

Regular Meeting of County Commissioners
Tuesday April 29, 2025 (Legislative Day)

The regularly scheduled meeting of the County Commissioners was convened hybrid format, in person and virtually, at 9:03 a.m. with the following persons in attendance:

Reuben B. Collins II, Esq., President, County Commissioner
Gilbert O. Bowling, III, County Commissioner
Amanda M. Stewart, Ed.D., County Commissioner
Deborah Hall, Acting County Administrator
Wes Adams, County Attorney
Carol A. DeSoto, Clerk to the Commissioners

**Ralph Patterson, II, M.A., Vice President, County Commissioner was absent and joined session later this day as noted.*

**Thomasina O. Coates, M.S., County Commissioner was absent and joined session later this day as noted.*

Call to Order/Pledge

Commissioner Collins called the meeting to order and began with the Pledge of Allegiance.

Roll Call

A roll call was taken. Commissioners Bowling, Stewart and Collins were present in person.

**Commissioners Coates and Patterson were absent.*

Commissioner Comments

There were no comments.

Approval of the Minutes of April 8, 2025

A motion was made by Commissioner Bowling, seconded by Commissioner Stewart and passed, with Commissioners Bowling, Stewart, and Collins present, voting in favor to approve the minutes of April 8, 2025. **Commissioners Coates and Patterson were not present for the vote.*

Announcement

Next Scheduled Session(s): May 6-7, 2025

Approval Items

Budget Amendment(s) and Budget Transfer(s):

There were no budget amendments or transfers discussed.

**At 9:08 a.m. Commissioner Coates joined session in person.*

FY2026 Annual Transportation Priority Letter to Maryland Department of Transportation (MDOT)

(Mr. Joel Binkley, Planning Supervisor, Mr. Markus Tarjamo, Planner I, and Mr. Jason Groth, Acting Director, Department of Planning and Growth Management)

A motion was made by Commissioner Coates, seconded by Commissioner Stewart and passed, with Commissioners Bowling, Coates, Stewart, and Collins present, voting in favor to approve the Transportation Priority Letter to include added sections as described. **Commissioner Patterson was not present for the vote.*

**TO BE RESCHEDULED* Resolution 2025-() NIKE Property Land Donation Transfer to The Official Piscataway Conoy Tribe of Maryland, Inc.*

FY2026 Budget Work Session: Review of FY2026 Operating Revenue Estimates and First Review of Proposed FY2026 General Fund, and Highlights of County Agencies Funding

Mr. Jacob Dyer, Acting Director, Ms. Samantha Chiriaco, Chief of Budget, and Ms. TaTanya Bowman, Assistant Chief of Budget, Department of Fiscal and Administrative Services; and Video/Comments from the Charles County Board of Education, Charles County Sheriff's Office, Charles County Public Library, College of Southern Maryland, Charles County Election Board, Charles County Circuit Court, Charles County State's Attorney, Charles County Health Department, Charles County Department of Social Services, Charles County Charitable Trust, joined the Commissioners to review the proposed FY2026 General Fund and proposed County agencies funding.

The proposed FY2026 General Fund Budget is five hundred and ninety-four million two hundred and ninety-three thousand three hundred dollars (\$594,293,300.00). This is an increase of about six percent (6%) over last year's budget. The proposed budget includes no property or income tax rate increases. The proposed budget does include increasing the Recordation Tax Rate from five dollars (\$5.00) per five hundred dollars (\$500.00) to seven dollars (\$7.00) per five hundred dollars (\$500.00).

Mr. Wes Adams, County Attorney, Office of the County Attorney for Charles County explained the County Code would need to be amended for this change to allow the Commissioners with more flexibility.

The Commissioners present reached a consensus to have Mr. Adams draft a proposed Bill for amending the Code for the Recordation Tax introduction later this day.

The Commissioners present reached a consensus to reintroduce weekly recycling in the Fiscal Year 2026 Budget.

