

Minutes of the County Commissioners of Worcester County, Maryland

October 7, 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 Bertino, 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, Legislative Analyst Charlene Sharpe, and Public Information Officer Kim Moses. Topics discussed and actions taken included receiving legal advice from counsel; and performing administrative functions, including discussing the contents of a bid proposal.

Following a motion by Commissioner Mitrecic, seconded by Commissioner Purnell, the commissioners unanimously voted to adjourn their closed session at 10:04 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 Bishop Elbert Davis of Free In deed Baptist Ministries 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 September 16, 2024 meeting as presented.

Commissioner Elder opened the floor to receive public comments.

Edward Lee of Snow Hill asked the commissioners to schedule the public hearing on the Worcester County Housing Study to take place in the evening to allow more stakeholders to attend and participate.

Hotel-Motel-Rental Association Director Susan Jones and President Ruth Waters supported increasing the Worcester County hotel room tax to continue to support the hospitality industry to strengthen advertising and marketing and public safety to grow the Town of Ocean City's tourism economy.

Laura Parker of Gum Point Road in Berlin discussed the request to replace a pump and wastewater collections capital equipment, as well as unchecked growth and the resulting traffic on Gum Point Road, where speed bumps are needed, and MD Rt. 589. She concluded that another traffic study is needed.

Delegate Wayne Hartman spoke in favor of increasing the Worcester County Room Tax. He stated that a lot of political collateral was used to get this legislation passed in Annapolis, but that it was worth it because tourism needs to pay for itself. He urged the commissioners to pass the room tax unanimously.

Dennis Parker of 11341 Gum Point Road discussed unsafe traffic conditions on Gum Point Road.

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

The commissioners presented a proclamation to Fire Marshal Matt Owens proclaiming October 5-11, 2025 as Worcester County Fire Prevention Week and recognizing October as National Fire Prevention Month.

The commissioners presented a proclamation recognizing October 15, 2024 as White Cane Awareness Day in Worcester County to Amy Crouse and other representatives of Blind Industries of Maryland in Salisbury.

The commissioners presented a proclamation to student members of the new Turning Point USA Chapter at Stephen Decatur High School retroactively recognizing Wednesday, September 10, 2025, as Charlie Kirk Day.

Chief Administrative Officer Weston Young advised that today's public hearing on Rezoning Case 451 has been postponed at the attorney's request and will be readvertised for another date.

Upon a motion by Commissioner Abbott, the commissioners unanimously approved by consent agenda item numbers 2-15 as follows: out-of-state travel for two deputies within the Sheriff's Office to attend firearms instructor training October 13-17, 2025 in Hanover, PA; out-of-state travel for one recreation program manager within Recreation and Parks to attend the United States Coaches Convention January 14-17, 2026 in Philadelphia, PA; a Worcester County Arts Council Mini Grant application for \$500 for youth recreational programs within Recreation and Parks; a letter from the commissioners supporting the change of scope of a Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) CV-2 Grant to use \$6,200 to purchase 25 bed bug proof mattresses and frames; a contract from Lywood Automation, LLC for \$130,555 to replace the control panel and enclosure for Mystic Harbour Pump Station F; a contract from Slurry Pavers for slurry seal on County roads at \$3.93 per square yard, with funds of \$500,000 approved in the FY26 budget; a contract from Davis, Bowen, and Friedel for \$24,100 for engineering services for the Hotel Road Bridge replacement project; a contract from Sherwood-Logan & Associates for \$48,795 to purchase a replacement pump for Pump Station T in the Ocean Pines Sanitary Service Area (SSA); scheduling a public hearing for a CDBG Housing Study in Worcester County; scheduling a public hearing for an application filed by Mark Cropper on behalf of Buck Brown's LLC to amend the Critical Area Map to reclassify 2.19 acres identified on Tax Map 25 as Parcel 298 from Resource Conservation Area (RCA) to Limited Development Area; scheduling a public hearing for an application filed by Mark Cropper on behalf of Olivia Harrison Phillips to reclassify 6.60 acres identified on Tax Map 22 as Parcel 268 from RCA to Intensely Developed Area; awarding the lowest responsive bid for the Public Landing shoreline

project to Brittingham Construction & Landscaping for \$214,462.50; and reclassifying the part-time liquor license inspector position to full-time to focus on investigating complaints and property checks for special events.

