

Minutes of the County Commissioners of Worcester County, Maryland

June 16, 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 Bunting, seconded by Commissioner Abbott, 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; promoting Assistant Warden Shytina Drummond to warden and Corporal Tiffany Purnell to sergeant within the County Jail; hiring Stanley Jones as a utility mechanic I and Alyssa Carpenter and LaRonda Foreman as transfer station attendants within the Solid Waste Division, Hunter Milligan as a grounds utility mechanic within the Maintenance Division, and Andrew Rickards as an intern within Recreation and Parks; transferring Roads Worker III Jake Evans to parks worker III within Recreation, and Parks 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 Abbott, the commissioners unanimously voted to adjourn their closed session at 9:47 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 Reverend Dale Brown of the Community Church at Ocean Pines 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 June 2, 2025.

The commissioners presented a commendation recognizing Private First Class Drew Ward as the 2026 Worcester County Correctional Officer of the Year. PFC Warfield received this honor for demonstrating exceptional judgement in high-pressure situations, maintaining the

highest standards of integrity, and serving as a role model to his peers.

The commissioners presented a years-of-service commendation to Parks Crew Leader William “Billy” Allman who is retiring following 29 years of dedicated service to Recreation and Parks where he helped to plan, coordinate work duties, and supervise personnel in the maintenance and repair of the County park system.

Commissioner Elder opened the floor to receive public comments.

Edward Lee of Snow Hill urged the commissioners to approve Rezoning Case No. 444. There being no further public comments, Commissioner Elder closed the floor.

Upon a motion by Commissioner Fiori, the commissioners unanimously approved by consent agenda item numbers 2-5 as follows: FY27 Local Behavioral Health Authority grant awards for behavioral health and substance use treatment programs within the County Jail; a memorandum of understanding between the County and Local Management Board (LMB) establishing the terms and conditions for which the LMB will carry out activities funded through the Community Reinvestment and Repair Fund (“CRRF”), and accepting proposals from the Bay to Beach Heritage Foundation, Berlin Activities Depot, Cricket Center, Healthport, and Wraparound Maryland for CRRF funding; scheduling a public hearing for Rezoning Case No. 452 seeking to rezone approximately 1.66 acres of land on the westerly side of MD Rt. 611 and the easterly side of Sinepuxent Road from A-2 Agricultural to C-2 General Commercial; and approving an over-expenditure of approximately \$90,000 within Recycling salaries by utilizing available Homeowner Convenience Center salary savings.

The commissioners reviewed the Board of Education’s (BOE) revised FY27 budget categorical amounts. Chief Administrative Officer Weston Young advised the commissioners that, following adoption of the County's FY27 operating budget, the BOE revised its FY27 operating budget to align with the local funding appropriated by the County. He explained that the revisions reflected the amount approved during the County budget process. No action was required by the commissioners.

The commissioners reviewed the proposed FY27 BOE Appropriation Transmittal Schedule, as submitted by Chief Financial Officer Vince Tolbert. Commissioner Abbott moved to approve the FY27 Transmittal Schedule. The motion failed for lack of a second.

Maryland Association of Counties (MACo) President MC Keegan-Ayer and Executive Director Michael Sanderson presented an overview of the 2026 General Assembly session and MACo's legislative advocacy efforts on behalf of Maryland's counties. They recognized Commissioner Chip Bertino for his service on the 2026 MACo Board of Directors and thanked him for representing Worcester County and contributing to the association's work on behalf of counties statewide. The presenters reviewed key legislative outcomes involving housing and community development, intergovernmental relations, government liability and public information, education funding, juvenile justice, and energy policy, highlighting MACo's efforts to preserve local authority, oppose unfunded mandates, and mitigate proposed cost shifts to county governments. They also discussed the State's long-term fiscal outlook and projected

structural budget deficits expected to affect future legislative sessions and concluded by highlighting upcoming MACo initiatives, including the 2026 Summer Conference in Ocean City, the MACo OPEB Trust, and cooperative purchasing opportunities available through Public Promise Procurement.

The commissioners conducted a public hearing on Rezoning Case No. 444 for an application submitted by Attorney Hugh Cropper on behalf of Black Water Relics, LLC, property owner, for an amendment to the Official Zoning Maps to change approximately 0.78 acres of land located at 4432 Market Street in Snow Hill and identified on Tax Map 63, Parcel 106 from A-1 Agricultural District to C-2 General Commercial District.

County Attorney Roscoe Leslie reviewed the procedural history following the remand by the Appellate Court of Maryland, which had vacated the commissioners' denial of the rezoning request, denied Black Water Relic's request to compel the rezoning request, and remanded the case to the commissioners for further proceedings to produce additional findings of fact regarding the denial of the rezoning request. He concluded that the County and counsel for Black Water Relics had agreed to re-open the hearing for this matter to allow both sides to present evidence and argument, and limit the scope of the rezoning request to the 0.78 acre parcel of property. Development Review and Permitting Director Jennifer Keener presented the amended staff report. Commissioner Bunting questioned the property's zoning history and prior commercial use, while Commissioner Fiori encouraged prospective property owners to verify zoning classifications with County staff before purchasing property.

Commissioner President Elder opened the floor for public comment.

Mr. Cropper argued that the 1992 downzoning was a mistake, the property is unsuitable for agricultural use, and the requested rezoning is consistent with the Comprehensive Plan.

Tom Islet, adjacent property owner, described the property's long history of commercial warehouse use and supported the rezoning.

Gregory Wilkins, surveyor, supported the Planning Commission's finding that the 1992 zoning was a mistake and noted the property's existing septic system.

Chris McCabe, Coastal Compliance Solutions, stated the property is unsuitable for agricultural use and supported the Planning Commission's recommendation.