Closed Session

At 11:55 a.m., a motion was made by Commissioner Bowling, seconded by Commissioner Coates, and passed, with Commissioners Bowling, Coates, Stewart, and Collins present, voting in favor to move into Close Session where all or a portion of this session may be closed pursuant to Section 3-305 (b)(1)(3)(7)(9) of the General Provisions Article of the Annotated Code of Maryland to discuss collective bargaining; receive legal update on a non-compliance issue; receive update on a potential property acquisition and to review vacancies on Boards and Commissions The reason for moving into closed session is to keep legal advice, strategies, negotiations and personnel information confidential.

**Commissioner Patterson was not present for the vote.*

Summary Closed Session Items

At about 12:06 p.m., the Commissioners went into closed session.

3-305(b)(9) Update: Collective Bargaining

Present: Commissioners Bowling, Coates, Stewart, and Collins, Deborah Hall, Wes Adams, Carol DeSoto, Jenifer Ellin, Alexis Blackwell, Megan Donnicks, Jacob Dyer, and Eric Paltell

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Mr. Eric Paltell, Outside Counsel, reviewed recommendations of the collective bargaining team.

The Commissioners present reached a consensus on the recommendations.

3-305(b)(7) Legal Update: State Non-Compliance Matter

Present: Commissioners Bowling, Coates, Stewart, and Collins, Deborah Hall, Wes Adams, Carol DeSoto, Jenifer Ellin, Elizabeth Theobalds, Samantha Knott, Victoria Rickett

Staff provided an update and reviewed steps that have been taken to address this matter with residents involved.

3-305(b)(3)(7) Update on Potential Property Acquisition

Present: Commissioners Bowling, Coates, Stewart, and Collins, Deborah Hall, Wes Adams, Carol DeSoto, Jenifer Ellin, Elizabeth Theobalds, Samantha Knott, Victoria Rickett, Keith Rounfort

Staff provided an update on the appraisal for the property which was lower than the initially negotiated price. Both parties have agreed to amend the Option Contract to reduce the purchase price to reflect the appraised value.

3-305(b)(1)(7) Personnel: Vacancies on Boards and Commissions

Present: Commissioners Bowling, Coates, Stewart, and Collins, Deborah Hall, Wes Adams, Carol DeSoto, and John Adelodun.

Mr. John Adelodun, Assistant Clerk to the Commissioners, reviewed vacancies on the Commissioners' appointed Boards and Commissions.

The Commissioners present reached a consensus on appointments. The official action took place on the April 30, 2025 agenda under Approval Items-Actions on Boards and Commissions.

At 12:55 p.m., a motion was made by Commissioner Stewart, seconded by Commissioner Coates and passed, with Commissioners Bowling, Coates, Stewart, and Collins present, voting in favor to end this closed session. **Commissioner Patterson was not present for the vote.*

At about 2:03 p.m. the Commissioners returned to open session.

Roll Call

A roll call was taken. Commissioners Bowling, Coates, Stewart, and Collins were present in person. Commissioner Patterson was virtual.

Briefing: Update On Magnolia Gardens Project

Mr. Luke Patton, Sr. Real Estate Development Manager/Community Development, Enterprise Community, provided an overview of this affordable housing project, which the Commissioners supported through Payment In Lieu of Taxes (PILOT) program. The complex is a seventy-two (72) unit apartment complex with most units set aside for workforce housing. Sixty-one (61) of the sixty-five (65) workforce housing units have been leased, with forty-two (42) units occupied by Charles County employees which include teachers, police, fire fighters, 911 Operators, and school bus drivers. Magnolia Gardens will have an official ribbon cutting on May 7, 2025.

Briefing: FY2024 Annual Comprehensive Financial Report (ACFR) and FY2024 Single Audit Report

Mr. Jacob Dyer, Acting Director, Mr. William DeAtley, Chief of Accounting, and Ms. Joan Thorp, Assistant Chief of Accounting, Department of Fiscal and Administrative Services; and Mr. Remi Omisore, Principal, CliftonLarsonAllen, LLP., presented the Annual Comprehensive Financial Report and FY2024 Single Audit Report. Mr. Omisore reviewed key legislation on government digital transformation, the Inflation Reduction Act Tax Credits, and summary of the Governmental Accounting Standards Board (GASB) recently issued standards. He reviewed the scope and deliverables of this audit and explained that the reports issued an unmodified opinion (clean-no deficiencies or concerns) on the County's financial statements, the County's expenditures of federal awards, and other required communications.

