

# Minutes of the County Commissioners of Worcester County, Maryland

January 29-30, 2019

## Strategic Planning Work Session

Diana Purnell, President  
Joseph M. Mitrecic, Vice President  
Anthony W. Bertino, Jr.  
Madison J. Bunting, Jr. (Absent)  
James C. Church  
Theodore J. Elder  
Joshua N. Nordstrom

The Commissioners conducted the first of a two-day strategic planning work session at the Berlin Branch of the Worcester County Library. Also present were The Novak Consulting Group Executive Search Practice Leader Catherine Tuck-Parrish and Morgan Daniel and County staff members Chief Administrative Officer Harold Higgins, Assistant Chief Administrative Officer Kelly Shannahan, County Attorney Maureen Howarth, and Public Information Officer Kim Moses.

Commissioner Bunting was absent from the work session.

Ms. Tuck-Parrish reviewed the agenda, norms, and expectations for the work session.

The Commissioners outlined expectations of the County Commissioners and County Administration, with a focus on the working conditions of the Commissioners, Commission expectations, expectations of the president, and expectations of the Chief Administrative Officer (CAO) and Assistant CAO. As a result of their discussion, the Commissioners agreed to schedule “Commissioners Remarks” at the end of each meeting.

The Commissioners recessed for 10 minutes.

Mr. Shannahan provided a brief update on the progress of the top five initiatives outlined in the Commissioners 2017 Strategic Plan.

The Commissioners reviewed input gathered from a department head survey on the County’s strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and challenges. Following some discussion, the Commissioners unanimously agreed to adopt an “Ask Don’t Task” policy with department directors, whereby they are free to request information, but they will refrain from providing direction to department heads or staff, which will be the responsibility of the CAO in carrying out the policy of the full Board of County Commissioners.

The Commissioners conducted a working lunch to discuss their long-term goals, also known as cathedral thinking, regarding the future of the County. Issues identified included the

following: funding for Other Post Employment Benefits (OPEB), broadband, access to quality healthcare, and a tournament sports complex. After this, they discussed their beliefs about the future of Worcester County.

The Commissioners identified factors critical to the County's future success. These Critical Success Factors included the following: Exceptional Schools, Natural Resources, Community Leadership, Adaptable Technology, Quality Healthcare, Cultural Opportunities, Safe and Sufficient Transportation, Sustainable County Services, Economic Growth, and Safe and Livable Communities.

Commissioner Elder left the meeting.

From the list of Critical Success Factors, the Commissioners and staff developed an overall vision for the County as follows: Worcester County is a desired location to live, work, and play for year-round residents and visitors. We are a premier tourism destination, known for pristine beaches, bays, and rivers, as well as a safe and relaxed lifestyle. We have a thriving economy, offering diverse, family-sustaining jobs with benefits, access to premier healthcare, and community-minded businesses. We boast a nationally-renowned educational system, which includes post-secondary education and trade schools to benefit future generations, while remaining fiscally conservative and financially sound. Our citizens are proud to call Worcester County home and look forward to sharing the benefits of Eastern Shore living with visiting family and friends.

The Commissioners adjourned to meet again on January 30, 2019, for day two of their strategic planning work session.

On January 30, 2019, the Commissioners reconvened for day two of their two-day strategic planning work session at the Berlin Branch of the Worcester County Library. Also present at the work session were The Novak Consulting Group Executive Search Practice Leader Catherine Tuck-Parrish and Morgan Daniel. County staff at the meeting included Chief Administrative Officer (CAO) Harold Higgins, Assistant Chief Administrative Officer (ACAO) Kelly Shannahan, County Attorney Maureen Howarth, Public Information Officer Kim Moses, Human Resources Director Stacey Norton, Health Officer Becky Jones, Emergency Services Director Billy Birch, Information Technology Director Brian Jones, Warden Donna Bounds, Development Review and Permitting Director Ed Tudor, Library Director Jennifer Ranck, Public Works Director John Tustin, Fire Marshal Jeff McMahan, Economic Development Deputy Director Kathryn Gordon, Finance Officer Phil Thompson, Budget Officer Kathy Whited, State's Attorney Kristin Heiser, Tourism Director Lisa Challenger, Sheriff Matt Crisafulli, Chief Deputy Mark Titanski, Circuit Court Administrator Mike Howard, Recreation and Parks Director Tom Perlozzo, and Environmental Programs Director Bob Mitchell.

Commissioner Bunting was absent from the work session.

Ms. Tuck-Parrish and the Commissioners provided a recap of actions taken during day one of the work session. Commissioner Mitrecic reviewed the discussion of Commissioner expectations. Mr. Higgins reviewed the discussion of expectations of the CAO and the ACAO and the new “Ask Don’t Task” policy of the Commissioners. He also advised department directors to provide options to the Commissioners to consider rather than specific direction in their memos. Commissioner Purnell reviewed the Commissioners’ discussion on Cathedral Thinking. Commissioner Nordstrom reviewed the current beliefs of the Commissioners. Commissioner Bertino reviewed the Critical Success Factors agreed upon by the Commissioners during day one of the work session. Commissioners Elder and Church expressed satisfaction with the results from day one and looked forward to working with the department directors during their second day of the work session.

