

COUNTY COUNCIL OF CECIL COUNTY

WORK SESSION MINUTES

February 10, 2026

OPEN SESSION – Elk Room

4:30 P.M.

NOTE: The recording and transcription of this meeting are available on the County website at www.cecilcountymd.gov

PRESENT: Council Members: Robert Meffley, Rebecca Hamilton, Al Miller, Donna Culberson and Dawn Branch; Council Manager L. Michelle Henson; Council Assistant Christine Palmer; members of the Administration and members of the public.

Call to Order

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

Approval of Minutes

On a motion made by Vice President Meffley, seconded by Councilwoman Branch, the Council moved to approve the minutes of the Council Work Session of February 3, 2026. The motion passed unanimously.

State Legislative Update

Discussion – HB 0815 – County Council and Board of Education Elections – Single Member Districts – Delegate Kevin Hornberger

Delegate Kevin Hornberger, District 35B, joined the Work Session via zoom. He stated that he was approached by Delegate Jeffrie Long, District 27B, sponsor of HB 0565, which would require all counties with at-large voting to adopt in-district voting. Del. Hornberger stated that Cecil County has been exempted from previous discussions regarding in-district voting. He stated that Cecil County, as a Charter Government, has the authority to enact this type of legislation via referendum, adding that this was the reason he sponsored HB 0815. He added that the National Association of Colored People (NAACP) requested that he initiate HB 0815.

Del. Hornberger stated that in-district voting, if approved via referendum, would take effect in 2032, after the 2030 Census.

Councilwoman Branch thanked Del. Hornberger for joining the meeting.

Councilwoman Branch queried why Del. Hornberger did not previously communicate with Council regarding HB 0815. Del. Hornberger stated that in-district voting bills are initiated yearly, adding his purpose for joining the Work Session was to provide details of HB 0815.

President Miller queried if Cecil County's District 36 Delegation was consulted regarding HB 0815. Del. Hornberger answered in the negative, adding that he was not informed previously of Del. Long's sponsorship of HB 0565.

Councilwoman Culberson stated HB 0815 indicated that in-district voting would be scheduled for the November 2026 General Election. She queried Del. Hornberger's statement that in-district voting would become effective in Cecil County in 2032. Del. Hornberger responded that if in-district voting passed at the State level in 2026 then it would be put to referendum in Cecil County in a subsequent election.

Councilwoman Hamilton noted that HB 0815 amended the State Constitution without amending the County's Charter. Del. Hornberger stated that the power of elections is vested at the State level.

Del. Hornberger stated that HB 0815 provides for initiation of in-district voting to be decided by County voters.

Del. Hornberger noted that the Maryland Association of Counties (MACo) has historically opposed bills related to local elections.

President Miller queried Del. Hornberger if he was aware that the County Council and Administration opposed in-district voting. Del. Hornberger stated that the State Legislature is empowered to pass a bill, adding that HB 0815 provides the most effective avenue to keep the decision of in-district voting within Cecil County.

Del. Hornberger opined that Gov. Moore and the House leadership will not succeed at redistricting at the federal level, adding that the next logical conclusion is they will look to establish in-district voting on a state-wide level.

President Miller reiterated that establishing in-district voting on a state-wide level overrides Cecil County's Charter. President Miller thanked Del. Hornberger for joining the meeting, adding his request that the Delegate inform Council prior to dropping a bill.

Councilwoman Hamilton queried if HB 0815 would appear on the Cecil County ballot or as a State-wide initiative. Del. Hornberger stated the question would appear on Cecil County's ballot as an amendment to the State Constitution.

Councilwoman Branch queried if Del. Long spoke with Del. Hornberger prior to dropping HB 0565. Del. Hornberger answered in the negative. Councilwoman Branch queried if Del. Hornberger contacted the NAACP regarding HB 0815. Del. Hornberger stated the NAACP requested a bill supporting in-district voting last year.

President Miller stated Council received 3 letters of opposition from Cecil County Public Schools (CCPS) Board of Education members.

