Work Session Meeting Minutes

The meeting of the Pocomoke City Mayor and Council was held in the Council Chambers on Monday, October 26, 2026. Mayor Nock called the Work Session to order at 6:30pm.

Present:

Mayor: Todd J. Nock
Council Members: M. Hall, C.L. Marshall, S. Tull, D. Downing, B. Cottman
City Manager: Brandy Matthews
Attorney: Andrew Illuminati
City Clerk: Lacey Merritt

Call to Order

Mayor Nock called the Work Session to order at 6:30 p.m. on Monday, October 26, 2026, and welcomed those in attendance. A roll call was conducted to establish attendance. Council members Hall, Downing, Tull, Cottman, and Marshall, were acknowledged during the roll call. Mayor Nock then proceeded with the first item of business.

Presentation on the Community Impact Grant Program – Judy Center

Ms. Latoya Parnell, Site Facilitator for the Judy Center at Pocomoke Elementary School, presented the Center's Community Impact Grant proposal, titled the Circle of Care initiative, and requested $10,000 in funding. Ms. Parnell explained that the Judy Center provides early-learning services to children from birth through age five, including prekindergarten and kindergarten students within the Pocomoke City service area. She clarified that the Center receives approximately $330,000 in funding from the Maryland State Department of Education (MSDE) for salaries, programming, and related expenses and is housed at Pocomoke Elementary School but is not funded by Worcester County Public Schools. Ms. Parnell outlined the proposed use of the requested grant funds, which included providing 50 Thanksgiving dinners and 50 Christmas dinners to families in need, for a total of 100 holiday meal distributions. She also discussed the continuation of the Soft Mom Society, a program established through the Judy Center's Family Advisory Committee to provide mothers with opportunities for connection, support, and self-care. Ms. Parnell reported that the program had received $4,500 from the Community Foundation and had served approximately 30 mothers through three activities: a meet-and-greet, a self-care day at Public Landing, and a brunch. Additionally, she proposed establishing a Weekend Backpack Program to provide approximately 30 backpacks of food twice weekly to children and families experiencing food insecurity. She explained that the Center currently lacks sufficient storage space to operate the program and expressed concern that some children may go without adequate food over the weekends. Finally, the requested funds would support community outreach and family engagement activities necessary to fulfill the Center's programming obligations. Ms. Parnell stated that the proposed activities were intended to begin November 1, 2026, and continue through June 1, 2027, allowing the Center to complete its programming and reporting requirements before the end of its grant cycle. Ms. Parnell also discussed the Center's limited space. She explained that the Center had previously operated from the high school and had recently returned to the elementary school, where it currently serves families from space located near the library. The Center was serving approximately 22 families and was seeking opportunities to expand its services. She noted that the Center anticipated using the library once additional space became available and was exploring other community partnerships. The Mayor and Council members discussed the need for additional resources to address food insecurity among local children and families. Ms. Parnell explained that the middle school operates a pantry and the high school operates the Warrior Warehouse, which provides food, hygiene products, and clothing. However, the elementary school does not currently have a weekend backpack program because of its space limitations. Mayor Nock expressed concern regarding the extent of food insecurity in the community and the need for additional support for children outside school hours. He suggested exploring donations from local churches and other community partners to obtain a storage shed or other suitable storage space, which could improve the program's ability to manage supplies and maintain appropriate records. The Mayor and Council members also discussed the importance of

gathering accurate information regarding food insecurity and homelessness in the community and continuing conversations with organizations that provide assistance to local families. Mayor Nock acknowledged Ms. Parnell's revised proposal and thanked her for clarifying the Center's organizational structure, funding, and intended use of the grant. Ms. Amanda Russell provided a recommendation to move forward with the requested grant. Following discussion, the Council indicated consensus in support of the $10,000 Community Impact Grant request. A consensus was reached among the Council Members.

Review of Special One Day Alcohol Permit – Coastal Chemicals Christmas Party – 11/28/26. Review of Special One Day Alcohol Permit – Wallops Christmas Party – 12/10/26. Review of Special One Day Alcohol Permit – Lewis Wedding and Reception – 01/01/27. Review of Special One Day Alcohol Permit – Matthews 50th Birthday Party – 01/23/27.

