

Minutes of the County Commissioners of Worcester County, Maryland

December 19, 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 Bunting, seconded by Commissioner Fiori, 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. Topics discussed and actions taken included the following: rehiring retiring Accounts Payable Specialist Tina Litten on a part-time, temporary contractual basis; hiring Stanyle Coulbourne, Jr. as a plant operator trainee within the Water and Wastewater Division, Jake Evans as a roads worker II within the Roads Division, Bryan Soper as the natural resources administrator within Environmental Programs, and Vicketta King and Cleavon Morris as correctional officer trainees within the County Jail, and certain personnel matters; receiving legal advice from counsel; and performing administrative functions, including discussing potential board appointments.

Following a motion by Commissioner Bunting, seconded by Commissioner Fiori, the commissioners unanimously voted to adjourn their closed session at 9:08 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 of 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 December 5, 2023 meeting as presented.

The commissioners presented a years-of-service commendation to Accounts Payable Specialist Tina Litten who is retiring following 32 years of service to the Treasurer's Office.

The commissioners presented a commendation to the Stephen Decatur High School (SDHS) Seahawks Football Team for winning the 2023 State championship, the team's first state title.

Upon a motion by Commissioner Purnell, the commissioners unanimously approved by consent agenda item numbers 2-5 as follows: applying for the FY24 Home Stretch Grant of up to \$1.1 million from the Office of Statewide Broadband to install broadband at difficult to serve properties (up to \$8,000 per location); accepting the lowest responsive bid of \$41,856 from Peninsula Sealcoating, LLC to renovate the Pocomoke Middle School basketball courts; scheduling a public hearing to consider a request to approve 33.46 acres of Atlantic Coastal Bays growth allocation for the Island Resort Campground; and authorizing Covington Machine & Welding, Inc. to utilize a portion of the West Ocean City Harbor parking lot for up to two days in early January and again in late March or early April to set up a crane, dunk, and assemble barges to repair the Harry W. Kelly Memorial drawbridge.

Pursuant to the recommendation of Procurement Officer Nick Rice and upon a motion by Commissioner Mitrecic, the commissioners unanimously accepted the highest-scoring proposal of \$151,551 from Montgomery & Associates, LLP for the Comprehensive Plan update.

Public Works Director Dallas Baker proposed a Career Ladder, which is a merit-based plan, to help motivated employees within the Water and Wastewater Division advance their careers. Human Resources Director Stacey Norton was also in attendance. This plan entails the use of service records for collections plant operators, maintenance workers and equipment operators, wastewater plant operators, and water plant operators to inform and track the progress of employees with regard to obtaining licensing and education requirements as well as the operation experience, which are required to advance to the next level. Mr. Baker stated that this plan will help leadership identify and reward hard-working individuals who are a real value to the County by providing them with a clear path toward career advancement.

Commissioner Fiori expressed his appreciation to staff for developing this plan, noting that it is sure to boost morale and give employees something worthwhile to work toward. Mr. Baker advised that they would develop and present a similar merit-based succession plan for the Solid Waste Division for the commissioners consideration in the near future.

Following some discussion and upon a motion by Commissioner Abbott, the commissioners unanimously approved the proposed plan.

In follow up to their December 5, 2023 meeting and upon a motion by Commissioner Abbott, the commissioners voted 6-1, with Commissioner Mitrecic voting in opposition, to adopt Resolution No. 23-20 adopting the Worcester County Five-Year Capital Improvement Plan for FY25-FY29.

The commissioners reviewed and discussed various board appointments.

Upon nominations by Commissioner Mitrecic, the commissioners unanimously agreed to reappoint Frank Knight to the Ethics Board and Jake Mitrecic to the Board of Zoning Appeals.

The public hearing for Rezoning Case 443 – which seeks to rezone approximately 27.25 acres of land located on the south side of MD Rt. 589, north of MD Rt. 90 and opposite the North Gate of the Ocean Pines Subdivision from A-1 Agricultural District to 25.25 acres of A-2 Agricultural District and 2.0 acres of C-2 General Commercial District – was cancelled at the request of the applicant.

The commissioners recessed until 10:35 a.m.

The commissioners conducted a public hearing on Emergency Bill 23-08 (County Government – County Commissioners), which was introduced by Commissioners Abbott, Bertino, Bunting, Elder, Fiori, Mitrecic, and Purnell on December 5, 2023. Development Review and Permitting Director Jennifer Keener reviewed the emergency legislation, which revises the commissioner district maps in response to the shifting population and 2% growth identified by the 2020 Census Survey to strive for an optimal population of 7,515 persons in each of the seven districts, retain a majority minority district, maintain current boundaries to the extent possible, and respect the boundaries of new State Legislative Districts 38A and 38C to the extent feasible.

Commissioner Bertino opened the floor to receive public comments.

Kathryn Culbertson of Snow Hill stated that, given the activity occurring between September and November, that the County had not provided constituents with adequate time or information to weigh in on the proposed district revisions. Therefore, she asked the commissioners not to adopt the revised maps at this time.

There being no further public comment, Commissioner Bertino closed the public hearing.

Upon a motion by Commissioner Fiori, the commissioners unanimously adopted Emergency Bill 23-08 (County Government – County Commissioners).

Commissioner Mitrecic stated that he received a troubling phone call last week from a Diakonia volunteer informing him that a few commissioners met with them last week and want them to negotiate with the Town of Ocean City to allow increased flow numbers to West Ocean City as part of the Diakonia addition project. Commissioner Mitrecic stated that Ocean City officials have already granted Diakonia a certain number of equivalent dwelling units (EDUs) to complete this project, and this allocation will not impact West Ocean City EDUs. He concluded that it would be wrong to hold this project hostage in order to negotiate more flow from WOC to the Ocean City Wastewater Treatment Plant, and he suggested the commissioners invite Diakonia officials to their next meeting on January 16 to resolve this matter.

Commissioner Abbott asked everyone to keep the Milburn family in prayer, as their 20-year-old daughter was killed December 16 in a car accident.

The commissioners wished everyone a Merry Christmas and a happy New Year.

Commissioner Bertino issued a reminder that the commissioners would not meet again until January 16, as their first meeting in January has been cancelled.

The commissioners answered questions from the press, after which they adjourned to meet again on January 16, 2024.