County Executive Adam Streight thanked Del. Hornberger for attending the meeting.

County Executive Streight stated the Del. Hornberger previously stated that he would serve as the eyes and ears of Cecil County and further asked the County to maintain communication.

County Executive Streight expressed concerns that Del. Hornberger had not mentioned HB 0815 when they met in Del. Hornberger's office on February 5th. He added that during the meeting on February 5th, Del. Hornberger did not mention his sponsorship of HB 0887, which impacts Cecil County's authority to disperse funds from the Video Lottery Terminal (VLT) fund.

County Executive Streight noted that Cecil County residents know best how to run Cecil County, adding that the County must maintain its autonomy.

County Executive Streight asked Del. Hornberger to withdraw HB 0815. Del. Hornberger stated he was not willing to pull HB 0815.

County Executive Streight reiterated his concerns regarding lack of communication regarding the bills.

Executive Streight, referring to HB 0887, stated that in 2025, the County distributed \$700,000 in VLT funds to local non-profits including \$100,000 for betting purses at horse races held at Fair Hill. Noting that HB 0887 proposed utilizing \$200,000 of County VLT funds to increase betting purses at horse races held at Fair Hill, Executive Streight reiterated his request for proactive communication between Del. Hornberger, County Administration and Council.

President Miller reiterated his request for direct communication.

Councilwoman Culberson queried the process for citizens to join legislative sessions. Del. Hornberger stated citizens can observe legislative sessions virtually via the Maryland General Assembly's website.

Presentations

Update – Upper Shore Regional Council – Rural Economic Development Fund Grant – Executive Director Susan O’Neill

Upper Shore Regional Council (USRC) Executive Director Susan O’Neill stated that the USRC, comprised of Cecil, Queen Anne’s and Kent Counties, is one of five Regional Councils in Maryland.

Executive Director O’Neill stated that the Hogan Administration created the Rural Economic Development Fund in February 2023, from which \$10 million was distributed to each of the five Regional Councils via the Maryland Department of Commerce (Commerce). She stated that each Regional Council was awarded \$9.2 million and each County within each Regional Council was awarded \$2.9 million after the USRC’s 3% retention.

Councilwoman Hamilton queried if the funds were to be utilized for economic development. Executive Director answered in the affirmative, noting that administration and distribution of the Rural Economic Development Fund was directed by Commerce via grants.

Executive Director O’Neill stated that Commerce established parameters for application, review and subsequent dispersing of funds, adding that individual Counties were given the decision to handle administration of the grants as they wished.

Councilwoman Culberson queried how many County representatives were on each Regional Council. Executive Director O’Neill stated that each Regional Council represents 3 Counties, adding that there are 3 voting members from a Commissioner government and a Charter government has 2 voting members from County Council and 1 vote from the County Executive.

Executive Director O’Neill stated that the Cecil County Farm Museum applied for and was awarded \$150,000 and added that their project was finished, and all paperwork had been submitted.

Executive O’Neill stated that Cecil County applied for and was awarded \$2 million for the Belvidere Road Improvement Project, which was underway, adding that the final draw was dispersed last week, and that most of the paperwork had been submitted. She noted that an unrelated project had not been completed, resulting in an additional allotment of approximately \$21,000 which will be dispersed to the Belvidere Road Improvement Project.

Executive O’Neill stated that the Paris Foundation applied for and was awarded \$750,000, which had been drawn down to approximately \$150,000 for kitchen equipment.

President Miller noted that representatives from Paris Foundation, the Farm Museum and the Department of Public Works were in attendance.

Farm Museum President (FM President) Molly Brumbley stated that the Farm Museum entered into agreements with Bay Country (Contractor) and Cecil County Public Schools (CCPS) in 2024. She stated the purpose of the project was to complete a multi-use, regional agriculture center with a kitchen and bathroom. She stated the facility has not yet received a Certificate of Occupancy due to outstanding issues with the Contractor.

