

Huntingdon, PA

Tuesday, February 16, 2021

7-2021

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; EMA Director, Joe Thompson; Planning Director, Jim Lettiere; Treasurer, Susan Harry and Daily News Reporter, Kylie Hawn.

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 Thomas and the Pledge of Allegiance to the flag was led by Commissioner Sather.

It was moved by Commissioner Walls, seconded by Commissioner Thomas and carried (Sather, yes; Walls, yes; Thomas, yes) to approve the minutes of the February 9th 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 was one addition to the agenda. It was moved by Commissioner Walls, seconded by Commissioner Thomas and carried (Thomas, yes; Sather, yes; Walls, yes) to add consideration of approval for the COVID-19 Hospitality Industry Recovery Program (CHIRP).

There were no announcements.

There were no public comments.

There were no items to be addressed by the solicitor.

Under new business, Jim Lettiere, Planning Director requested consideration of approval for Resolution 4-2021. This is related to the County's Hazard Mitigation Plan. Under 322 of the Disaster Mitigation Act of 2000, we are required to update our Hazard Mitigation Plan every five years. This is a prerequisite to receiving most disaster hazard mitigation grant program funds. Joe Thompson, EMA Director, the Planning Department, and our consultant, Michael Baker International worked with 48 municipalities and the update is now in the final stages. Each of the 48 municipalities will also pass a resolution like the one in front of you today. He will be sending it out this week. Commissioner Walls commented that he would like to thank the Planning Department, EMA, and Michael Baker International, as well as all 48 municipalities. We would just ask that when the municipalities get notice of the resolution, please expedite passing that resolution. We appreciate your participation thus far, but we will need full participation in this step of the plan as well. Commissioner Thomas asked if the reason it is so important for municipalities to get their paperwork in because they will not be eligible for grant funding without it in the event of a disaster. Joe Thompson commented that that is correct. This is a very important project. Normally it is a two-year project. We did it in one in the middle of a pandemic. We had a change of Planning Directors in the middle and it was a very smooth transition. There are certain funds that the County and municipalities can benefit from. Twice in the past year, the County has benefited from this funding in the event of a disaster. There was no county funding required to complete this project because it was also paid for out of the federal disaster declaration. We were also able to purchase PPE using disaster relief funding that we were eligible to receive because of this plan. It was moved by Commissioner Thomas, seconded by Commissioner Walls and carried (Sather, yes; Walls, yes; Thomas, yes).

Jim Lettiere requested consideration of approval for the 2021 Act 13 Marcellus Shale Fund Application Cycle funding in the amount of \$30,000. In the past, you have authorized the same amount for eligible projects throughout the county. Last year, due to COVID this process was delayed and projects were not approved until August so we want to get an earlier start this year. In addition to the funding, we would like to ask for consideration of approval to make a change to the point system. In the point system, on the fact sheet that was provided, there is a category called "appropriateness of solutions" and points were assigned as to how effective the proposed project addressed the problem that was stated. I feel that attendance at one of the virtual workshops that we are going to hold is important for people who are interested in applying for this money to get an understanding of how this process works. We feel that there should be some points awarded for attendance at one of the two virtual workshops. We simply created a new category and assigned it 15 total points. If you attended one of the two workshops you would get 15 points and we reduced the appropriateness of solution category by 15 points. If you do approve this today, the applications will go out this week. I think We will bring the applications that are received in our office along with our recommendations to the County Planning Commission on May 20th at 5:00 PM. We will then bring the recommendations from the Planning Commissioner to the Commissioners at the public meeting on May 25th for your consideration. We are also sending out notifications to Southern Alleghenies regarding the DCNR mini grants which coincide with this timeline. Their applications are due at the end of March. We wanted to get both notices out to make sure that everybody has an opportunity to apply for these funds. Commissioner Thomas commented that we put this out to make this as easy as we possibly can for the municipalities to apply. There is no fault to Jim or the Planning Commission for the time frame that we are releasing this, but we should probably look at next year releasing it earlier. We were trying the last few years (before COVID) to have the money released by the end of April so small projects could be done by Memorial Day for parks and recreation. My only request for the change in points system is to change the time on the April 7th virtual meeting. 5:30PM could be tough for a lot of people to attend, especially those that work out of county. I would prefer to see that take place at 7PM. I think that would accommodate more people. Mr. Lettiere commented that that change could easily be made. It was moved by Commissioner Walls, seconded by Commissioner Thomas and carried (Walls, yes; Thomas, yes; Sather, yes).