The commissioners met with Maryland Department of Transportation (MDOT) Acting Secretary Samantha Biddle and local State Highway Administration (SHA) officials to discuss County projects included in the MDOT/SHA FY26-FY31 Maryland Consolidated Transportation Program (CTP) budget of \$21.5 billion in projects and programs aimed at enhancing safety, maintaining the State's transportation system to keep it in working order, and driving economic growth. She noted that, in spite of the federal government shutdown, MDOT continues to operate as normal. She also stated that MDOT was able to meet a request made by County officials during the 2025 Maryland Association of Counties Summer Conference to expedite the report for the Tanhouse Creek Bridge on Bayside Road in Public Landing.

SHA Administrator Will Pines and District Engineer Mark Crampton discussed the kickoff of the Cheswick the Crab bike and pedestrian safety program and reviewed multiple resurfacing projects that were recently completed in the County, including US Rt. 50 eastbound from the Wicomico County Line to MD Rt. 346 and US Rt. 113 from Hayes Landing Road to Shiloh Farms Road. SHA is currently resurfacing US Rt. 113 southbound from Shiloh Farms Road to north of Langmaid Road. In FY26 they will resurface MD Rt. 12 from US Rt. 113 to north of MD Rt. 354, MD Rt. 365 from US Rt. 113 business to US Rt. 113, MD Rt. 374 from west of Ann Drive to MD Rt. 818, and MD Rt. 377 from MD Rt. 376 to MD Rt. 346. Rehabilitation of the draw span section of the US Rt. 50 Bridge into Ocean City runs from this winter through summer 2027, and the planning process for the MD Rt. 90 expressway project from US Rt. 50 to MD Rt. 528 is moving forward, with environmental analysis and engineering anticipated to begin in July 2026. He also discussed projects that include implementing enhanced technologies on US Rt. 50 to improve safety and traffic flow. SHA is in the final stages of the Maryland Rt. 611 corridor study that the County requested to improve access management along the corridor. The \$400,000 study is expected to be done at the end of the year, and SHA is also working on the design of the Pedestrian Safety Action Plan on Coastal Highway from 15th Street to 67th Street, with a stakeholder meeting to discuss the concept plan on December 8.

Melissa Williams, director of planning and program development at MTA, discussed the status of the Chesapeake Bay Bridge replacement project.

MTA Support Director Travis Johnston discussed \$5.34 in grants to support local transit operations provided by Shore Transit in Worcester and Somerset counties, in conjunction with Wicomico County, including preventative maintenance, mobility management, and two small buses, and \$4.1 million for transit operations in Ocean City, including preventative maintenance, two articulated buses and one small bus.

Motor Vehicle Administration (MVA) Field Operations Director Rhashad Johnson discussed reduced wait times at the Salisbury MVA office, as well as online and mobile bus services.

Maryland Aviation Administration Regional Deputy Director Sean Hammer reviewed aviation grant funding of \$602,000 in FY26 for the Ocean City Municipal Airport.

In response to concerns raised by Commissioner Elder, Mr. Pines agreed to look into issues regarding utilities in need of permitting assistance to install the infrastructure needed

along State right-of-way areas for highspeed internet.

Commissioner Bertino addressed concerns that still no funding has been allocated to address the buildup of traffic on MD Rt. 589. Ms. Biddle noted that she will be asking her team to go back and look for other options to improve traffic flow and safety. Mr. Pines discussed sustainable development in the area. Commissioner Bertino stated that the property rights of individuals on MD Rt. 589 should be protected and understood. Commissioner Fiori thanked Mr. Crampton for hosting update meetings, which allow him to keep constituents up to date on roads projects. In response to a question by Commissioner Fiori, Mr. Crampton stated that the signal for the intersection at MD Rt. 376 and MD Rt. 611 is awaiting federal funding. He then reviewed work taking place at various intersections.

