

**COUNTY COUNCIL OF CECIL COUNTY
WORK SESSION MINUTES**

MARCH 25, 2025

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 (arriving at 4:52 p.m.), Rebecca Hamilton, Al Miller, Donna Culberson and Dawn Branch; L. Michelle Henson, Council Manager; Christine Palmer, Council Assistant, members of County Administration and members of the public.

Call to Order

President Miller 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 Councilwoman Culberson, seconded by Councilwoman Hamilton the Council moved to approve the minutes of the Council work session of March 18, 2025, as presented. The motion passed unanimously.

Presentations

1. Paris Foundation Update – Mike Brandon

Mr. Paul Palmer, Bay Country Contractors, stated Bay Country serves as the Construction Manager for the Paris Foundation building. He noted that the goal will be to have framing complete and the structure under roof in approximately 2 months, adding that contractors are providing services at greatly reduced prices as well as donation of materials, such as windows and doors.

President Miller questioned the timeframe for completion of the building. Mr. Palmer stated the building can be finished in approximately 6 months if no funding issues arise, adding that Mr. Imperatrice plans to provide a walk-through of the facility to provide a view of the progress.

Councilwoman Culberson queried the project's funding status. Mr. Brandon stated the Paris Foundation is preparing submittal of the final disbursement of \$330,400 from the Upper Shore Regional Council, adding that approximately \$82,000 is in the building fund account and \$225,000 in pledges from vendors is in the general fund. He added that the Paris Foundation will likely require an additional \$1 million by the time the project is completed.

Councilwoman Branch stated she has been associated with the Paris Foundation through the Judy Center and expressed her appreciation to the volunteers and contractors who are assisting with the project.

Councilwoman Hamilton questioned if the \$1 million in additional funds mentioned by Mr. Brandon is needed for the interior of the building. Mr. Palmer answered in the affirmative.

President Miller expressed appreciation for volunteers who come together and bring a project to completion.

2. Finance – 2nd Quarter Fiscal Report for FY25

Finance Deputy Director Andrew Ondish noted that the 2nd Quarter Fiscal Report for FY25 was included in the Council meeting packet, stating that the report provides the County's financial position as of December 31, 2024. He stated Finance is working with the MUNIS system to obtain up to date information as well as improved efficiency.

Deputy Director Ondish stated the reports indicate that Real Property and Personal Property Tax revenues are favorable over the next 3 months adding that up to 50% of revenue is collected during April, May and June.

Councilwoman Culberson questioned the 275% increase in Contributions. Deputy Director Ondish stated the percentage reflected contributions from entities for various projects, noting a recent \$10,000 donation from W.L. Gore to the Department of Parks & Recreation.

Deputy Director Ondish noted that investment earnings are in line with expected returns.

Deputy Director Ondish noted that expenditures are trending at about 50% of budget. He added that Board of Education expenses will increase toward the 4th quarter, as projects proceed over summer.

Councilwoman Culberson questioned the \$600,000 negative balance for the Board of Elections.

Deputy Director Ondish stated the Board of Elections is actually at 43% of budget, adding that the \$600,000 negative balance was due to elections held in 2024. Councilwoman Hamilton questioned if municipalities utilized the Board of Elections. Deputy Director Ondish stated the Board of Elections provides various levels of support to municipalities.

President Miller questioned debt service interest. Deputy Director Ondish stated that bond-related interest is amortized and will reduce when the associated bonds are satisfied.

Councilwoman Hamilton questioned why Cecil College is at 71% of the FY25 Budget. Deputy Director Ondish stated the allocation will diminish as the school year winds down.

Deputy Director Ondish salary expenses decreased due to attrition and staffing changes in Administration.

Councilwoman Hamilton queried if the Discount line reflected the previous tax rebate. Deputy Director Ondish stated the \$10,231,274 was the actual amount that had been applied, adding that this amount was budgeted by the previous Administration.

Councilwoman Culberson questioned the activity listed in Transfers and Intergovernment Fund. Deputy Director Ondish stated the activity reflected transfer of funds, ie. Video Grant Fund revenue.

Deputy Director Ondish stated that all IT related budget items will be included in the IT Department Budget. He stated the purpose of this was to increase accuracy. Councilwoman Culberson noted that IT Department budget items will increase while IT budgets for individual department budgets will decrease. Deputy Director Ondish affirmed her statement.

Deputy Director Ondish stated the Finance Department is awaiting data regarding pension information for the Cecil County Public Schools Budget, noting that the State of Maryland may pass pension costs of potentially \$500,000 to \$1.5 million in order to balance its budget.

Deputy Director Ondish stated the proposed FY2026 Budget will be presented on April 1, 2025.

Deputy Director Ondish stated that income tax revenue is tracking at the expected rate of 50%.

Deputy Director Ondish stated the Enterprise Zone credits have continually benefited Cecil County.

Councilwoman Culberson stated her understanding that Gov. Moore will maintain the Enterprise Zone designation for Cecil County.

Councilwoman Hamilton questioned if ebbs and flows of income tax is related to the State of Maryland's processes. Deputy Director Ondish stated that the State of Maryland will not release income tax payments until the filer's return is reconciled.

Deputy Director Ondish stated that Video Lottery Terminal (VLT) revenue funds continue are on their expected track as well as landfill and wastewater revenue. Councilwoman Culberson questioned the negative \$342,383 under professional and related services in the Landfill Fund. Deputy Director Ondish stated this negative amount is likely related to timing of payments associated with the Department of Public Works.

