



Construction Trades Board
Department of Planning, Housing, and Zoning

MINUTES

April 2, 2026

8:30 a.m.

Video recordings of the Construction Trades Board meetings are available online based on the availability of the internet and posted at the County website at <https://www.kentcounty.com/commissioners/kent-countys-agenda-and-minutes-portal>.

CALL TO ORDER

Chair Victor Shepard called the meeting to order at 8:30 AM.

Attendance

Board Members Present: Victor Shepard (Chair), Jason Pinder, Dave Eason, and Erin Zierfuss, Zeb Blyman

Staff Present: Mike O'Neil, Billy Dwyer, Tyler Arnold, Maria Grieb

ELECTION OF OFFICERS

New member, Zeb Blyman, was introduced, bringing extensive experience in site prep and landscaping.

ACTION ITEMS

Adoption of Minutes from July 3, 2025 and October 2, 2025

General Discussions

Low-Voltage Electrician Licensing Discussion

Mike O'Neil reported receiving information from Craig Bussick regarding recent developments involving low-voltage electrician licensing. According to the information received, the State may now recognize county authority to license low-voltage electricians.

Victor Sheppard stated this information was new and noted that several low-voltage contractors had recently contacted the county regarding licensing and grandfathering provisions.

Mike O'Neil explained that details remain unclear, including:

- Testing requirements
- County authority and responsibilities
- Enforcement procedures
- State guidance

The board discussed previous state actions that limited county licensing authority primarily to master electricians and the impact those changes had on journeymen and specialty contractors.

Mike O'Neil stated that additional information would be gathered before the next meeting and that consultation with the county attorney would likely be necessary.

County Attorney Update

Mike O'Neil informed the board that Kent County now employs an in-house county attorney rather than relying solely on contracted legal services.

Mike O'Neil noted that having an attorney physically located within county offices would improve accessibility and allow legal questions related to licensing and registration matters to be addressed more efficiently.

HVAC Contractor Registration Discussion

The board discussed establishing a registration process for HVAC contractors similar to existing registration requirements for master electricians and master plumbers.

Victor Sheppard asked whether HVAC inspections were currently being performed.

Mike O'Neil explained that inspections are conducted through MDIA and that the proposed registration program would primarily provide:

- Verification of state licensing
- Verification of insurance coverage
- Contractor accountability
- Additional protection for the county and consumers

Victor Sheppard agreed and noted that contractor insurance issues are often discovered only after a problem occurs.

Mike O'Neil stated that implementation could occur during the next registration cycle in 2027, allowing sufficient time for outreach and preparation.

Board Consensus

Board members expressed support for:

- Creating an HVAC contractor registration requirement
 - Developing implementation procedures before the 2027 registration cycle
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Registration Fee Structure Discussion

The board discussed registration fees for contractors.

Mike O'Neil recommended standardizing fees across trades and eliminating inconsistencies between electricians and plumbers.

Discussion focused on:

- Maintaining a \$100 registration fee for in-state contractors
- Charging \$150 for out-of-state contractors

Victor Sheppard questioned the rationale for reducing fees for out-of-state contractors.

Jason Pinder noted that consistency across trades was important and that plumbers, electricians, and HVAC contractors should be treated equally.

Board Consensus

The board expressed support for:

- \$100 registration fees for in-state contractors
- \$150 registration fees for out-of-state contractors across all applicable trades

Permit Coordination and Enforcement

The board discussed coordination between Kent County and MDIA regarding permit issuance and contractor registration verification.

Mike O'Neil explained that:

- Electrical permits (inspections) are issued through MDIA
- Contractor registrations are maintained by the county

- There may be limited coordination between those systems

Jason Pinder suggested verifying contractor registration during permit review.

Beth Grieb noted that contractor registration is reviewed during permit intake.

Victor Sheppard noted that electrical permits are generally required for electrical work and questioned whether registration verification should occur during permit issuance.

The board agreed that additional discussion with Craig would be beneficial to better understand:

- Which permits are issued independently of building permits
- Registration verification procedures
- Potential enforcement mechanisms

Permit Pulling Under Another Contractor's License

Board members discussed the practice of contractors working under another individual's master license.

Dave Eason asked whether contractors continue using other individuals' licenses to perform work.

Mike O'Neil stated that the practice is generally recognized within the industry and may have increased following state licensing changes affecting journeymen.

Victor Sheppard referenced previous board discussions acknowledging the issue.

The board discussed the liability assumed by the master license holder when permits are pulled under their authority.

Health Department and Wet-Season Percolation Testing

The board discussed permitting delays associated with wet-season percolation testing and septic approvals.

Dave Eason reported recent improvements resulting from assistance provided by MDE.

Dave Eason stated that some visiting staff demonstrated a more practical and efficient approach to evaluations, resulting in improved progress.

Mike O'Neil noted that delayed percolation testing had significantly affected development activity and expressed optimism that increased staffing would reduce the backlog.

Health Department Communication Concerns

Jason Pinder expressed concern regarding:

- Lack of clarity
- Inconsistent communication

Jason Pinder suggested that improved communication between the Health Department and the Construction Trades Board could benefit contractors and property owners.

Dave Eason stated that Health Department staff are often reluctant to provide guidance until receiving directions from higher authorities.

Mike O'Neil acknowledged that Kent County generally follows Maryland Department of the Environment (MDE) guidance closely, which can create differences between Kent County and neighboring jurisdictions.

Follow-Up

Mike O'Neil agreed to explore options for improving communication and potential Health Department participation in future discussions.

Board Membership

Mike O'Neil advised that the board is authorized for seven members but currently has five active members.

Mike O'Neil stated that current membership adequately represents the major construction trades but invited members to consider:

- Additional expertise that may benefit the board
- Potential candidates for future vacancies

Victor Sheppard raised questions regarding quorum requirements if additional members are appointed.

Mike O'Neil stated that clarification would be obtained from county staff regarding quorum calculations under the board's governing provisions.

SCHEDULING

The board meets quarterly. July 2, 2026 will be the next followed by October 1, 2026, and then January 7, 2027. Staff will issue reminder emails one week in advance.

Action Items / Follow-Ups

Research low-voltage electrician licensing authority and state guidance.

Consult the county attorney regarding licensing and registration matters.

Continue developing an HVAC contractor registration program.

Standardize contractor registration fees.

Explore improved communication with the Health Department.

Review permit verification and enforcement procedures with MDIA representatives.

Identify outreach locations for future contractor registration notices

ADJOURN

Chair Victor Shepard made a motion to adjourned. Motion was passed unanimously at 9:05 am