

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

May 5, 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, Environmental Programs Director Bob Mitchell, Development Review and Permitting Director Jennifer Keener, and Human Resources Director Stacey Norton and Deputy Director Pat Walls. Topics discussed and actions taken included the following: a personnel update, hiring Seth Place as deputy finance officer within the Treasurer's Office, and other matters with Human Resources; receiving legal advice from counsel; and performing administrative functions, including discussing potential board appointments.

Following a motion by Commissioner Bertino, seconded by Commissioner Bunting, the commissioners unanimously voted to adjourn their closed session at 9:57 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 Natosha Owens 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 regularly scheduled meeting on April 21, 2026.

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

The commissioners presented a proclamation recognizing May 3-9, 2026 as National Travel and Tourism Week to Tourism and Economic Development Director Melanie Pursel and County tourism partners.

The commissioners presented a proclamation recognizing May as Foster Care Month to

representatives from the Department of Social Services.

In a related matter, the commissioners presented a commendation to Seth Place recognizing him and Ryan Whittington as the 2026 Foster Parents of the Year.

Upon a motion by Commissioner Bertino, the commissioners unanimously approved by consent agenda item numbers 2-4 and 6-10 as follows: an FY27 Sex Offender and Compliance Enforcement Grant of \$7,827; a Local Government Energy Modernization Program grant agreement for \$171,507 for energy-efficiency projects at various County-owned facilities; out-of-state travel for one deputy fire marshal to attend the Fundamentals of Fire Investigation Training program in Tarpon Springs, Florida May 10-15, 2026; a request for proposals for environmental monitoring consulting services at the Central Landfill and three closed landfills; awarding the bid for fuel dispenser replacement to the lowest responsive bidder, Delmarva Petroleum Service for \$31,943.72; an over-expenditure totaling \$2,525.60 in salary and \$604.14 in benefits to temporarily convert the intern within Environmental Services to full-time to assist with water sampling while a staff member is out on medical leave; an extra work order for \$16,200 for the Riddle Farm bypass force main project; and Lewis Road Bond Resolutions authorizing \$618,000 in USDA funding for the sewer extension project.

Pursuant to the request of Public Works Director Dallas Baker and upon a motion by Commissioner Bertino, the commissioners unanimously approved an over-expenditure totaling \$5,000 to cover electricity costs of \$3,500 and propane costs of \$1,500 throughout the remainder of the fiscal year;

Pursuant to the request of Procurement Officer Ed Welch and upon a motion by Commissioner Mitrecic, the commissioners unanimously awarded the lowest responsive bid to Alertus Technologies, LLC totaling \$1,410,143.20 to upgrade the outdoor warning siren system.

Mr. Baker presented speed study data from Center Drive near Ocean City Elementary School and sought interest from the commissioners in developing an ordinance authorizing Automated Speed Enforcement (speed cameras) in County school zones. A seven-day study recorded 11,693 vehicle passages, with 94.4% exceeding the 30 mph speed limit and an 85th percentile speed of 42 mph. The commissioners expressed concern about speeding, but favored increased Sheriff's Office enforcement over the use of speed cameras, which appear to have questionable success rates.

Following some discussion and upon a motion by Commissioner Mitrecic, the commissioners unanimously denied the proposal to develop the proposed ordinance.

Pursuant to the request of Mr. Welch and upon a motion by Commissioner Abbott, the commissioners unanimously awarded the contract to replace the Tanhouse Creek Bridge to Murtech, Inc. for \$622,646.

Pursuant to the request of Mr. Baker and upon a motion by Commissioner Mitrecic, the commissioners unanimously approved an over-expenditure in the Roads Maintenance Materials Blacktop for Overlay account totaling \$43,016.93 to accommodate additional paving work, including the potential addition of Harbor Road to the FY26 paving schedule and a change order

related to additional asphalt milling identified in the West Ocean City harbor area. The approved funding will be offset using \$44,578 in unspent funds from the Road Maintenance Contractual Services account.

The commissioners reviewed and discussed various board appointments.

Upon a nomination by Commissioner Abbott, the commissioners unanimously agreed to appoint Jenifer Ketner to the Water and Sewer Advisory Council for the Newark Service Area.

The commissioners conducted a public hearing to receive comments on the proposed FY26 Enterprise Funds Budget Amendment. Finance Officer Ondrea Starzhevskiy reviewed the projects and over-expenditures within the proposed budget amendment.

Commissioner Elder opened the floor to receive public comments.

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

Upon a motion by Commissioner Bertino, the commissioners unanimously passed a resolution adopting the requested budget amendment for FY26.