The Commissioners and staff reviewed the overall vision statement and agreed to revise the economic development vision statement for the County to read as follows: Worcester County enjoys a diverse economy, primarily based on tourism, agriculture, and burgeoning industrial parks that support the nearby NASA facility on Wallops Island and other regional partners. We have a thriving business community, offering good-paying, year-round jobs with benefits, and we continue to attract new businesses and entice existing businesses to expand in Worcester County thanks to our well-educated workforce and superior services and infrastructure. We may offer an attractive incentive package to encourage business growth and development using a combination of tax deferrals, grants, and low-interest loans. Worcester County offers diverse lodging, restaurant, and retail services to support existing and emerging tourism trends.

The Commissioners and staff discussed steps necessary to achieve the County’s vision.

Each Commissioner outlined their top three priorities among the Critical Success Factors. Commissioner Mitrecic listed solving the Other Post Employment Benefits (OPEB) issue, providing a first-class tournament sports complex, and providing competitive salaries for County employees as his top three priorities. Commissioner Purnell listed economic growth, including a sports complex and affordable housing, public transportation, and supporting local and State education as her top three priorities. Commissioner Church listed economic development, focused on clean industry, quality education, and encouraging controlled growth with a “Can Do” attitude as his top three priorities. Commissioner Bertino listed OPEB, competitive salaries for County staff, and Countywide broadband access as his top three priorities. Commissioner Elder listed broadband as his top one and two priorities, as well as supporting and protecting agriculture. Commissioner Nordstrom listed vocational education, creating career jobs, and high speed internet and mobile communications as his top three priorities.

The Commissioners, with input from County staff, developed specific initiatives for each of the 10 Critical Success Factors.

The Commissioners recessed for lunch.  
Commissioner Elder left the meeting.

The Commissioners reviewed, modified, and approved the 10 Critical Success Factors, as

well as their goals for each of the Critical Success Factors, as follows:

1. Exceptional Schools - Worcester County provides a wide range of educational opportunities for our citizens, including a solid foundation in public schools that focus on college and career readiness, with diverse trade and post-secondary opportunities.
  - a. Goal: work with the State on an equitable funding method to increase per-student funding
  - b. Goal: increase science, technology, engineering, and math (STEM) partnerships
2. Natural Resources - Worcester County is a desirable location for residents and visitors thanks to our pristine parks, beaches, bays, and rivers, which support our relaxed lifestyle and preserves our rural landscape.
  - a. Goal: protect agriculture and prevent harmful regulations
3. Community Leadership - Worcester County Government provides responsive, effective, and positive leadership, supporting the private sector and encouraging volunteerism to improve the lives of our residents and visitors.
4. Adaptable Technology - Worcester County provides evolving infrastructure, adapting to our changing technological world.
  - a. Goal: develop and implement a plan to provide high-speed internet throughout the County
  - b. Goal: explore incentives for broadband company investment
5. Quality Healthcare - Worcester County enjoys quality healthcare facilities providing services to all ages and stages of life.
6. Cultural Opportunities - Worcester County offers a wide range of museums, theaters, arts and entertainment venues that support an engaged citizenry which preserves the County's cultural heritage.
7. Safe and Sufficient Transportation - Worcester County provides a safe, secure, and affordable public transportation network, addressing the needs of all citizens.
8. Sustainable County Services - Worcester County provides a cost-effective, customer-focused approach to the provision of services to our citizens, businesses, and visitors.
  - a. Goal: identify a funding source for OPEB
  - b. Goal: review County staff salaries
  - c. Goal: identify alternative (non-tax) revenues to support competitive employee wages
9. Economic Growth - Worcester County enjoys a diverse economy, primarily based on tourism, agriculture, and burgeoning industrial and medical parks, which provide career opportunities for our residents. We also maintain a commercial harbor that supports both commercial and recreational fishing industries.
  - a. Goal: move forward with sports complex development, with non-County funding
  - b. Goal: offer tuition assistance to incentivize students to learn a trade
  - c. Goal: develop an economic development strategy:
    - i. explore incentives and tax breaks to attract new businesses and jobs
    - ii. add to the economic development team, and provide vision and tools to bring in new business
    - iii. remove unnecessary regulations, fees, and other obstructions
10. Safe and Livable Communities - Thanks to our exceptional public safety agencies, Worcester County citizens and visitors can rely on a safe, clean, and secure environment.

The Commissioners worked with County staff members in small groups to further develop goals by identifying the problem they were trying to solve, success for the goal, who should take the lead, and any initial steps. Small groups then reported out to the larger group. Following that discussion, the group discussed the next steps to take to achieve their vision and goals. The Strategic Planning report will be presented to the Commissioners for review and approval at a future meeting.

The Commissioners provided closing thoughts and thanked the department directors as well as Ms. Tuck-Parrish, after which they adjourned to meet again on February 5, 2019.