Vice President Meffley stated his notes reflected that the Farm Museum project would provide a work force training facility for students from the School of Technology. He added that this was the qualifying reason for the grant application.

President Miller stated that the Farm Museum is currently being used for Farm Bureau meetings and other ag-related events. FM President Brumbley noted the goal of providing education regarding Cecil County’s agricultural heritage and the economic importance of agriculture.

Discussion ensued regarding the Farm Museum project completion. FM President Brumbley stated she is not in the position to discuss the situation. Farm Museum Attorney Justin Breidenstein stated the museum is working to reach a resolution with the Contractor.

Councilwoman Hamilton queried how the Farm Museum originally heard about the grant funds. FM President Brumbley stated the Farm Museum monitors USRC fund availability.

Councilwoman Hamilton queried if there was an application process. Executive Director O'Neill answered in the affirmative.

Councilwoman Hamilton noted that the intention of the funds was support of economic development. FM President Brumbley stated that the intent, and a component of grant approval, was to provide a kitchen for individuals to process their own products for sale.

Paris Foundation Executive Director Mike Brandon and Board President Bob Imperatrice provided an overview of the Paris Foundation project. Executive Director Brandon stated the grant funds were applied for to support job training and economic development.

Councilwoman Culberson queried if the contractor had been replaced. President Imperatrice stated that Bay Country, the second contractor on the project, had not been replaced.

Councilwoman Culberson queried the timeframe for completion of the project. Executive Director Brandon stated the goal of completion in late spring of this year.

Councilwoman Culberson queried if local contractors were utilized. Board President Imperatrice stated that some contractors were local while others were from outside of the county. Councilwoman Culberson requested a list of contractors. Executive Director Brandon stated that a list of contractors will be provided.

Councilwoman Culberson queried the status of fundraising for the project. Executive Director Brandon stated that fundraising is within 18% of its goal, adding that a \$600,000 donation was received last year. He added that the Paris Foundation will go into the project debt-free.

Councilwoman Culberson requested an overview of the planned uses for the facility. Board President Imperatrice stated the facility will be used for job training in the food industry, adding that the Susquehanna Work Force will provide a part time staff member for employability skills training.

Councilwoman Branch stated she was looking forward to the grand opening.

Councilwoman Hamilton queried how the Paris Foundation learned of the Rural Economic Development Fund Grant. Board President Imperatrice stated that at the time of the initiation of the Rural Economic Development Grant program, he was serving on the Board of the Maryland Rural Development Council (MRDC) with Vice President Meffley and Executive Director O'Neill. He stated the MRDC was interested in the Paris Foundation's concept for the facility, and the Paris Foundation subsequently applied for the grant.

Councilwoman Hamilton requested clarification that the Paris Foundation followed a process to apply for the grant funds. Executive Director O'Neill stated that the Paris Foundation was required to complete and submit their application to Commerce.

Executive Director O'Neill stated that Commerce permitted each County to make its own determination regarding division of their funds. She stated that support from the elected officials was required for the applications from Cecil County, adding that a letter of support was received from then County Executive Hornberger.

Councilwoman Hamilton queried the number of grant applications that were received. Vice President Meffley stated he was serving as Council President at that time and spoke directly with

County Executive Hornberger regarding the applications from the Farm Museum and the Paris Foundation, adding that they discussed utilizing the balance of the funding for the Belvidere Road Project.

Councilwoman Hamilton expressed concern that the Rural Economic Development funds were not publicized to a wider audience. She expressed support for development of a process for public awareness and processing of applications through a designated County department.

Executive Director O'Neill noted that Queen Anne's County utilized its Department of Economic Development for administration of the Rural Economic Development grants, but Kent County did not.

Executive Director O'Neill noted that 2 Cecil County Council members served on the USRC Executive Board during meetings of the USRC.

Councilwoman Hamilton queried which Council members served on the USRC Executive Board during the time that the Rural Economic Development grants were issued. Executive Director O'Neill stated that Vice President Meffley and then Councilwoman Gregory served on the USRC Executive Board during that time.

