

Wednesday, September 16, 2020

The second regular meeting of September 2020 of the Pike County Commissioners was called to order by Commissioner Osterberg at 9:00 a.m. at the Pike County Administration Building, followed by the "Pledge of Allegiance" to the flag.

PRESENT: Commissioners Osterberg, Schmalzle and Guccini; Chief Clerk Orben; and Solicitor Farley.

Public Comments/Questions concerning today's agenda.

MOTION: by Commissioner Guccini and seconded by Commissioner Schmalzle, to recess the Commissioners' Meeting to hold a Retirement Board Meeting.

VOTE: Commissioners Osterberg, Schmalzle and Guccini voted 'aye'. Motion carried.

A RETIREMENT BOARD MEETING WAS HELD.

MOTION: by Commissioner Guccini and seconded by Commissioner Schmalzle, to reconvene the Commissioners' Meeting.

VOTE: Commissioners Osterberg, Schmalzle and Guccini voted 'aye'. Motion carried.

MOTION: by Commissioner Guccini and seconded by Commissioner Schmalzle, to approve the September 16, 2020 Agenda.

VOTE: Commissioners Osterberg, Schmalzle and Guccini voted 'aye'. Motion carried.

MOTION: by Commissioner Guccini and seconded by Commissioner Schmalzle, to approve the September 2, 2020 Commissioners' Meeting Minutes.

VOTE: Commissioners Osterberg, Schmalzle and Guccini voted 'aye'. Motion carried.

MOTION: by Commissioner Guccini and seconded by Commissioner Schmalzle, to approve the September 1 and 10, 2020 Commissioners' Conference Minutes.

VOTE: Commissioners Osterberg, Schmalzle and Guccini voted 'aye'. Motion carried.

MOTION: by Commissioner Guccini and seconded by Commissioner Schmalzle, to approve payment from **GENERAL FUND (County Bills)**, in the amount of **\$296,928.62**, subject to further review.

VOTE: Commissioners Osterberg, Schmalzle and Guccini voted 'aye'. Motion carried.

MOTION: by Commissioner Guccini and seconded by Commissioner Schmalzle, Approve exonerations as presented by Cynthia Gehris, Tax Claim Bureau Director, for 78 properties that were sold out of the County Repository for \$14,076.91 (taxes) and \$13,808.59 (Bureau costs).

VOTE: Commissioners Osterberg, Schmalzle and Guccini voted 'aye'. Motion carried.

PERSONNEL:

MOTION: by Commissioner Guccini and seconded by Commissioner Schmalzle, to hire **JANINE MCLAUGHLIN** to fill the temporary full time Clerk position in the Election Office, for a 37 ½ hour work week, effective September 14, 2020 through October 30, 2020, with no benefits. This is a newly created temporary position.

VOTE: Commissioners Osterberg, Schmalzle and Guccini voted 'aye'. Motion carried.

MOTION: by Commissioner Guccini and seconded by Commissioner Schmalzle, to recess the Commissioners' Meeting to hold a Salary Board Meeting.

VOTE: Commissioners Osterberg, Schmalzle and Guccini voted 'aye'. Motion carried.

A SALARY BOARD MEETING WAS HELD.

MOTION: by Commissioner Guccini and seconded by Commissioner Schmalzle, to reconvene the Commissioners' Meeting.

VOTE: Commissioners Osterberg, Schmalzle and Guccini voted 'aye'. Motion carried.

OLD BUSINESS:

MOTION: by Commissioner Guccini and seconded by Commissioner Schmalzle, to open bids received for the purchase of groceries and frozen foods for the Correctional Facility.

VOTE: Commissioners Osterberg, Schmalzle and Guccini voted 'aye'. Motion carried.

Solicitor Farley opened bids from the following vendors: Sysco - \$148,459.34; Keyco - \$152,362.18; Mivila - \$157,949.75; and Driscoll Foods - \$256,282.79.

MOTION: by Commissioner Guccini and seconded by Commissioner Schmalzle, to table the bids received for the purchase of groceries and frozen foods for the Correctional Facility until October 7, 2020.

VOTE: Commissioners Osterberg, Schmalzle and Guccini voted 'aye'. Motion carried.

NEW BUSINESS:

MOTION: by Commissioner Guccini and seconded by Commissioner Schmalzle, to adopt Resolution No. 20-24, Recognizing the Staff of Pike County Children & Youth Services, which was read by Commissioner Guccini.

VOTE: Commissioners Osterberg, Schmalzle and Guccini voted 'aye'. Motion carried.

Commissioner Osterberg added that every year we recognize this organization and every year we say the same thing, the amount of dedication that those individuals have is unimaginable. What they have to go through every day. As I have said many times, I don't want their job. What they are dealing with is very difficult decisions, dealing with families and making sure they stay together and protecting the children that are in our County. We take our hats off to everybody that works upstairs and thank them for their dedication to the County and to the residents in Pike County. Commissioner Guccini echoed those sentiments. Having worked with a bunch of them in the past, it's an impossible job. We thank you for your services.

MOTION: by Commissioner Guccini and seconded by Commissioner Schmalzle, to advertise the rescheduling of the November 4, 2020 Pike County Commissioners' Meeting to November 5, 2020.

VOTE: Commissioners Osterberg, Schmalzle and Guccini voted 'aye'. Motion carried.

