

Minutes of the County Commissioners of Worcester County, Maryland

July 21, 2026

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

Following a motion by Commissioner Fiori, seconded by Commissioner Bunting, with Commissioner Purnell momentarily out of the room and Commissioner Bertino absent, 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; hiring Jeffrey Lank and Amari Quevedo as communication specialist trainees within Emergency Services; promoting License Permit Clerk II Savannah Guy to DRP specialist I within Development Review and Permitting; receiving legal advice from counsel; and performing administrative functions, including discussing potential board appointments.

Following a motion by Commissioner Mitrecic, seconded by Commissioner Bunting, the commissioners unanimously voted to adjourn their closed session at 9:41 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 Keegan Brown of Bates United Methodist Church in Snow Hill 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 July 7, 2026 meeting as presented.

The commissioners presented a proclamation recognizing August 1-9, 2026 as Agriculture Appreciation Week to tourism officials and representatives from the farming community.

Commissioner Elder opened the floor to receive public comments.

Stephen Katsanos of South Point discussed smart growth verses sprawl and said that the change proposed in Rezoning Case No. 453 would further impact strained infrastructure on MD Rt. 589, which does not reflect smart growth.

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

Upon a motion by Commissioner Mitrecic, the commissioners unanimously approved by consent agenda item numbers 2-11 as follows: signing the FY25 Emergency Management Performance Grant Sub-Recipient Agreement award of \$68,974.05 and the FY25 State Homeland Security Program (SHSP) Grant Sub-Recipient Agreement award of \$90,460.49; approving lodging expenses of \$1,653.30 for jail staff who attended the Maryland Correctional Administrators Association Training Conference and Awards Banquet; scheduling a public hearing to update the County's Critical Area Maps; approving out-of-state travel for Sheriff's Office personnel to attend the International Association of Chiefs of Police Conference in Orlando, Florida October 23-28; authorizing the purchase of an interview room recording system from Axon Enterprise totaling \$34,508.20 for the Sheriff's Office; signing a lease agreement with Infrastructure Solutions Group totaling \$554,310.85 for a Water & Wastewater Division vacuum truck; signing a letter opposing a proposed 4.95 MW community solar project in an area adjacent to Pocomoke City's designated growth area and denying the requested setback modification; awarding a contract to Data Integrators totaling \$77,918 for tax and utility bill printing and mailing services; approving the development and execution of a Memorandum of Understanding for shared technology and cybersecurity initiatives.

The commissioners met with Development Review and Permitting (DRP) Director Jennifer Keener to review a text amendment application submitted by Attorney Mark Cropper to permit a larger residential accessory structure on a lot or parcel without having a principal structure. Ms. Keener said that the current 500 square foot limitation remains, but a special exception provision would be added to allow up to 1,600 square feet where the lot or parcel is located within 100 feet of the applicant's primary residence. She concluded that the Planning Commission gave a favorable recommendation as revised to include a deed restriction.

Following some discussion, Commissioner Fiori introduced the aforementioned text amendment as a bill entitled Zoning – Accessory structure size and agreed to schedule a public hearing on the bill.

The commissioners met with Ms. Keener to discuss a draft resolution establishing a one-year moratorium on data center and cable landing station permit applications while legislation is drafted to address these uses in the Zoning Code. Commissioners discussed the scope of the proposed moratorium, with Commissioner Mitrecic seeking clarification that it would apply to pending applications. County Attorney Roscoe Leslie confirmed the intent was to pause all data center and cable landing station applications during the moratorium. Commissioner Fiori expressed concern that data centers are not an appropriate use in the County's C-2 zoning district and emphasized the need to rely on the County's planning and legal experts to develop regulations addressing these emerging land uses.

Following some discussion and upon a motion by Commissioner Fiori, the commissioners unanimously adopted Resolution No. 26-18 imposing a moratorium on the establishment of data centers and cable landing stations in Worcester County for twelve months or until such time as the commissioners rescind the resolution.

The commissioners recessed until 10:30 a.m.

The commissioners conducted a public hearing on Rezoning Case No. 453 for an application submitted by Hugh Cropper, IV on behalf of Ocean Pines Plaza Partnership & James B. Vito Revocable Trust, property owners, for an amendment to the Official Zoning Maps to change approximately 14.72 acres of land located on the north side of Racetrack Road in Berlin, and more specifically identified on Tax Map 15, Parcels 130 and 191, in the Third Tax District of Worcester County, Maryland, from R-2 Suburban Residential District to R-3 Multi-family Residential District. County Attorney Roscoe Leslie swore in those individuals who planned to give testimony during the hearing. Development Review and Permitting (DRP) Director Jennifer Keener reviewed the application, which received a favorable recommendation from the County Planning Commission.

Commissioner Elder opened the floor to receive public comment.

Mr. Cropper concurred with the Planning Commission's findings and asked the commissioners to accept the findings and staff report as his testimony as well. He provided an overview of the request and urged the commissioners to approve the rezoning, noting that it would allow the developer to construct 88 townhomes to provide workforce housing, assuring residents could afford to live in the communities where they work. He noted that only 59 single family homes could be developed under the existing zoning, which when factoring in costs like water and sewer would make such a project cost prohibitive.

Commissioner Mitrecic stated that Ryan Homes, the developer, is advertising the proposed 88 townhomes as luxury townhomes, not as affordable housing. Commissioners Bunting, Fiori, and Mitrecic all noted that the additional traffic that would be generated by the addition of 88 townhomes would place additional burdens on already strained infrastructure.

Property owner Mary Claire Consorte urged the commissioners to approve the rezoning, so that her family could sell the property.

Principle Landscape Architect Steve Engel, of Vista Design, Inc. concurred with changes to the character of the neighborhood that support the rezoning. In response to commissioners' comments, he also stated that historically single family homes generate more traffic than townhomes.

In response to questions from Mr. Cropper, Traffic Engineer Joe Caloggero of the Traffic Group agreed that he has access to all of the Traffic Group's files, reviewed them as necessary to render a position, and stated that the impacts to MD Rt. 589 from the proposed development would be minimal during peak hours.

Environmental Consultant Chris McCabe confirmed that no impacts are proposed to the two nontidal wetlands and associated buffers, as shown on the conceptual plan.

Ocean Pines Association President John Latham said that the OPA adamantly opposes the proposed rezoning, noting that water and sewer infrastructure and MD Rt. 589 are already overtaxed, and he asked the commissioners to deny the request.

Brian Mostek, an engineer and Ocean Pines resident, discussed the adverse impacts of the proposed development on infrastructure and asked the commissioners to deny the request. He concluded that the applicant had failed to demonstrate any substantial change in the neighborhood to warrant the proposed rezoning.

Following some discussion, Mr. Cropper advised that his clients are implementing their right to withdraw their request at this time. With the request withdrawn, Commissioner Elder closed the public hearing, and the commissioners took no further action on the matter.

Commissioner Fiori requested an update on the proposed volunteer firefighter property tax credit. Chief Administrative Officer Weston Young advised that, while no significant progress has been made, the County has additional time to move forward after previously missing the implementation window. He added that staff also continues to work on language related to the Length of Service Award Program (LOSAP).

The commissioners answered questions from the press, after which they adjourned to meet again on August 4, 2026.