

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

January 28, 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, Al Miller, Donna Culberson and Dawn Branch; David Culver, Council Manager; Christine Palmer, Council Assistant, members of the 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 four Council Members present and one absent, which constitute a quorum.

Approval of Minutes

On a motion made by Councilwoman Culberson, seconded by Councilwoman Branch, the Council moved to approve the minutes of the Council work session of January 21, 2025, as presented. The motion passed 4 – 0 with 1 absent.

Presentation

- a. Dr. Jeff Lawson, Superintendent of Cecil County Public Schools
 1. State Legislative and Blueprint Update

Dr. Lawson gave the opening introduction of his staff that will review the Blueprint program goals and challenges and give an update on potential changes to the Blueprint program. Dr. Jenni Hammer noted that Pillar 1 – Early Childhood Education included the expansion of Pre-K programs, both public and private, as well as expansion of programs at the Judy Center. She also noted the challenges such as the limited number of qualified early education teachers, funding, space and resources. Councilwoman Culberson inquired on the limited number of private providers and Dr. Lawson and Dr. Hammer noted that accreditation is needed to provide this service and private providers are not always able to be competitive with the pay and benefits that the BOE offers. President Miller inquired if children in the Pre-K programs perform better once they enter kindergarten and Dr. Hammer noted they are better prepared for kindergarten. Vice President Meffley also noted the MRDC offer some programs for Pre-K.

Dr. Joe Buckley noted that Pillar Two – High Quality and Diverse Teachers and Leaders promotes increasing teacher salaries, creating a career ladder and raises expectations for teachers. He noted the challenges included finding certified teachers, funding and class sizes. He also noted that Cecil County is in the top eight counties for teacher retention. Councilwoman Culberson inquired about the vacancy rate, non-certified teachers who are on contracts, the salary they receive and recruitment and Dr. Lawson noted that they only receive one thousand dollars less on contract and that Cecil County does not have an issue with hiring of teachers, it is usually a timing and budget issue. Councilwoman Culberson inquired if they could hire more classroom aides and Dr. Lawson noted they do hire aides based on budget availability, class size and student needs. Councilwoman Culberson inquired on previous budget amendments that moved the salary of full-time teachers and Finance Director Denise Sopa and Dr. Lawson noted that has not occurred other than grant funded positions being reclassified. President Miller inquired on the fund balance being used for teacher salaries and Director Sopa noted that fund balance has been moved to cover the salaries for 72 positions in this year's budget.

Dr. Hammer noted that Pillar Three – College and Career Readiness helps student prepare for college or careers, aligns curriculum to assist the students with a career path and also works on the apprenticeship programs. She noted the challenges are the rising cost of programs, inconsistencies with higher education standards and funding. Councilwoman Branch inquired on the dual enrollment costs and Dr. Hammer noted it is currently 75% school, and 25% college funded and the family should have no costs. Councilwoman Culberson inquired on the student assessments and Dr. Hammer noted it begins in elementary school and the curriculum is modified for the student who may not be meeting the grade level standards. Councilwoman Branch noted the need for funding for special needs and Dr. Lawson noted that is critical and that he does not believe in retaining students in the same grade level.

Dr. Hammer noted that Piller Four – More resources for students, provides for the funding for the concentration of poverty schools, of which Cecil County has 9 this year and will have 11 next year, targets underserved students and support students in learning English and assists students with disabilities. She also noted the challenges with increasing diversity enrollment, costs of services and the 75%-25% spending per pupil that must now go with the pupil. Vice President Meffley inquired how Piller Three and Four are implemented with the School of Technology and Dr. Hammer noted the Susquehanna Workforce mentors and Dr. Lawson noted the apprenticeship programs and the growth of the programs at the School of Technology.

Director Sopa noted that Piller Five - Governance and Accountability requires reporting on the funding for the Blueprint, review of the implementation plan and working with the State on the program. She noted the major challenge is the financial reporting. Dr. Lawson noted that numerous bills are being introduced at the General Assembly on funding changes for Blueprint and specifically discussed HB0504/SB0429 - Excellence in Maryland Public Schools Act and that not only would it delay funding but the funding they would receive would be severely encumbered to a few programs. He noted other pending legislation would also increase the County's share of the pension cost for teachers and would increase class sizes. President Miller thanked everyone for the presentation and the need to make sure the schools are funded is a major priority for the County.

