

Huntingdon, PA

Tuesday, April 6, 2021

13-2021

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; CYS Director, Shannon Walborn; Public Defender, Fred Gutshall; Planning Director, Jim Lettiere; Register and Recorder, Jinny Cooper; Wendy Melius from Center for Community Action; EMA Director, Joe Thompson 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 March 30<sup>th</sup> 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 3 additions to the agenda. Consideration of approval was given to add the PHARE Funding Grant with the Center for Community Action to the agenda. It was moved by Commissioner Walls, seconded by Commissioner Thomas and carried (Thomas, yes; Sather, yes; Walls, yes). Consideration of approval was given to add Proclamation 3-2021 for Child Abuse Prevention Month. It was moved by Commissioner Thomas, seconded by Commissioner Walls and carried (Sather, yes; Walls, yes; Thomas, yes). Consideration of approval was given to add to the agenda a letter of approval for the East Broad Top Foundation to secure RACP funding. It was moved by Commissioner Thomas, seconded by Commissioner Walls and carried (Walls, yes; Thomas, yes; Sather, yes).

Under announcements, Commissioner Thomas announced that there have been issues with the former recycling site in Porter Township. These recycling bins have been removed and you may no longer put your trash or recycling there. That is considered littering. The only recycling spots that we have left in Huntingdon County are at Smithfield and at Marklesburg at the post office as well as Parks Garbage. If there is not a bin there at the site, the recycling has stopped. I would also like to announce that, with the help of the Appalachian Regional Commission, Alleghenies Broadband Incorporated received a grant to provide internet service in three locations in the six county region. There are two locations in Somerset and one is in the Broad Top Area. Those RFPs are out and due back in May. Commissioner Walls added that if the recycling bins at the remaining two locations are full and you place items outside of the receptacles that is considered littering as well. You could be subject to fines for littering.

There were no public comments.

Under Matters to be addressed by the solicitor, Attorney Newton commented that on March 31, Judge Zanic dismissed Gail Galloway's lawsuit against the County. He gave Mr. Galloway 20 days to file an amended complaint. My suspicion is that he will file an amended complaint. We will file the same kind of motion to dismiss. As you are aware, Mr. Galloway is complaining about not receiving CARES Act funding for a business that was only open for about a month before the pandemic hit. I will also be talking with Joe Thompson about Eagle Towing about the purchase of meters with paddles for their certification and if we are able to proceed with that we will get an agreement together and proceed accordingly.

Under new business, Fred Gutshall, Public Defender, requested consideration of approval to hire Keri Aurand for the position of Legal Assistant. She is currently employed with Ody and Wilson and is highly recommended by the Assistant Public Defender who worked with her at Ody and Wilson. The tentative start date is April 19<sup>th</sup>. This is an open position that is being filled. It was moved by Commissioner Thomas, seconded by Commissioner Walls and carried (Thomas, yes; Sather, yes; Walls, yes).

Shannon Walborn, CYS Director, requested consideration of approval for Proclamation 3-2021. April is National Child Abuse Prevention Month. That is something that we work to prevent every month. Last week I worked in conjunction with Corporal Streightiff and the Abuse Network and the Say Something organization. We created a small informational image that we put out on our Facebook page. It has some phone numbers and information on how to report child abuse, sexual assault,

information on becoming a foster parent and information on receiving services. Every year over 4.3 million reports are made to Child Protective Services. This proclamation seeks to increase community engagement and awareness of child abuse and work to build thriving families and communities. It was moved by Commissioner Walls, seconded by Commissioner Thomas and carried (Sather, yes; Walls, yes; Thomas, yes).

Shannon Walborn commented that along with Child Abuse Prevention Month, if you suspect abuse please report it. You can reach out to Child Line at [keepkidssafe.pa.gov](http://keepkidssafe.pa.gov) or 1-800-932-0313. Our agency is right here on Penn Street and our phone number is 814-643-3270. If you suspect child abuse report it and let us do the investigation piece. That is what we are here to do.

