

Minutes of the County Commissioners of Worcester County, Maryland

May 12, 2026

Budget Work Session

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

The commissioners, with Commissioner Bunting absent, conducted a work session to review and discuss issues pertaining to the Committee Reviewed and Recommended FY27 Solid Waste and Water and Wastewater (WWW) Enterprise Fund Operating Budgets and the FY27 General Fund Operating Budget.

Enterprise Fund Controller Quinn Dittrich reviewed the FY27 Solid Waste Operating Budget, with revenues and expenditures totaling \$5,461,554, and the FY27 WWW Operating Budget, with revenues and expenditures totaling \$27,868,623.

Budget Officer Kim Reynolds reviewed the Committee Reviewed and Recommended FY27 General Fund Operating Budget of \$300,002,146 and requested expenditures of \$298,631,635, which leaves a surplus of \$1,370,511.

The commissioners discussed replacing the proposed 3% cost of living adjustment (COLA) with a flat \$4,000 COLA for County and Board of Education employees. Chief Administrative Officer Weston Young advised that the Sheriff's Office salary grade increases already included in the FY27 Requested Budget, combined with the proposed flat COLA, would raise certified deputy starting salaries above the approximately \$70,000 starting salary currently being offered in neighboring Wicomico County. Following some discussion, the commissioners agreed to move forward with the proposed \$4,000 flat COLA adjustment for County and Board of Education employees.

The commissioners reviewed proposed expenditures for each department and agency within the requested operating budget.

Upon a motion by Commissioner Mitrecic, the commissioners voted 5-0-1, with Commissioner Bertino abstaining, to waive the salary increase for County Commissioners during the 2026-2030 term.

The commissioners concurred with the Committee Reviewed FY27 operating budgets as follows: County Administration budget of \$2,190,709; Circuit Court budget of \$2,369,505; Orphan's Court budget of \$ 82,325; State's Attorney's Office budget of \$4,924,679; Treasurer's

Office budget of \$2,036,497; Elections Office budget of \$1,728,109; Human Resources budget of \$934,671; Development Review and Permitting budget of \$3,129,076; Environmental Programs budget of \$3,411,219; Information Technology budget of \$2,098,510; and Other General Government budget of \$8,082,031.

The commissioners reviewed the FY27 committee reviewed budget for the Sheriff's Office totaling \$22,047,540.

Following some discussion and upon a motion by Commissioner Fiori, the commissioners approved the Sheriff's Office budget, with the understanding that the budget will be revised to reflect a \$4,000 cost-of-living adjustment (COLA), rather than a 3% COLA, for all County employees and the Board of Education. The commissioners further acknowledged that this adjustment would increase the starting salary for sheriff's deputies to \$70,000.

In response to a question by Commissioner Elder, Ms. Reynolds confirmed that all departmental budgets will be updated to reflect the COLA change.

The commissioners concurred with the Committee Reviewed FY27 operating budgets as follows: Emergency Services budget of \$6,454,792; Jail budget of \$15,867,741; Fire Marshal's Office budget of \$1,514,975; Volunteer Fire Departments budget of \$15,354,106; Maintenance Division budget of \$3,146,421; Roads Division budget of \$8,336,806; Public Works budget of \$1,572,111; Boat Landings budget of \$379,913; Homeowner Convenience Centers budget of \$974,891; Recycling budget of \$1,264,630; Health Department budget of \$7,113,658; Mosquito Control budget of \$295,144; Commission on Aging budget of \$2,223,781; Social Services Groups budget of \$979,408; and Wor-Wic Community College budget of \$2,775,142.

The commissioners reviewed the Committee Reviewed County Appropriation for the FY27 Board of Education (BOE) budget totaling \$137,048,773.

Commissioner Mitrecic made a motion to adopt the BOE budget as presented. That motion was followed by a lengthy discussion.

Commissioner Bertino stated that, while the BOE has improved transparency in recent years, he remains concerned about past financial oversight issues, including previously undisclosed nonprofit foundation funding and the recent embezzlement case. He said he supports negotiated salary increases for teachers, support staff, and bus drivers, but could not support additional funding increases until an independent forensic audit provides assurance regarding the BOE's financial controls and accounting practices.

Commissioner Mitrecic noted that the BOE has already issued a request for proposals for an independent forensic audit and argued that withholding funding pending the outcome of a lengthy review was unreasonable. He discussed the impact of increased living costs and the need for livable wages for County and BOE employees.

Commissioner Fiori stated that the commissioners previously reviewed the BOE budget in detail and that transparency has improved significantly. He commended BOE financial staff for responding to the commissioners' requests for additional information and said the embezzlement incident should not justify withholding education funding. Commissioner Fiori stated that the BOE budget needs to be fully funded to address cost increases head on, and added that any additional concerns identified through the forensic audit can be addressed once the audit is complete.

Commissioner Abbott stated that she supports salary increases for teachers, support staff, and bus drivers, but remains concerned about prior audit findings. She reiterated her support for an independent forensic audit and expressed concerns regarding financial oversight, accountability, and other operational issues. Commissioner Abbott stated that she could not support increasing funding until additional accountability measures are in place.

Commissioner Purnell stated that the commissioners have historically scrutinized the BOE budget and in response the BOE has come to them with a clean budget, one that is substantially more transparent and easier to review than in prior years. While acknowledging concerns related to the embezzlement incident and the need for a forensic audit, which is in the works, she emphasized that the school system must be fully funded to continue supporting students and employees.

