

**Regular Meeting of County Commissioners**  
**Tuesday July 11, 2023 (Legislative Day)**

The regularly scheduled meeting of the County Commissioners was convened in hybrid format, virtually and in person, at 9:01 a.m. with the following persons in attendance:

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

**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. All Commissioners were present.

**Recognition- Telly Awards**

The Commissioners presented Bronze Telly Awards from the forty fourth (44<sup>th</sup>) Telly Awards to Ms. Alexandria Harris for her piece titled, the Charles County Long Driveway (Cat3) Grant program in the General Government Relations category; and to Ms. Lee Ann Stone for the twentieth (20<sup>th</sup>) anniversary of the La Plata Tornado in the short-form documentary category. The Telly Award is the world's largest honor for video and television across all screens with nearly thirteenth thousand (13,000) entries from across the globe.

**Proclamation(s) Issued for July 2023**

2023-56 National Parks and Recreation Month  
2023-57 National Ice Cream Day

The Commissioners were joined by staff from the Department of Recreation, Parks, and Tourism to receive proclamations 2023-56 National Parks and Recreation Month and 2023-57 National Ice Cream Day.

**Approval of the Minutes of June 27 and June 28, 2023**

A motion was made by Commissioner Patterson, seconded by Commissioner Bowling and passed, with all Commissioners present, voting in favor to approve the minutes of June 27, 2023.

A motion was made by Commissioner Patterson, seconded by Commissioner Bowling and passed, with all Commissioners present, voting in favor to approve the minutes of June 28, 2023.

**Announcement**

Next Scheduled Session(s): July 25-26, 2023

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Approval Items

Budget Amendments and Budget Transfers

(Mr. Jacob Dyer, Chief of Budget, Department of Fiscal and Administrative Services)

FY2023 Budget Amendment Increase #655 Charles County Sheriff's Office Sworn Officer Overtime for Charles County Public Schools

A motion was made by Commissioner Stewart, seconded by Commissioner Bowling and passed, with all Commissioners present, voting in favor to approve FY2023 Budget Amendment Increase #655 for twenty-six thousand one hundred dollars (\$26,100.00).

FY2023 Budget Transfer Request #795 Capital Improvement Projects (CIP) Account for Recreation, Parks, and Tourism (RPT) Equipment and Improvements

A motion was made by Commissioner Stewart, seconded by Commissioner Coates and passed, with all Commissioners present, voting in favor to approve FY2023 Budget Transfer Request #795 for two hundred and seventy-six thousand two hundred dollars (\$276,200.00).

FY2024 Budget Amendment Increase #7 Health Department FY2023 Carryover Hiring for Behavioral Health Staff

A motion was made by Commissioner Coates, seconded by Commissioner Stewart and passed, with all Commissioners present, voting in favor to approve FY2024 Budget Amendment Increase #7 for one hundred and fourteen thousand two hundred dollars (\$114,200.00).

FY2024 Budget Amendment Increase #8 Department of Planning and Growth Management (PGM) Consultant Services permitting Software Build Out

A motion was made by Commissioner Stewart, seconded by Commissioner Coates and passed, with all Commissioners present, voting in favor to approve FY2024 Budget Amendment Increase #8 for one hundred thousand dollars (\$100,000.00).

Letter of Support- Southern Maryland Heritage Grant for Windows on Mount Aventine: Chapman's Point Fishery and Chapman's Landing

(Ms. Sheryl Elliot, Friends of Chapman State Park)

A motion was made by Commissioner Stewart, seconded by Commissioner Coates and passed, with all Commissioners present, voting in favor to approve this letter of support.

Interfaith Commission Logo Request- Community Support Fund

(Rev. Kate Heichler, Chair, and Pastor Michael Wilson, Vice Chair, and Ms. Julie Losh, Liaison, Interfaith Commission)

The Commissioners directed staff to bring back the Community Support Standard Operating Procedure (SOP) and Media Support SOP to be consistent with County branding and logo design and uses and recommendations for consistent policies for all Boards and Commissions.

Letter of Support and Financial Funds: Tri-County Council and Southern Maryland Agricultural Development Commission (SMADC) Grant for Lothian Mills 2

(Mr. Craig Sewell, SSM Marketing & Livestock Specialist, SMADC).

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The Commissioners directed staff to add this approval item to the July 12, 2023 agenda so that staff can reach out to other counties to find out if they are supporting this request.

**Request to have Interfaith Prayer Before Each Board of County Commissioners' Sessions**  
(Commissioner Patterson)

The Commissioners directed Mr. Wes Adams, County Attorney, Office of the County for Charles County, to draft a Standard Operating Procedure (SOP) on how to potentially implement this practice.

