

Minutes of the County Commissioners of Worcester County, Maryland

December 16, 2025

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

Following a motion by Commissioner Bertino, seconded by Commissioner Abbott, with Commissioner Purnell 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, Human Resources Director Stacey Norton, Deputy Director Pat Walls, Finance Officer Ondrea Starzhevskiy, and incoming Deputy Finance Officer Steven Doutt. Topics discussed and actions taken included the following: hiring Peyton Becker as a recreation program manager II and Bethany Hartman as an event management/sports marketing intern within Recreation and Parks, Tina Parks as a communications specialist trainee within Emergency Services, Chayce Neal as an electronic services specialist I within Emergency Services, Shelby Mich as the grants and contract accountant within County Administration and Steven Doutt as deputy finance officer within the Treasurer's Office; transferring Equipment Operator/Driver Sam Swift of the Water and Wastewater Division to heavy equipment operator within the Solid Waste 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 9:25 a.m.

After the closed session, the commissioners reconvened in open session. Commissioner Elder called the meeting to order, and following a morning prayer and pledge of allegiance, announced the topics discussed during the morning closed session.

Commissioner Purnell was absent from the meeting.

The commissioners reviewed and approved the open and closed session minutes of their December 2, 2025 meeting as presented.

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

The commissioners presented years-of-service commendations to Plant Operator III Richard Mills (25 years) of the Water and Wastewater Division and Heroin and Analysis Coordinator Timothy Sponaugle (nine years) of the Sheriff's Office.

Upon a motion by Commissioner JM, the commissioners unanimously approved by consent agenda item numbers 2-12 as follows: a request from the Local Management Board to schedule a public hearing on the Community Reinvestment and Repair Fund (CRRF) Distribution Plan; submitting an online application for an L-GEM grant totaling \$1,940,000 for energy-saving improvements in County-owned buildings; a letter summarizing the commissioners findings for Gadwell Solar following the pre-application consultation on December 2; scheduling a public hearing for Rezoning Case 452, seeking to rezone approximately 1.66 acres of land on the westerly side of Stephen Decatur Highway and the easterly side of Sinepuxent Road in West Ocean City from A-2 Agricultural District to C-2 General Commercial District; accepting the best proposal from Paul's Land Works & Construction for \$13,850 to demolish the Fire Training Tower; out-of-state travel for one staff member within Information Technology to attend the Tyler Connect Conference in Las Vegas, NV from April 6-10, 2026 using budgeted funds and for one staff member within Environmental Programs to attend that same conference, with funding approved as an authorized over-expenditure; executing a Land Control Agreement to receive federal funding for the George Island Landings boat ramp reconstruction project; waiving the standard bid process and accepting the proposal from Douron Furniture Solutions for \$276,220.67 for furnishings and \$205,056.78 for shelving for the new Pocomoke Branch Library; renewing certain County software and maintenance contracts within Information Technology; and approving the use of the training room within the Worcester County Government as a backup early voting site from June 10-18, 2026 and October 21-29.

Sheriff Matthew Crisafulli met with the commissioners to propose a midyear salary increase to attract and retain highly qualified law enforcement officers.

Following some discussion, a motion by Commissioner Mitrecic to approve the proposed salary adjustments failed 3-3, with Commissioners Abbott, Fiori, and Mitrecic voting in favor and Commissioners Bertino, Bunting, and Elder voting in opposition.

At the request of Sheriff Crisafulli and following a motion by Commissioner Mitrecic, the commissioners unanimously authorized Sheriff Crisafulli to sign a contract amendment with Axon to secure a discounted rate for the addition of AI software to the Sheriff's Office's existing agreement, contingent upon the approval of funding in the FY27 budget.

Pursuant to the request of Public Works Director Dallas Baker and upon a motion by Commissioner Bertino, the commissioners unanimously approved the Final Balancing Change Order for the Riddle Farm Wastewater Treatment Plant upgrades, which extends the contract time from 360 to 438 days due to long-lead items and reduces the final contract amount from \$3,547,890.00 to \$3,322,436.42. Mr. Baker stated that the final balancing change order resulted in total project savings of \$288,588.52.