2. Small Cap Projects – Resolution 09-2025

Dr. Lawson introduced Director of Facilities Charles Simpers and Facilities Supervisors Andrew Curran and Brian Rimel. Dr. Lawson noted that the projects being requested will help the schools to begin to catch up on much needed school repairs. Vice President Meffley inquired on the scope of the Elkton Middle School HVAC project and Supervisor Curren noted it is for over 20 offices and required a new chiller and significant steel structural work. Vice President Meffley requested a better description of the projects in the future and Dr. Lawson noted they would provide that detail. Councilwoman Branch noted that the interior of the schools also need attention and Dr. Lawson agreed that they do and that additional funding will be needed to address this need. Vice President Meffley commented that the sidewalk at Cherry Hill were much needed and inquired on the location of the blacktop repairs and Supervisor Rimel noted the numerous schools that will need repairs and noted they are piggybacking off of the Public Works bid for repairs. He also noted that many schools will need a complete repaving in the near future. Councilwoman Branch reviewed the recent small cap budgets and the actual allocation and noted the cuts in funding did create many of these issues. President Miller noted the changes at Rising Sun Elementary parking area are helpful and Supervisor Rimel noted that was done with in house staff as a temporary fix, but a total redesign of the parking area is needed.

b. Monthly Review of County Contracts (section 516)

Acting Finance Director Andrew Ondish reviewed the contracts for December. He noted that four contracts met the Charter threshold. Acting Director Ondish noted that two were for Public Works, one for Facilities and one for Parks and Recreation. For Public Works the contracts included construction of Paramedic 2 and the on call engineering services for oversight at the Public Safety Training Center. For Facilities, the contract was for the HVAC renovations at the Administrative Building and for Parks and Recreation the contract was for equipment repairs at Brantwood Park. Vice President Meffley inquired if a third bay at Paramedic 2 was considered and Acting Director Ondish noted it was, but because of the need to encumber the ARPA funds, it is not possible to change the scope at this point in time. Councilwoman Branch inquired if insurance coverage would cover the costs the equipment at Brantwood Park and Director Ondish noted that since we are self-insured that the County will cover the costs.

Council Manager Report

Council Manager Culver noted the updated Council Manager report is in the packet. He also noted that draft FY26 Budget Schedule has been sent to Council for review.

State Legislative Update

President Miller noted he has discussed the process of bill consideration with other organizations and he will forward a recommended form for Council to use before taking a position a bill. President Miller noted a pending bill on health care and nursing homes visits funding and discussed with Health Department Director Lauren Levy who noted this would be a fiscal impact to the counties. Councilwoman Culberson again reviewed the bills she previously discussed and inquired

if Council would like to take a position since these bills will help protect student safety. President Miller inquired on the hearing dates and Councilwoman Culberson noted she would review and send the information to Council. President Miller noted that he sent the bills that the Farm Bureau is following and noted they were also sent to MACO. President Miller noted that the bills addressed eminent domain and solar siting. President Miller also noted that Senator Hershey did introduce the bill on the FAMLI program being delayed and noted this would help small business.

Council Member Items

Councilwoman Branch noted that the Library Board appointed Rachel Wright as new Director. She also noted that the Board of Education had a FY26 Budget discussion on January 22 and the next meeting to discuss the budget is on February 12. The preliminary BOE budget will be sent to the County Executive on February 28.

Vice President Meffley noted at the last Social Services Meeting that a new group called RITE announced they received an \$85,000 grant to assist children who parent(s) or caretaker is incarcerated. He noted that Cecil County already has several organizations that do this type of program and hopes they can work in collaboration. He also noted that MRDC hired a new director.

Councilwoman Culberson reviewed the intel numbers for the previous week. She noted that two out of the three weeks this year had no overdose deaths and that the intervention programs are working.

President Miller congratulated Rachel Wright on being named the Library Director. He also noted the Chamber State of the County and State of the Council address will be January 30.

Adjournment

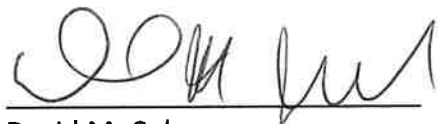
Councilwoman Branch made a motion to adjourn, which was seconded by Councilwoman Culberson. Council President Miller adjourned the work session at 5:46 pm.

The next County Council Work Session will be held on Tuesday, February 4, 2025 at 4:30 pm in the Elk Room of the County Administrative Building. The session will be livestreamed on the County Council's webpage at www.ccgov.org/council.

Approved:



Al Miller
Council President



David M. Culver
Council Manager