

# Mozambique trade trip approved by commissioners

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Mozambique international trade mission, VanGO safety management system plan, energy conservation efforts, county code amendment and out-of-county hauled waste discharges were among the open session briefings presented Tuesday before the commissioners' board during its weekly meeting in La Plata.

The commissioners approved an international trade mission to Mozambique which is being planned for later this year in May. Business development chief Lucretia Freeman-Buster and project coordinator Danielle Djiogan from the Charles County Economic Development Department gave an update on its Sister Cities partnership with the city of Matola, located in Mozambique, where staff will help local businesses explore new markets there and facilitate trade outside of the United States, according to a press release.

In addition to sharing their proposed agenda, estimated staff-related expenses and the members of the local delegation who plan to participate in the trade mission, Buster and Djiogan also provided background about the county's other two Sister Cities partnerships with Jogevia, Estonia, and Walldorf, Germany. These partnerships were established to share information on mutual interests related to business and trade; community development; youth and education; and arts and culture.

A budget amendment request of \$5.38 million was approved by the commissioners to record lease proceeds and lease purchases for energy conservation efforts, as well as a request to advertise financing options for an energy savings performance contract.

Staff from the department of public works and fiscal and administrative services presented information about an energy savings audit of county facilities that identified opportunities for reducing utility expenses, decreasing water consumption, advancing climate change goals, and supporting minority businesses through subcontractor participation. They also summarized recommendations that would include upgrades to LED lighting, replacement of certain infrastructure to conserve water use and improvements in HVAC controls to reduce energy consumption, according to a press release.

Commissioners approved the VanGO Safety Management System Plan — which is required by the federal government and includes safety performance targets, an employee safety reporting program and safety risk mitigation procedures — as presented.

According to a presentation from the county planning and growth management department's transit division, the top four goals that are specific to providing safe, reliable and efficient transit services include the following: ensuring the contractor, MV Transportation, is fulfilling its maintenance obligations per manufacturers' recommended service and documenting work; ensuring the contractor is making proper repairs; minimizing service interruptions related to maintenance; and maximizing service life of buses.

Another request for the introduction of a county code amendment to a portion of Chapter 97 — which enables the county to be petitioned by the majority of a community to upgrade or replace community water, sewer or stormwater management systems — was also approved by the commissioners following a briefing on the regulations governing benefit assessments as part of a county petition project. The amendment, according to a county government press release, would enable a property owner to transfer the remaining debt to a subsequent property owner/purchaser of the property.

Currently, Chapter 97 requires an affected homeowner to pay 100% of their share for infrastructure improvements before the home can be sold, the press release noted, which has created a barrier to home sales in affected communities where neither the seller nor the buyer can afford to pay these costs at the settlement table. The proposed amendment would authorize the buyer to assume the debt and pay it back over time through future annual assessments. A public hearing on the code amendment is scheduled for Tuesday, March 31.

A public hearing on March 31 is also scheduled for an amendment to vehicle parking restrictions under the penalty section of Chapter 287 Vehicle Parking Laws, Code of Charles County. Commissioners approved a \$20 penalty to be enforced for drivers who unlawfully stop, stand or park their vehicle in prohibited areas.

Associate county attorney Danielle Mitchell, who referred to a county government memorandum, stated that in September of 2019, "the board of commissioners approved changes to Chapter 287 to achieve consistency with the Annotated Code of Maryland for defining 'stopping' and 'standing,' as well as to clarify restrictions related to stopping, standing and parking vehicles."

However, Mitchell said, "the amendment to the penalty section of Chapter 287 was inadvertently left out of the bill that the board approved in September." Therefore, the board had to approve a minor code change "in order to enforce the penalty provisions against those who unlawfully stop, stand or park a vehicle" as outlined under the penalties provisions of Chapter 287.

In addition, commissioners approved a \$19,200 budget transfer request for administrative salaries associated with the approval of an upgrade for a part-time accounts payable position to full time in the sheriff's office. Commissioners also approved a \$376,000 budget transfer request from fund balance to contract services to pay for closeout of the yearly contract and current inspections.

For more information about Tuesday's meeting, go to [go.boarddocs.com/md/chrlsco/Board.nsf/Public](http://go.boarddocs.com/md/chrlsco/Board.nsf/Public). A video from the meeting can be viewed at [www.charlescounty.org/apps/mediacenter/public/listEventsPublic.jsp](http://www.charlescounty.org/apps/mediacenter/public/listEventsPublic.jsp).

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