Briefing: Charles County Services Provided To and From Washington Suburban Sanitary Commission (WSSC)

Mr. James Sizemore, Acting Deputy Director-Utilities, Department of Public Works; Mr. Jacob Dyer, Acting Director, Department of Fiscal and Administrative Services; and Mr. Jason Groth, Director, Department of Planning and Growth Management, briefed commissioners on the services provided to and from the Washington Suburban Sanitary Commission (WSSC). The WSSC has an allocated share of the Mattawoman Wastewater Treatment Plant's capacity and supports yearly maintenance and fixed expenses. They are also responsible for covering capital costs incurred at the plant. Charles County is eligible to purchase up to six point four (6.4) million gallons per day of potable water from the WSSC at a wholesale water rate. The fiscal year 2025 wholesale rate is two dollars and eighty-six cents (\$2.86) per one thousand (1,000) gallons of water. The County also pays a proportional share of infrastructure costs to deliver water to the County.

Discussion: Establishing Term Limits for Charles County Commissioners

Commissioner Collins; Mr. Wes Adams, County Attorney, Office of the County Attorney for Charles County and the Commissioners present, discussed introducing legislation to establish term limits for Charles County Commissioners. Mr. Adams explained the various considerations that could apply to term limit legislation, such as the number of terms, the starting date, and whether it applies to district Commissioners and/or the Commissioner president collectively or separately. He suggested that any Commissioner send thoughts/suggestions to him as he prepares this legislation for review.

The consensus of the Commissioners present was to direct staff to develop draft legislation on term limits and bring back at the June 10, 2025 session.

Briefing and Request to Introduce and Schedule a Public Hearing Proposed Bill 2025-04 Revisions to Recordation Tax

Mr. Wes Adams, County Attorney, Office of the County Attorney for Charles County, reviewed the proposed amendment to change the recordation tax rate from five dollars (\$5.00) per five hundred dollars (\$500.00) to seven dollars (\$7.00) per five hundred dollars (\$500.00).

A motion was made by Commissioner Stewart, seconded by Commissioner Coates and passed, with Commissioners Coates, Stewart, and Collins present, voting in favor to introduce proposed Bill 2025-04 Revisions to the Recordation Tax. **Commissioner Bowling was opposed, and Commissioner Patterson was not present for the vote.* A roll call of the vote was taken: Commissioner Bowling-no;

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Commissioner Coates-yes; Commissioner Stewart-yes; Commissioner Patterson-absent; Commissioner Collins-yes. The motion passed three (3) to one (1).

A motion was made by Commissioner Coates, seconded by Commissioner Stewart and passed, with Commissioners Bowling, Coates, Stewart, and Collins present, voting in favor to schedule the public hearing on Tuesday, May 20, 2024 at 6pm in the Government Building at 200 Baltimore Street, La Plata, MD to be held hybrid, in-person and virtually. **Commissioner Patterson was not present for the vote.*

Charles County Boards and Commissions Annual Update

Briefing: Annual Update from Agricultural Land Preservation Advisory Board

Briefing: Annual Update from Agricultural Reconciliation Committee

Briefing: Annual Update from Animal Matters Hearing Board

Staff and members of the Agricultural Land Preservation Advisory Board, the Agricultural Reconciliation Committee and the Animal Matters Hearing Board provided an overview of their 2024 Annual Reports.

Commissioners' New Business

There was no new business discussed.

**Break 3:28 p.m.-5:02 p.m.*

Roll Call

A roll call was taken. All Commissioners were present in person.

Commissioners' Public Comment Session

Commissioners held an open session to receive public comments on any issue. This agenda item was added for the Commissioners to listen to feedback only, twice each month during their regular meetings.

