

Regular Meeting of County Commissioners

Tuesday May 6, 2025 (Legislative Day)

The regularly scheduled meeting of the County Commissioners was convened in person 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
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.*

**Amanda M. Stewart, Ed.D., 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, Coates, and Collins were present in person.

**Commissioners Stewart and Patterson were absent.*

***TO BE RESCHEDULED* Recognition: Ronald Brown Service on Heritage Commission Service**

Recognition: Employee Length of Service First Quarter (January-March, 2025) Top Performer, First Quarter (January-March, 2025) and Top Performer of the Year for 2024

The Commissioners recognized employees' years of service for January through March 2025. The Top Performers for the year 2024 were unable to attend. The Top Performer for the first quarter of 2025, was also unable to attend.

Charles County Proclamations for May 2025

2025-30 Foster Care Awareness Month and Resource Parent Appreciation Day

2025-31 National Drug Court Month

2025-32 National Mental Health Awareness Month and Children's Mental Health Awareness Week

2025-33 Older Americans Month

2025-34 National Small Business and Business Appreciation Week

2025-35 Public Service Recognition Week

2025-36 National Public Works Week

2025-37 National Travel and Tourism Week

2025-38 National Correctional Officers Week

2025-39 National Police Week

2025-40 Emergency Medical Services Appreciation Week

2025-41 Emergency Medical Services for Children Day

2025-42 National Bike to Work Day

The Commissioners were joined by staff from the Charles County Circuit Court to receive proclamation 2025-31 National Drug Court Month; staff from the Charles County Department of

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Health to receive proclamation 2025-32 National Mental Health Awareness Month and Children's Mental Health Awareness Week; member of the Area Council on Aging to receive proclamation 2025-33 Older Americans Month; staff from the Department of Economic Development and members of the Economic Development Advisory Board to receive proclamation 2025-34 National Small Business and Business Appreciation Week; staff from the Department of Recreation, Parks, and Tourism and the Department of Economic Development to receive proclamation 2025-37 National Travel and Tourism Week; staff from the Tri-County Council for Southern Maryland (TCCSMD) to receive proclamation 2025-42 National Bike to Work Day; Charles County Correctional Officers to receive proclamation 2025-38 National Correctional Officers Week; members of the La Plata Police Department and the Charles County Sheriff's Office to receive proclamation 2025-39 National Police Week; members of the Department of Emergency Services to receive proclamations 2025-40 Emergency Medical Services Appreciation Week and 2025-41 Emergency Medical Services for Children Day; and staff from Charles County Government to receive proclamation 2025-35 Public Service Recognition Week; and staff from the Department of Public Works to receive proclamation 2025-36 National Public Works Week.

**Break 9:58 a.m. – 10:17 a.m.*

The Commissioners continued the session in a hybrid format.

Roll Call

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

**Commissioner Patterson was absent.*

Commissioner Comments

There were no comments.

Approval of the Minutes of April 29 and April 30, 2025

A motion was made by Commissioner Bowling, seconded by Commissioner Stewart and passed, with Commissioners Bowling, Coates, Stewart, and Collins present, voting in favor to approve the minutes of April 29, 2025. **Commissioner Patterson was not present for the vote.*

A motion was made by Commissioner Bowling, seconded by Commissioner Stewart and passed, with Commissioners Bowling, Coates, Stewart, and Collins present, voting in favor to approve the minutes of April 30, 2025. **Commissioner Patterson was not present for the vote.*

Announcement

Next Scheduled Session(s): May 13-14, 2025

Approval Items

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

There were no budget amendments or transfers discussed.

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Briefing and Request for Approval: VanGO Five Year Transit Development Plan

(Mr. Jeffry Barnett, Chief of Transit, Mr. Robert Romero, Transit System Administrator, and Mr. Jason Groth, Director, Department of Planning and Growth Management; Mr. Dan Dalton and Mr. Jimmy McGuire, KFH Group)

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 approve the VanGo Five (5) Year Transit Plan. *Commissioner Patterson was not present for the vote.

Discuss and Approve: Compensation Commission Charge

(Ms. Danielle Mitchell, Assistant Deputy County Attorney, Office of the County Attorney for Charles County, and Mr. Jacob Dyer, Acting Director, Department of Fiscal and Administrative Services)

A motion was made by Commissioner Bowling, seconded by Commissioner Stewart and passed, with Commissioners Bowling, Coates, Stewart, and Collins present, voting in favor to approve Resolution 2025-06 *Creation of the Charles County Compensation Commission*. *Commissioner Patterson was not present for the vote.