Jennifer Patrick, nearby property owner, supported the rezoning, stating redevelopment would improve the appearance of the property and benefit Snow Hill.

Amy Kelly, property owner, explained she purchased the property intending to open a consignment store and believed she had exercised due diligence before purchasing it.

Snow Hill resident Edward Lee supported the rezoning, stating it was consistent with the Comprehensive Plan and the area's growth objectives.

Former Sheriff Chuck Martin supported the application, citing the applicants' reputation and his continued support for the rezoning.

There being no further public comments, President Elder closed the hearing.

During commissioner discussion, Commissioner Mitrecic stated the evidence demonstrated a zoning mistake had occurred in 1992. Commissioner Fiori said the case was unique and, although generally opposed to rezoning agricultural land to commercial, concluded the evidence supported the request. President Elder said the testimony established that a commercial business was operating on the property at the time of the 1992 downzoning. Commissioner Bertino questioned conflicting testimony regarding how long the property had

been vacant. Commissioner Bunting maintained that the evidence did not establish a zoning mistake and expressed concern about creating isolated commercial zoning in an agricultural area. County Attorney Leslie reminded the commissioners that, if they conclude that there has been a mistake, they must also determine that the proposed rezoning would better served the goals of the Comprehensive Plan.

Upon a motion by Commissioner Fiori, the commissioners voted 5-2, with Commissioners Bertino and Bunting voting in opposition, to conceptually adopt the Planning Commission's Findings of Fact as their own and approved the rezoning from A-1 Agricultural District to C-2 General Commercial District.

The commissioners conducted a public hearing to provide information on the progress of homeless shelter supply and facility improvement activities funded through the on Maryland Community Development Block Grant Program. Grants and Contract Accountant Shelby Mitch presented the program update.

Commissioner Elder opened the floor to receive public comments.

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

Upon a motion by Commissioner Bertino, the commissioners unanimously concurred with the scheduled expenditure of the Housing Rehabilitation Grant.

Pursuant to the request of Sheriff Matthew Crisafulli and upon a motion by Commissioner Bertino, the commissioners unanimously authorized FY26 capital equipment/public safety equipment funds of \$260,854.05 to be carried over to FY27 and approved Blue Tech as the sole source vendor for the uplifting of 10 new vehicles with the Sheriff's Office that were purchased in FY26.

Pursuant to the request of Public Works Director Dallas Baker and upon a motion by Commissioner Abbott, the commissioners unanimously accepted the proposal from Stratified, Inc. for \$449,970, with a 5% contingency (\$25,000), for the Ocean Pines Wastewater Treatment Plant (WWTP) lagoon vertical expansion project.

Senior Budget Accountant Lynn Wright reviewed the proposed FY25 surplus assignments and new project funding requests. Upon a motion by Commissioner Abbott, the commissioners approved the proposed assignments and requests by a 4-3 vote, with Commissioners Fiori, Mitrecic, and Purnell voting in opposition.

Pursuant to the recommendation of Legislative Analyst Charlene Sharpe and upon a motion by Commissioner Bertino, the commissioners unanimously approved submitting a letter of support for TidalHealth Atlantic's application for a \$4 million Maryland Hospital Association Bond Program grant to modernize and expand the operating rooms at the Berlin hospital.

In response to a question from Commissioner Mitrecic regarding agenda item numbers 6 and 7, Mr. Young explained that, under State law, the BOE is required to submit its revised budget to the County within 30 days of budget adoption, but the commissioners are not required to approve the revised budget. He noted that, while the commissioners have historically voted to acknowledge receipt of the revised budget, he recommended approval of the FY27 Transmittal

Schedule because it benefits both County and BOE staff. Commissioner Mitrecic stated he would not make a motion.

Commissioner Abbott then moved to approve the FY27 Transmittal Schedule. The motion passed by a 4-3 vote, with Commissioners Fiori, Mitrecic, and Purnell voting in opposition.

Commissioner Mitrecic stated that the BOE's Other Post-Employment Benefits (OPEB) contribution was not included in the motion approving the BOE budget and expressed concern that failing to fully fund the contribution would increase the County's long-term liability. He urged the commissioners to continue working toward fully funding the OPEB trust.

In response to questions from Commissioners Mitrecic and Bertino, Mr. Young explained that the BOE currently budgets approximately \$2.8 million annually for retiree healthcare costs, while the County funds the remaining OPEB trust contribution. Mr. Tolbert added that the BOE had requested an additional appropriation to cover the increased OPEB contribution, but that request was not included in the adopted budget. Mr. Young clarified that the recent adjustment to the trust funding percentage did not include the additional BOE request.

Following some discussion, a motion by Commissioner Mitrecic to restore the BOE's additional OPEB funding to the FY27 budget failed by a 3-2-2 vote, with Commissioners Mitrecic, Purnell, and Fiori voting in favor, Commissioners Bunting and Elder voting in opposition, and Commissioners Bertino and Abbott abstaining.

During commissioner comments, Commissioner Fiori requested updates on the proposed volunteer firefighter property tax credit and the County's review of zoning regulations related to data centers. Mr. Young advised that staff continues to research volunteer firefighter tax credit eligibility requirements and best practices used by other counties and is also working to improve the Length of Service Award Program.

In response to questions raised by the commissioners, Development Review and Permitting Director Jennifer Keener explained that County staff have determined that the proposed cable landing station is not considered an energy facility under the Zoning Code and outlined the remaining review process.

Commissioner Bertino asked for clarification regarding funding for dual enrollment and suggested exploring outside funding sources, including the Worcester County Education Foundation, to address potential summer school funding shortfalls.

The commissioners answered questions from the press, after which they adjourned to meet again on July 7, 2025.