

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

March 3, 2026

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

Following a motion by Commissioner Bertino, 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, and Human Resources Director Stacey Norton and Deputy Director Pat Walls. Topics discussed and actions taken included the following: a personnel update; hiring Keith Boyle as a roads worker II within the Roads Division; promoting Plant Operator IV Allen Hermann, Jr. to assistant chief plant operator with the Water and Wastewater Division, request to transfer to temporary Office Assistant, and other matters with Human Resources, discussion of the contents of a proposal; receiving legal advice from counsel; and performing administrative functions, including discussing potential board appointments

Following a motion by Commissioner Fiori, seconded by Commissioner Mitrecic, the commissioners unanimously voted to adjourn their closed session at 10:07 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 Pastor Mary Boyd of 1st Corinthians Holiness Church in Pocomoke 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 February 17, 2026 meeting as presented.

The commissioners presented a proclamation recognizing March as Professional Social Work Month to representatives from the Department of Social Services, Health Department, and Life Crisis.

The commissioners presented a years-of-service commendation to Alice Paterra who is retiring following 28 years of service to the County Library.

The commissioners presented commendations to Pocomoke City EMS Paramedic Deyton Dean, Pocomoke City Volunteer Fire Company (PCVFC) Firefighters Tommy Wall and

Christian Martin, and Pocomoke City Police Officer Chris Barrs for their heroic actions to rescue a resident from a house fire.

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 approved by consent agenda item numbers 2-7 as follows: out-of-state travel for three animal control officers to attend the Animal Care Expo in Pittsburgh, PA April 6-10, 2026; an over-expenditure of \$10,764.09 to replace a water heater and associated maintenance costs for the Berlin Senior Center; returning a motorhome to the Maryland Forest Service that was used by Emergency Services during the COVID-19 pandemic as drive-through testing and vaccination clinics; County concurrence with Maryland Department of Transportation updates to the Federal Functional Classification for the listed County roads; a pilot speed hump program on select County roads to address speeding concerns; and a change order with Absolute Security for \$24,109 to provide additional hardware needed to incorporate the County firing range into the camera replacement project.

The commissioners conducted a public hearing to receive comments on Bill 25-07 (Zoning – Off-Street Parking Clear Height). Development Review and Permitting (DRP) Director Jennifer Keener reviewed the draft legislation, which would establish a minimum, seven-foot clear height for off-street parking provided in an enclosed or covered structure in two-family, multi-family, and townhouse dwelling units. She advised that the Planning Commission gave the draft legislation a favorable recommendation. In response to a question from Commissioner Bertino, Ms. Keener confirmed that this bill is establishing a standard, as none exists currently. Commissioner Fiori said this legislation was necessary, as a lot of developers were advertising seven-foot garage heights, but the garage doors hang considerably lower, making it difficult for those with SUVs and large trucks to access the structures.

Commissioner Elder opened the floor to receive public comments.

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

Upon a motion by Commissioner Fiori, the commissioners unanimously adopted Bill 25-07 as presented.

The commissioners conducted a public hearing to receive comments on Bill 26-01 (Zoning – Short-Term Rentals), which was introduced by Commissioners Abbott, Fiori, Mitrecic, and Purnell on January 20, 2026. Ms. Keener reviewed the draft legislation, which would modify the effective date for which a third off-street parking space shall be provided for a short-term rental property from January 1, 2020, the effective date of the rental law, to January 1, 2026 for short-term rentals only. She advised that those who purchased a rental after January 1, 2020 were required to have a third parking space, according to the Code as currently written. She stated that there has not been a change in the interpretation of the law, which has been enforced previously, and the parking information can be found on the rental license application. She stated that the proposed legislation came about because of a mistake made by the former rental license coordinator who resigned September 2025. This mistake resulted in 20 short term rental licenses being revoked for townhouse units in two separate communities and affected eight single-family

lot owners who were given the option to construct a third parking space on their properties. She discovered this issue during an August 2025 site meeting about off-street parking at the Landings. In anticipation of a potential nuisance complaint, she requested staff conduct an audit of all the short-term rental properties and reviewed that actions taken to correct the issues discovered. The Planning Commission unanimously recommended denial of the proposed text amendment submitted by Landings at Bayside property owner Christy Agnese to modify § ZS 1-351(b)(5) by changing the effective date for the third parking space requirement for short-term rental properties from January 1, 2020 to January 1, 2026 to address the revocation of short-term rental licenses for certain post-2020 homes after a change in code interpretation created financial hardship for homeowners who relied on rental income. The Planning Commission asked staff and the County Attorney to explore alternative language to address licenses revoked due to staff error; however, staff later determined that such an exemption was not feasible.

Commissioner Bertino said that this is a despicable situation that needs to be addressed because this government told property owners they could do something and then went back three years later and revoked their approvals. He stated that the government failed them, that the property owners should not be penalized, and the situation must be resolved, as government must be held to a higher standard.

