

Minutes of the County Commissioners of Worcester County, Maryland

July 7, 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: hiring Zachary White as a DRP Specialist II within DRP, Michael Brooks as an intern and Derrek Frantum as a heavy equipment operator within the WWWW Division, Jack Davis as the project engineer within Public Works, David Spain as a recycling utility mechanic I within the Solid Waste Division, and Jason Brittingham as an equipment and mechanic II within the Solid Waste and Fleet Management Divisions; promoting Environmental Intern Ian Burak to environmental health specialist trainee within Environmental Programs 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 Mitrecic, the commissioners unanimously voted to adjourn their closed session at 9:54 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 Brian King of Snow Hill Mennonite Church 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 June 16, 2026 meeting as presented.

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

The commissioners presented a proclamation recognizing July as Park and Recreation Month to Worcester County Recreation and Parks Director Kelly Rados and her team.

Upon a motion by Commissioner Bertino, the commissioners unanimously approved by consent agenda item numbers 2-11 as follows: a \$15,000 grant from the MD250 Commission for Tourism and Economic Development; a Circuit Court Courthouse Security Grant Modification totaling \$20,031.99; a Small Project Agreement for the sewer force main project at 11923 Salt Grass Point Road; requesting a Housing Rehabilitation Grant waiver from the Department of Housing and Community Development to extend the 5% draw provision until September 8, 2026; updating the Housing Rehab Guidelines; submitting the County's FY27 Program Open Space Annual Program to the Department of Natural Resources for approval of the projects; modifying the FY27 Recreation and Parks Facility Fees; approving a three-year contract with Environmental Systems Research Inc. totaling \$105,200 for the use of geospatial data; and purchasing of a Toto Infield Pro 5040 ride-on utility tractor from Turf Equipment and Supply Company for \$30,374 and a T650 T4 Bobcat Compact Track Loader from Bobcat of Sussex County totaling \$108,534.24 for use within Recreation and Parks.

The commissioners met with representatives of Atwell, LLC and Clean Capital, LLC for a pre-application consultation regarding a proposed 4.95-megawatt utility-scale community solar energy system on Old Virginia Road in Pocomoke City. Development Review and Permitting (DRP) Director Jennifer Keener advised that the project was generally consistent with the County's Comprehensive Plan and zoning requirements, subject to a setback modification or revised site layout.

Commissioner Abbott opposed the proposal, stating that her concerns centered on the cumulative loss of land available for future growth in the Pocomoke area. She specifically noted that the city's designated growth area is located across the road and that four solar facilities already exist within a two-mile radius. She also expressed concern regarding the project's potential impact on property values and economic development.

Upon a motion by Commissioner Abbott, the commissioners unanimously found the proposed project to be inconsistent with the current Comprehensive Plan and denied the siting modification request.

Pursuant to the request of Ms. Keener and upon a motion by Commissioner Mitrecic, the commissioners voted 5-2, with Commissioners Bertino and Bunting voting in opposition, to adopt the Findings of Fact and Zoning Reclassification Resolution No. 26-17 in Rezoning Case No. 444, rezoning 0.78 acre of land located at 4432 Market Street in in Snow Hill and more specifically identified on Tax Map 63 as Parcel 106 from A-1 Agricultural District to C-2 General Commercial District.

Vincent DeMarco and Dr. Andrew York of the Maryland Health Care for All Coalition presenting information to the commissioners about the benefits of the Prescription Drug Affordability Board, which was created by the State in 2019 to address the high cost of prescription drugs.

Pursuant to the request of Procurement Officer Ed Welch and upon a motion by Commissioner Abbott, the commissioners unanimously awarded the contract for Solid Waste Environmental Monitoring Services to EA Engineering, Science, and Technology for \$373,030.

Pursuant to the request of Human Resources Director Stacey Norton and Public Works Director Dallas Baker and upon a motion by Commissioner Bertino, the commissioners unanimously agreed to convert the landfill operator I position to landfill operator III and to fill this position with an existing employee. The commissioners further approved an over-expenditure of \$44,673.09 to cover the additional salary and benefit expenses.

Pursuant to the request of Emergency Services Director Chris Shaffer and upon a motion by Commissioner Mitrecic, the commissioners unanimously approved an over-expenditure of \$53,273.81 for Neverfail software to support operations within the Sheriff's Office, Snow Hill Police Department, and County Jail.