Mayor Nock requested to combined agenda Items 3, 4, 5, and 6 for discussion of four Special One-Day Alcohol Permit applications, noting that the Council had previously reviewed the applications. The applications included the Coastal Chemicals Christmas Party, scheduled for November 28, 2026, from 6:00 p.m. to 11:00 p.m., the Wallops Christmas Party, scheduled for December 10, 2026, from 5:00 p.m. to 10:00 p.m., the Lewis Wedding and Reception, scheduled for January 1, 2027, from 3:00 p.m. to 9:00 p.m., and the Matthews 50th Birthday Party, scheduled for January 23, 2027, from 4:00 p.m. to 10:00 p.m. Each event anticipated approximately 100 attendees and requested permission to serve beer, wine, and liquor. The Council members indicated that they had reviewed the applications and expressed no additional concerns during the work session. Mayor Nock stated that the necessary forms would be signed following the meeting. A consensus to approve all four Special One-Day Alcohol Permit applications was reached among the Council members.

Discussion of the Meeting Calendar for the Remainder of Calendar Year 2026 and January 2027

City Manager Brandy Matthews presented the proposed meeting calendar covering the remainder of 2026 and the first meeting of January 2027. Ms. Matthews identified the November 2, 2026, meeting at 6:30 p.m. as the next scheduled meeting. The anticipated agenda included the first reading of Resolution 2027-06 concerning an annexation, the first reading of Ordinance 2027-03 concerning the local homestead property tax credit, and the first reading of Ordinance 2027-04 concerning the taxation of qualified commercial vehicle inventories.

Council members discussed the proposed schedule, with particular attention to budget meetings and the possibility of scheduling a closed session in November to discuss real estate. The Council also discussed the proposed timing for the second reading and public hearing associated with the annexation. The City Attorney explained that annexation procedures require review by the appropriate county and state entities, which have statutory time periods to provide comments. The public hearing also requires advance advertisement. The Council was advised that scheduling the matter for December 7 could create a risk of additional advertising expenses or postponement if the required reviews were not completed in time. The City Attorney explained that the proposed January 4, 2027, date represented the more conservative approach to allow the required review and advertising periods to be completed. Staff had already begun coordinating with the county and preparing the necessary annexation documents. The Mayor and Council members discussed whether the annexation could be advanced to an earlier meeting if the county completed its review promptly. Staff explained that the timing would depend on the county's actions, the state review period, and advertising deadlines. The Council acknowledged the need to balance an expedited schedule with compliance with statutory requirements. The Mayor and Council expressed general agreement with the proposed meeting calendar, while noting that the schedule would remain tentative and subject to change by the authority of the Mayor and Council.

Discussion of Budget Schedule for Fiscal Year 2028

The Mayor and Council discussed the proposed budget schedule for Fiscal Year 2028. The schedule provided in the meeting packet was reviewed and deemed acceptable by the Council. It was noted that additional budget meetings could be scheduled as needed to accommodate the budget review process. The schedule was considered tentative and subject to change at the discretion of the Mayor and Council.

Discussion of Ordinance 2027-O-3 – Reduction of the Local Homestead Property Tax Credit

Mayor Nock introduced a discussion concerning Ordinance 2027-O-3, which would amend the City's local homestead property tax credit provisions by reducing the maximum local credit from 10% to 4%, effective July 1, 2027, for Fiscal Year 2028.Mayor Nock explained that Pocomoke City had historically maintained a 10% local homestead property tax credit, the highest level permitted under Maryland law. The Mayor noted that other municipalities in the county had lower credit levels and stated that City staff believed the City could reduce its credit while maintaining its financial position. Mayor Nock explained that the proposed ordinance would need to be adopted by March 25, 2027, and that introducing the matter early would allow adequate time for consideration rather than waiting until the statutory deadline approached. The Mayor and Council Members discussed whether additional tax relief should be considered for senior citizens, individuals with disabilities, and veterans. Mayor Nock indicated that these matters could be explored separately and suggested that the City undertake a broader review of its tax policies and economic development incentives. The discussion included concerns about incentives for new businesses, the costs associated with water and sewer connections for new residential construction, and whether existing programs adequately encourage businesses to remain in the City. Mayor Nock cited the example of a business receiving a water-bill rebate before subsequently leaving the City and suggested that eligibility requirements and the duration of such incentives warranted further review. The Mayor and Council generally supported continued consideration of the proposed homestead credit reduction and broader discussions regarding tax policy and business incentives.