**Briefing: Park Master Plans and Financing Options**

Ms. Kelli Beavers, Director, Mr. Sam Drury, Deputy Director, Mr. Tim Drummond, Chief of Parks, Ms. Ashley Chenault, Chief of Tourism, Department of Recreation, Parks, and Tourism; and Dr. John Crompton, Distinguished Professor, Texas A&M University, joined the Commissioners to share information on the Charles County Park Master Plans, benefits, and financing options. They reviewed development timelines, design layouts, and recreational offerings for three parks in Charles County: Popes Creek Waterfront Park, La Plata Farm Park, and Waldorf Park. They are exploring two funding opportunities to pay for future tourism efforts and new parks. The first opportunity is a new, short-term rental tax dedicated to tourism, and the second opportunity is a user fee applied to new development to support the cost of additional parks and park amenities as the county grows.

The Commissioners reached a consensus supporting this plan and reviewing options for future financing.

**Briefing: Healthy Kids Meals Initiative**

Ms. Dyotha Sweat, President, NAACP; and Ms. Danielle Mitchell, Associate County Attorney, Office of the County Attorney for Charles County; Ms. Emily Friedman, Legal Affairs Attorney, Center for Science in the Public Interest; Ms. Laura Hale, Director, American Heart Association State Government Relations; Dr. Yola Hancock, Pediatrician, Maryland American Heart Association Board of Directors; and Dr. Maria Navarro, Superintendent, Charles County Public Schools joined the Commissioners to brief them on a legislative proposal to require a healthy meals option for children at all restaurants located in Charles County. They provided details about what options would be required in a healthy meal, how it could be enforced, and a suggested timeline for implementation. Charles County Department of Health, Charles County Public Schools, the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People, and the American Heart Association shared their support for the proposal.

The Commissioners reached a consensus to have staff research and bring back proposed legislation.

**Discussion: Property Tax Credit for Volunteer Emergency Responders**

Ms. Danielle Mitchell, Associate County Attorney, Office of the County Attorney for Charles County; Ms. Jenifer Ellin, Action Deputy County Administrator, Office of the County Administrator; and Mr. Jacob Dyer, Acting Director, Department of Fiscal and Administrative Services, provided an overview of a draft Bill for a property tax credit for volunteer emergency responders. Ms. Mitchell provided the Commissioners with a background on the authority that took effect on June 1, 2023, giving the

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Commissioners the authority under State Law to establish a tax credit against the property tax imposed on owner occupied residence of certain emergency responders and their surviving spouse. She reviewed potential fiscal impact and other Southern Maryland Jurisdictions' tax credits.

The Commissioners reached a consensus to have Ms. Mitchell prepare draft legislation that would incorporate the property tax credit into Charles County code for July 25, 2023.

**Briefing: Education and Outreach Options-Charter Form of Government**

Ms. Jennifer Harris, Chief of Media Services, Ms. Deborah Hall, Acting County Administrator, Office of the County Administrator; and Ms. Danielle Mitchell, Associate County Attorney, Office of the County Attorney for Charles County, reviewed the current and proposed communications and public outreach for the new Charter Board. Staff is focusing on keeping the public informed and providing education on the process for developing a proposed charter. The Charter Board is receiving public comments and reaching out to ensure that they invite residents to participate in the process and engage them in providing recommendations and feedback. The Commissioners discussed getting proposals to hire a public relations agency to assist with education and outreach on behalf of the Charter Board.

Commissioner Collins acknowledged that the current media efforts for educating the public was more than in 2014. He also felt it was important to look at the feasibility to have an outside marketing group to develop a plan. He did not want to sway the public opinion.

Commissioners Stewart expressed her belief that the Charter Board itself should focus on educating the public during the process and that the Board of County Commissioners should have nothing to do with it.

Commissioner Bowling did not believe that the County should spend taxpayer money hiring a marketing firm. He shared the education flyer created by the Maryland Association of Counties (MACo) that describes the differences between Charter Form of Government and Code Home Rule Government and Commissioner Government. He questioned why they would need to spend money on marketing if, as his colleagues mentioned, that there was an overwhelming support already for Charter Government. He stressed the need for education but felt the MACo piece would help provide that information.

A motion was made by Commissioner Coates, seconded by Commissioner Patterson and passed with Commissioners Coates, Patterson, and Collins present, voting in favor to have staff explore costs to establish an RFP (Request for Proposal) for a marketing/public relations firm to develop a plan to move forward. Commissioners Bowling and Stewart were opposed. A roll call of the vote was taken: Commissioner Bowling-no; Commissioner Coates-yes; Commissioner Stewart-no; Commissioner Patterson-yes; Commissioner Collins- yes. The motion passed three (3) to two (2).

**Bi-Monthly Update: Western Parkway Roadway Improvements**

Mr. Brian Kagarise, Acting Program Manager, and Mr. Martin Harris, Director, Department of Public Works, presented an update to the Commissioners on the status of the Phase Three design efforts for Western Parkway. Staff shared details and next steps in the permitting processes for the various County, State, and Federal jurisdictional permits.

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Commissioner's New Business

There was no new business discussed.

Closed Session

At 12:51 p.m., motion was made by Commissioner Coates, seconded by Commissioner Patterson and passed, with all Commissioners 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)(8) of the General Provisions Article of the Annotated Code of Maryland to discuss one (1) personnel issue; to discuss appointments to Commissioner appointed Boards, Commissions, and Committees; to receive updates on two (2) potential litigation issues; and to discuss potential property acquisition. The reason for moving into closed session is to keep legal negotiations, strategies and personnel information confidential.