Commissioner Mitrecic said that what was told to these property owners in the beginning has to stand.

Commissioner Elder opened the floor to receive public comments.

Jason Beach of the Landing opposed the amendment and urged the commissioners to maintain the 2020 parking requirement, citing existing parking shortages and residents' reliance on the original standard when purchasing homes.

Ann Borden of the Landings supported the amendment, stating she obtained a short-term rental license in good faith and believes the current situation infringes on property rights.

Debra Dills, speaking on behalf of her daughter, supported the amendment, explaining that she purchased a property in 2025 intending to operate a short-term rental and later learned the rules were inconsistently enforced.

Mark Cropper, attorney for Seaside Venture LLC and Seaside Village 2 LLC, supported the amendment, noting that his clients followed County guidance and obtained permits before their short-term rental licenses were later revoked.

Greg Peterson, speaking on behalf of two homeowners, supported moving the effective date for the third parking space requirement and requested that affected properties be grandfathered.

Jennifer Campbell, a full-time resident of the Landings who does not rent, supported short-term rentals, noted that the HOA documents clearly permit short-term rentals, and she supported the amendment.

Chris Scheidt of Seaside Village opposed the amendment, stating the community expected long-term rentals and believes short-term rentals negatively impact the neighborhood.

Karen Nixon supported the amendment, describing the situation as an administrative error, which harmed property owners, causing them to lose rental income to which they were entitled, destroyed friendships, and divided the community.

Donald Marsh of the Landings opposed the amendment, stating that reducing parking requirements would diminish residents' quality of life and that the County—not neighbors—should remedy any administrative mistakes.

Kerry Moorer of Hidden Bay Drive supported the amendment, asking the commissioners to correct what she described as a hardship that has caused many to sell their homes.

Jim Brucculeri of Coastal Marsh Drive supported the amendment, stating he purchased his home with the expectation of renting it short-term because the County had indicated such rentals were permitted. He concluded that there was no need for the County to micromanage their rental rights.

John Magathan, of Ocean Pines and Bluvista Vacation Rentals in Ocean City, supported the amendment, arguing that two parking spaces are sufficient and that the issue stems from a government error.

Mark Vanschaick of 12451 Sea Oaks Lane supported the amendment, explaining that he invested significantly in a short-term rental property and cannot add another parking space.

Cassidy Stransel supported the amendment, stating that the loss of a previously approved parking space and short-term rental eligibility threatens her ability to maintain the property.

Robert Knauer of 12420 Coastal Marsh Drive supported the amendment, stating it would correct a wrong and noting that covenant changes should be addressed through homeowners' associations rather than any County action.

Kelly Brown of Bishopville, speaking on behalf of Emily Brauman, supported the amendment, stating the property was purchased in good faith for short-term rental use based on county information.

Christy Agnese of 12423 Coastal Marsh Drive supported the amendment, explaining that she applied for the text amendment after experiencing financial hardship from the loss of short-term rental eligibility.

Charles Crawford of 12408 Coastal Marsh Drive opposed the amendment, warning that lowering the parking requirement to two spaces would overwhelm community parking and penalize residents who followed the existing rules.

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

The commissioners further discussed Bill 26-01 following the public comments. Commissioner Fiori clarified for those in attendance that this bill concerns the requirement for a third parking space, not the legality of short-term rentals. He reiterated that many property owners made significant investments in their properties based on County guidance.

Commissioner Abbott expressed support for protecting property rights and voiced disappointment with the County's oversight that contributed to the situation.

Commissioner Mitrecic questioned how the third parking space requirement aligns with reported HOA's rules limiting residences to two vehicles, prompting discussion about the distinction between HOA and County regulations.

Commissioner Bunting reiterated concerns about the short-term rental program and cautioned that the amendment would affect short-term rentals Countywide. He pointed out that HOAs may impose stricter requirements than County law.

During the discussion, Commissioner Fiori also suggested the bill's effective date should coincide with the date the legislation takes effect rather than January 1, 2026. Following further discussion and upon a motion by Commissioner Fiori, the commissioners voted 6-1, with Commissioner Bunting voting in opposition, to adopt Bill 26-01, with the requirements to become effective the date that the legislation goes into effect.

The commissioners recessed for 10 minutes.

The commissioners conducted a public hearing to receive comments on Bill 26-02, an act to empower and authorize the commissioners to borrow not more than \$618,000 to finance and refinance improvements to the Lewis Road sewer extension project(s). Mr. Leslie advised that this bond bill is required to repay the loan for the Lewis Road sewer extension project.

Commissioner Elder opened the floor to receive public comments.

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

Upon a motion by Commissioner Purnell, the commissioners unanimously adopted Bill 26-02 as presented.