Discussion of Ordinance 2027-O-4 – Taxation of Qualified Commercial Vehicle Inventories

Mayor Nock introduced Ordinance 2027-O-4, which would amend Chapter 210, Article II, of the Pocomoke City Code concerning taxation and the exclusion of certain motor vehicles. The proposal would provide for taxation of qualified commercial vehicle inventories at a rate of $1.50 per $100 of assessed value, effective July 1, 2027, for Fiscal Year 2028. Mayor Nock explained that an ordinance adopted in 1990 had exempted certain dealership vehicle inventories from personal property taxation. Mayor Nock then recognized Ms. Matthews and invited her to provide further information and lead the discussion on the matter. Ms. Matthews reported had reviewed the matter and identified the potential revenue implications of reinstating taxation on qualifying commercial vehicle inventories. Ms. Matthews explained that the proposed change was being considered in conjunction with the proposed reduction in the local homestead property tax credit and the City's broader efforts to maintain revenue without increasing the real property tax rate. She estimated that the City could be foregoing approximately $100,000 per dealership, depending on the inventory and the timing of its assessment. The Mayor and Council members discussed the need to ensure that the proposed tax policy was administered fairly and consistently. The discussion included questions about the appropriate assessment date, the timing of dealership inventory reporting, and the possibility of vehicles being moved out of state before the assessment date. Mayor Nock emphasized the importance of maintaining complete and accurate meeting minutes, noting that the absence of detailed records from the original 1990 decision had made it difficult to determine the reasoning behind the previous exemption. The Mayor and Council expressed interest in further reviewing the proposal and considering an assessment date to be calendar year to establish a clearer and more consistent basis for determining qualifying inventory. Staff agreed to review the feasibility of the proposed date and incorporated into the ordinance. The Mayor and Council reached a general consensus to continue working on the proposal, with further review needed before the ordinance could be finalized.

Discussion on City Drafting its own Liquor Permit and Cost

Mayor introduced a discussion regarding revisions to the City's special event permitting process, including the application form, administrative requirements, and proposed fees. Mayor Nock explained that the existing process required considerable staff time to review and process repeated applications, particularly for organizations that regularly host events requiring Special One-Day Alcohol Permits. Ms. Matthews and Ms. Russell presented information concerning existing alcohol licensing fees and the City's ability to charge additional fees. Ms. Matthews explained that certain eligible hotels and restaurants already generate licensing revenue for which the City receives a portion. She stated that staff did not recommend imposing an additional annual fee on those businesses, citing the importance of supporting local businesses and the other taxes and fees they already pay.

The Mayor and Council discussed whether the existing special event application was unnecessarily lengthy and whether applicants should be required to provide the same information for every event. Members suggested that information that remains unchanged, such as a facility's layout, access points, and other established operational details, could be maintained on file. The Mayor and Council discussed using the county's application as a model and adapting it to meet the City's needs. Members expressed support for streamlining the process so applicants would only need to complete a shorter form for subsequent events when the event setup and other relevant details had not changed. The Council also discussed a proposed $25 permit fee and a multi-event discount intended to reduce administrative work when applications are submitted together. The Council indicated general agreement with the $25 fee and a proposal allowing four or more events to be submitted together under a discounted arrangement. The discussion included the suggestion that four applications could effectively qualify for a "get one free" arrangement. Mayor Nock directed staff to revisit the application form, simplify the process, and consider input from the Police Department regarding information needed for public safety and event oversight. The Council agreed that the proposal had merit but that additional revisions were necessary before implementation.

Motion to Adjourn to closed session at 7:25pm made by Council Member Marshall. Seconded by Council Member Cottman. Mayor Nock called for any unreadiness or discussion. Mayor Nock called for a vote. Hall – aye, Marshall – aye, Tull – aye, Downing – aye, Cottman – aye.

Approved: Lacey Merritt

City Clerk