Shannon Walborn provided an update on the Children's Services Agency. It has been a long 13 months working under the same restrictions as everyone else is working under. I am very proud of the staff. They have done amazing things for the kids and families of Huntingdon County in the last year. I know we have brought up foster care many times in the public meetings. That program is up and running. In October of 2020, we had two approved foster homes in Huntingdon County and, as of March, we have 10 approved foster homes that our agency has licensed. We still use our providers and they are essential to our functioning, but it is nice to be bringing some of those services in house and allowing our staff to work with those foster parents. Anyone interested in becoming a foster parent can reach us at the office number previously listed. We have a dedicated caseworker who works with people who are interested in becoming foster parents. We need foster parents for infants to teenagers. Abuse does not discriminate by age, race, or sibling group. We need parents to take care of all kinds of children. HCCS will be at Mayfest this year. We will also be setting up a booth at the Thursday farmer's market here in Huntingdon. If you are interested in foster care or just want to talk to someone and see what it is about feel free to stop by at any of those events. The spring was very busy here. We were able to obtain the old Mutual Benefit building at 412 Penn Street. We are about 99% moved into the new space. It has been an amazing opportunity to have this space. It is making our communication and teamwork more efficient. We have a classroom and conference rooms and we have created a visitation room. This allows us to provide services faster to families. We had a state program inspection where we received a full one year license. The state audited a bunch of files and found no safety violations so that was excellent. Talking to the program specialists that have been here in Huntingdon for 23 years, it was by far the best inspection they had seen. In that same month, we had a fiscal audit that received a 100% rating. There were no errors on the fiscal audit. We want to make sure that we are spending the taxpayer dollars the best that we can. The state gave us a 100% rating. We are fully staffed. We do have one vacant position but it is a new position that was created and never filled. We are in a position that is very capable of handling the work that we have. We are right on target for the number of reports made to the agency. For the past several years, by this point in the year we are averaging 205-215 reports. While we are on target with the number of reports this year, the severity of the reports have increased. There are definitely links to COVID and children being quarantined and not being able to get to school. Our agency staff is doing everything we can, so please if you suspect abuse report it. Commissioners Sather, Walls and Thomas expressed their appreciation for the hard work of the CYS staff. Commissioner Walls commented that abuse did not take a break during the pandemic and the work of the CYS department is vital. Commissioner Thomas commended Ms. Walborn for her excellent leadership. Jinny Cooper commented that, as someone who sees the positive outcome of the work that you do, she wants to extend her congratulations. You and your staff do a wonderful job.

Jinny Cooper, Register and Recorder, provided a public update on Deeds and DD214 Military Discharge Records. Recently the Recorders Offices across the state have been receiving packets of mail containing copies of DD214s from a company known as DD214 Direct with instructions to record and return the copies to them. Upon investigation of this site, among other services, this company is offering to record military discharges on behalf of the veteran for a fee. This is not a scam because they are providing a service, however the fee is extraordinary. The recording and providing of a certified copy of a veteran's discharge is a free service provided by the County. We only record the original military discharge. Copies can be recorded with the express consent of our Veteran's Affairs Director, Brian Bassett. If you do not have your original DD214, Brian Bassett can assist you in getting that. He can be reached at 814-643-1360. Veteran discharges are not public information. No one other than the veteran or the Director of Veterans Affairs has access to those discharges. Because we only record original documents, we will not be recording anything that comes in from this company that is a copy. This is a service available to our county residents and you do not need to go through any special company to do it. Do not pay for services that are available to you by the county for no charge. Similarly, we are getting calls from county residents about mailings that they are receiving related to their deeds. These companies are offering to get a certified copy of the deed for a fee. In some cases, this fee is in excess of \$80. If you need a certified copy of your deed, it is \$5. If you need a copy of your deed, there is no charge for it. If you want your neighbor's deed, that is public record and you can have a copy for \$.25 per page. I do not know of any situation where you may need a certified copy of your deed, but we are happy to provide that for you for \$5. Original deeds are not housed at the county level. The deed is digitized, verified, and then the original document is returned to the original parties who brought it in for recording. Companies who need regular access to our public records do so by subscription to the County's software supplier, Infocon. Before using a third party service, please call the appropriate county office to find out if that service is provided at and by the county offices. Commissioners Sather, Walls, and Thomas thanked Ms. Cooper for providing such good and timely information.