Chief Administrative Officer Weston Young advised the commissioners that the two conditions outlined in Resolution No. 25-28 Amending Hotel Rental Room Tax Rate have been met and, therefore, the six percent hotel rental room tax rate will take effect January 1, 2026.

Upon a motion by Commissioner Mitrecic, the commissioners unanimously authorized Commission President Elder to sign the First Amendment to Sewerage Treatment Facilities Transfer Agreement between the Mayor and City Council of Ocean City (Transferee) and the County Commissioners (Transferor) and the First Amendment to Memorandum of Understanding Spray Irrigation – Eagles Landing Golf Course between the same parties.

Mr. Baker and Environmental Programs Director Bob Mitchell outlined the next steps and approximate timeframe for connecting the Assateague Point and Landings Sanitary Service Areas (SSA) to the West Ocean City (WOC) sewer system and requested a \$780,386 over-expenditure to fund the capacity purchase from Ocean City. Mr. Baker stated that this connection would increase the cost of sewer by \$14 per quarter for those in the Assateague Point Service Area and \$35 for those in the Landings Service Area. Conversely, if the County opted to instead repair the Landings Wastewater Treatment Plant (WWTP), users in that SSA would pay an additional \$575.60 and those in the Assateague Point SSA would pay an additional \$1,261.05 per quarter.

Commissioner Mitrecic noted that the Town of Ocean City agreed to provide treatment to Diakonia also. Mr. Baker agreed to coordinate the County's design with their engineer to identify the most advantageous way to hook up to the sewer line. Commissioner Fiori thanked staff for their work to make this connection possible and recognized Ocean City as a great neighbor for helping the County.

Following some discussion and upon a motion by Commissioner Fiori, the commissioners unanimously authorized Commission President Elder to sign the Assateague Point SSA (\$321,176) and Landings SSA (\$458,824) Promissory Notes for Inter-Governmental Loans to cover costs for the purchase of Ocean City wastewater treatment capacity.

Pursuant to the request of Enterprise Fund Controller Quinn Dittrich and upon a motion by Commissioner Bertino, the commissioners unanimously agreed to temporarily suspend the utility shut-offs for the Mystic Harbour SSA.

Pursuant to the request of Mr. Baker and upon a motion by Commissioner Mitrecic, the commissioners unanimously agreed to post 25 mph speed limit signs in the West Harbor Village community.

Pursuant to the request of Mr. Baker and upon a motion by Commissioner Mitrecic, the commissioners unanimously approved an over-expenditure of \$100,000 within the Roads Division's Vehicle Operating Expense budget.

The commissioners reviewed and discussed various board appointments.

Upon a nomination by Commissioner Abbott, the commissioners unanimously agreed to appoint Jennifer Sirman to the Agricultural Land Preservation Board.

The commissioners discussed the need to fill the vacant District 6 (Northern District) seat on the Board of Education that was created by the resignation of Katie Addis.

Upon a motion by Commissioner Bunting, the commissioners unanimously agreed to appoint Jaclyn Cutlip to the BOE to fill the vacant seat for the remainder of this four-year term.

Commissioner Mitrecic suggested sending a letter to the BOE requesting an exploratory review of combining the two lower-end school districts, including what such a consolidation would entail. He emphasized that any consideration would be preliminary, include public hearings, and seek community input before implementing any actions. He noted that declining student enrollment in the southern end of the county—while maintaining a disproportionate share of school facilities—contributes to rising education costs that will increasingly burden taxpayers. He further stated that exploring consolidation could help control long-term costs and better position the County to fairly compensate teachers and staff while maintaining equal educational and extracurricular opportunities countywide.

Following some discussion and upon a motion by Commissioner Mitrecic, the commissioners unanimously agreed to send the proposed letter to the BOE to explore the possibility of combining the schools.

The commissioners wished everyone a Merry Christmas and a happy New Year.

The commissioners answered questions from the press, after which they adjourned to meet again on January 6, 2026.