In response to a question from Commissioner Abbott about the status of a signal at MD Rt. 367 and MD Rt. 611, Mr. Crampton stated that if they see movement to develop a Wawa in that area, SHA would be able to secure funding to signalize that intersection sooner.

The commissioners met with Ocean City Mayor Rick Meehan to discuss a request from the Town of Ocean City to increase the Worcester County hotel rental tax from its current rate of 5% to a new rate of 6%. Mayor Meehan reviewed actions taken by the town, County, and other Code Home Rule Counties in 2024 to petition the State to adopt House Bill 186 – Eastern Shore Code Counties – Maximum Hotel Rental Tax Rate, legislation adopted by the General Assembly that would allow Code Home Rule Counties to increase room tax rates up to 6%. Mayor Meehan stated that this increase is needed to fund tourism marketing, to hire 10 new deputies in place of the season police program eliminated by the Maryland General Assembly, and to implement a take home vehicle policy to attract law enforcement officers. He stated this request is time sensitive, as hospitality industry officials have requested the new room tax rate be in place by January 1, 2026. He concluded by seeking unanimous support from the commissioners for this request.

Commissioner Mitrecic made a motion, which he later amended, to approve the request. Commissioner Mitrecic thanked Delegates Wayne Hartman and Charles Otto and Senator Mary Beth Carozza for expending a tremendous amount of political capital to get this legislation passed in Annapolis. He stated that this is a win-win for the County and the towns, and he agreed that now is the time to implement the requested room tax rate increase.

In response to a question by Commissioner Abbott, Mayor Meehan confirmed that the additional revenue generated by the room tax increase would offset the cost of the new police officers going forward.

Commissioner Fiori thanked town officials for identifying a funding source to meet the public safety needs of the resort at no cost to residents. He noted that Worcester County already has one of the lowest room tax rates around, and he agreed to support the requested increase.

In response to a request from Chief Administrative Officer Weston Young, County Attorney Roscoe Leslie reviewed the steps the commissioners would need to take to implement any room tax rate increase: introduce legislation to amend TR 1-601 to raise the county room tax cap to 6%, conduct a public hearing to occur after introduction, and vote to pass the legislation; and after that legislation goes into effect conduct a public hearing on the proposed new rate, and then vote unanimously to set the higher rate. In response to questions by Commissioner Mitrecic, Mr. Leslie stated that they may be able to schedule the two hearings for the same day.

After some discussion, Commissioner Mitrecic made an amended motion to move

forward with the steps outlined by Mr. Leslie to increase the room tax rate.

In response to a question from Mayor Meehan, Mr. Leslie stated that the legislation will be introduced at the commissioners' next meeting on October 21, with the two public hearings to be scheduled to take place in mid-November.

The commissioners conducted a public hearing on a CDBG application for funding of \$800,000 for phase one of the Diakonia 611 Shelter Project. Senior Budget Accountant Lynn Wright reviewed the roughly \$10 million project to be developed in two phases to create an affordable rental housing complex designed to help people transition from homeless shelters and institutions. The new facility will provide a range of services in one location, along with an expanded community food pantry, and a thrift store.

Commissioner Elder opened the floor to receive public comments.

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

Upon a motion by Commissioner Bertino, the commissioners unanimously adopted Resolution No. 25-22 authorizing the filing of a CDBG application to fund the Diakonia 611 Shelter Project in Worcester County, Maryland.

Pursuant to the request of Public Works Director Dallas Baker and upon a motion by Commissioner Bertino, the commissioners unanimously authorized staff to implement a penalty and suspension schedule targeting commercial haulers who dispose of out-of-county waste at the Central Site Lane Landfill, in violation of County regulations. Mr. Baker reviewed the penalties and advised that letters will be mailed to all of the haulers informing them of the fines and suspensions that would be implemented by those who are caught violating County regulations.