Joe Thompson provided a COVID-19 update. We are seeing a bit of an uptick in cases around the area. This is something that has been discussed for a while. We do not believe that this is going to be a surge. Restrictions are being lifted and more people are getting out so we may see an increase in cases. Huntingdon County has now gone back to the substantial level of community transmission. This was initially designed as information for schools to develop guidance for their operation. The other thing this indicates is current level of community transmission. Now that we are back in the substantial category, this indicates that there is a bit more of a risk for COVID-19 to everyone. You may see restrictions back to long-term care facilities and hospitals and things like that. We do keep in touch with our human and social service agencies. They are doing their best to

get back into the swing of things. Vaccines are available in Huntingdon County at several locations we have mentioned before. Please understand that it goes in cycles and not every place may have vaccine every week. The other good news is we are now transitioning into the 1B phase of vaccinations, which widens the group of those who are eligible for vaccines. Now the following categories are newly eligible: corrections officers, education workers, USPS, manufacturing and clergy. 3 day average was 6 new cases per day. The seven day average is 9. We are seeing that small uptick. Our total number of cases to date is 4,606 with 127 COVID-19 related deaths. About 20% of Huntingdon County residents have had full vaccinations. We have about 4,000 partial and just over 7200 full vaccines administered in Huntingdon County. The difference in average number of daily hospitalizations is up slightly. There is just one in the hospital right now and they are unfortunately in the ICU. Juniata College and the other schools are continuing to operate. All schools are full in-person except New Day Charter School. SCI Huntingdon is reporting zero active inmate cases, 2 active staff. SCI Smithfield is reporting 35 inmate cases as of this morning. There is a slight number of cases in our long-term care facilities. We are estimating that about 32% of eligible Pennsylvanians have received at least a first dose of COVID-19 vaccine. There is definitely some improvement there. The state issued some new guidelines that relax some of the restrictions that were in place. They took effect on Sunday. Restaurants may resume bar service. The curfew for serving alcohol and how that alcohol must be served has changed a bit. Indoor dining capacity has now increased to 75% for most of the restaurants. Again a reminder that requirements such as mask wearing, social distancing, and frequent hand-washing are still in place. Those basics are vital. The capacity for other businesses are increasing as well. That includes personal service facilities like gyms and theaters and casinos. The maximum occupation limits have increased to 25% for indoor events and 50% for outdoor. We know that several of our community events that have traditionally been held were cancelled last year. Many of them are coming back this year, like Mayfest which will be held this month. The Creation Christian Festival in late June has been cancelled again this year but we are trying to get back on track to have other community events. The Commissioners thanked Mr. Thompson for his hard work and for keeping the public informed.

Joe Thompson made some additional announcements. There was a significant fire event yesterday that did involve hazmat. Huntingdon County EMA was involved. We have also called State DEP Emergency Response, just as a precaution. We owe a lot to our volunteer firefighters. They did a remarkable job handling a bad situation that could have gotten a lot worse. We were keeping an eye on threats to nearby facilities and residences and there were none. There is no evidence of off-site contamination. We are going back today to check in. We will also be doing some PR work over the next few days to remind the public that it is Pennsylvania 811 Safe Digging Month in April. It is an awareness initiative sponsored by Pennsylvania 811. Please make sure you call 811 at least 3 days before you dig.

