

**WORCESTER COUNTY PLANNING COMMISSION  
WORK SESSION  
MEETING MINUTES – July 10, 2025**

**Meeting Date:** July 10, 2025

**Time:** 1:00 P.M.

**Location:** Worcester County Government Office Building, Third Floor Training Room A

**Attendance:**

**Planning Commission**

Jerry Barbierri, Chair

Kathy Drew

Marlene Ott

Betty Smith

Mary Knight

Ken Church

**Staff**

Jennifer Keener, Director, DRP

Matt Laick, Deputy Director, DRP

Bob Mitchell, Director, EP

**I. Call to Order**

**II. Comprehensive Plan Work Session**

As the first item of business, the Planning Commission met with Michael Bayer and Ainsley Pressl from Wallace Montgomery to discuss the most recent working draft of the Water Resources Element (WRE) that was provided to staff just before the meeting. Several data points need to be added or verified within the document, and they are highlighted within the draft. He identified the current goals and objectives, which were carried forward from the 2011 element. Mr. Bayer noted that after the chapter is finalized, they may pull out some of the text where there is overlap within other chapters as part of the document consolidation process to make sure all of the pieces fit together.

The first section of the chapter discusses water supply and is relatively complete. It addresses topics such as available groundwater resources, general hydrology, discussion on the various aquifers, and water planning areas. He noted that much of this is similar to the prior document.

Noting that water and sewer planning typically occurs separately from the comprehensive plan, there are many references to those planning documents. Mr. Mitchell stated that relative to the water planning areas, language was added in 2007 stating “the inclusion of any water system in the *Water and Sewer Plan* does not legally obligate the County or any of its political subdivisions to take any action to implement such projects or to enforce the implementation of such projects.” Therefore, applicants cannot use the inclusion of properties via water and sewer amendments as sole justification for a change in the character of the neighborhood associated with a requested rezoning (map) amendment.

Relative to Figure 9-4, Mr. Mitchell explained that the St. Martin’s River/Ocean Pines Water Service Area has been designated as a Water Management Strategy Area, only one of five in the state of Maryland. The specific issue identified was the potential for saltwater intrusion into the Columbia aquifer, an unconfined aquifer. Mr. Mitchell further explained that water

**WORCESTER COUNTY PLANNING COMMISSION**  
**WORK SESSION**  
**MEETING MINUTES – July 10, 2025**

withdrawals are managed as part of the permit approval process at the state level to protect the resource.

Relative to the water supply assessment section, Mr. Mitchell explained that they were going to try to better quantify some of the agricultural withdrawals using data from Maryland Department of the Environment, who issues the withdrawal limits on the permits. He noted that farmers are increasingly adding irrigation to their farms. Overall, Mr. Mitchell stated that Worcester County has sufficient water supply to serve agricultural uses as well as new growth, they just want to quantify it better.

The Planning Commission asked about the total number of wells in the County, which Mr. Mitchell stated were over 8,000. Ms. Ott inquired about the conversion of agricultural farms to solar installations. Mr. Mitchell said that property owners would shelve their permit with MDE if they no longer needed it. Relative to well abandonment, Mr. Mitchell stated that his department does track abandonments, especially along the waterfront where the chlorides and iron spikes. Property owners must properly abandon the well and drill a newer, deeper well to reach a different aquifer. He also explained that well abandonment occurs with demolition permits.

Mr. Bayer explained that Table 9-4 represents the analysis that was done because of the initial growth areas identified by the Planning Commission. The calculations became the input to the WRE. There were assumptions made relative to the gallons per day (GPD) per Equivalent Dwelling Unit (EDU). If the actual gpd per EDU is less, then the overall additional demand projected will be less.

In Table 9-6, Mr. Mitchell stated that the Village of Showell was listed as n/a for water systems. He stated that this will likely have to be footnoted if it will remain as a planned growth area. He anticipates that any development would be served by Ocean Pines for sewer via a restricted line. Water would require a well, tower and water treatment plant, depending on the size of the development. In addition, this may require additional infrastructure improvements in Ocean Pines to get service to the development.

Mr. Bayer stated that there is a placeholder for specific recommendations for water system improvements. His team will work with Mr. Mitchell to review and provide suggestions to be reviewed by the Planning Commission at the next meeting.

Relative to the wastewater services section, Mr. Bayer stated that the descriptions of the wastewater treatment plant in Table 9-7 have been updated to reflect current facility capacity and discharge types. Certain sections are still a work in progress, with areas in need of data highlighted. They are trying to use the Chesapeake Assessment Scenario Tool (CAST) to extract impervious surface data by watershed. Mr. Mitchell stated that relative to impervious surfaces, the Assawoman Bay watershed (which includes the Town of Ocean City) is in the worst condition. When a watershed approaches 10% impervious surface, there are more readily apparent impacts on the water bodies as a result of the stormwater runoff. He stated

**WORCESTER COUNTY PLANNING COMMISSION**  
**WORK SESSION**  
**MEETING MINUTES – July 10, 2025**

that there are some watersheds in Delaware that are over 10%. In Worcester County, the worst impervious area is Manklin Creek, a subwatershed of the Assawoman Bay watershed. Mr. Mitchell stated that language could be added to the plan to recommend limits placed on new development within watersheds that are at or nearing the 10% threshold.

Mr. Mitchell explained the boundaries of the Coastal and Chesapeake Bay watersheds, the limited growth that the Chesapeake Bay watershed will be anticipating, and upgrades that have occurred to the Snow Hill and Pocomoke City municipal wastewater treatment plants. In addition, new septic systems are required to have pre-treatment installed. Mr. Mitchell mentioned a potential for retrofitting older communities in Pocomoke City with grant funds, as well as a potential nutrient reduction project in Snow Hill.

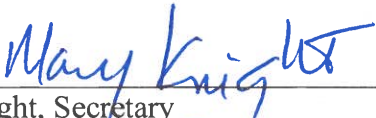
Mr. Mitchell provided a brief discussion on Total Maximum Daily Loads (TMDLs), Watershed Implementation Plans (WIPs) and the impacts on various watersheds. He mentioned that there are ongoing projects that have received grants to improve the Newport Bay watershed, such as the sewer service to Lewis Road residences, as well as flooding and stormwater management projects in and around Berlin. Mr. Mitchell explained that agricultural uses have the largest land area and have the highest alleged nutrient contribution. Residential uses contribute less nutrient runoff. The goal is to try to get more Best Management Practices (BMPs) on farmland, especially waterfront property owners, to reduce non-point source discharge.

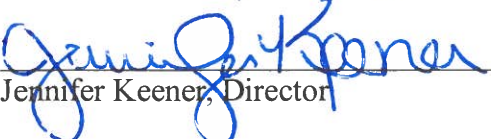
Relative to impervious surfaces, the Planning Commission inquired if a homeowner or developer wanted to convert their gravel driveway to asphalt, whether a permit would be required? Mr. Mitchell stated that it would not, as the gravel driveway is already considered lot coverage under Critical Area and stormwater management regulations.

Mr. Bayer noted that the findings were to be determined, but his team will work with Mr. Mitchell to update the recommendations.

Mrs. Keener stated that the draft chapter will be forwarded to the Planning Commission members for their review and asked that any questions or comments be sent to her for consolidation and forwarding to the consultant. The revised element, along with the land use chapter, will likely be reviewed in September at a joint work session with the County Commissioners.

**III. Adjourn**

  
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Mary Knight, Secretary

  
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Jennifer Keener, Director