Commissioner Elder stated that the BOE budget has increased at a rate exceeding many other County budgets and greater than increasing costs. He characterized the FY27 request as a substantial increase over prior funding levels. While stating he did not support reducing funding to maintenance of effort (MOE) levels, he also said he could not support the budget at the requested amount and would instead support a compromise that balances educational needs with taxpayer affordability. Commissioners Elder and Bertino concurred that the BOE may not have gotten everything requested in prior years, but they have received substantial increases above MOE.

After much discussion, the commissioners voted on the prior motion by Commissioner Mitrecic to approve the FY27 BOE budget as presented. The motion failed 3-3, with Commissioners Fiori, Mitrecic, and Purnell voting in favor and Commissioners Abbott, Bertino, and Elder voting in opposition. Following the vote, Commissioner Elder stated that the Commissioners could revisit the BOE budget at a subsequent work session in an effort to resolve their differences.

The commissioners concurred with the Committee Reviewed FY27 operating budgets as follows: Recreation budget of \$3,343,670; Parks budget of \$1,912,785; Library budget of \$5,016,233; and Other Recreation and Culture budget of \$175,001.

The commissioners revisited the committee reviewed county appropriation for the Committee Reviewed FY27 Other Social Services.

A motion by Commissioner Bertino to flat fund Other Social Services and to deny any new funding requests failed 3-1-1, with Commissioners Abbott, Bertino, and Elder voting in favor of the motion, Commissioner Fiori voting in opposition, Commissioner Purnell abstaining, and Commissioner Mitrecic temporarily out of the room.

Upon a motion by Commissioner Bertino, the commissioners voted 4-1, with Commissioners Abbott, Bertino, Elder, and Purnell voting in favor and Commissioner Fiori voting in opposition, to flat fund Big Brothers/Big Sisters at the 2026 rate.

A motion by Commissioner Bertino to deny a new funding request from Chesapeake Down Syndrome Parent Group failed 3-3, with Commissioners Abbott, Bertino, and Elder voting in favor of the motion and Commissioners Fiori, Mitrecic, and Purnell voting in opposition.

The commissioners discussed tabling all non-profit grant requests for departments 1402 and 1604 until the next budget work session on May 19.

The commissioners reviewed the Committee Reviewed FY27 operating budget for Extension Services. The commissioners requested salary information for the new master gardener position being requested.

The commissioners concurred with the Committee Reviewed FY27 operating budgets as follows: Other Natural Resources budget of \$1,125,800; Economic Development budget of \$649,156; Tourism budget of \$1,918,273; and Taxes Shared with Towns budget of \$396,338.

The commissioners discussed the Committee Reviewed FY27 Grants to Towns.

Upon a motion by Commissioner Mitrecic, the commissioners unanimously approved the Grants to Towns as requested.

Based on additional information provided by Deputy Chief Administrative Officer Candace Savage regarding the Town of Berlin's request that its unrestricted grant receive the same consideration as the Town of Pocomoke City's recently approved \$55,000 unrestricted grant increase, and upon a motion by Commissioner Fiori, the commissioners unanimously agreed to provide equivalent unrestricted grant increases of \$55,000 each to the Towns of Berlin and Snow Hill as well. Chief Administrative Officer Weston Young advised that the additional funding impact for both municipalities would total \$110,000. Commissioner Mitrecic stated that while Berlin and Snow Hill had not specifically requested the increase during their budget presentations, he did not wish to deny them the same consideration provided to Pocomoke City.

The commissioners concurred with the Committee Reviewed FY27 operating budgets as follows: Debt Service budget of \$10,155,254; and Interfund Budget of \$6,456,087.

Ms. Reynolds reviewed FY27 capital requests.

Human Resources Director Stacey Norton reviewed Enterprise Fund personnel requests.

Upon a motion by Commissioner Bertino, the commissioners unanimously approved one new water and wastewater system operator intern or apprentice position within the Water and Wastewater Division.

Upon a motion by Commissioner Mitrecic, the commissioners unanimously approved nine job reclassifications for the FY27 enterprise fund totaling \$114,479.

Ms. Norton reviewed General Fund personnel requests impacting 42 employees.

Upon a motion by Commissioner Bertino, the commissioners unanimously approved 12 new positions; 180 additional hours for one intern position in Human Resources; 300 additional hours for one roads worker II position; 1,228 additional hours for part-time recreation program monitors; 200 additional hours for a part-time Welcome Center greeter; a reduction of 1,200 part-time custodial monitor hours; and a reduction of 830 part-time recreation program monitor II hours, at a total cost of \$583,260.

Upon a motion by Commissioner Fiori, the commissioners unanimously approved reclassifications for 46 employees, who have obtained certain certifications and/or licenses, totaling \$189,142.

Upon a motion by Commissioner Mitrecic, the commissioners unanimously approved 25 job reclassifications for a total cost of \$115,560, including the changes recommended by Ms.

Norton to reclassify two special investigator positions within the State's Attorney's Office from a grade 19 to a grade 22.

The commissioners answered questions from the press, after which they adjourned for lunch and to meet in closed session.

Following a motion by Commissioner Bertino, seconded by Commissioner Mitrecic, with Commissioner Bunting absent, the commissioners unanimously voted to meet in closed session at 11:28 p.m. in the Commissioners' Meeting 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, Budget Officer Kim Reynolds, Public Information Officer Kim Moses, and Human Resources Director Stacey Norton and Deputy Director Pat Walls. Topics discussed and actions taken included discussing FY27 requested budget promotions, reclassifications, and adjustments for General Fund Employees.

Following their closed session, the commissioners adjourned to meet again on May 19, 2026.