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

(Ms. Jenifer Ellin, Acting Deputy County Administrator, Office of the County Administrator; Ms. Danielle Mitchell, Assistant Deputy County Attorney, Office of the County Attorney for Charles County; Ms. Sarah Guy, Property Acquisition Officer, and Ms. Victoria Rickett, Assistant Property Acquisition Officer, Department of Planning and Growth Management)

*At about 11:11 a.m. Commissioner Patterson joined session virtually.

Ms. Mitchell noted that the Commissioners completed all legal requirements for approving the land donation and noted that any land donation is deeded in “as-is” condition without any representations or warranties by the County. It is also deeded with a reversionary clause, that requires the land to be returned if the transferee ceases to be a nonprofit, stops using the property, or stops using it for native American community.

Mr. Wes Adams, County Attorney, Office of the County Attorney for Charles County, noted that based on the findings of the Ethics Commission, Commissioner Coates is not prohibited from voting on this matter since there is no personal benefit.

A motion was made by Commissioner Coates, seconded by Commissioner Stewart and passed, with Commissioners Coates, Stewart, Patterson and Collins present, voting in favor to approve Resolution 2025-07 *Land Donation to the Official Piscataway Conoy Tribe of Maryland, Inc.* Commissioner Bowling abstained from voting. A roll call of the vote was taken: Commissioner Bowling-abstained; Commissioner Coates-yes; Commissioner Stewart-yes; Commissioner Patterson-yes; Commissioner Collins-yes. The motion passed four (4) to zero (0) with one (1) abstention.

*At about 11:17 a.m. Commissioner Patterson left session

*Break 11:17 a.m. -11:23 a.m.

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Roll Call

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

Bi-Annual Health Department Report

Dr. Dianna Abney, Health Officer, Charles County Department of Health, provided the Bi-Annual Health Department Report. It included an update on the status of measles, pertussis, disease prevention and health promotion, nursing program updates, cancer screenings, dental program, school health, the Women, Infants, and Children (WIC) program, services for developmental disabilities, behavioral health services, virtual Narcan training and the Harm Reduction program, environmental health programs, healthy kids' meal program, and Community Health programs.

Briefing: Mobile Integrated Health (MIH) and Mobile Crisis Team (MCT)

Ms. Michelle Lilly, Director, Dr. Kevin Seaman, Medical Director, and Ms. Jennifer Mott, Registered Nurse, Department of Emergency Services; Dr. Dianna Abney, Health Officer, Charles County Department of Health; Ms. Constance Coggins, and Ms. Tia Deloatch, Sante Group, briefed the Commissioners on the Mobile Integrated Health and Mobile Crisis Team. The Mobile Integrated Health Team was established in 2017 via a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) agreement with the Charles County Department of Health and University of Maryland Charles Regional Medical Center. The team focuses on access to care, connection to community resources, and other emergency services. The Mobile Crisis Team (MCT) provides immediate, community-based face-to-face intervention for individuals experiencing an acute mental health crisis. The team responds to acute crisis situations in St. Mary's and Charles Counties.

The Commissioners directed staff to bring back this discussion with details related to the budget for this from the American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) funds. They also requested a follow up discussion on the Mobile Crisis Team (MCT).

***Rescheduled to the Afternoon* FY2026 Budget Work Session: Review of FY2026 General Fund, Special Revenue Funds and Enterprise Funds**

Closed Session

At 12:53 p.m., a motion was made by Commissioner Bowling, seconded by Commissioner Stewart, 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)(3)(4)(7)(9) of the General Provisions Article of the Annotated Code of Maryland to discuss collective bargaining; receive update on a potential property acquisition; and to discuss potential new business in the County. The reason for moving into closed session is to keep legal advice, strategies, and negotiations confidential. **Commissioner Patterson was not present for the vote.*

Summary Closed Session Items

At about 1:00 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 Donnick, and Jacob Dyer

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Staff reviewed recommendations of the collective bargaining team.

The Commissioners present reached a consensus on the recommendations.

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

Present: Commissioners Bowling, Coates, Stewart, and Collins, Deborah Hall, Wes Adams, Carol DeSoto, Jenifer Ellin, Danielle Mitchell, Sarah Guy, Victoria Rickett

Staff provided an update on the negotiations and new appraisal on the proposed property.

A motion was made by Commissioner Stewart, seconded by Commissioner Bowling and passed, with Commissioners Bowling, Coates, Stewart, and Collins present, voting in favor to accept the new appraisal.