Consideration of approval was given to hire two Corrections Officers for the County Jail. The two candidates, Noah Rodgers and Joshua Shope, have completed their pre-employment screening process. The effective start date for this position is tentatively set at February 22nd. It was moved by Commissioner Walls, seconded by Commissioner Thomas and carried (Thomas, yes; Sather, yes; Walls, yes).

Joe Thompson, EMA Director, requested consideration of approval for the Hazardous Material Emergency Response Report Certification. This is our final step in a grant application for the hazardous material response fund. It is supported by fees assessed to chemical facilities, primarily in our county. This is a competitive grant and it must be used to provide emergency funding for hazardous materials preparedness. The Local Emergency Planning Committee (LEPC) oversees these funds. The funding is approximately \$8500. Last year, our funding was cut in half. We researched how to get our funding back up. I am really happy to report that we are back up to the \$8500 being awarded by the state through this grant program. We have 60 chemical facilities in Huntingdon County. We are not an enforcement agency. We are not punitive. We are just trying to locate the facilities for education for emergency services preparedness. Of those 60 facilities in the county, 10 of those have enough chemicals and are large enough to require plans. Those are the ones that are paying into this fund. Commissioner Sather commented that Mr. Thompson has seen a lot of adversity this year and has come through it with shining colors. Your service to county residents is appreciated. Commissioner Walls commented that he would also like to recognize the group of volunteers that serves on the LEPC. They are very dedicated and do a good job. Joe Thompson commented that he also wanted to recognize the hard work and dedication of Katie Unger, the administrative assistant and Operations Training Officer. She does a great job with the grants, and working with the people at the state, and working with the LEPC. It was moved by Commissioner Thomas, seconded by Commissioner Walls and carried (Sather, yes; Walls, yes; Thomas, yes).

Joe Thompson presented a weekly update on COVID-19 in Huntingdon County. Huntingdon County remains in the substantial level of community transmission. We are seeing improvements in areas of the Commonwealth and some areas are leaving that designation and coming into the moderate or low. Our case count to date is 4,072 and we have had 117 COVID-19 related deaths. The difference in confirmed cases over the past couple of days is decreasing. The average in daily number of hospitalizations is also going down. The percent of ER visits in the most recent seven days in flattening out. Our positivity rate has gone down two percent in the past seven days. The folks at Juniata College have been doing a great job of surveillance testing for faculty, staff, and employees. There have been 302 cases of COVID-19 reported in our long-term care facilities. Penn Highlands Huntingdon is reporting only four COVID-19 patients, which is the lowest it has been for many months, and none are in the intensive care unit. The average daily number for the past seven days has been 16. The average number of new cases for the past three days is 12. There really is some improvement. EMA and the Commissioners and others have been receiving some inquiries about upcoming events, both indoor and outdoor. At this time, the restrictions enacted by the PA

Department of Health and the Governor's Office do remain in effect. We are doing our best to keep up with any changes in those restrictions, however these restrictions come from the state level and cannot be changed at the local level. Penn Highlands Huntingdon has planned a COVID-19 vaccination clinic tomorrow at Juniata Valley High School. This is not the project that EMA has been involved in. We have been in touch with them and offered assistance. This is primarily for those aged 65 and older. My understanding is it is fairly well booked up now, but you may see these pop up every once in a while. Huntingdon County Business and Industry has planned a question and answer session via Zoom for this Friday. It is primarily designed for businesses who have questions, whether COVID-19 related or not, but primarily COVID-19. The State Health Department is sponsoring another free COVID-19 testing site that will be opening on Sunday the 21st and it will be open until the 25th at the Huntingdon Plaza. We will get the information out more publicly shortly. The hours of operation will be from 9AM to 6PM. There is no fee or any kind of out of pocket cost and there will be drive-through and walk-in options available.

