifecycle analysis of the different systems. Mr. Taylor explained the purpose for providing space for health services, noting that many Title I students lack access to healthcare, and placing these services in schools removes cost and accessibility barriers. This model, encouraged by the State, is similar to the setup at Beaver Run Elementary School in Wicomico County. Mr. Taylor said that there is also a similar facility in Pocomoke. There are no operational costs to the taxpayers, as medical partners like TidalHealth or AGH

would cover the expenses. A request for proposals will be sent to healthcare providers, and Mr. Taylor expressed confidence that a partner will be secured by the school's opening.

In response to a question by Mr. Young, Mr. Taylor stated that no approvals are being requested at this stage.

Pursuant to the request of WCPS Chief Financial Officer Vince Tolbert and upon a motion by Commissioner Purnell, the commissioners unanimously approved the revised WCPS FY26 budget categorical amounts based on the amount of local funding included in the FY26 County Operating Budget.

Pursuant to the request of Mr. Tolbert and upon a motion by Commissioner Bertino, the commissioners unanimously approved the WCPS FY26 Transmittal Schedule.

The commissioners conducted a public hearing on the FY26 Water and Wastewater Enterprise Fund Budgets. Enterprise Fund Controller Quinn Dittrich reviewed the proposed budgets for the County's various service areas. He advised that, as discussed during the May 20 budget work session, new information was obtained that resulted in the proposed rates not being feasible, and this budget reflects the new rates being proposed.

Commissioner Elder opened the floor to receive public comment.

There being no public comment, Commissioner Elder closed the hearing.

Upon a motion by Commissioner Bertino, the commissioners unanimously adopted Resolution No. 25-15 adopting SSA budgets, assessments, and charges and establishing classifications for July 1, 2025 through June 30, 2026.

Pursuant to the request of Recreation and Parks Director Kelly Rados and upon a motion by Commissioner Bertino, the commissioners unanimously approved the FY26 Program Open Space (POS) Annual Program.

Pursuant to the request of Public Works Director Dallas Baker in response to concerns raised by citizens and upon a motion by Commissioner Bertino, the commissioners unanimously agreed to reduce the speed limit on Downs Road from 50 mph to 45 mph and post the new speed limit.

Pursuant to the request of Mr. Baker and upon a motion by Commissioner Bertino, the commissioners unanimously approved the plan to limit on-street parking in the Landings at Bayside. These restrictions were developed based on public input at a hearing on May 6 and from a letter submitted by the homeowners association.

Mr. Baker and Procurement Officer Nicholas Rice met with the commissioners to recommend awarding the bid for the Mystic Harbour Pump Stations B & C replacement design project to EA Engineering for \$104,000, which a three-member team agreed represents the best value. Mr. Baker said that due to budget constraints, only Items 1–4 on the proposal will be awarded at this time. Upon a motion by Commissioner Bertino, the commissioners unanimously awarded the design project to EA Engineering, with project costs to be covered utilizing

budgeted funds of \$80,000 and additional funds of \$50,000 to be reallocated from an unneeded pre-screening retrofit design project.

Mr. Baker updated the commissioners on repairs and upgrades to the Riddle Farm Wastewater Treatment Plant (WWTP), noting that the project is ahead of schedule and should be completed in early fall, contingent upon the delivery and installation of the new membrane control system by the manufacturer.

In response to a question from Commissioner Bertino, Mr. Baker stated that Wicomico County issues landfill permits that are good for a year from the date of purchase and County staff could look into options to implement that same policy.

Pursuant to the recommendation of County Attorney Roscoe Leslie and upon a motion by Commissioner Abbott, the commissioners approved the Communications Shelter Shared Usage Agreement to allow Simple Fiber to use the County's old communications shelter for the installation of broadband-related equipment.

In a related matter, Brett Davis of Simple Fiber updated the commissioners on the company's efforts to provide fiber internet services, noting that they have essentially completed work in Pocomoke, and they are completing permitting in Snow Hill and Berlin, and within the next year all of the towns should have high speed internet. Mr. Young stated that most grants for broadband can only be used to serve harder to reach rural areas, so the commissioners had allocated economic development funding awarded under former Governor Larry Hogan to help bring broadband to Pocomoke and Snow Hill. Mr. Davis concurred and noted that Simple Fiber put up a lot of company money as well to extend broadband to the towns.

Mr. Young updated the commissioners on the proposed Reinvestment and Repair Grant Program, which if approved would provide grants of varying amounts to projects that benefit low-income communities or serve disproportionately impacted areas. Mr. Young explained that in 2023 the state passed the Cannabis Reform Act, which legalized adult-use marijuana, and created the Community Reinvestment and Repair Fund, which is funded by cannabis tax revenue and designed to support local community initiatives. To access these State funds, the commissioners approved Bill 24-06 in July 2024 establishing the county's own Reinvestment and Repair Special Revenue Fund. As of June 1, the fund holds \$1,084,316.44. Mr. Young stated that staff will solicit, compile, and seek the commissioners approval on qualifying grant applications. He stated that funds cannot be used for police activities.

In response to a question from Commissioner Abbott, Mr. Young stated that a business that applies should be located in low-income areas and include letters of support from others in the community. Following some discussion and upon a motion by Commissioner Fiori, the commissioners unanimously approved the Reinvestment and Repair Grant Program.

Pursuant to the request of Mr. Dittrich and upon a motion by Commissioner Bertino, the commissioners unanimously adopted Resolution No. 25-16 adopting the Solid Waste Enterprise Fund Budget and Fees for July 1, 2025 through June 30, 2026.

The commissioners discussed items of individual concern.

Upon a motion by Commissioner Mitrecic, the commissioners unanimously agreed to send a letter requesting the State Highway Administration replace the faded sign on U.S. Rt. 113 outside of Pocomoke dedicated to Deputy First Class Brian Keith Heller.

Upon a motion by Commissioner Mitrecic, the commissioners unanimously agreed to institute a public input program to take place during the commissioners' open session meetings. Comments will be accepted after the presentation of certificates, with each member of the public allotted two minutes to comment on an item or items included on that day's agenda.

Commissioner Mitrecic reiterated his concerns that the commissioners had denied the Town of Ocean City's FY26 grant request for one-time funding to help offset costs associated with the State-mandated discontinuation of the summer police program.

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

Following a motion by Commissioner Abbott, seconded by Commissioner Bunting, the commissioners unanimously voted to meet in closed session at 11:08 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, and Public Information Officer Kim Moses. Topics discussed and actions taken included the following: receiving legal advice from counsel; and performing administrative functions, including a discussion on the May 13, 2025 closed work session meeting minutes.

Following a motion by Commissioner Bertino, seconded by Commissioner Fiori, the commissioners unanimously voted to adjourn their closed session at 12:12 p.m. They will meet again on July 1, 2025.