

Minutes of the County Commissioners of Worcester County, Maryland

February 17, 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 Fiori, 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 David Johnson as a heavy equipment operator within the Water and Wastewater Division, and Alex Harmon as a vehicle and equipment mechanic III and Garet Lowman as a part-time temporary vehicle and equipment mechanic intern/apprentice within the Fleet Management Division; receiving legal advice from counsel; and performing administrative functions, including discussing potential board appointments, and agreeing to a 90-day email hiring review to fill communications specialist vacancies in Emergency Services.

Following a motion by Commissioner Mitrecic, seconded by Commissioner Bertino, the commissioners unanimously voted to adjourn their closed session at 9:35 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 Christopher Lonsdale of the Son Spot Ministries in Ocean City 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 3, 2026 meeting as presented.

Commissioner Elder opened the floor to receive public comments.

Jenny Mumford asked to present an affidavit and expressed concern about protecting the integrity of local elections. Commissioner Elder reminded the public that comments are limited to agenda items. Chief Administrative Officer Weston Young said that the State of Maryland, not the County, oversees the Board of Elections, and he urged her to contact the elections office for help resolving her concerns.

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

Upon a motion by Commissioner Bertino, the commissioners unanimously approved by consent agenda item numbers 1-8 as follows: a sole source waiver for the LMB to contract with Due East Partners to complete the Worcester County Community Plan for \$60,000; scheduling a public hearing to receive comments on the proposed expansion of the Water and Sewer Planning Area to include a group of adjacent commercial properties for the Riddle Farm Sanitary Service Area; awarding the Ocean Pines Pump Station T wet well relining project to Pleasants Construction, Inc. for \$67,205.28; awarding the purchase of crushed aggregate for the Roads Division to H&K Materials for \$49,702; declining an offer to purchase surplus property owned by the State Highway Administration; approving 2027 employee recognition events; signing a letter supporting the Bishopville Fire Department's application for Congressionally Directed Funds and House Committee Project Funding; and signing a Federal Aid Supplement Agreement for the Fleming Mill Bridge replacement project.

Pursuant to the request of Public Works Director Dallas Baker and upon a motion by Commissioner Mitrecic, the commissioners unanimously approved the purchase of a dump truck under the Mack Truck Sourcewell Contract for \$223,065 for the Water and Wastewater Division.

Mr. Young advised that the County's new auditing firm identified a \$1,936,565.23 balance recorded as a liability that does not meet the definition of a liability and requires review. This represents unspent FY2013 county funding for the Health Department that was placed in a "Due to Local Health Department" liability account and held in a separate Local Health Department special fund. Following some discussion and upon a motion by Commissioner Mitrecic, the commissioners unanimously approved Option 3 to reverse the original entry that held these funds, with the full amount to fall into the general surplus and be comingled with other surplus funds.

Mr. Young advised that the County submitted an application for roughly \$2 million for energy efficiency projects through the Maryland Local Government Energy Modernization (L-GEM) Program and was awarded \$1,940,000. However, the State recently informed staff that roughly \$828,493 must be used for renewable energy projects, and only \$171,507 can be used for energy efficiency projects. He then presented options for the funds.

Following some discussion and upon a motion by Commissioner Bertino, the commissioners unanimously agreed to accept the \$171,507 for energy efficiency funding only.

Legislative Analyst Charlene Sharpe sought approval from the commissioners to provide testimony on several Sate bills being considered over the next two weeks.

Upon a motion by Commissioner Bertino, the commissioners unanimously authorized Commissioner Mitrecic to testify in support of SB 681/HB 914, which would increase the size of the Board of License Commissioners to five members.

Following some discussion and upon a motion by Commissioner Bertino, the commissioners approved staff's recommendations to provide testimony to support these bills: SB 270/HB 674 requiring the Public Service Commission to conduct an analysis of the full costs and benefits of electricity generation in the state; SB 846 establishing a temporary to-go permit that could be used during special events; HB 988 repealing certain parts of the Building Energy Performance Standards; and HB 1019 incentivizing propane powered school buses.

The commissioners further approved staff's recommendations to oppose these bills: SB 719/HB 925 establishing restrictions on the land application of sewage sludge or products containing sewage sludge, which will contribute to a large fiscal and operational impact on local jurisdictions; HB 778 establishing that certain jurisdictions have an affirmative duty to create opportunities for housing by evaluating the suitability of vacant, unused commercial and industrial land for housing use, among other things; and HB 905/SB 547 substantially increasing reporting requirements for the county, requiring local governments that receive funding from the state to provide an annual report to the Comptroller detailing subcontractors used, the number of employees each contractor employs, whether the contractor is a certified minority business enterprise, etc.

The commissioners reviewed and discussed various board appointments.

Upon a nomination by Commissioner Abbott, the commissioners unanimously agreed to appoint Mark Frostrom, Jr. to the Building Code of Appeals Board.