Commissioner Bertino requested staff provide the commissioners with estimated FY27 revenue reduction estimates and reserve balances based on property tax rate reductions of one, two, and three cents as well as available fund balance totals.<sup>1</sup>

The commissioners answered questions from the press, after which they adjourned until 6:00 p.m. for a public hearing on the requested FY27 General Fund Operating Budget and the FY27 Solid Waste and Water and Wastewater Operating Budgets.

The commissioners conducted a public hearing at 6:00 p.m. in the Commissioners' Meeting Room at the Worcester County Government Center on the FY27 Requested County General Fund Operating Budget and the FY27 Enterprise Fund Budgets, including Solid Waste and Water and Wastewater (WWW) Operating Budgets. Commission President Elder called the meeting to order and welcomed those in attendance. Chief Administrative Officer Weston Young presented PowerPoint presentations outlining the FY27 Requested Operating Budgets as originally presented to the Commissioners on March 17, 2026. He advised that several significant updates have occurred since that time. These include a March 30 report from the State Department of Assessments and Taxation reflecting an \$884,000 increase in projected property tax revenues; a reduction of approximately \$3.2 million in required core funding for the Health Department; and reduced General Fund support for the Water and Wastewater Service Areas due to additional equivalent dwelling unit (EDU) sales and decreased Other Post Employment Benefits allocations. Additional updates include personnel request adjustments and other miscellaneous changes. Based on these revisions, the County currently projects a surplus of approximately \$1.3 million. Mr. Young noted that the changes will be discussed in greater detail during the May 12 budget work session; however, due to required newspaper advertising

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<sup>1</sup> The worksheet, handed out prior to the public hearing on the requested FY27 Operating budget, identified estimated revenue reductions of \$2.5 million for one cent, \$4.9 million for two cents, and \$7.4 million for three cents, and identified an available fund balance reserve of \$41.1 million (15%), budget stabilization of \$15.1 million, and unassigned funds of \$1.7 million.

deadlines, the presentation for the public hearing was based on the advertised budget previously presented to the Commissioners on March 17, which reflects estimated revenues of \$299,118,027 and requested expenditures of \$302,074,374, leaving a projected shortfall of \$2,956,346. He also reviewed the FY27 Solid Waste Operating Budget, with revenues and expenditures totaling \$5,494,947, and the FY27 WWW Operating Budget, with revenues and expenditures totaling \$22,348,449. Budget work sessions will take place May 12 at 9 a.m. and May 19 at 1 p.m. The commissioners will adopt the FY27 General Fund Operating Budget and Tax Rates on June 2 and the Enterprise Fund Operating Budgets on June 16.

Commissioner Elder opened the floor to receive public comment.

The following individuals addressed the University of Maryland Extension (UME) Budget:

Ginny Rosencranz of Quantico spoke in support of creating a master gardener position.

Robin Jenks Vanderlip of Berlin supported creating a master gardener position, noting that this position would support the work that is done in partnership with coastal and bay conservation affiliates to educate the public about local flora and fauna.

Martha Bennett of Berlin stated that the creation of a master gardener coordinator position would generate thousands of volunteer hours for Worcester County.

The following individuals addressed grants to nonprofits:

Stephanie James of the Worcester County Developmental Center (WCDC) requested a 2% funding increase to offset reductions proposed in the State's budget and discussed difficulties recruiting and retaining skilled staff while competing with higher wages offered elsewhere.

The following individuals addressed General Government:

John Franklin Adkins of Ocean City spoke on the budget as a whole, emphasizing Ocean City's contribution to County revenues. He supported teacher pay raises, fully funding the Sheriff's Office budget, and requested a 20% tax discount for senior citizens.

Jerry Redden of Girdletree, representing the Girdletree Historical Foundation, requested County grant assistance with ADA-compliant bathroom renovations and kitchen upgrades for the community center.

The following individuals addressed Public Safety:

Nancy Michelson of Ocean Pines spoke in support of fully funding the Board of Education (BOE) and Sheriff's Office budgets to give needed raises to recruit and retain highly qualified personnel.

Carole Frazier of Ocean Pines urged the commissioners to provide decent living wages for sheriff's deputies and teachers.

Shane Cannon of Snow Hill discussed the financial challenges faced by law enforcement officers and urged the commissioners to fully fund the Sheriff's Office budget, which includes needed salary increases, as his family is living paycheck to paycheck.

Bryn Blackburn, president of the Fraternal Order of Police Lodge #50 in Ocean City, requested full funding for the Sheriff's Office budget and advocated for increasing starting deputy salaries to \$70,000 annually.

