

**COUNTY COUNCIL OF CECIL COUNTY
WORK SESSION MINUTES
March 8, 2022**

OPEN SESSION – Elk Room

4:30 P.M.

NOTE: The recording and transcription of this meeting are available on the County website at www.ccgov.org/council.

PRESENT: Council Members: Robert Meffley, William Coutz, Al Miller, Donna Culberson and Jackie Gregory; James Massey, Council Manager; Terry Hale, Council Assistant, Charles MacLeod, Council Attorney; members of the administration, and members of the public.

Call to Order

Council President Meffley called the meeting to order at 4:30 pm, and announced that there were five Council Members present, which constitute a quorum.

Approval of Minutes

On a motion made by Councilman Coutz, seconded by Vice President Gregory, the Council moved to approve the minutes of the Council work session of March 1, 2022, as presented. The motion approved unanimously.

2022 Election Update

Karen Perry, Acting Election Director, introduced Kelly Sengstock, Election Board President. Ms. Perry reviewed the deadlines for the 2022 Primary and General Elections, which will be held on June 28 and November 8, respectively. She stated that the deadline for candidates to file for office was extended until March 22, due to recent changes in congressional and legislative redistricting. She stated that early voting in the primary election will be held June 16 to 23; and in the general election on October 27 to November 23. She stated that Cecil County will have two early voting centers, the County Administration Building and the Cecil Arena.

Ms. Sengstock stated that she was very impressed with the election staff and the measures that they do to ensure accurate voter registration and election management.

Council questions and comments ensued. Vice President Gregory clarified that Ms. Perry and the Maryland Association of Election Officials, support allowing election offices to canvass absentee ballots prior to election day so that election returns can be handled more efficiently. Other Council Members questioned Ms. Perry about tracking ballots, voters with different addresses, security of voting machines, deceased voters, voter identification, and ballot collection boxes.

Ms. Perry and Ms. Sengstock stated that more election judges are needed for the primary election.

State Grant Awards to Parks and Recreation

Steve Overbay, Acting Director of Administration, and Clyde Van Dyke, Parks and Recreation Director, explained that the Maryland Department of Natural Resources has awarded a grant to the Department of Parks and Recreation of 1.5M of which \$1.1M to be used to renovate the stadium and field at Elkton High School, which will include a synthetic turf field. They stated that the Parks and Recreation Department also received a grant from DNR of \$400,000 to be used to construct a pickle ball court at Cecil Community Center (160,000) and a sensory playground at Calvert Regional Park (240,000). Mr. Overbay stated that these grants require no matching county funds.

Council questions and comments ensued. Councilman Coutz asked if the Town of Elkton would contribute to the pickle ball court and whether the county could fund two turf fields. Mr. Van Dyke explained that the county is responsible for the fields. Mr. Overbay stated that the county will seek additional funds to provide a turf field at Rising Sun High School. Council Members praised the Parks and Recreation Department for their superior care of the sports fields and thanked them for supporting Brantwood Park.

State Legislative Update

Vice President Gregory, MACo legislative committee representative, stated that there was no MACo meeting and that there is no new legislation introduced this week.

Vice President Gregory led discussion of HB 1328 Counties and Municipalities – Water Transfer Fee- Authorization. She stated that MACo supported this legislation, but it is likely that this bill will not be acted upon this year and additional amendments are expected. She stated that the legislature has several recreational cannabis use bills that are being considered. There is likely to be a referendum to make access to abortion a constitutional right.

Vice President Gregory led discussion on HB 1239 Environment – Plastic and Glass Products – Postconsumer Recycled Content Program, which MACo supports. An amendment was proposed to allow counties to go farther in restricting use of plastic bags. She recommended opposition because of being a state mandate. The Council took no action.

She updated the Council on HB 275/SB 273 Environmental – PFAS Chemicals – Prohibitions and Requirements, which had additional amendments that local business favored. The Council took no action.

Charter Amendments

The Council reviewed the proposed charter amendments that have not been finalized.

An alternative to the board of estimates, the Council reviewed a proposal to require all purchases over \$100,000 to require Council approval. Charles MacLeod, Council Attorney, was asked to review the proposal. He explained that this proposes a degree of Council oversight and sets a threshold for considering purchases. Lawrence Scott, County Attorney, was opposed

to this proposal and cited that it could create havoc and result in litigation with bidders. He stated that he would prefer the board of estimates original proposal.

Councilwoman Culberson stated that there were twelve transactions in the last month above \$100,000 that included several routine insurance expenses. She stated that she would prefer the Council to review, not approve purchases. She also stated that the Council approved the budget and questioned why the Council needs to approve of individual purchases. She also stated that the county's purchasing process is very sophisticated. She also stated that a Charter Review Committee was required in 2022 to review the entire charter for possible amendments.

Vice President Gregory suggested that Council oversight could be proposed as a Code amendment, rather than a Charter Amendment.

Mr. MacLeod stated that the Council has expressed concerns for transparency as well as previous real estate transactions that were done without Council knowledge. He stated that the Council seemed more concerned about the implementation of the budget and how the funds are being spent. He also stated that any Code changes were subject to Executive veto. He further stated that if the administration has the majority on the board of estimates, there would essentially be no change in control of purchases and no delay.

Councilman Coutz stated that he supports the proposal for the board of estimates that would give transparency and does not get involved in the purchasing process.

Council President Meffley asked to postpone further discussion until the next work session and asked Council Members to send their ideas and suggestions to the Council Manager.

Council President Meffley asked Mr. MacLeod to review the proposed charter amendment on the ethics commission. Mr. MacLeod stated that Mr. Scott was correct that the responsibilities of the ethics commission should be under the County Attorney's purview. He stated that the County Attorney is responsible for filing documents with the State Ethics Commission as well as assisting the Ethics Commission. He stated that the charter amendment can restate that the County Attorney will assist the Commission in its duties and allow the Commission to request independent legal counsel if the County Attorney has a conflict.

Vice President Gregory suggested that nominees by the Executive should be approved by the Council and vice versa.

Council President Meffley polled Council Members of their support or opposition to this charter amendment. Council Members supported the proposal unanimously.

Council Manager Report

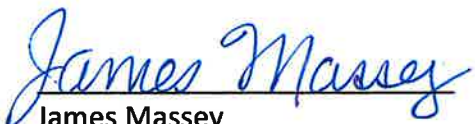
Due to time, the Council Manager Report was suspended.

Council Member Items

Due to time, the Council Member items were suspended.

Adjournment

Council President Meffley adjourned the session at 6:26 pm.


James Massey
Council Manager

Approved:

Jackie Gregory, Council Vice President