

Minutes of the County Commissioners of Worcester County, Maryland

September 16, 2025

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

Following a motion by Commissioner Mitrecic, seconded by Commissioner Fiori, with Commissioners Abbott and Bunting absent, 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 Deputy Director Pat Walls. Topics discussed and actions taken included the following: a personnel update, hiring Michael Perry as a roads worker II within the Roads Division, Robert Brownlie as a landfill operator I within the Solid Waste Division, Austin Vanlill as an inventory/shop foreman within the Water and Wastewater Division, Ted Singleton as a correctional officer trainee within the County Jail, Stacey Odell as an office assistant IV within Development Review and Permitting, and Calvin Lowe as a communications specialist trainee and Alexis Wilson as an emergency management specialist within Emergency Services; transferring Electronic Services Installer Don Clemens to emergency management specialist within Emergency Services; receiving legal advice from counsel; and performing administrative functions, including discussing potential board appointments.

Following a motion by Commissioner Bertino, 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 Hope Carmean of Whatcoat Church of Snow Hill and pledge of allegiance, announced the topics discussed during the morning closed session.

Commissioners Abbott and Bunting were absent from the open and closed session meetings.

The commissioners reviewed and approved the open and closed session minutes of their regularly scheduled meeting on September 16, 2025.

Commissioner Elder opened the floor to receive public comments.

John Adkins of Ocean City discussed the need to acquire additional capacity from the Town of Ocean City and said that developers should be held responsible for sewer disposal failures in the West Ocean City (WOC) area.

There being no further public comment, Commissioner Elder closed the floor.

The commissioners presented a proclamation recognizing September as Workforce Development Professionals Month to Tourism and Economic Development Director Melanie Pursel and her staff.

The commissioners presented a proclamation recognizing September 17-23, 2025 as Constitution Week in Worcester County to Gail Weldin and Pat Arata of the General Levin Winder Chapter of the Daughters of the American Revolution.

The commissioners presented a years-of-service commendation to Building and Maintenance Mechanic IV Bryan Furches who is retiring following nine years of service to the Maintenance Division.

Upon a motion by Commissioner Mitrecic, the commissioners voted 4-1, with Commissioner Bertino voting in opposition, to approve consent agenda item numbers 2-10 as follows: a Maryland Department of the Environment grant application for the Greys Creek Watershed living shoreline restoration project; adopting a Notice of Non-Discrimination and Grievance Procedures as part of EPA federal earmark grant requirements; scheduling a public hearing on an application to the Maryland Community Development Block Grant Program for funding for the Diakonia 611 shelter project; River Run Single Family Project water and wastewater turnover documents; increasing the salary ranges and associated budgets for deputy director of Public Works and superintendent of the Water and Wastewater Division; purchasing a solids conveyor/screw press from Innovative Treatment Products, Inc. for \$34,900 for the Water and Wastewater Division; purchasing two roll off containers from Mid-Atlantic Waste Systems for \$44,578; converting the position of rental license coordinator within Development Review and Permitting from part-time to full-time; and reclassifying one administrative services coordinator position to administrative supervisor within the State's Attorney's Office.

At the prior request of the commissioners, Public Works Director Dallas Baker presented a proposal to purchase an additional 170,000 gallons per day (gpd) of sewer capacity from the Town of Ocean City to support flow from the Landings Sewer District (100,000 gpd) and Assateague Point Sewer District (70,000 gpd) via an existing force main under the Isle of Wight Bay. He stated that purchasing additional flow from the town would save the County an estimated \$30 million by avoiding major infrastructure upgrades in those two areas.

Following some discussion and upon a motion by Commissioner Mitrecic, the commissioners unanimously authorized Commissioner President Elder and Commissioner Vice President Fiori to attend an upcoming Ocean City Mayor and Council work session to present the proposal to purchase an additional 170,000 gpd of sewer capacity from the town as outlined by Mr. Baker.

Pursuant to the recommendation of Development Review and Permitting Director Jennifer Keener, at the request of Ocean 8 Group, LLC, and upon a motion by Commissioner Bertino, the commissioners unanimously adopted Resolution No. 25-21 approving certain private roads and a certain road construction standard within The Elms Residential Planned Community.

In response to a question by Commissioner Fiori, Ms. Keener confirmed that in the early 2000s, the property had approval for a large retail facility, but was later rezoned and residential uses were proposed, with a minimum requirement for two parking spaces per unit. She confirmed that these units could not be used for short-term rentals, which require a minimum of three parking spaces per unit.

The commissioners conducted a public hearing on Bill 25-03 (Zoning – Multi-family dwelling units in the C-2 General Commercial District), which was introduced by Commissioners Fiori, Mitrecic, and Purnell on July 15, 2025. Ms. Keener reviewed the bill, which would allow multi-family residential dwelling units as an accessory use to commercial development, provided that at least sixty-five percent or more of the net lot area for a given parcel be developed with commercial uses or structures permitted in the C-2 District. She advised that the Planning Commission gave the bill a favorable recommendation. In response to a question by Commissioner Bertino, Ms. Keener reviewed the long-term permitted uses, which include J-1 housing.

Commissioner Elder opened the floor to receive public comment.

Hugh Cropper, attorney for the applicant, Todd Ferrante, reviewed the 63-unit project, which is intended to act as a buffer between the residential developments and the more intense commercial uses. He stated that this is a great bill, a positive for the County, and he urged the commissioners to adopt the bill as presented.