Pursuant to the request of Warden Tim Mulligan and upon a motion by Commissioner Abbott, the commissioners unanimously agreed to accept the contract from CFG Health Systems to provide medical services at the County Jail at a cost of \$1,799,992 for year one, with a 3.75% cost increase in year two, a 3.25% cost increase in year three, and a 1.75% cost increase in both years four and five. The commissioners also agreed to extend the current medical contract with Wellpath from June 30 to December 1, 2025 to allow for a smooth transition between providers.

Pursuant to the request of Budget Officer Kim Reynolds and upon a motion by Commissioner Mitrecic, the commissioners unanimously approved FY25 budget transfers and encumbrances totaling \$4,724,250, which includes a transfer of \$4.5 million from Interfund to Economic Development to streamline accounting for the Riddle Farm bypass and rehabilitation projects.

Upon a motion by Commissioner Bertino, the commissioners unanimously approved a Worcester County Commission on Aging (WorCOA) FY25 over expenditure of \$9,975.70 for the upkeep and maintenance of the four County facilities used by WorCOA.

Enterprise Controller Quinn Dittrich provided an update on corrective actions taken to stabilize and restore funding to the Shared Facilities Escrow Fund (Fund 505). This fund was created to collect developer contributions for project-related costs, but beginning in mid-2022, it experienced a sustained cash shortfall that led to \$231,260 in internal transfers and \$92,653 in

unpaid payroll expenses. These gaps were not followed at the time by formal recovery efforts. Mr. Dittrich acknowledged issues related to the negative cash balance, internal fund transfers, and insufficient developer contributions during the 2022 to 2024 period, reviewed corrective actions being taken, and confirmed that the Treasurer's Office is committed to corrective action and transparent reporting to ensure this will not happen again.

Pursuant to the recommendation of Legislative Analyst Charlene Sharpe and upon a motion by Commissioner Mitrecic, the commissioners unanimously accepted the proposal from R&R Solutions to provide lobbying services for Worcester County.

In follow up to their public hearing on September 16, 2025, the commissioners met with Ms. Keener to review the following modifications to the solar energy systems text amendment: updated code section number for the C-2 District use as a result of the passage of the C-2 multi-family bill; and further simplified definition of major and utility solar energy systems to simply reflect the size of the systems by eliminating the specified means by which the power is sold. Upon a motion by Commissioner Bertino, the commissioners voted 6-0-1, with Commissioner Bunting abstaining from the vote, to adopt the text amendment as Emergency Bill 25-04 Zoning – Solar Energy Systems and Public Health – Nuisances.

The commissioners reviewed and discussed various board appointments.

Upon a nomination by Commissioner Bertino, the commissioners unanimously agreed to appoint Sarah Ash to the Tourism Advisory Board.

Upon a nomination by Commissioner Abbott, the commissioners unanimously agreed to reappoint Jerry Barbierri to the Planning Commission.

Upon a nomination by Commissioner Purnell, the Commissioners unanimously agreed to appoint Kelsey Moran to the Commission for Women.

Pursuant to the request of Ms. Keener and upon a motion by Commissioner Bertino, the commissioners unanimously agreed to schedule a public hearing on October 21, 2025 to receive comments on a CDBG application for \$300,000 in funds for grants associated with the Housing Rehabilitation Program, with all of the funds to be utilized to meet the national objective of benefitting low- and moderate-income persons.

The commissioners conducted a second work session with Development Review and Permitting Director Jennifer Keener and Consultant Michael Bayer on updates to the Comprehensive Plan. Michael Bear presented a general overview of the Community Facilities, Economic Development and Tourism, and Transportation chapters.

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

Following a motion by Commissioner Fiori, seconded by Commissioner Bertino, the commissioners unanimously voted to meet in closed session at 12:35 p.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 Deputy Director Pat Walls. Topics discussed and actions taken included the following: hiring Jacob Bratten as a part-time, temporary vehicle and equipment mechanic intern within the Fleet Division and Cole Howard as a communications specialist trainee within Emergency Services; receiving legal advice from counsel; and performing administrative functions, including discussing potential board appointments

After the closed session, the commissioners adjourned to meet again on October 21, 2025.