

Huntingdon, PA

Tuesday, January 12, 2021

2-2021

The regular meeting of the Huntingdon County Commissioners was held on the above date and time in the Commissioner's Office with the following present via GoToMeeting: Commissioners Sather, Walls and Thomas; Chief Clerk, Heather Fellman; Solicitor, Peter McManamon; Planning Director, Jim Lettiere; Barb Covert and Micelle Heane from Employment and Training; Celina Seftas from the Conservation District; Daily News Reporter, Kylie Hawn and visitor, Dean Fluke.

The meeting was called to order at 9:30 a.m. by Commissioner Sather. Heather Fellman conducted roll call of all call-in participants and discussed policies and procedures for public comment during the meeting. All participants will be muted for the duration of the meeting except during public comment periods. During public comment periods, participants will be unmuted individually to ensure that everyone is heard. Prayer was led by Commissioner Sather and the Pledge of Allegiance to the flag was led by Commissioner Walls.

It was moved by Commissioner Walls, seconded by Commissioner Thomas and carried (Sather, yes; Walls, yes; Thomas, yes) to approve the minutes of the January 5th Public Meeting.

It was moved by Commissioner Thomas, seconded by Commissioner Walls and carried (Walls, yes; Thomas, yes; Sather, yes) to approve the payment of bills.

There were no additions to the agenda.

There were no announcements.

There were no public comments.

There were no items to be addressed by the solicitor.

Under new business, Barb Covert and Michelle Heane from Employment and Training presented the annual report on the medical transportation program. Michelle Heane noted that they have been able to stay open during the pandemic and continue services for medical transportation to consumers. The staff has worked diligently to continue to provide transportation. As of January 5, we continue to receive new applications. We have 4,574 applications currently on file. Of that number, 1,919 are registered to use CART. There are about 531 persons with disabilities registered to use these services as well. We are still continuing to reimburse consumers 25 cents per mile. This does include any parking and toll costs when travel is necessary. This is intended to ease the difficulties and support the use of mileage reimbursement options when available. This plan continues to stay in effect until we get notice from MATP in Harrisburg of any further updates. The CART program is continuing to provide services through the Area Agency on Aging. Barbara Covert offered her thanks to the Commissioners for allowing the Employment and Training team to continue to provide this service to our community. We are grateful for this opportunity and our customers are grateful for this support. She would also like to publicly recognize Michelle and her team. They have done an outstanding job ensuring that services continue during this pandemic and all trips have been scheduled with no trips needing to be cancelled because of the pandemic. They do extra work to ensure that the customers travelling are getting extra screenings the days before trips to ensure there is no COVID cases being transported. Ms. Covert would also like to thank the Treasurer's Office, Susan Harry and her team. They expedite those checks to make sure that we can get the reimbursements out in a timely manner. Even during the pandemic, things have been able to continue with very little interruption. Thank you for allowing us to do this yet another year.

Michelle Heane requested consideration of approval for the signing of the 4th quarter MATP report. Commissioner Sather commented that we do not have a copy of the full report. We have the signature page. Is the full report

available? Ms. Heane commented that Laura Brumbaugh, Fiscal Administrator, had sent it over in November to the Treasurer's Office. Ms. Covert responded that they will send it over to the Commissioners' Office now and we can delay signing of the document until next week to give the Commissioners more time to review. It was moved by Commissioner Walls, seconded by Commissioner Thomas and carried (Thomas, yes; Sather, yes; Walls, yes) to table signing pending receipt of the report. The Commissioners expressed their support of the program and thanked Ms. Covert and Ms. Heane