There were three (3) people who provided comments in person and three (3) people who provided virtual comments. Any written comments received were added to the website for the public to view.

Summary of Public Comments

In Person:

- Speaker spoke on addressing hypocrisy of Commissioners accepting criticism when directed at others but is now deemed unacceptable when aimed at two specific Commissioners, also accused Commissioner Bowling of using Facebook to criticize colleagues and other Democrats; raised concerns about government decisions made with little public input, such as expanding staff, purchasing properties for nine (\$9) million dollars, paying a county administrator on extended leave, and granting a Super Bowl holiday to employees; Speaker is in strong support of term limits.

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- Speaker expressed concerns about water supplies related to the negotiations involving the Town of LaPlata, since the County has little control over La Plata's residential development and the town is nearing its water draw limit, which could restrict future growth; questioned why the negotiations around water allocation are being kept confidential and wants clarity on the goals, parties involved, and the potential impact of these negotiations, including whether Charles County's water allocation might be reduced and whether this involves the WSSC pipeline; also wants transparency and engineering reports; and spoke on the Southern Maryland Rapid Transit (SMRT) project.
- Speaker addressed concerns on the process for updating the 2026 Charles County Comprehensive Plan.

Virtual:

- Speaker expressed voiced strong support for implementing local term limits stating they are essential for creating a dynamic, responsive, and representative government; the speaker rejected arguments against term limits as distractions rooted in resistance to change, emphasizing that the issue is about accountability, responsibility, and transparency and not partisanship.
- Speaker expressed strong support for implementing term limits, emphasizing that the issue is widely supported by the community and is not intended to target any specific individual; addressed concerns that some commissioners have raised about comparisons to state-level officials, arguing that local government must make decisions independently of what happens in Annapolis and offered two (2) proposals for how term limits could take effect: one where previous terms would not count if implemented by the next election, and another where past service would count if the change is delayed until 2028 or later; speaker supports Parks and Recreation funding; wants Commissioners to revisit the idea of creating a formal process for removing elected officials in the future.
- Speaker supports local action on term limits, agreeing it is appropriate for the County to act independently of the state and suggested that term limits for state delegates be addressed separately and to create strong term limits policy, including applying current service toward the limit, to avoid appearing self-serving and to prioritize the county's interests over individual Commissioners.

Commissioner's Responses

Commissioner Patterson:

- Agrees to disagree amicably; agrees that the Comprehensive Plan process needs to be accessible to all residents; looks forward to seeing term limits options and feedback. He also spoke on the events for the Clifford House and the important work the Department of Social Work is doing; the Blue Crabs opening event; and the anniversary celebration Nu Zeta Omega Chapter of Alpha Kappa Alpha Sorority.

Commissioner Coates:

- Thanked speaker for the comments; explained that the County is looking for the best fit related to the water issue for the community; believes the Comprehensive Plan process will be open, like the Subarea plan process and getting the community engaged; supports term limits.

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Commissioner Collins:

- Believes the County is making more effort for the public process to be more participatory and using better tools today compared to the past; he acknowledged the professional media team looking at more ways for public feedback, such as the FY2026 Budget feedback from the public and that the County is engaging the community with a Diversity, Equity and Inclusion (DEI) process. He also stated that the Southern Maryland Rapid Transit (SMRT) project process has been difficult.

Commissioner Bowling:

- Stated that water discussions are ongoing and hears concerns related to this issue; believes the Comprehensive Plan process is an important document and encourages residents to get involved; believes in term limits and supports community involvement and input and should be a policy the community wants not what the Board of Commissioners want, should be broad, follow the process; believes term limits should be at levels of government.

Commissioner Stewart:

- Thanked everyone for their comments and input.

At 5:39 p.m., a motion was made by Commissioner Bowling, seconded by Commissioner Patterson and passed, with all Commissioners present, voting in favor to adjourn.

Carol A. DeSoto, Clerk to the Commissioners

Reuben B. Collins, II, Esq., President