There being no further public comment, Commissioner Elder closed the floor.

Upon a motion by Commissioner Fiori, the commissioners unanimously adopted Bill 25-03 as presented.

The commissioners conducted a public hearing on Emergency Bill 25-04 (Zoning – Solar Energy Systems and Public Health Nuisances), which was introduced by Commissioners Abbott, Bertino, Elder, Fiori, Mitrecic, and Purnell on August 19, 2025. Ms. Keener reviewed the bill, which includes but is not limited to the following: aligns definitions, updates district regulations, modifies the lot requirements for the utility review process to be consistent with State law, creates local decommissioning and restoration plan requirements and local bonding, adds a nuisance provision to the Public Health Article for abandoned projects, and includes enhanced landscape buffer provisions for major systems between 200 kW and one MW.

Commissioner Elder opened the floor to receive public comments.

There being no public comments, Commissioner Elder closed the floor.

In response to questions by Commissioner Bertino, County Attorney Roscoe Leslie advised that four-fifths or 80% of the commissioners must be present and vote in favor to adopt a bill as emergency legislation; however, due to absences they lack that required majority to take this action today. He concluded that if the commissioners vote to adopt the bill today, it will not take effect for 45 days. He stated that the commissioners could wait until their next meeting to vote on the bill, at which time it would take effect immediately. In response to a question by Commissioner Fiori, Ms. Keener stated that there are two projects in the pipeline that would not

be subject to the requirements of Bill 25-04 if they are able to complete all the necessary permitting before the bill takes effect.

Upon a motion by Commissioner Bertino, the commissioners unanimously voted to table further action on Emergency Bill 25-04 until their next meeting on October 7, 2025.

The commissioners recessed until 11 a.m.

The commissioners conducted a work session to review updates to the Comprehensive Plan, which establishes priorities to help the County achieve desired future land use goals and to serve as a guide for future County decisions about land uses, infrastructure needs, and the need for capital projects and other measures. Ms. Keener and Consultant Michael Bear of Wallace Montgomery provided a brief overview that included general background, a review of chapters one and two of the Comprehensive Plan, and discussed next steps. Mr. Bear advised that they had received over 1,500 responses during the County's public engagement period in 2023. That data was incorporated into certain elements of the plan, and the Planning Commission is reviewing updated plan chapters monthly. He confirmed that the public is still welcome to ask questions and/or provide comments on the plan. Ms. Keener concurred and advised that there are links in the document and on the County website at <https://www.co.worcester.md.us/comprehensive-plan>.

In response to a question by Commissioner Elder, Mr. Bear stated that the overall schedule includes bi-weekly meetings with the commissioners and the Planning Commission through November 21. He stated that the Planning Commission will review the final draft on December 11, after which it will be sent to the commissioners for review and adoption.

In response to concerns raised by Commissioner Bertino, Mr. Bear agreed to include the demographics of Ocean Pines, the largest population base in the County, in the Census section along with the incorporated municipalities. Ms. Keener stated that the Planning Commission had also raised that same concern. Following some discussion, the commissioners thanked Mr. Bear and Ms. Keener for the update.

The commissioners reviewed and discussed various board appointments.

Upon a nomination by Commissioner Fiori, the commissioners unanimously agreed to appoint Tina Dikes to the Adult Public Guardianship Advisory Board and the following individuals to the Youth Council: Griffin Hagenrater-Gooding, Gina Thomas, Levi Goddard, Jaydon Boulware, Jesse Mariner, Malasia Dennis, Saniah Mumford, Trenton Hilliard, Makayla Hayman, Brooklyn Brady, and Jaycee Johnson.

Upon a nomination by Commissioner Purnell, the commissioners unanimously agreed to reappoint Theophilus Hobbs to the Local Management Board, Vaughn White to the Solid Waste Advisory Board, Lisa Bowen to the Zoning Appeals Board, and Nancy Howard¹ to the Social Services Advisory Board.

Commissioner Bertino (CB) raised concerns over transfers of money out of the Ocean Pines Sanitary Service Area (SSA) escrow funds and questioned how this was permitted. Chief Administrative Officer Weston Young acknowledged the transfers occurred during prior budget

¹ It was determined that Ms. Howard has already served two consecutive terms and is not eligible for reappointment.

processes, that current staff were not involved in the transfers, and that corrective steps are underway. He also clarified that past practices involved using developer escrow funds to cover inspection costs, and when those escrow balances ran out, funds were pulled from Ocean Pines.

Deputy Chief Administrative Officer Candace Savage explained that since she became aware of the issue about two and a half months ago, staff has been reviewing and reconciling developer escrow accounts to determine which balances remain collectible.

Enterprise Fund Controller Quinn Dittrich advised that the transfers were coded to the Ocean Pines account, and projects that contributed to the shortfall over the last four years include Windmill Creek, Triple Crown, and the casino project. He stated that repayments include \$46,000 from River Run and others, with recovery efforts ongoing.

Commissioner Mitrecic thanked Procurement Officer Nick Rice for his work with the County and wished him well as he prepares to step into the role of city administrator for the City of Salisbury.

Commissioner Bertino offered his condolences and recognized the contributions of Joe Reynolds of the Ocean Pines Forum, who passed away September 3, 2025.

Responding to remarks from Mr. Adkins during the public comment period, Commissioner Elder stated that the County has limited authority to hold contractors accountable for the failure of sewer facilities constructed many years ago.

The commissioners answered questions from the press, after which they adjourned to meet again on October 7, 2025.