Summary Closed Session Items

At 1:17 p.m., the Commissioners went into closed session.

3-305(b)(7)(8) Legal: Update on a Potential Litigation Issue

Present: Commissioners Bowling, Coates, Stewart, Patterson, and Collins, Wes Adams, Deborah Hall, Jenifer Ellin, Carol DeSoto, Martin Harris, Brian Kagarise

Mr. Wes Adams, County Attorney, Office of the County Attorney for Charles County, reviewed the status of this issue to keep the Commissioners informed on the process.

3-305(b)(3)(7) Legal: Potential Land Acquisition

Present: Commissioners Bowling, Coates, Stewart, Patterson, and Collins, Wes Adams, Deborah Hall, Jenifer Ellin, Carol DeSoto, Danielle Mitchell, Jacob Dyer, Judy Michael, and Gina Markovich.

Ms. Jenifer Ellin, Acting Deputy County Administrator, and Ms. Deborah Hall, Acting County Administrator, provided an overview of a potential land acquisition.

A motion was made by Commissioner Stewart, seconded by Commissioner Coates and passed, with all Commissioners present, voting in favor to authorize Commissioner Collins to sign a one hundred and twenty (120) day option contract with the added amendment for Ms. Mitchell to have up to *the specified* amount of an earnest money deposit.

3-305(b)(7)(8) Legal: Update on a Potential Litigation Issue

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

Mr. Wes Adams, County Attorney, Office of the County Attorney for Charles County, provide an update on a potential litigation issue and the proposed response letter.

The consensus of the Commissioners was for Mr. Adams to send the letter as presented.

3-305(b)(1) Personnel: BCC Appointments

Present: Commissioners Bowling, Coates, Stewart, Patterson, and Collins, Wes Adams, Deborah Hall, Carol DeSoto, and Christina Elkins,

Ms. Christina Elkins, Assistant Clerk to the Commissioners, reviewed vacancies on the Animal Matters Hearing Board, the Police Accountability Board, the Commission of Individuals with Disabilities, the Historic Preservation Board, and the Interfaith Commission.

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The Commissioners' reached a consensus on these boards and official action took place on July 12, 2023 under Approval Items- Action on Boards, Commissions, and Committees.

*\*At 1:56 p.m. Commissioner Bowling left session.*

*\*At 2:09 p.m. Ms. Deborah Hall, Acting County Administrator left closed session.*

**3-305(b)(1) Personnel Issue**

Present: Commissioners Coates, Stewart Patterson, and Collins, Wes Adams, Carol DeSoto, and Alexis Blackwell.

Ms. Alexis Blackwell, Director, Department of Human Resources, reviewed a personnel issue and the findings.

At 2:33 p.m., a motion was made by Commissioner Stewart, seconded by Commissioner Coates and passed, with Commissioners Coates, Stewart, Patterson, and Collins present, voting in favor to end this close session. *\*Commissioner Bowling was not present for the vote.*

The Commissioners returned to open session at 5:15 p.m.

**Roll Call**

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

**Public Comments**

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 two (2) citizens who provided comments in person and two (2) citizens who provided comments virtually. Written comments were added to the website for the public to view.

**Commissioners' Comments**

Each of the Commissioners provided remarks and feedback related to the comments received during the Public Comments portion of the agenda.

Commissioner Stewart:

- Explained that the County has a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) related to the Swan Point Public Access and will request a follow up briefing on Swan Point.
- Stated she has not seen any evidence related to the May 18, 2023 press conference with Commissioner Coates related to the Klugh Klux Klan (KKK) nor has she heard anything from the Charles County Sheriff's Office of County Attorney.
- She explained the three (3) minute time limit for comments was a policy to try and make the comment process more equitable.

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- She will have a conversation with State Officials related to the Catch and Release policy since this is a State issue. She felt the Sheriff's office was doing a great job and not their fault about Catch and Release since they are following the laws enacted in Annapolis.

Commissioner Patterson:

- Expressed that he would work with Commissioners Bowling and Stewart related to Swan Point concerns.
- Mentioned that he could speak for Commissioner Coates and the allegations about the KKK.
- Expressed his willingness to meet one on one with resident.
- Respects the Charles County Sheriff's Office and that he has an open door for them to speak with him.

Commissioner Collins:

- Wants to learn more about the public access issue at Swan Point.
- Timing of public comments are to try and be efficient for all public to be heard and the need to have rules in place. Cannot measure how many people will show up each time.
- Charter Government discussion is a good thing and is an opportunity to see citizens involved in the process.
- Everyone is troubled about the KKK allegation. If it has happened, then it is being investigated.

At 5:44 p.m., a motion was made by Commissioner Stewart, seconded by Commissioner Patterson and passed, with Commissioners Stewart, Patterson, and Collins present, voting in favor to adjourn.

*\*Commissioners bowling and Coates were not present for the vote.*

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Carol A. DeSoto, Clerk to the Commissioners

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Reuben B. Collins, II, Esq., President