The following individuals addressed the Board of Education (BOE):

Dr. Annette Wallace of Snow Hill reviewed the BOE's people-centered budget (86% of the budget funds salaries for teachers, support staff, and bus contractors), emphasizing educator recruitment and retention, salary increases for teachers, bus contractors, and support staff, as well as continued support for pre-K programs in Pocomoke. She asked the commissioners to fully fund the FY27 BOE budget, which includes increasing starting teacher salaries to \$60,000 annually to meet State mandates and to attract and retain highly qualified teachers.

Allison Hooper of Berlin shared her experiences as a parent of three children, one of whom has down syndrome. She praised Worcester County Public Schools (WCPS), and in particular the teachers and classroom aides, and she advocated for fully funding the BOE budget to assure fair wages and benefits.

Matthew Sweeny of Ocean Pines spoke in support of funding for Cedar Chapel Special School (CCSS), describing the specialized services and support his child receives there.

Carl DeShield of Pocomoke urged the commissioners to fully fund the BOE budget, emphasizing the importance of investing in children and the future of the community.

Connie Bernal of Ocean City and a CCSS teacher, requested the commissioners fully fund the BOE budget. She then invited the commissioners to visit WCPS prior to voting on the budget to watch what is happening in the classrooms and throughout the schools.

Michael Creech of Snow Hill urged the commissioners to fully fund the BOE budget, which includes the funding needed to maintain manageable class sizes, provide needed classroom support, and offer a competitive salary package.

Hunter Caudill of Berlin, a business owner and parent of three WCPS students, spoke about the importance of intentional investment in education and support for school leadership.

Kathy Cater of Bishopville encouraged the commissioners to appropriately fund the BOE budget, citing the need to provide the increased funding to offset rising operational costs and provide the resources needed to maintain strong school performance ratings.

Katherin Colbertson of Snow Hill expressed concern about potential reductions to BOE funding and urged the commissioners to maintain consistent long-term support for WCPS by fully funding the requested budget. She stated that the recent fraud incident should not be leveraged as an attempt to reduce the BOE budget.

Mary Hathaway of Ocean Pines stated that isolated incidents should not overshadow the work of teachers and support staff and urged full funding of the BOE budget.

Phil Cropper of Worcester Technical High School (WTHS) urged the commissioners to fully fund the requested BOE budget and discussed the return on investment created through education and workforce development programs.

Shannon Bone of Willards, a Stephen Decatur High School (SDHS) teacher, described challenges facing educators, including exhaustion and the impacts of funding limitations, and requested full funding of the BOE budget to support teachers, faculty, and students.

Beth Shockley Lynch, president of the Worcester County Teachers Association (WCTA), urged the commissioners to fully fund the requested BOE budget, which addresses Blueprint for Maryland's Future requirements. She pointed out the County's low teacher starting salaries compared to neighboring counties, and how the requested BOE budget provides the salary increases needed to be competitive.

Laura Sharley of Ocean Pines described the positive impact Showell Elementary School (SES) staff have on students and families and encouraged full funding for the BOE budget.

Ivory Smith of Pittsville, representing the Education Support Professional Association, spoke about the role support employees play in schools and urged the commissioners to invest in fair wages and employee retention by fully funding the requested BOE budget.

The following individuals addressed Solid Waste and Water and Wastewater Enterprise Fund budgets and other topics:

MaryAnn Salabsky of Berlin urged the commissioners to fully fund education and law enforcement and to look at long-term plans for water and wastewater instead of short-term Band Aids.

Robin James Vanderlin of Berlin, representing the UME Bay-Wise Master Gardener Program, suggested establishing an organization to review long-term wastewater planning and also supported full funding for education and law enforcement.

Barbara Connor of Ocean City expressed concerns regarding increases in wastewater bills and questioned the size of the rate increase.

Laura Parker of Berlin discussed costs associated with mandatory sewer hookups, concerns regarding wastewater system management and infrastructure operations, maintenance, and costs, and suggested exploring privatization and other self-sustaining enterprise funding measures. She also urged the commissioners to eliminate General Fund subsidies to Water and Wastewater, but to fully fund salary increases for teachers and police.

Cindy Sansone of Berlin expressed concerns regarding rising utility bills and received clarification from staff regarding Enterprise Fund cost breakdowns.

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

The commissioners answered questions from the press, after which they adjourned to meet again on May 12, 2026 to conduct a work session on the requested FY27 General Fund Operating Budget.