



Mayor and City Council of Cumberland

Mayor Raymond M. Morriss
Councilman Richard J. "Rock" Cioni
Councilman Eugene T. Frazier
Councilman James L. Furstenberg
Councilman Brian R. Lepley

City Administrator Jeffrey F. Silka
City Solicitor Michael S. Cohen
City Clerk Allison K. Layton

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WORK SESSION

City Hall 2nd Floor Conference Room
57 N. Liberty Street
Cumberland, MD 21502
Tuesday, May 5, 2026; 4:30 pm

PRESENT: Mayor Raymond M. Morriss; Council Members: Eugene Frazier, James Furstenberg, and Brian Lepley.

ABSENT: Richard J. "Rock" Cioni

ALSO PRESENT: Jeffrey F. Silka, City Administrator; Allison Layton, City Clerk; Michael Cohen, City Solicitor; Robert Smith, Director of Engineering and Utilities; Rich Reinhardt, Percy Public Affairs; Mark Gandolfi, Comptroller; and Chief Pyles

Media: Hannah Fout from WCBC, and Theresa McMinn from Cumberland Times News

Members of the public

I. FUNDING REQUEST FROM ALLEGANY COUNTY FOR PHASE II OF THEIR WILLOWBROOK OUTDOOR WELLNESS COMPLEX

Mr. Silka advised that Allegany County is requesting a \$200K contribution from the City toward the \$1.8M Phase II project to install restroom facilities, concession stands, and stadium lighting at Allegany College. Council members questioned the overlap with the proposed Sports Complex and agreed to wait until information on when the feasibility study would be completed and when

the County needed to know about the funding before making a decision. Mr. Silka will bring more information to a future meeting.

II. DISCUSSION OF A LEGISLATIVE ACTION REQUEST

Mr. Silka proposed reaching out to the Maryland Municipal League (MML) to gain support for municipalities like Cumberland in seeking state oversight of electric bikes and scooters due to rising safety concerns and the lack of licensing or insurance requirements.

In addition, Mr. Silka proposed to also inquire with MML regarding assistance in implementing the FAMLI Act. The program will begin taxing employees beginning January 1, 2027 with the program becoming available for use in January of 2028.

III. RIVER PARK PROJECT UPDATE

Robert Smith presented drawings outlining the project and advised that it is progressing, which consists determining who will have ownership of and take responsibility for maintenance of the walking path and the 20-spot parking lot under I-68.

To move forward with the project, the City would have to enter an MOU with Canal Place, assuming ownership and maintenance of the trails and the parking lot. All of the Council members agreed to proceed with the MOU.

IV. 2026 END OF SESSION REPORT PRESENTED BY RICH REINHARDT OF PERCY PUBLIC AFFAIRS (VIA ZOOM AT 5:00 PM)

Fiscal Overview & State Budget

- **Budget Balancing:** Maryland faced a projected **\$1.5 billion** budget gap. To balance it without new taxes, the state repurposed approximately **\$282 million** from the Strategic Energy Investment Fund (SEIF) to help close the shortfall.

- **Energy Relief:** An additional **\$100 million** from the SEIF was used to reduce "Empower Maryland" program surcharges on utility bills, which is projected to save the average Maryland homeowner roughly **\$150 annually**.
- **Future Deficits:** A structural deficit is projected to grow from **\$2.3 billion** in the coming term to over **\$4.1 billion by fiscal year 2031**. This is largely driven by education mandates.

Key Wins for Western Maryland

- **Flood Recovery:** The state allocated **\$9.45 million** in FY27 to support recovery efforts in Westernport and Allegany County following the May 2024 floods.
- **George Edwards Fund:** The Fund received **\$9 million** to support regional economic development.
- **Disparity Grants:** Allegany County is set to receive approximately **\$6 million** of a total \$27 million allocation for local government disparity grants.
- **Historic Vehicle Tags:** Legislation reverted the eligibility for historic vehicle tags from pre-1999 models, back to vehicles **25 years or older**.

Additional Highlights

- **Non-Profit Accountability:** New budget language was adopted that allows the state to restrict grants to non-profit organizations if they are not compliant with required state tax filings.
- **Immigration & Law Enforcement:** A controversial budget provision restricts over **\$124 million** in state aid to local law enforcement until departments certify they are not cooperating with ICE on certain immigration efforts.
- **Western Maryland Scenic Railroad:** **\$325,000** in operational funds was secured to support its ongoing steam engine operations between Cumberland and Frostburg.
- **Solar Permitting Mandate:** A new requirement for all local governments to implement automated **IT solar permitting software** for residential systems by August 2027.

V. FOLLOW UP BUDGET PRESENTATION

Mark Gandolfi reviewed the overall fiscal position for FY27 that includes a total budget of approximately \$87 million. Some of the main factors that emerged include:

Key Financial Drivers

- **Project Substitution:** A \$400,000 sewer replacement project on Sedgwick was removed in favor of a more immediate \$60,000 project, reducing anticipated debt by \$406,000.
- **Grant Reallocation:** A \$35,000 city match for a sports complex study was reallocated as a special project for the CEDC, though the project scope remains the same.
- **New Facility:** A \$60,000 pavilion for the Mason Road Recreation Complex was added to the budget, with \$54,000 covered by grant funding.
- **Assessable Base:** The city's assessable base is projected to grow by 5.94%.
- **Utility Rate Increases:** To address the increasing operational costs, an 8% rate increase for water and an 11% rate increase for sewer are recommended in order to keep the funds cash-neutral.
- **Cost-of-Living Adjustment (COLA):** The budget includes a 3% COLA for all full-time employees, which is just under the current 12-month inflation rate.
- **New Positions/Staffing:** The budget funds three new full-time positions, and has 263 budgeted positions with only nine current vacancies.

VI. CITY ADMINISTRATOR UPDATES

There are 27 entrants for the 250th parade, and five food trucks are committed. Registration is open until June 8, 2026.

In a concentrated effort along the Virginia Avenue corridor, door hangers will be placed to advise of code enforcement, and a chance to win a gift cards will be provided for motivation.

VII. REVIEW OF THE PUBLIC MEETING AGENDA OF MAY 5, 2026

No discussion took place

VIII. MAYOR AND CITY COUNCIL UPDATES

Councilman Lepley met with John Michael, Assistant Director for Resources for Independents, who voiced concerns and proposed solutions he would like to discuss with the Council Members.

Concerns were addressed regarding soliciting signs along roadways and enforcement.

IX. ADJOURNMENT

With no further business at hand, the meeting adjourned at 6:12 p.m.

Respectfully Submitted,

Allison K. Layton
City Clerk

Minutes approved on May 19, 2026