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

3-305(b)(4)(7) Potential Business in the County-Update

Present: Commissioners Bowling, Coates, Stewart, and Collins, Deborah Hall, Wes Adams, Carol DeSoto, Jenifer Ellin, Kelly Robertson-Slagle, Michelle Frye, Mark Thompson, Jason Groth, Martin Harris, and Charles Rice.

Staff provided an update of the proposed business for the County and proposed next steps.

The Commissioners directed staff to bring back more information from outside entities related to this proposal.

At 1:55 p.m., a motion was made by Commissioner Bowling, seconded by Commissioner Stewart 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 2:59 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. Commissioners Patterson was virtual.

Additional Approval Items

Budget Amendment(s) and Budget Transfer(s): (Mr. Jacob Dyer, Acting Director, Department of Fiscal and Administrative)

**At about 3:00 p.m. Commissioner Bowling left session.*

FY2025 Budget Amendment Increase to Purchase Property in Waldorf to Retrofit Building into a Career Emergency medical Services (EMS) Station

A motion was made by Commissioner Coates, seconded by Commissioner Stewart and passed, with Commissioners Coates, Stewart, Patterson and Collins present, voting in favor to approve this FY2025 Budget Amendment increase for two million nine hundred thousand dollars (\$2,900,000.00).

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

**At about 3:02 p.m. Commissioner Bowling returned to session in person.*

***TO BE RESCHEDULED* Briefing: Communications Plan for Recognition of Heritage Months**

Briefing: Charles County Maryland Climate Adaptation Report Card

Ms. Beth Groth, Climate Resilience and Sustainability Officer, Department of Planning and Growth Management; Ms. Stacy Schaefer, Executive Director, Charles County Resilience Authority; and Ms. Katie May Laumann, Associate Director of Research, University of Maryland Center for Environmental Science (UMCES) presented the Maryland Climate Adaptation Report Card for Charles County. The report measures the County's ability to withstand the effects of climate change and guides the County to where investment is needed. Charles County scored an initial grade of B-. The County has strong resilience factors in groundwater management, living shorelines, and flooding, while the need for improvement was noted in resistance to hurricanes, extreme weather, and riverine flooding.

FY2026 Budget Work Session: Review of FY2026 General Fund, Special Revenue Funds and Enterprise Funds

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, reviewed the Proposed General Fund Budget of five hundred and ninety-four million two hundred and ninety-three thousand three hundred dollars (\$594,293,300.00). 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). The proposed FY2026-FY2030 Capital Improvement Program proposed funded projects of five hundred and twenty-three million nine hundred and fifteen thousand one hundred dollars (\$523,915,100.00); the proposed Special Revenue Fund of seventy-eight million three hundred and thirty-five thousand eight hundred and sixty-eight dollars (\$78,335,868.00); and the proposed Enterprise Fund of one hundred and ten million six hundred and five thousand one hundred dollars (\$110,605,100.00). Staff presented the fiscal impact of moving from bi-weekly to weekly recycling. Staff also provided historical information regarding funding for the Sheriff's Office, the Board of Education and County Government.

Discussion: Fire Suppression Task Force

Ms. Michelle Lilly, Director, Department of Emergency Services; Ms. Deborah Hall, Acting County Administrator, Office of the County Administrator; and Mr. Wes Adams, County Attorney, Office of the County Attorney for Charles County joined the Commissioners to discuss Commissioner Collins proposal related to establishing a Fire Suppression Task Force. Commissioner Collins explained that the goal of this Task Force would be to review and make recommendations on how to better coordinate, support, and provide fire services in Charles County. The Task Force would provide recommendations on creating better continuity between paid and volunteer personnel; consolidating resources, planning, and budgets; exploring the feasibility of adding a Fire Chief position; increasing accountability in paid and volunteer Fire/EMS operations; recruitment of volunteer staff; and improving response times. Staff should come back and present to the Commissioners a fair and impartial process for Task Force member selection that will ensure diversity of voices; a plan to ensure Task Force membership includes paid and volunteer Fire/EMS system representatives, subject-matter experts, County residents, and thought leaders; how we can engage a neutral facilitator from a trusted organization such as the Metropolitan Washington Council of Governments (COG), Maryland Association of Counties (MACo), or National Association of Counties (NACo) to guide the Task Force in their work; Task Force member service terms; timeline for member selection; and a deadline for Task Force recommendations to be presented to the Board of County Commissioners.

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**At about 4:13 p.m. Commissioner Patterson joined session in person.*

Commissioner Stewart expressed her thoughts that since the Charter did not pass and that it was a political agenda, she felt that this was a way the Commissioners trying to piece mill what was in the Charter.