Commissioner Thomas commented that by February 19th, all the places giving the shots have to have availability of phone service, not just a recording directing people to a website. Mr. Thompson responded that the state is hearing and responding to concerns. In Huntingdon County 20% of the population is over age 65. Not everyone has the ability or internet connection to arrange for their vaccine through a website. Mr. Thompson commented that everything that he was able to share today was the result of Doug Hart working in the office. He thanked the Commissioners for allowing him to continue to work in this capacity and serve as the COVID-19 point person.

Consideration of approval was given to re-appoint Donald Trego to the Huntingdon County Housing Authority Board for a five year term expiring on March 1, 2026. This request comes from Dawn Sunderland, Executive Director of the Housing Authority. It was moved by Commissioner Thomas, seconded by Commissioner Walls and carried (Walls, yes; Thomas, yes; Sather, yes).

Consideration of approval was given to adopt the PA Department of Transportation Policy and Procedures for Consultant Selection. These are procedures put into place by PennDOT for the orderly determination of a need to use the consulting/engineering firms, qualification and selection of firms, and the general administration and monitoring of the engineering agreements. This documentation is good for a five year period. It was moved by Commissioner Walls, seconded by Commissioner Thomas and carried (Thomas, yes; Sather, yes; Walls, yes).

Under Matters for Action, consideration of approval was given for CHIRP through the Department of Community and Economic Development (DCED). The county is eligible to receive \$511,317. The purpose is for promoting and encouraging the prosperous development of Pennsylvania businesses, expanding markets and promoting new markets. The period of time for this contract is March 1, 2021 through June 15, 2021. The County is to receive and name a community enterprise to distribute up to \$511,317 from the CHIRP grant contract. Commissioner Walls commented that there is \$145 million total. This is from the first stimulus that has not been spent yet. The largest recipients are Philadelphia County at \$17,900,000 and Allegheny County is getting \$13,700,000. Thanks to everyone for completing this. We learned about it the morning of the 10th of February and the application had to be completed by the 11th. They did not give us much time to turn it around but this office pulled together and got it done. Thank you everyone for that. Commissioner Thomas commented that hopefully this can help serve a lot of the hospitalities and maybe some of those that were not eligible for the first go-around with the CARES Act. It looks like the guidelines have changed a little, but there are still many guidelines you have to follow. Some of the timeframes have changed as well. Hopefully it can make some of these restaurants and lodges and everything in the hospitality industry whole. I am anxious to get this money out to people to help them get through this pandemic. Commissioner Walls commented that our office will not be the end administrator for this funding. There will be more information to follow on who you should contact as soon as that is put together. Commissioner Sather commented that these are badly needed funds at a time particularly when the hospitality industry needs it. At this point in time, we want to be in a position to utilize these funds and continue a program where it is desperately needed. Solicitor, Peter McManamon commented that he has looked at the documentation and it is pretty loose. That is probably by design because it is trying to get money out quickly to entities that are qualified. I do think that there should be some sort of memorandum from the Commissioners' point of view that defines what the relationship is between DCED, the County, and HCBI. In the agreement with HCBI, there should be some parameters as to how the money is reported back up the line so that the Commissioners are truly just a pass-through entity and not making decisions on their own in this case. I do think there has to be some sort of memorandum to that effect. Commissioner Sather commented that we have been in conversation with HCBI to seek and receive applications for businesses interested in receiving these grants. We have not formalized that relationship at this point. What we are taking action on today is acknowledging, by deadline and requirements from DCED, that the County is to receive the funds. It was moved by Commissioner Thomas, seconded by Commissioner Walls and carried (Sather, yes; Walls, yes; Thomas, yes).

There were no Veteran's Burial Allowances.

There being no further business, it was moved by Commissioner Walls to adjourn the meeting at 10:20 a.m.

Minutes prepared by Heather Fellman, Deputy Chief Clerk.

Respectfully Submitted,

Jeffrey Thomas, Secretary