Pursuant to the request of Mr. Welch and upon a motion by Commissioner Mitrecic, the commissioners unanimously approved on over-expenditure of \$135,898.65 for five change orders from Whayland Company, LLC for the Fire Training Center logistical storage building project.

The commissioners reviewed an over-expenditure request of \$406,662.90 for the County's FY26 share of private pre-kindergarten costs under the Blueprint for Maryland's Future. Budget Officer Kim Reynolds explained that private pre-k is a 50/50 State and County cost share, and counties are billed based on the actual number of eligible students served rather than preliminary enrollment estimates, resulting in costs that differed from those anticipated during the budget process. She further advised that the County is required to share the cost of eligible private pre-kindergarten students under the Blueprint, although the final number of participating students is not known until after enrollment is complete.

Commissioner Bunting questioned why the expense had not been anticipated during the budget process. Commissioner Mitrecic questioned the State's funding model, requested information regarding the number of qualified private providers, available enrollment capacity at each location, and verification that participating students are County residents. He also emphasized the need for County staff to provide the commissioners with advance notice of future Blueprint costs. Commissioner Purnell asked whether the County was required to fund private pre-kindergarten, and Deputy Chief Administrative Officer Candace Savage confirmed that it is required under the Blueprint.

Commissioner Bertino requested additional information regarding the State's funding contribution, the number of approved student slots, provider capacity, and student residency. Commissioner Fiori questioned whether the State shares similar costs for public pre-kindergarten programs and requested additional information regarding that funding formula, noting that it should also be based on the 50/50 formula for private school funding.

Upon a motion by Commissioner Mitrecic, the Commissioners voted 5-2, with Commissioners Bunting and Bertino voting in opposition, to postpone consideration of the request until staff could provide additional information regarding qualified providers, enrollment capacity, participating students, residency verification, and projected future costs.

Pursuant to the request of Ms. Reynolds and upon a motion by Commissioner Bertino, the commissioners unanimously approved an FY27 over-expenditure of \$97,893 in the West Ocean City EMS Supplemental Account.

Pursuant to the request of Information Technology Director Brian Jones and upon a motion by Commissioner Bertino, the commissioners unanimously approved the updated IT Security Policy, which now includes comprehensive guidance on the use of Artificial Intelligence technologies within County government.

Pursuant to the request of Legislative Analyst Charlene Sharpe and Ms. Keener and upon a motion by Commissioner Mitrecic, the commissioners unanimously agreed to send a letter to the Maryland Public Service Commission supporting the State's decommissioning cost estimation tool, while advocating for local control of decommissioning bonds and opposing salvage value deductions to protect local taxpayers from potential financial liabilities associated with abandoned solar facilities.

Commissioner Bertino left the meeting.

The commissioners conducted a work session to consider a proposed text amendment to the Worcester County Zoning Code establishing regulations for data centers and cable landing stations, including proposed definitions, potential zoning districts, design standards, noise mitigation, and sustainability requirements. The commissioners discussed the appropriate zoning districts for such facilities, concerns regarding water and wastewater capacity, power demand, noise, environmental impacts, future growth, and the legal implications of prohibiting the use countywide. Commissioner Bunting supported limiting data centers to the I-2 Heavy Industrial District, while Commissioner Fiori advocated prohibiting data centers in all zoning districts. Environmental Programs Director Bob Mitchell discussed the significant infrastructure demands associated with data centers, including water consumption, electrical demand, noise, and air quality concerns. Commissioner Abbott expressed concern that data centers would compete with future residential and commercial growth opportunities, particularly in the Pocomoke area, while Commissioner Mitrecic stated that a countywide prohibition could invite legal challenges and emphasized the need to establish regulations within the County Code. Commissioner Elder noted that noise standards should also be addressed as part of the legislation.

A motion by Commissioner Fiori to prohibit data centers in all zoning districts failed, with Commissioners Mitrecic, Elder, Bunting, and Purnell voting in opposition. Following additional discussion, and upon a motion by Commissioner Fiori, the commissioners unanimously approved a one-year moratorium on new data centers and cable landing stations to allow staff time to prepare comprehensive zoning regulations. Ms. Keener advised that a moratorium resolution would be presented for adoption at the next meeting.

The commissioners answered questions from the press, after which they adjourned to meet again on July 21, 2026.