Councilwoman Hamilton questioned if professional and related services expenses relate to contracted services. Deputy Director Ondish answered in the positive.

Deputy Director Ondish advised that the current uncertainty in Federal funding cuts may impact grant funds for departments such as Community Services.

Vice President Meffley questioned if Landfill Fund User Fees was specific to commercial haulers.

Deputy Director Ondish stated the User Fees included haulers and private users.

Deputy Director Ondish provided a Power Point overview of the General Fund, stating the presentation provided audited expenditures and adjustments for FY 2024 and FY 2025. He stated the current Fund Balance is approximately \$31 million.

Councilwoman Branch questioned if State funds were received for the Middle School project. Mr. Ondish stated the County will receive \$7 million per year from the State of Maryland. Councilwoman Culberson questioned if the referenced funds had been allocated. Deputy Director Ondish answered in the affirmative.

Councilwoman Hamilton noted that funds associated with the Route 40 Revitalization and Ag Preservation programs had not yet been utilized. Deputy Director Ondish answered in the affirmative.

Deputy Director Ondish stated that the Fund Balance will be presented at the end of June.

Vice President Meffley queried funds associated with the Upper Shore Regional Council, stating a portion of the funds were used for the Paris Foundation and the Farm Museum. He added that the balance was to be used for a study regarding upgrades to Belvidere Road. Deputy Director Ondish stated he will follow up regarding the status.

State Legislative Update

President Miller stated he received an email notice that the State is anticipated to increase "tech" fees from 2.5% to 3%.

Council Member Items

Councilwoman Branch noted that March 25th is Maryland Day, which commemorates the arrival of first Europeans in 1634.

Councilwoman Branch congratulated the Maryland Terrapins Basketball team for attaining "Sweet 16" status.

Councilwoman Branch stated that she received notice that Councilwoman Culberson filed an Ethics issue, stating Councilwoman Culberson expressed concern that a conflict of interest exists if

Councilwoman Branch votes on the Cecil County Board of Education Budget while being an employee of the Board of Education. Councilwoman Branch stated that the Cecil County Charter was amended via Bill No. 2021-01 after voters approved the Charter Amendment on November 2, 2020. Councilwoman Branch stated that Cecil County Public Schools exists as a local education agency of the Maryland State Department of Education and is not a part of Cecil County Government. She added that County Council does not have the authority to hire, fire or set salaries associated with Cecil County Public Schools. Councilwoman Branch stated she will provide an update upon receipt of the Ethics Commission's findings. Vice President Meffley stated that he drafted Bill No. 2021-01 with the intent to provide the opportunity for professionals to serve on Council.

Councilman Meffley stated he attended the opening of Cecilton Fitness on March 22, 2025 and also participated in Daffodil Day. He stated volunteers made 885 bouquets for delivery to patients. Councilman Meffley noted that he attended the 93rd annual Farm Bureau Banquet. Councilman Meffley stated the Rotary Club made 15 donations to local non-profits, including the Library, Fishing Rodeo, Voices of Hope, and MOV, a local Veterans organization that provides musical instruments and lessons for veterans. Councilman Meffley stated he and County Administration met with the Maryland Department of the Environment (MDE) about 2 ½ weeks ago regarding permitting for sanitation and water.

Councilwoman Hamilton stated the County Choral Society will perform its annual Spring Concert at Nottingham Presbyterian Church on April 5, 2025 and at Immaculate Conception on April 6, 2025. Councilwoman Hamilton stated she attended the 93rd Annual Farm Bureau Banquet, adding that she sat with the family that owns Wrights Deli and the Helen Edith Farm. She stated the importance of supporting local businesses and local farms.

Councilwoman Culberson stated she advised Councilwoman Branch prior to filing the Ethics inquiry, adding that she does not want Councilwoman Branch removed from Council. Councilwoman Culberson stated she requested an opinion of the Ethics Commission if a Council member who is an employee of Cecil County Public Schools should be voting on monthly budget amendments or for the budget overall. She stated that she was not filing a complaint against Councilwoman Branch, adding that it was a request for a review by the Ethics Commission. Councilwoman Culberson noted the weekly Intel report that consisted of 238 calls, 8 of which were mental health-related; 47 domestic calls, which was the highest in 12 months, adding that 27 of those calls were physical; and 9 overdose calls, 1 of which resulted in a fatality.

President Miller stated the Farm Bureau Annual Banquet began many years ago, beginning with recognition of an individual farmer, then family farms and currently honoring outstanding farm operations. He stated the recent recipients are Tom and Donna Sue Crowl of Port Deposit. He stated Donna Sue's parents farmed the property for many years, adding that Donna Sue's father Fitch was a gentleman who was eager to assist anyone at any time. President Miller stated the Rising Sun Little League Parade is scheduled for April 5, 2025.

Adjournment

Councilwoman Branch made a motion to adjourn, which was seconded by Councilwoman Culberson. President Miller adjourned the work session at 5:56 pm.

Next County Council Work Session – June 3, 2025

A Council Budget Meeting is scheduled for Tuesday, April 1, 2025 at 4:30 pm in the Elk Room of the County Administrative Building, 200 Chesapeake Boulevard, Elkton, Maryland 21921. The session will be livestreamed on the County Council's webpage at www.ccgov.org/council.

Public Hearing on FY 2026 County Budget is scheduled for Thursday, May 22, 2025 in the Elk Room of the County Administrative Building, 200 Chesapeake Boulevard, Elkton, Maryland 21921.

Approved:



Al Miller
Council President



L. Michelle Henson
Council Manager