

Minutes of the County Commissioners of Worcester County, Maryland

July 5, 2023

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

Following a motion by Commissioner Elder, 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, Human Resources Director Stacey Norton and Deputy Director Pat Walls. Topics discussed and actions taken included the following: personnel update, promoting Recycling Crew Leader Robert Keenan to recycling manager within the Solid Waste Division, and certain personnel matters; receiving legal advice from counsel; and performing administrative functions, including discussing board appointments.

Following a motion by Commissioner Elder, seconded by Commissioner Bunting, the commissioners unanimously voted to adjourn their closed session at 9:53 a.m.

After the closed session, the commissioners reconvened in open session. Commissioner Bertino 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 June 20, 2023 meeting as presented.

The commissioners presented a years-of-service commendation to Executive Director Jack Ferry who is retiring following 15 years of service to the Worcester County Developmental Center.

The commissioners presented a proclamation recognizing July as National Park and Recreation Month to Worcester County Recreation and Parks (WCRP) Director Kelly Rados and encouraged those in attendance to learn more about county parks by visiting <https://worcesterrecandparks.org> and to get out, get active, and enjoy nature with WCRP.

The commissioners presented commendations to the Worcester County Camp Coast team for taking first place during the 33rd annual Berlin Bathtub Races. Team members included Drivers Derek Jarmon and Aaron Goddard, pit crew members Lisa Gebhardt, Ben Kirk, Tyler Keiser, Myro Small, Brianna Dix, Lauren Ahlers, Emelia Goddard, and Kelly Buchanan, building and construction crew members Jacob Stephens, Billy Allman, and Ryan Blevins, and Roads Division welder Travis Timmons.

Upon a motion by Commissioner Bunting, the commissioners unanimously approved by consent agenda item numbers 2-4 and 6-10 as follows: the Findings of Fact and Resolution in Rezoning Case No. 441, rezoning approximately 3.29 acres of land identified on Tax Map 26 as Parcel 445, Lot 1B, from C-2 General Commercial District to R-4 General Residential District; scheduling a public hearing on leasing approximately four feet of front lobby floor space in the Government Center to the State Employees Credit Union of Maryland to install and maintain an Automated Teller Machine; the FY24 Edward J. Byrne Memorial Justice Grant application of \$99,981 to purchase public safety equipment for the STAR Team; a letter supporting the African American Heritage Preservation Program Grant application submitted by St. James AME Church of Snow Hill; the State Homeland Security Program 2023 Sub-Recipient Grant Agreement administered by the Maryland Department of Emergency Management for the Department of Homeland Security awarding Worcester County Emergency Services a total of \$97,308.52 for training and public safety programs within the County; a Local Management Board (LMB) Community Partnership Agreement for grant funds of \$927,531 for FY23 LMB programs and strategies; the purchase of 59 LIFEPAK CR2 Defibrillators and related equipment from Stryker Medical at a cost of \$100,002.40; and scheduling a public hearing on the eight FY24 Maryland Agricultural Land Preservation Foundation applications.

Pursuant to the recommendation of Procurement Officer Nick Rice and upon a motion by Commissioner Abbott, the commissioners voted 4-3, with Commissioners Elder, Mitrecic, and Purnell voting in opposition, to approve the purchase of an armored rescue vehicle from Lenco Armored Vehicles at a cost of \$321,833 for use within the Sheriff's Office. Commissioner Mitrecic stated that this would not be a wise use of taxpayer funds; therefore, he could not support this purchase. Commissioner Bertino disagreed, stating that it would provide the Sheriff's Office with the public safety tools needed to protect the community.

Pursuant to the request of State's Attorney Kris Heiser and upon a motion by Commissioner Elder, the commissioners unanimously agreed to convert on full-time assistant state's attorney (ASA) position to two part-time ASA positions. One of the two positions is to be filled by a retiring ASA. Commissioner Mitrecic stated that it is difficult to fill part-time positions. He further expressed concern that Ms. Heiser will request that the second part-time position be converted to full-time in the future if it cannot be filled.

