

Minutes of the County Commissioners of Worcester County, Maryland

May 28, 2020

Emergency Meeting

Joseph M. Mitrecic, President
Theodore J. Elder, Vice President
Anthony W. Bertino, Jr.
Madison J. Bunting, Jr.
James C. Church
Joshua C. Nordstrom
Diana Purnell

Due to the current COVID-19 pandemic, this meeting took place virtually via Zoom, for which the live stream could be viewed at <https://media.swagit.com/zoom/worcestercountymd>.

At 3:00 p.m. Commissioner Mitrecic called the emergency meeting to order to discuss Governor Larry Hogan's latest executive order and to receive briefings from County staff on this latest information and recommendations for expedited implementation of this next stage in the COVID-19 recovery efforts.

The Commissioners met with incoming Assistant Chief Administrative Officer Weston Young to review Governor Hogan's latest Executive Order and Associated Guidance, allowing the reopening of certain businesses and facilities, subject to local regulations, and to discuss Worcester County's response to the completion of stage one of the State's Roadmap to Recovery. Mr. Young stated that the new order includes allowing limited outdoor youth sports, youth camps, and swimming pools, and the reopening of bars and restaurants, for outdoor dining. He noted that this latest executive order complies with the Commissioners May 15, 2020 letter to Governor Hogan requesting an addition to stage one of the Roadmap to Recovery that authorizes bars and restaurants that are able to meet certain criteria to reopen and offer outdoor customer seating only. The Commissioners thanked Mr. Young for his ongoing leadership in this area and directed him to continue to serve as the point person on the County's response to the State's Roadmap to Recovery.

The Commissioners met with Development Review and Permitting (DRP) Director Ed Tudor to review and discuss the proposed Temporary Outdoor Seating Permit Application developed by County staff from DRP, Environmental Programs, Fire Marshal's Office, Health Department, and Board of License Commissioners (as applicable). Mr. Tudor stated that, about two weeks ago in anticipation of the Governor's latest executive order, County staff developed this application to allow them to quickly process applications for outdoor seating at no cost to the applicants. He stated that this application is only for those seeking to expand existing permitted or add new outdoor seating. He stated that businesses that currently have permitted outdoor seating do not need to reapply to the County, though the Health Department may have some additional requirements.

In response to a question by Commissioner Mitrecic, Mr. Tudor stated that the County will allocate parking requirements based solely on outdoor seating, and County staff will enlist the assistance of area chambers of commerce and the Ocean City Hotel-Motel-Restaurant Association to help spread the word about this process to bars and restaurants within the unincorporated areas of the County.

Upon a motion by Commissioner Bertino, the Commissioners unanimously agreed to open outdoor seating in the unincorporated areas of the County and approved the Temporary Outdoor Seating Permit Application.

In response to comments by Commissioner Mitrecic, Health Officer Becky Jones stated that health officials do not want to be a barrier to bars and restaurants obtaining the necessary permits to implement outdoor seating, and they have been working in partnership with County and Ocean City officials to expedite the permit process. She stated that, in addition to the County application, the Health Department has developed a very brief outdoor seating application, which is based on guidance from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC).

With regard to recreational swimming pools, Ms. Jones stated that her staff is working with State officials to clarify gray areas regarding the reopening of these facilities. Commissioner Mitrecic stated that the Commissioners would like to get these places open as quickly as possible.

The Commissioners reviewed their May 27, 2020 letter to Governor Hogan requesting the start of Phase Two of the State's Roadmap to Recovery including the reopening of certain commercial activities, including outdoor and limited indoor restaurant and bar seating, certain attractions, like miniature golf, go-karts, and other stand-alone attractions, limited operation of the Ocean Downs Casino, outdoor open-air wedding venues, indoor gymnasiums, and the raising of the cap on social gatherings and certain activities. Commissioner Mitrecic stated that the Commissioners need to continue to encourage the Governor's Office to permit these activities in the beginning of phase two.

Upon a motion by Commissioner Bertino, the Commissioners unanimously agreed to send another letter to Governor Hogan that both reiterates and builds on their May 27 letter in an ongoing effort to resume normal business operations Countywide.

The Commissioners answered questions from the press, after which they adjourned to meet again on June 2, 2020.