Jim Lettiere, Planning Director, requested consideration of approval for the 2021 Certification of County Funds for the Pennsylvania Farm Land Preservation Program. Each year, the Department of Agriculture requests from each county with an approved conservation program to certify the county appropriation for the purchase of agricultural conservation easements. Celina Seftas, who is our Conservation District Manager, and Jim Lettiere, Planning Director have worked collaboratively on this to provide certification. The total 2021 funds are derived from the interest accumulated from the Clean and Green Rollback taxes, Act 13 Marcellus Shale Legacy Fund contribution from the County Commissioners, and municipal contributions for Ag Land Preservation in those specific municipalities. This year the total derived is \$50,977 consisting of \$1,977 from interest accumulated from the Clean and Green Rollback Taxes provided by Susan Harry, Tax Claim Director. Typically the County Commissioners contribute \$5,000 from Act 13 Marcellus Shale Legacy Funding. The balance were from municipal contributions in the amount of \$44,000. Celina Seftas added that she works with the State Farmland Preservation Office to complete all the necessary paperwork for the Conservation Easement purchases. While working on our most recent easement, it was brought to my attention that the amount of funds certified were less than what were in the locally held Ag Land Preservation account. Those funds were contributed by the county and those municipalities and are held for the sole purpose of purchasing conservation easements. This certification will provide that information to the state office. Commissioner Thomas commented that this is a yearly report that goes in and this is how we are able to put our match up to the state funds to purchase the farms. I know Ms. Seftas in her report last month, noted that there are 10 farms now in Ag Land Preservation and the Conservation District is working on the 11th. Dean Fluke asked if the agencies of the county, when one wants to join the preservation program, are there people there present giving people options that they really have. Commissioner Thomas responded that there are. The program is run by Huntingdon County and administered by the Conservation District. There are all sorts of criteria that people have to meet to even be eligible for going into that program. Celina Seftas added that she receives calls inquiring about the program from time to time, so she takes the time to work with each caller to let them know what those eligibility criteria are. She also takes their name down on a list and keeps a record of people who are interested in the program. The next time the application period opens it is announced publicly, but she also contacts these people individually to let them know. It was moved by Commissioner Thomas, seconded by Commissioner Walls and carried (Sather, yes; Walls, yes; Thomas, yes).

Fred Gutshall, Public Defender, requested consideration of approval for a conflict counsel contract with Lance Marshall. He will provide services for up to 100 cases from January 1, 2021 through December 31, 2021 at a rate of \$40,000. Dean Fluke commented that the cost of cases is \$40,000. When or how will that be provided for the general public to know? Commissioner Thomas commented that it is paid on a monthly salary. It is the same program that we have had in place since you have been commissioner. They are guaranteed that \$40,000 because they will each definitely receive 100 cases. Mr. Fluke commented that that does not answer his question. How is that number going to be furnished? Who is it going to be approved by? How will the public know? Commissioner Sather commented that we are currently taking action at this public meeting. This contract is for 100 cases for the year 2021. Lance Marshall will be paid a sum of \$40,000 for the year in monthly payments of \$3,333. Mr. Fluke commented that he feels this is a very poor answer. The public should know from the County Commissioners, who are the ones who are spending the money, right where it goes. There shouldn't be any questions to be answered. Commissioner Thomas commented that there are not any questions as to where this money is going and this is the same contract that you did not ask any questions about when you were commissioner. There are hundreds and hundreds of cases that move through the Public Defender's Office every year, as you should be well aware. It is good to have the public, and we want to keep them informed of everything through these public meetings. These contract have worked out well through all the years we have used them and we have saved the County a significant amount of money by contracting with these attorneys. Fred Gutshall commented that his office keeps track of who gets what cases, including the Public Defender and the Assistant Public Defender. All of this information is furnished to the Commissioners' Office on a monthly basis. We certainly keep track of how many cases conflict counsel are getting. Mr. Fluke thanked Mr. Gutshall for his answer and for saying that the Commissioners are responsible. It was moved by Commissioner Walls, seconded by Commissioner Thomas and carried (Walls, yes; Thomas, yes; Sather, yes).

Fred Gutshall requested consideration of approval for a conflict counsel contract with Timothy Burns. He will provide services for up to 100 cases from January 1, 2021 through December 31, 2021 at a rate of \$40,000. It was moved by Commissioner Thomas, seconded by Commissioner Walls and carried (Thomas, yes; Sather, yes; Walls, yes).

Fred Gutshall requested consideration of approval for a conflict counsel contract with BMZ Law. They will provide services for 50 cases from January 1, 2021 through December 31, 2021 at a rate of \$20,000 (\$1,666 per month). It was moved by Commissioner Walls, seconded by Commissioner Thomas and carried (Sather, yes; Walls, yes; Thomas, yes).

There were no Matters for Action, Information, and Discussion.

There were 2 Veteran's Burial Allowances.

There being no further business, it was moved by Commissioner Thomas to adjourn the meeting at 10:04 a.m.

Minutes prepared by Heather Fellman, Deputy Chief Clerk.

Respectfully Submitted,

Jeffrey Thomas, Secretary