

Minutes of the County Commissioners of Worcester County, Maryland

May 19, 2026

Budget Work Session

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

The commissioners 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 adjustments from the May 12, 2026 FY27 Budget Work Session for the Solid Waste Fund totaling \$5,518,376 in revenues and expenditures. The revised budget reflects a projected deficit of \$17,276 in the Solid Waste Fund, proposed to be covered through a transfer from fund balance.

Upon a motion by Commissioner Mitrecic, the commissioners approved the FY27 Solid Waste Fund budget adjustments as presented.

Mr. Dittrich reviewed adjustments from the May 12 FY27 Budget Work Session for the Water and Wastewater Service Areas. He advised that the revised budget totals \$28,057,726 in revenues and expenditures, including \$850,136 in requested General Fund support to cover budgeted deficits in the Briddletown, Landings, and River Run service areas, as well as an operational grant for Briddletown. In response to a question by Commissioner Fiori, Mr. Dittrich said that the FY27 rates do not include the potential refund. Commissioner Fiori said that he would like to see the new rates calculated with the refunds given. Deputy Chief Administrative Officer Candace Savage said that if you want to move forward with the FY26 refunds, those refunds would be calculated back to FY26 and the hit fund balance. This would not affect the FY27 budget.

Upon a motion by Commissioner Bertino, the commissioners approved the FY27 Water and Wastewater Service Area budget adjustments as presented.

Budget Officer Kim Reynolds reviewed adjustments from the May 12 FY27 Budget Work Session for the General Fund. She advised that revised revenues total \$300,172,146 and expenditures total \$300,584,274. Following the budget work session adjustments, the FY27 General Fund budget reflects a projected deficit of \$412,128.

Upon a motion by Commissioner Mitrecic, the commissioners approved the FY27 General Fund budget adjustments as presented.

Upon a motion by Commissioner Purnell, the commissioners voted 5-2, with Commissioners Fiori and Mitrecic voting in opposition, to adopt a draft resolution setting the commissioners scheduled salary for the 2026-2030 term, which includes the cost of living increases that were awarded to County employees during the 2022-2026 term and result in a \$5,419 salary increase.

Ms. Reynolds reviewed open budget items that were tabled in the May 12 budget work session.

Upon a motion by Commissioner Bertino, the commissioners unanimously agreed to convert the county engineer position, which is currently split between DRP and Public Works, into two positions.

Upon a motion by Commissioner Bertino, the commissioners unanimously agreed to include the full payment of \$125,010 for elections pollbooks and \$288,299.50 for voting machines within the FY27 budget.

The commissioners discussed a proposed volunteer firefighter property tax credit requested by the Worcester County Volunteer Firefighters Association during the FY27 budget process. Staff advised that, due to procedural requirements, the program could not be implemented prior to FY27 tax billing and would instead need to be considered for FY28. The commissioners discussed concerns regarding limited eligibility, as well as program costs and potential alternatives. A motion by Commissioner Bunting to table the matter pending additional information died for lack of a second, and the commissioners took no action on the proposal. Commissioner Bertino suggested researching best practices and determining how other Maryland counties are addressing similar requests in their jurisdictions.

Upon a motion by Commissioner Bertino, the commissioners voted 4-3, with Commissioners Abbott, Bertino, Bunting, and Elder voting in favor and Commissioners Fiori, Mitrecic, and Purnell voting in opposition, to remove the new master gardener position from the FY27 Extension Office budget. Commissioner Bertino suggested Extension officials seek grant opportunities to fund this position.

A motion by Commissioner Mitrecic to evaluate each nonprofit request individually failed 3-4, with Commissioners Fiori, Mitrecic, and Purnell voting in favor and Commissioners Abbott, Bertino, Bunting, and Elder voting in opposition.

Upon a motion by Commissioner Bunting, the commissioners voted 4-3, with Commissioners Abbott, Bertino, Bunting, and Elder voting in favor and Commissioners Fiori, Mitrecic, and Purnell voting in opposition.

The commissioners discussed the Board of Education's FY27 budget request, including additional County funding requested to support salaries, insurance and OPEB increases, pre-kindergarten expansion, dual enrollment requirements, technology upgrades, and other operational needs. Superintendent Annette Wallace, Board President Jon Ferrante, and Chief

Financial Officer Vince Tolbert were in attendance, reviewed budget needs, and emphasized that the requested funding reflected necessary expenses. Mr. Ferrante warned that reductions could result in cuts to pre-kindergarten programs in Pocomoke, Ocean City, and Showell, as well as the potential loss of an \$800,000 State grant.

Commissioner Mitrecic supported increasing BOE funding, stating that the requested items represented essential educational needs. He noted that funding approximately \$300,000 for pre-kindergarten would leverage an estimated \$800,000 State grant and emphasized that any reductions would require the school system to identify cuts elsewhere in the budget.

Commissioner Purnell expressed concern over the condition of school facilities and the impact budget reductions could have on students, teachers, and parents. She stated that the requested funding was necessary and urged the commissioners to listen to the needs of the school system before reducing support.

Commissioner Fiori encouraged the commissioners to visit the schools and see existing conditions firsthand, stating that improvements were necessary. He also noted that the revised funding figure discussed during the meeting would total approximately \$10,853,903.

Commissioner Bertino stated that he supported salary increases for school employees but opposed approving additional funding until the Board of Education completed and passed a full audit review. He also requested additional breakdowns of certain school programs and suggested exploring best practices and additional funding opportunities.

Commissioner Abbott asked questions regarding pre-kindergarten expansion, out-of-county student enrollment, and operational costs associated with programs such as Culinary Arts, Pines Café, and The Nest. She also discussed educational needs within her district and requested additional budget details from school officials.

Commissioner Elder expressed concerns regarding the proposed volunteer tax credit discussion and later asked Ms. Wallace whether out-of-county tuition rates could be reviewed and potentially increased in the future. He also discussed transportation needs with school officials during prior budget discussions.

Commissioner Bunting questioned the value and structure of several proposed initiatives and expressed concerns about the overall funding request during the discussion.

Following much discussion, a motion by Commissioner Mitrecic to increase the BOE budget by \$11,113,793 failed 3-4, with Commissioners Fiori, Mitrecic, and Purnell voting in favor and Commissioners Abbott, Bertino, Bunting, and Elder voting in opposition.

The commissioners reviewed and concurred with proposed FY27 fee increases within Recreation and Parks.

Following the budget work session, the commissioners adjourned to meet in closed session.

Following a motion by Commissioner Bertino, seconded by Commissioner Bunting, the commissioners unanimously voted to meet in closed session at 12:29 p.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, Public Information Officer Kim Moses, State's Attorney Kris Heiser, Development Review and Permitting Director Jennifer Keener, and Environmental Programs Director Bob Mitchell. Topics discussed and actions taken included individual personnel matters and salaries for the FY27 General Fund Operating Budget.

Following a motion by Commissioner Bertino, seconded by Commissioner Abbott, the commissioners unanimously voted to adjourn their closed session at 12:57 p.m.

After the closed session, the commissioners adjourned to meet again on June 2, 2025.