Councilwoman Hamilton stated her understanding that the Paris Foundation project, based on workforce development, revolved around the kitchen. She queried what activities are related to workforce development outside of the kitchen project. Board President Imperatrice stated the Paris Foundation will offer supplemental classes to those entering the workforce, including interviewing and the process of completion and submission of employment applications.

Board President Imperatrice stated that during the beginning of the Paris Foundation's project, he met with Susquehanna Workforce Executive Director Kim Justice. He stated that Susquehanna Workforce will provide an Employment Coordinator who will be onsite for assistance with computers and employment applications.

Executive Director O'Neill stated that Commerce was clear that Rural Maryland Economic Development funds could be used solely for the commercial kitchen and local hospitality training.

Councilwoman Hamilton queried if the physical building was included in the grant funding. Executive Director O'Neill stated that the portion of the building that includes the kitchen was part of the grant funding application.

Councilwoman Hamilton noted that the remaining \$150,000 was to be applied toward kitchen equipment. Executive Director O'Neill stated that Commerce reviewed the application and approved the grant funds. Board President Imperatrice stated he met with Commerce via zoom during the grant review process.

Councilwoman Culberson queried if grant applicants are required to provide invoices to support a grant request. Executive Director O'Neill stated that submission of a project budget is required as part of the application process.

Executive Director O'Neill stated that a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) is entered with individual grant recipients, adding that the document is reviewed by an outside Attorney prior to execution.

Vice President Meffley stated that invoices are reviewed by the USRC Board prior to release of funds. Executive Director O'Neill added that when an invoice is received from a County, the USRC Board has another County review it.

Councilwoman Hamilton noted that Bay Country was the contractor for the Farm Museum as well as the Paris Foundation project. Executive Director Brandon stated there were no issues with Bay Country.

President Miller noted that the final draw for the Belvidere Road Project was processed on February 5th. Executive Director O'Neill stated that a separate project under the Rural Maryland Economic Development fund had not come to fruition, subsequently approximately \$21,000 in additional funding was allocated to the Belvidere Road Project.

Executive Director O'Neill advised Council that she will provide copies of grant applications for the projects discussed during the meeting.

Department of Public Works Deputy Director Robert Ritter stated that the County received \$1.98 million for the Belvidere Road Project on February 5th, adding that \$21,663 is expected by the end of February. He stated the project contract was awarded to Mumford and Miller Concrete in December 2025 and the Notice to Proceed was issued on February 5th. He stated that the project, which includes improvements to Belvidere Road from the CSX Bridge to Route 40, is due to commence in March and should be completed in December.

Councilwoman Culberson queried if the Belvidere Road Project contractor will utilize Route 40 and I-95 for access to the project. Deputy Director Ritter answered in the affirmative.

Councilwoman Hamilton queried if Belvidere Road Project grant funds were utilized for property acquisition. Deputy Director Ritter answered in the affirmative, stating that the property acquisitions were for rights-of-way to widen Belvidere Road.

Councilwoman Hamilton queried if Bay Country was involved in the Belvidere Road project. Director of Administration Schneckeburger answered in the negative.

Council Manager Report

Council Manager Henson stated the report was included in Council's meeting packet.

Council Member Items

President Miller stated he attended the Taste of Maryland Agriculture Celebration event on February 5th. He commended Robbie Miller, President of the Maryland Ag Education Foundation Board for his speech during the event. President Miller expressed pride and appreciation that Mr. Miller is also his son.

Adjournment

President Miller requested a motion to adjourn the Work Session.

Councilwoman Branch made motion to adjourn the Work Session, which was seconded by Vice President Meffley.

President Miller adjourned the work session at 6:18 pm.

The next County Council Work Session will be held on Tuesday, February 17, 2026 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.cecilcountymd.gov

Approved:



L. Michelle Henson
Council Manager


Al Miller, Council President