Pursuant to the recommendation of Development Review and Permitting Director Jennifer Keener and upon a motion by Commissioner Bunting, the commissioners unanimously adopted Resolution No. 23-16 naming a private lane off of South Point Road in Berlin as Bay Point Lane.

Pursuant to the request of Mr. Rice and Housing Program Coordinator Davida Washington and upon a motion by Commissioner Elder, the commissioners unanimously approved the proposed Request for Qualifications documents for housing rehabilitation projects. Mr. Rice explained that the County will no longer solicit bids for individual projects, but will instead establish a pool of qualified contractors that the County will solicit directly for all future housing rehabilitation projects. In response to comments by Commissioner Bertino, Mr. Rice stated that historically the County has been unable to attract the State-required minimum of three bidders for housing rehabilitation projects, and developing a pool of qualified contractors would satisfy the State requirements.

Pursuant to the recommendation of Mr. Rice and upon a motion by Commissioner Purnell, the commissioners unanimously approved the use of American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) funds of \$38,190 for rescue rope and accessory roper rescue equipment (\$19,065) and electric vehicle firefighting equipment (\$19,125) for Berlin EMS and \$75,000 towards the purchase of a replacement ambulance for the Berlin Fire Company.

Pursuant to the recommendation of Mr. Rice and Recreation and Parks Director Kelly Rados and upon a motion by Commissioner Abbott, the commissioners unanimously accepted the low bid of \$355,500 for the Worcester County Recreation Center storage addition project to Delmarva Veteran Builders.

Pursuant to the request of Mr. Rice and Warden Fulton Holland and upon a motion by Commissioner Abbott, the commissioners unanimously agreed to extend the medical services contract with Wellpath through June 30, 2024, which includes additional requested Medical Assisted Treatment program services required by the State, at a cost of \$1,660,862. In response to a question by Commissioner Elder, Warden Holland advised that the new contract includes a seven percent rate increase over the prior year.

Deputy Chief Administrative Officer Candace Savage provided a snapshot of the three Elementary and Secondary School Relief (ESSER) grants totaling approximately \$22.4 million that have been awarded to the Board of Education, with approximately \$9.5 million remaining. She advised that future operating budgets could start with a shortfall of \$2.3 million if the BOE continues two ESSR-funded programs totaling approximately \$1.7 million and the grant-funded pre-k program totaling approximately \$600,000 once these grants expire. Ms. Savage stated that County staff continues to work through the information provided about other grants, and so far they have identified 30 new restricted or grant-funded positions created by the BOE in 2022. She stated that County staff will identify if and how other grants may also impact the operating budget.

In response to a question by Commissioner Abbott, Ms. Savage advised that one of the FY24 reductions proposed by the BOE to balance the budget is the LEADS grant match, which is not mentioned in the FY23 or FY24 budget books, but is included as a budget line item within the salaries category of \$450,000 in documents submitted to County staff following their public information act request. She stated that staff will request clarification on that item. In response to questions by Commissioner Bertino, Chief Administrative Officer Weston Young confirmed that if Maintenance of Effort funding is continued and those grants are added to the BOE's general

fund it could compress funding for teacher salaries, but that would be contingent upon whether the State provides additional funding to assist with those expenses.

With the project to replace Buckingham Elementary School included as one of the four elementary school projects in the State's FY23 budget, the commissioners met with Mr. Young to discuss developing a policy on school construction funding beyond the State's formulated funding. Following some discussion and upon a motion by Commissioner Bunting, the commissioners voted 6-1, with Commissioner Mitrecic voting in opposition, to establish a school construction funding committee to evaluate what level of funding the county would allocate for school construction beyond the state's formulated funding. The committee is to be chaired by Mr. Young and include Procurement Officer Nick Rice, County Attorney Bill Bradshaw, and a representative from the BOE.

Commissioner Bertino directed the committee to report their recommendations to the commissioners no later than their meeting on August 15, 2023.

Commissioner Bertino recognized the contributions of Dr. Ray Hoy, retiring president of Wor-Wic Community College, welcomed incoming President Deb Casey, and thanked Commissioner Purnell who participated in the search committee for the new president.

The commissioners answered questions from the press, after which they adjourned to meet again on July 18, 2023.