Wendy Melius from the Center for Community Action requested consideration of approval for the Pennsylvania Housing Authority and Rehabilitation Enhancement (PHARE) funds grant. She noted that everything was taken care of back in December. It has been sent to the state. Tiffany Jones found some information and we received the final contract to be executed. It is for the PHARE funds in the amount of \$100,000. We requested \$200,000 but received \$100,000. This funding is for rental assistance, utility assistance, and landlord mitigation. We are proposing to serve approximately 17 households with this program. Commissioner Walls commented that last week it was announced that the County had received \$2.9 million for rental and utility assistance for back rent due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Can you please give the public some information on how they might access that funding if they are behind on their rent or if there are landlords who have tenants who are behind on their rent? Ms. Melius commented that so far we have spent \$35,000 and have about \$10,000 pending. We have helped 11 families. The applications are coming in. The process can happen in two ways. You can submit a preliminary application through COMPASS, the state website. You put your information in and we pull that information down and contact the applicant or the landlord. The actual person living in the household can apply or the landlord can apply on the participant's behalf. If they are not able to use the website, they can call our office and we will walk them through the whole process. The COMPASS website is at [www.compass.state.pa.us](http://www.compass.state.pa.us). There is a button on the main website that takes you to the emergency rental assistance. It is in the top green section "Click for more information." It was moved by Commissioner Walls, seconded by Commissioner Thomas and carried (Walls, yes; Thomas, yes; Sather, yes).

Jim Lettiere, Planning Director, requested consideration of approval for a letter of support. This letter was requested by the Commissioners and the Planning Office has drafted a letter for your approval and signature for the East Broadtop Foundation's application to the Pennsylvania Office of the Budget for the Supplemental Redevelopment Assistance Capital Program. The amount they are applying for is \$1,100,000. This money will be leveraged with other funding through private matching funds and the Economic Development Administration CARES Act funding and previous RACP funds in the amount of \$4 million, representing a total project cost of \$5,100,000. The purpose of this project is rehabilitating 4 miles of track used by the East Broad Top for tourist trains from 1960 through 2011. Additionally the project will also acquire land from two RACP grants and the construction of an event facility at the Colgate Picnic Grove that will allow the railroad to schedule a variety of summer, fall, and Christmas events which are key to the financial success of the Foundation's business plan. This will begin reopening of the historic southbound main line through the Three Springs and Saltillo areas. These are small towns that eagerly anticipate the return of the railroad and the arrival of tourists interested in food, antiques, and other spending. Commissioner Walls commented that it is amazing how this has been preserved. It will be a great economic benefit to the southern end of the county and I am proud to support it. Commissioner Sather commented that it truly is a time capsule. The workshops are as the workers had left as of the closing of the last whistle. Redeveloping and bringing that back will bring visitors from all over the eastern region. Commissioner Thomas also expressed his excitement at seeing the return of the railroad. It was moved by Commissioner Thomas, seconded by Commissioner Walls and carried (Thomas, yes; Sather, yes; Walls, yes).

Jim Lettiere also reminded the public that the Commissioners authorized the release of the Act 13 Marcellus Shale Legacy Funding. There are two scheduled workshops that will take place tomorrow. One is at 12:30 and one is at 7:00PM. Please contact our office if you are interested in participating. Applications are due to our office by April 28<sup>th</sup>. The information for the

Zoom meetings can be found on the Planning Department Website. If you have any questions please call our office at 814-643-5091.

Under Matters for Action, sealed bids were opened for the sale of a county vehicle. The first bid was from Chris Lalli for \$200. The second bid was from Terry Norris for \$201. It was moved by Commissioner Walls, seconded by Commissioner Thomas and carried (Sather, yes; Walls, yes; Thomas, yes) to accept the bid submitted by Mr. Norris.

There were no Veteran's Burial Allowances.

There being no further business, it was moved by Commissioner Thomas to adjourn the meeting at 10:32 a.m.

Minutes prepared by Heather Fellman, Deputy Chief Clerk.

Respectfully Submitted,

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Jeffrey Thomas, Secretary