The commissioners conducted a public hearing to receive comments on the proposed inclusion of Beech Tree Road, located in the Beech Tree Subdivision into the Inventory of County Roads. Public Works Dallas Baker reviewed the proposed addition.

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 approved the proposed addition to the Inventory of County Roads.

The commissioners met with representatives from the towns of Pocomoke, Berlin, Snow Hill, and Ocean City, and the Ocean Pines Association (OPA) to review their FY27 grant requests from the County.

Pocomoke City Mayor Todd Nock and City Manager Brandy Matthews requested County grant funding totaling \$2,432,226 for FY27.

Berlin Mayor Zack Tyndal requested County grant funding totaling \$2,845,779 for FY27.

Snow Hill Mayor Janet Simpson and Town Manager Rick Pollitt requested County grant funding totaling \$2,595,826 for FY27.

Ocean City Mayor Rick Meehan and Town Manager Terry McGean requested County funding totaling \$10,797,956 for FY27.

Ocean Pines Association President John Lathum requested County funding totaling \$2,729,315 for FY27.

Pursuant to the request of Mr. Baker and upon a motion by Commissioner Bertino, the commissioners unanimously approved the 2026 Consolidated Transportation Program letter to the Maryland Department of Transportation, which includes dualizing MD Rt. 90 and MD Rt. 589; a new U.S. Rt. 50 drawbridge entering Ocean City; signalizing the intersections at MD Rt. 611 and MD Rt. 376 in the Berlin/West Ocean City area, at MD Rt. 367 and MD Rt. 368 in Bishopville, at US Rt. 13 and MD Rt. 366 in Pocomoke, and US Rt. 50 and MD Rt. 610 in Berlin; construct safety improvement on US Rt. 113 near Corkers Creek; eliminate flooding on MD Rt. 12 north of Snow Hill; construct a dedicated right turn lane on south bound St. Martins Neck Road at MD Rt. 90; develop an Access Management Strategic Plan for the MD Rt. 611 corridor; construct a shared use path on MD Rt. 611 from US Rt. 50 to Assateague Park; and other small projects.

Pursuant to the request of Grants and Contract Accountant Shelby Mich and upon a motion by Commissioner Mitrecic, the commissioners approved the submission of the FY26

Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) Special Projects Re-Application for Diakonia. The original application submitted during the October 2025 competitive funding round was not selected; however, Worcester County was subsequently invited to submit a revised application with a narrower scope of work under the Special Projects category.

Pursuant to the request of Development Review and Permitting Director Jennifer Keener and upon a motion by Commissioner Bertino, the commissioners approved a request to name an existing private lane/access easement serving three or more buildable lots and structures off Langmaid Road in Newark as Lewis Lane.

Pursuant to the request of Legislative Analyst Charlene Sharpe and upon a motion by Commissioner Bertino, the commissioners approved submitting testimony in opposition to Senate Bill 885, which would authorize internet gaming and online bingo in Maryland, and Senate Bill 761, which would authorize internet gaming to support public education funding. The commissioners also approved submitting testimony in support of House Bill 1605, which would repeal the requirement that counties pay 50% of compensation awarded to individuals who were wrongly convicted.

Following further discussion and upon a motion by Commissioner Bertino, the commissioners unanimously authorized the lobbyists to submit applications for Congressionally Directed Spending Funds to replace the Pocomoke Health Department and 50 Plus Center, and a combination project to replace the Ocean Pines force main and construction of the River Run sewer interconnection.

The commissioners reviewed and discussed various board appointments.

Upon nomination by Commissioner Purnell, the commissioners unanimously agreed to reappoint Reverend James Jones and Alyce Marzola to the Drug and Alcohol Abuse Council.

Commissioner Bunting thanked County staff involved for the great job they did in responding to the recent blizzard. Commissioners Abbot, Bertino, Elder, Fiori, and Purnell concurred.

Commissioner Abbott pointed out that this was a historic storm, and County staff faced a monumental task plowing roads and clearing trees, but they did so quickly and efficiently while maintaining public safety.

Commissioner Fiori advised the public that County staff are not able to remove trees that are tangled up in powerlines, but must instead wait for representatives from the power companies to remove the lines. He noted that in the recent storm all of the power companies were overwhelmed by the tremendous number of downed trees and lines, but worked quickly to safely resolve these issues.

Commissioner Mitrecic expressed concern that due to a scheduling conflict with the Roland E. Powell Convention Center, the Board of Elections proposes to use the Princess Royale Oceanfront Resort at 9100 Coastal Highway as the polling site for Ocean City citizens during both the Primary and General Elections and to use the Convention Center during General Election early voting. Upon a motion by Commissioner Mitrecic, the commissioners unanimously agreed to send a letter to the Board of Elections proposing the board use the Ocean

City Senior Center as the polling location during the Primary and the Convention Center during the General Elections.

The commissioners answered questions from the press, after which they adjourned to meet again on March 17, 2026.