

Huntingdon, PA

Tuesday, June 1, 2021

20-2021

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, Larry Newton; EMA Director, Joe Thompson; Barb Covert and Michelle Heane from Employment and Training 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 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 previous meeting.

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

There was one addition to the agenda: consideration of a letter of engagement and joint defense agreement with McNees, Wallace, and Nurick regarding a fee agreement on a state-wide class action lawsuit against prothonotaries. It was moved by commissioner Walls, seconded by Commissioner Thomas and carried (Thomas, yes; Sather, yes; Walls, yes).

There were no announcements.

There were no public comments.

There were no matters to be addressed by the solicitor.

Under new business, Barb Covert and Michele Heane from Employment and Training presented information on the Medical Assistance Transportation Program (MATP). They thanked the Commissioners for allowing them to be the provider of this program for about 30 years. Michele Heane did the work to prepare the new contract. As of May 27, 2021, the number of client applications completed on file is 4,569. Of that number, 1,921 are registered to use CART. We have 542 persons with disabilities registered. We are continuing to reimburse consumers at a rate of 25 cents per mile plus any parking and toll costs when travel is necessary. This plan went into effect last year on April 1st. It is in an effort to ease the difficulties and support the use of the mileage reimbursement option. This will stay in effect until further notice from Harrisburg. We also offer an on-call phone service during weekend hours along with our toll-free line. We have also begun working with Nolton Diagnostic and Treatment Center. This program is for summer consumers to continue their session while on summer break from school. CART continues to provide through the Area Agency on Aging transportation throughout the county and to other counties on scheduled days. The trip rate for 2021-2022 is going to be \$27.22, which is down from the current rate of \$34.84. We are looking at a tentative allocation of \$834,296. This is 50% funded from the federal government and 50% funded from the state. This funding goes right to consumers. There are some operational costs, but the majority goes to consumers. Consideration of approval was given for the 2021-2022 County Medical Assistance Transportation Program Contract. It was moved by Commissioner Thomas, seconded by Commissioner Walls and carried (Sather, yes; Walls, yes; Thomas, yes).

Consideration of approval was given for the 2021-2022 MATP Participation Grant Agreement and Assurance of Compliance. This says that the grantee assumes full responsibility for ensuring that non-emergency medical transportation services are provided to eligible MATP participants in need of such services. Susan Harry will also need to sign this. She was not able to attend this meeting and I will have her sign it. It was moved by Commissioner Walls, seconded by Commissioner Thomas and carried (Walls, yes; Thomas, yes; Sather, yes).

Commissioner Walls thanked Ms. Covert and Ms. Heane for their work on unemployment compensation in the past year, given how difficult a situation it was. Ms. Covert commented that the UC log and the UC helpers were able to help resolve all of the issues we experienced. Southern Alleghenies has been great at supporting us locally. We are excited to see some of the job search requirements come back into play because as our local employers continue to struggle to find qualified applicants, we're hoping to be able to make good job matches and utilize the resources for on the job training and transitional work to get folks back into the job market. Our team is really dedicated to our community and making Huntingdon a great place to work and live.

It was moved by Commissioner Walls and seconded by Commissioner Thomas and carried (Thomas, yes; Sather, yes; Walls, yes) to table the item from the Planning Department until further notice. Commissioner Thomas commented that he is not happy about tabling this item because when PennDOT sends this information, it needs to get done quickly. We have had one bridge in Huntingdon County get moved down the line on the TIP. I want the municipalities to know that when this paperwork comes in, we need to act on it in a timely manner because we can be knocked down the line a couple of years on these projects.

Joe Thompson, EMA Director, presented a COVID-19 update. It has been 15 months now since the beginning of the pandemic and the pandemic is now finally in retreat. All mitigation orders have been lifted as of yesterday. The mask mandate will be lifted no later than June 28th. The Department of Health will no longer require vaccinated individuals to wear a mask in public effective June 28th or once 70% of adults are fully vaccinated – whichever comes first. 70% of PA adults aged 18 and over have already received at least one dose and over half of the population has been fully vaccinated. Some businesses, schools and other facilities may still require a mask. New infections continue to fall rapidly. Huntingdon County remains in the moderate level of community spread for the third week. Surrounding counties are in similar situations. We are averaging about 3 new cases per day. Yesterday there were zero. In total, Huntingdon County has had 5,109 cases and our percent positivity rating is at 3%, which is slightly less than the state-wide average of 3.8%. We unfortunately did have one new death last week, bringing the total number of people who have lost their lives to COVID in Huntingdon County to 132. There is one person currently hospitalized. There is nothing exceptional to report from the Prisons, Jail, long-term care facilities, or schools. PA is ranked 9th among all of the states for first doses of vaccine administered. 17,000 total vaccines have been administered in Huntingdon County. This accounts for about 38% of the population of the county. Of that number, 14,900 are fully vaccinated and 2,100 are partially vaccinated. All Pennsylvanians aged 12 and older are eligible to receive the vaccine. Anyone with any questions should contact the PA Department of Health.

Joe Thompson also announced that the EMA office is continuing to work on the Huntingdon County Hazard Mitigation Plan Update. We have started the close-out work for the state grant that paid for the project. This came at no cost to the county or the municipalities. We will continue to accept adoption resolutions from municipalities, but we would really like to ask municipalities to send in those resolutions as soon as we can. We would like to have them as part of the complete close-out package. We still have about 10-12 municipalities that we have not seen a resolution from. Those resolutions can be returned to the Planning Office.

If anyone needs help getting to a vaccine site, the Center for Community Action (CCA) is working with the Area Agency on Aging (AAA) to provide transportation at no cost to qualified individuals to get to a vaccine site. Larry Newton asked if Mr. Thompson is seeing resistance to the vaccine in this county. Mr. Thompson responded that the biggest at-risk populations went out right away and got the vaccine. Our numbers are not too bad. There are some people who, for whatever reason, feel that the vaccine is not safe and we respect that, however we also encourage anyone with questions or concerns about the vaccine to reach out to reputable information sources – your doctor or pharmacist or the Department of Health.

Consideration of approval was given for a letter of engagement and joint defense agreement with a fee agreement for McNees, Wallace, and Nurick regarding a state-wide class-action lawsuit against prothonotaries. CCAP has organized this defense effort and it certainly makes sense to consolidate things. Solicitor Newton commented that there are valid defenses to this including lack of standing and whether you can file a class-action lawsuit in the Commonwealth Court. Also for consideration, the Judicial Code contains the section that says political subdivisions cannot be charged more than \$10, there were subsequent amendments which give prothonotaries the right to charge fees that keep up with inflation. The hourly rate for this firm ranges from \$234-430. When you divide that by 40 counties that is not bad at all. This is a reputable firm that we can be comfortable with. Commissioner Walls asked for clarification that this is two Delaware County School Districts suing every Prothonotary in the state. Solicitor Newton confirmed that this is correct. They are suing for refunds of what they claim are overcharged fees and attorney's fees. Commissioner Walls commented that it is his opinion that if there was any harm done, that Delaware County School Districts can only claim to have been harmed by Delaware County. Solicitor Newton confirmed that that is one of the objections that has been raised to this lawsuit. We have limited exposure anyway, based on some work that Kay Coons has done.

There were no Matters for Action.

There were two Veteran's Burial Allowances.

There being no further business, it was moved by Commissioner Walls to adjourn the meeting at 10:21 a.m.

Minutes prepared by Heather Fellman, Chief Clerk.

Respectfully Submitted,

Jeffrey Thomas, Secretary