

**Regular Meeting of County Commissioners**  
**Tuesday October 17, 2023 (Legislative Day)**

The regularly scheduled meeting of the County Commissioners was convened in hybrid format, virtually and in person, at 9:02 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 (*late*)  
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.

**Opening Remarks**

Commissioner Collins read a letter from the Charles County Interfaith Commission8/

**Roll Call**

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

*\*Commissioner Coates was not present.*

**Additional Proclamation(s) Issued for October 2023**

2023-80 Fire Prevention Month

The Commissioners were joined by members from the Charles County Volunteer Fire Organization to receive proclamation 2023-80 Fire Prevention Month.

**Recognition**

The Commissioners recognized the Charles County Xceleration Nation Track Club and Charles County Elite Participation in the Amateur Athletic Union (AAU) Track and Field Junior Olympics.

**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 four (4) residents who provided comments in person and no virtual comments. Written comments were added to the website for the public to view.

Summary of Public Comments:

- Need for a performing arts center.
- Let the Charter Board do its job without Commissioner input and improper decorum.
- Opposed to additional road opening in Stoneleigh. The private road- Edonton Place has no feedback from residents.

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- Opposed to cancelling Public Comments on October 31, 2023; Notice that Commissioner Coates is not in attendance again; Water Issue outlined in the New York Times article; Commissioner Collins view on affordable housing by building more homes.

**Commissioners' Comments**

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

Commissioner Patterson:

- Agrees with the need for a performing arts center.
- Agrees that Charter Board should do their work first before conversations.
- Will listen to presentation on Edonton Place later this day but is also willing to meet with resident one on one.
- Public Comment Sessions are being held in open session to hear from residents.

Commissioner Stewart:

- Agrees with performing arts center and should be prepared to discuss during the budget sessions.
- Charter discussions in public meetings should include all Commissioners since three (3) want a Charter and two (2) do not.
- She has a clear understanding of the issues surrounding the Road issue.
- Looks forward to future public comments.

Commissioner Bowling:

- Will follow up with the Towns of La Plata and Indian Head related to performing arts center and grant money.
- He has concerns related to Stoneleigh Court about public outreach; needs public opinion.
- He didn't vote for creating a Charter Board. Once the Charter Board submits the Charter to the Commissioners there is no opportunity to change it. Feels there was no public input on the decision to include a County Executive. This should not be political, need to respect to disagree.
- Staff is on top of the water issue with a plan, but it will be an expensive process. Feels we are prepared with a plan but not budget wise.
- Can't speak for Commissioner Coates not being here, but personally feels it is important for him to represent his district.

Commissioner Collins:

- Thanked everyone for their comments

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- Agrees with the performing arts center. Discussed the establishment of an Arts District created with the Charles County Arts Alliance in the St. Charles Area. The document should still be applicable and needs to be revisited. The Board of Commissioners are interested in it.
- He appreciates comments related to Stoneleigh Court. Appreciates hearing from the public directly.
- Comments on his view on affordable housing is a new twist. He would be willing to meet to discuss his vision and strategy but feels he has been clear that he has been an advocate for affordable housing for current residents not building additional housing.

**Approval of the Minutes of October 3 and October 12, 2023**

A motion was made by Commissioner Bowling, seconded by Commissioner Patterson and passed, with Commissioners Bowling, Stewart, Patterson, and Collins present, voting in favor to approve the minutes of October 3 , 2023. *\*Commissioner Coates was not present for the vote.*

A motion was made by Commissioner Bowling, seconded by Commissioner Patterson and passed, with Commissioners Bowling, Stewart, Patterson, and Collins present, voting in favor to approve the minutes of October 12 , 2023. *\*Commissioner Coates was not present for the vote.*

**Announcement**

Next Scheduled Session(s): October 24-25, 2023.

**Approval Items**

Budget Amendments and Budget Transfers

There were none.

**Interfaith Commission- Community Support Fund**

(Rev. Kate Heichler, Chair, and Pastor Michael Wilson, Vice Chair, Interfaith Commission)

A motion was made by Commissioner Bowling, seconded by Commissioner Patterson and passed, with Commissioners Bowling, Stewart, Patterson, and Collins present, voting in favor to approve the Interfaith Commission's request for Community Support Funds *of up to nine hundred dollars (\$900.00)*. *\*Commissioner Coates was not present for the vote.*

**Update: American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA)**

(Ms. Jenifer Ellin, Acting Deputy County Administrator, Office of the County Administrator; Mr. Jacob Dyer, Acting Director, and Ms. Debra Posey, Sr. Budget Analyst, Department of Fiscal and Administrative Services; Ms. Rita Wood, Chief of Housing Authority and Ms. Dina Barclay, Director, Department of Community Services; Mr. Stephen Staples, Chief of County Roads, and Mr. Martin Harris, Director, Department of Public Works)

Ms. Ellin reviewed the proposed uses of the two million dollars (\$2,000,000.00) ARPA funds for the Housing Assistance Rental Program (HARP); Settlement Expense Loan Program Plus (SELP+); and Surface Transportation Project.

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Commissioner Collins requested considering the affordable housing project at Southern Crossings. He wanted staff to look at the feasibility as a funding mechanism in addition to the road improvements discussed to see if there is a way to do both.

*\*At about 10:09 a.m. Commissioner Coates joined the session.*

Commissioner Stewart requested staff to not restrict people but focus advertisement for the SELP+ program to other public servants. She also requested that Commissioner Collins have a separate agenda item to discuss his request related to Southern Crossings.