Commissioner Bowling was not against the task force but suggested using the nonpolitical Board of Fire and Rescue (BOFR) to review these items. Commissioner Stewart agreed.

Commissioner Coates expressed the need for EMS, Career, and Volunteers to come together since something was broken.

Commissioner Patterson also agreed to give the Board of Fire and Rescue (BOFR) the opportunity since they are the experts in the field, and he sits on that board.

Commissioner Stewart clarified that the BOFR should be given expectation on benchmarks and final recommendations; and have a mutual, professional facilitator and subject matter experts then provide update. Staff member assigned to this BOFR task force can bring back information with Commissioner Patterson.

The Commissioners agreed to have staff bring back a plan on how to move forward with this task force charge to the BOFR in two (2) weeks.

Commissioners' New Business

There was no new business discussed.

**Break 4:42 p.m.- 4:59 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 two (2) 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:

- The speaker urged the Commissioners to implement term limits, reflecting public frustration with career politicians. Also called for greater transparency, recommending that the Fire Task

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Force draft proposals for review by the fire and rescue boards and return with a compromise for the Commissioners to consider.

- The speaker expressed skepticism about proposed term limits, arguing that regular elections already serve that function. They questioned claims of overwhelming public support, citing the Charter referendum's failure as evidence. The speaker warned that retroactive provisions could prevent popular incumbents from running again, particularly in District 3, and predicted public backlash once voters become aware. They also voiced concerns about past development-related votes and suggested some Commissioners may be unfairly targeted by the proposal.
- Speaker voiced strong opposition to the proposed retroactive term limits, stating they undermine voter choice and appear politically motivated. They criticized the lack of public engagement prior to drafting legislation and drew parallels to the failed charter initiative, which also lacked community input. The speaker raised serious concerns about racial bias in county leadership, referencing findings against Commissioner Coates and her role in the termination of the County Administrator. Speaker called for transparency, protections for staff, and the removal of any Commissioner found to have engaged in discriminatory behavior.

Virtual:

- The speaker challenged a previous legal assertion that term limits must be independent for district Commissioners and the Commissioner president, arguing that precedent in Maryland allows for unified term limits and counting current service. Speaker requested data cited at the prior meeting regarding public opinion on term limits. The speaker also expressed concern over the proposed role of the Board of Fire and Rescue in evaluating fire suppression reform, stating the board is designed to manage financial distribution not system oversight or management reform. Speaker warned against allowing a financially entangled board to self-regulate, calling instead for outside expertise and structural reform to ensure transparency, oversight, and improved public services.
- The speaker expressed appreciation for the recent efforts to engage citizens and provide responses during meetings, noting it has helped restore a sense of transparency and trust. Speaker praised Dr. Abney's briefing on equity and raised concerns about the lack of communication regarding potential impacts of changes at the Maryland Airport on the Bryan's Road community, particularly increased noise and possible environmental harm. The speaker emphasized that community members feel excluded from ongoing discussions with agencies like the Maryland Department of the Environment and requested more direct outreach. They recommended sending mailed notices with clear meeting dates, times, and locations to ensure broader public participation, especially for residents who work outside the County.

Commissioner's Responses

Commissioner Stewart:

- Believes the term limit item was in the Charter and needs continued conversation; Staff provides the Commissioners an update, but it is a legal issue at this time; She has expressed concerns about the water since 2013 and believes the need to ensure water for the future.

Commissioner Bowling:

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- Recognizes that term limits is the basic right for voters to decide and cautions to tread lightly when change course. He believes it can be overwritten by citizens but should not move forward with retroactive terms; Believes there is a middle ground for the Fire Suppression issue discussed and the need to find a middle ground; water issue is an important issue.

Commissioner Collins:

- Thanked everyone for their comments; he will support whatever comes out of the Fire Suppression Task Force but believes moving forward with public comments and actual expert beyond our County and to critically discuss overall plan.

Commissioner Coates:

- Has the same sentiments as Commissioner Collins and agrees with collaboration for the volunteers and paid and the input from the BOFR that Commissioner Patterson sits on; She believes the term limits affect four (4) Commissioners; she will not address her strategic fundraising since it is her choice and request to keep her name out of it and allow due process; feels this obsession is a little much.

Commissioner Patterson:

- Agrees that community engagement is important; agrees the need to make sure healthy relate to Maryland Airport; community wants term limits; encouraged people to come out and show up for public hearings. He Spoke about the Special Olympic held at Lackey High School; attending an event at Daves Middle School to discuss Federal Employees concerns; and the Eva Turner Community Day.

At 5:31 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