Pursuant to the request of Public Works Director Dallas Baker and upon a motion by Commissioner Bertino, the commissioners unanimously agreed to solicit help from the Eastern Shore Delegation to advocate to the Maryland Department of Energy for a cold weather exemption from the requirements needed to qualify for an exemption from the annual Bay Restoration Fee (BRF) in the Ocean Pines service area. Mr. Baker advised that MDE has denied the 2025 exemption request because the annual average nitrogen value for the plant was 3.6 mg/L. He advised that the overage was the result of abnormally low, sustained temperatures in January and February 2025, which affected the wastewater plant's performance; however, MDE has granted the County the BRF exemption in similar situations previously.

Following some discussion and upon a motion by Commissioner Bertino, the commissioners unanimously agreed to ask the Eastern Shore Delegation to advocate to MDE to grant the requested exemption.

The commissioners recessed until 10:30 a.m.

The commissioners conducted a public hearing to receive comments on Rezoning Case No. 452, which was filed by Hugh Cropper on behalf of KASA Holdings, LLC, property owner, for an amendment to the Official Zoning Maps to change a narrow parcel consisting of approximately 1.66 acres of land located on the westerly side of MD Rt. 611 and the easterly side of Sinepuxent Road in West Ocean City from A-2 Agricultural District to C-2 General Commercial District.

County Attorney Roscoe Leslie swore in individuals who planned to give testimony during the hearing. Development Review and Permitting Director Jennifer Keener reviewed the application, which received a favorable recommendation from the Planning Commission. She then stated that according to the application for rezoning, the applicants' claim as the basis for their rezoning request was that there was a change in the character of the neighborhood. She then entered the Planning Commission's Findings of Fact into the record. In response to a question from Commissioner Mitrecic, Ms. Keener said that the Town of Ocean City has no problem with the rezoning, as long as a navigation easement is placed on the property.

Commissioner Elder opened the floor to receive public comment.

Mr. Cropper concurred with the Planning Commission's findings and asked the Commissioners to accept the findings as his testimony as well. He reviewed the history of this and surrounding properties. He also noted that planning is a continual process, and this is an opportunity to manage growth, noting that the County should not postpone piecemeal rezonings. He confirmed that the property is not in the runway protection zone, access will not be available from MD Rt. 611, and the owner agrees to the town's stipulations. Mr. Cropper stated that the petitioned area is not appropriate for a single-family dwelling, and 95% of the A-1 District uses would be unable to be developed on the narrow, petitioned area.

Mr. Erin Finney, owner of the property and TR Group, Inc. in Teal Marsh, advised that he employs seven people, the growing demand for limited commercial space in the West Ocean City area makes it difficult to accommodate the needs of his business, and he purchased this property three years ago to be able to relocate his business to that site.

Surveyor Brian Dolinger of Vista Design agreed that there has been a change in character of the neighborhood, and the proposed C-2 zoning would be more desirable based on the limited uses of this narrow property.

Commissioner Fiori said that he wants Mr. Finney to be able to build his business, but that this is not a great commercial location. Commissioner Bunting concurred, noting that A-2 is the best use of this property.

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

Commissioner Fiori initially made a motion to deny the request to rezone the property from A-2 to C-2 because any change in the neighborhood has been residential in nature, not commercial, and C-2 does not fit the character of this neighborhood. However, following further discussion between the commissioners and Mr. Cropper and upon a motion by Commissioner Mitrecic, the commissioners unanimously agreed to table the matter to provide Mr. Cropper with the time needed to return to the Planning Commission to request to amend the request to rezone the property from A-2 to C-1 rather than C-2.

The commissioners conducted a public hearing to receive comments on the request to establish the Racetrack Village Residential Planned Community (RPC) floating zone, which was filed by MD Medical Owners III, LLC for a proposed 137-unit multi-family residential development with a commercial component, located on the east side of Racetrack Road at Taylorville Lane and more specifically identified on Tax Map 21 as Parcel 66, Lots 1 and B.

County Attorney Roscoe Leslie swore in individuals who planned to give testimony during the hearing. Zoning Administrator Kristen Tremblay reviewed the application, which received a favorable recommendation from the Planning Commission, and she entered the Planning Commission's Findings of Fact into the record.

Commissioner Elder opened the floor to receive public comments.

Attorney Hugh Cropper reviewed the project's compatibility with the comprehensive plan, noting that this R-3 zoned property is located in an existing developed area, designated S-1 in the Water and Sewer Plan in the Greater Ocean Pines Sanitary Service Area, fits into the MD Rt. 589 Infrastructure Plan, and the State Highway Administration has no concerns with the project.

Carl Wilson of the Traffic Group advised that the capacity of existing road network and the new signal at MD Rt. 589 are adequate for the proposed RPC.

In response to a question from Commissioner Bertino, Mr. Cropper confirmed that there will be no access between this development and Ocean Pines.

Stephen Bacco opposed the project, noting that the area is overbuilt, and there is no way the traffic can handle this additional influx of vehicles.

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

Commissioner Mitrecic said this project is hundreds of times better than what could have been developed on this site. Commissioner Fiori agreed.

Upon a motion by Commissioner Bunting, the commissioners unanimously approved the establishment of the Racetrack Village RPC as presented.

Commissioner Purnell recognized the passing of civil rights activist Reverend Jesse Jackson for his work to make the United States a better place.

The commissioners answered questions from the press, after which they adjourned to meet again on March 3, 2026.