A motion was made by Commissioner Bowling, seconded by Commissioner Patterson and passed with all Commissioners present, voting in favor to approve allocating from the ARPA funds, three hundred and sixty thousand dollars (\$360,000.00) to the HARP program; one hundred and forty thousand dollars (\$140,000.00) to the SELP+ program; and one million five hundred thousand dollars (\$1,500,000.00) to the Surface Transportation Project to be divided as phase one and phase two equally with seven hundred and fifty thousand dollars (\$750,000.00) each. Phase One would begin immediately.

**Educational Post Card Mailing for Charter Board Support**

(Ms. Jennifer Harris, Chief of Media Services, and Ms. Ms. Doria Fleisher, Community Engagement Coordinator, and Ms. Tina Kozloski, Media Specialist, Office of the County Administrator, reviewed the two (2) post card mailing options to the Commissioners.)

A motion was made by Commissioner Patterson, seconded by Commissioner Coates and passed with all Commissioners present, voting in favor to approve option two (2), the larger mailer with the added amendment to add additional language indicating that items numbered three (3), four (4), and five (5) is for both Code Home Rule and Charter Government (see items listed below)

3. *District and at-large election of Council members, and Council meeting requirements*
4. *Process for the approval of the budget and local laws*
5. *Coordination of public safety functions*

**Briefing and Request to Introduce: Proposed Bill 2023-13 Property Tax Credit for Disabled Law Enforcement and Rescue Workers and Proposed Bill 2023-14 Property Tax Credit for Public Safety Officers**

Ms. Danielle Mitchell, Assistant Deputy County Attorney, Office of the County Attorney for Charles County; Mr. Jacob Dyer, Acting Director, and Ms. TaTanya Bowman, Assistant Chief of Budget, Department of Fiscal and Administrative Services, reviewed proposed Bill on the Property Tax Credit for Disabled Law Enforcement and Rescue Workers and proposed Bill for Property Tax Credit for Public Safety Officers.

Commissioner Stewart wanted to include forfeiture language for any fraudulent or criminal activity, (which would require a criminal background check) and wanted it for non-volunteers to help retain employees. She originally suggested adding language for surviving spouses if it was their primary resident. Ms. Mitchell explained that surviving spouses cannot be added to this legislation.

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Commissioner Bowling wanted to include volunteers and three thousand five hundred dollars (\$3500.00) across the board. Commissioner Stewart suggested one thousand dollars (\$1,000.00) for volunteers and one thousand seven hundred dollars (\$1,700.00) for non-volunteers.

Commissioner Bowling suggested a letter of good standing from the department in lieu of a criminal background check. Later in the meeting, under New Business, Commissioner Stewart concurred.

Commissioner Coates requested a comprehensive approach at looking at the Department of Emergency Services and volunteers and seeing all of the fiscal numbers.

The Commissioners reached a consensus to bring these back during the budget process.

**Briefing: State Budget Appropriations for Charles County**

Ms. Danielle Mitchell, Associate County Attorney, Office of the County Attorney for Charles County; Ms. Jenifer Ellin, Acting Deputy County Administrator, Office of the County Administrator; Mr. Jacob Dyer, Acting Director, Department of Fiscal and Administrative Services, reviewed the State budget appropriations for Charles County under Senate Bill 291, which is also known as the Maryland Bond Bill. An update on the following areas included in this grant were provided: Behavioral Health Crisis Mobile Response Unit, Charles County Multicultural Recreational and Amphitheatre Facilities, Hospice of Charles County, Melwood Horticultural Training Facilities, Regency Furniture Stadium, and the Waldorf Urban Park and Amphitheater.

The Commissioners reached a majority agreement (Commissioner Stewart was opposed) to have staff request to change the wording of the grant for a sports and wellness center to a market and economic feasibility study for a sports and wellness center. Funding for the study is part of the Maryland Stadium Authority budget.

**Discussion: Private Road-Edonton Place**

Ms. Margaret Witherup, Attorney, Witherup Allen Law, LLC; Mr. Wayne Fowler and Mr. Lawrence Fowler, joined the Commissioners to present information related to their request for a portion of Edonton Place to connect with Helen Fowlers Place with Stoneleigh Court.

**Commissioner's New Business**

Commissioner Bowling requested that the County Flag be lowered to honor former County Administrator Dr. Bridgett.

Commissioner Stewart confirmed her agreement for a letter of good standing from the department in lieu of a criminal background check discussed in the earlier discussion on property tax credit legislation.

**Closed Session**

The Commissioners decided not to go into closed session to receive legal advice on potential land acquisition.

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The Commissioners reached a consensus to have the County Attorney handle this issue and provide a response to the request.

*\*Break 12:29 p.m. - 2:02 p.m.*

**Roll Call**

A roll call was taken. All Commissioners were present.

**Annual: Maryland Department of Transportation (MDOT) Consolidated Transportation Program (CTP) Tour**

Mr. Paul Wiedefeld, Secretary Maryland Department Transportation and other State of Maryland transportation officials met with the Commissioners in person as part of the State's Annual Transportation Tour to brief local jurisdictions on the state of Maryland's Consolidated Transportation Program (CTP), and capital budget. Members of the Charles County State Delegation, Delegates Patterson, Davis, and Senators Ellis joined the meeting as well. Participants discussed MDOT's Draft FY2024- FY2029 Consolidated Transportation Program, which details a twenty one point two (\$21.2) billion dollar six-year capital budget investment in the state's transportation network. The meeting is part of MDOT's tour of twenty-three (23) Maryland counties and Baltimore City to update local officials and the public on the CTP. Secretary Wiedefeld and other MDOT officials outlined the state's investments and discussed Charles County's transportation priorities.

At 3:10 p.m., a motion was made by Commissioner Bowling, seconded by Commissioner Patterson and passed, with all Commissioners present, voting in favor to adjourn.

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Carol A. DeSoto, Clerk to the Commissioners

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Reuben B. Collins, II, Esq., President