Commissioner Osterberg said this is being done due to the fact that the overwhelming number of mail-in ballots and absentee ballots will probably consume a lot of time for the Board of Elections and they use this room during that time. We feel it is important that we push off our meeting at least one day to give them an opportunity. If everything goes the way it is planned, then everything will be done on Election Day and that night (November 3rd). We know they are going to be inundated and we are giving them ample time and effort to do it here so that is why the meeting is moved to the next day.

MOTION: by Commissioner Guccini and seconded by Commissioner Schmalzle, to authorize the Chairman to execute the Lackawanna College License Agreement for use of space at their Lake Region Center in Hawley, on behalf of the Workforce Development Agency.

VOTE: Commissioners Osterberg, Schmalzle and Guccini voted 'aye'. Motion carried.

MOTION: by Commissioner Guccini and seconded by Commissioner Schmalzle, to authorize the Chairman to execute the PCCD Subgrant Award Notification for the Pike County Sheriff's Office Body Worn Cameras (BWC) Program for \$2,349.

VOTE: Commissioners Osterberg, Schmalzle and Guccini voted 'aye'. Motion carried.

MOTION: by Commissioner Guccini and seconded by Commissioner Schmalzle, to execute the FY 2020-21 Purchase of Service Agreement between Diversified Treatment Alternative Centers and the County of Pike, on behalf of Children & Youth Services.

VOTE: Commissioners Osterberg, Schmalzle and Guccini voted 'aye'. Motion carried.

MOTION: by Commissioner Guccini and seconded by Commissioner Schmalzle, to authorize the Chairman to execute the Affordable Housing Fund Payment Voucher payable to Diana T. Myers & Assoc. for the Pike Strategic Plan for August 2020 for \$1,502.50, on behalf of the Human Development Office.

VOTE: Commissioners Osterberg, Schmalzle and Guccini voted 'aye'. Motion carried.

MOTION: by Commissioner Guccini and seconded by Commissioner Schmalzle, to authorize the Chairman to execute the Affordable Housing Fund Payment Voucher payable to the County of Pike for the reimbursement of CDBG funds from Housing Rehab Project for \$7,180.98, on behalf of the Human Development Office.

VOTE: Commissioners Osterberg, Schmalzle and Guccini voted 'aye'. Motion carried.

MISCELLANEOUS: None.

PRESS & PUBLIC COMMENTS/QUESTIONS/ADJOURNMENT

Commissioner Osterberg said in the last few days we have restructured our debt in the County. Part of the restructuring of debt had to do with the fact of the COVID Virus and, in some cases, the amount of revenue lost in the County, and the other part of it is the amount of expenses we incurred due to it (COVID). It turned out to be an opportune time because interest rates are so low. We were able to not only expend a few more dollars in debt so that we can finish some projects we have. It also saved us some money on certain loans we had because interest rates are so low. It added a few more years onto the end of it, I think our debt was going to be paid off in 2028 and we're going to 2031 now. If anything, nobody anticipated anything with this COVID, but because interest rates are so low, it is an opportune time for us to do it. The County of Pike has a minimal amount of debt considering the size of the County. Some of that is because of our efforts, but also the efforts of the previous Boards of Commissioners from years ago. Everyone was fiscally conservative all of these years and that has, now during this crisis, benefitted the residents of Pike County. The last thing we want to see happening in these cases is that because of this lost revenue in some cases and more expenses, is to raise taxes. That is not something we wanted to do and this is one way of helping us offset that. We can move forward and restructure ourselves moving into 2021 and into 2022. It's going to take a while for us to get out of this – the Pandemic is not over yet and there are still expenses we are incurring. It was a lot of hard work on our part to research this, but it was a good effort for us to do on behalf of the residents of the County. Commissioner Schmalzle added that it's important not to kick the can down the road and to deal with some of the things now. A lot of the projects we are looking at are creating efficiencies in lighting and how we heat buildings and cool buildings and I think that will serve the County well into the future. Commissioner Osterberg continued that we were able to borrow a little bit more money without really impacting our debt. This was the time to do these things because these projects need to be done with some updating of some of the buildings. We have projects here and some projects at the jail yet to be completed. We still have the Bennett Avenue property which is in our possession now but Penn DOT is still using the facility. At some point the plan is to refurbish that project there and we needed money to do that so this was the right time to do it.

Commissioner Osterberg announced that regarding the CARES money that the County has received (\$5M) the County received 80 applications. They are being reviewed and processed right now by Rob Ruiz and the company we hired, Hailstone & Associates. The process will be completed and checks should be cut by October 9th. This is a long process and we have to be very careful how we allocate these funds because next year we will be audited and we will obviously have to make sure the funds we use are in the proper format according to the law by the Federal and State government. There will be a press release coming out soon to explain more about it, but right now we thought it was important that we let people know their applications are being processed.

Reporter Chris Jones asked who the beneficiaries of the CARES? Commissioners Osterberg answered it will go to hospitality businesses, municipalities, non-profits, emergency services, mental health and drug alcohol, broadband allocations and PPE reimbursements.

Reporter Chris Jones asked about shortfall of revenue for the County, what revenue are we talking about? Commissioner Osterberg answered the revenue that is down is our contract with ICE (Immigration and Customs Enforcement) at the Correctional Facility. The population there had to be reduced due to the virus brought into the Correctional Facility back in April. To be able to create social distancing within the confines of the Correctional Facility, we had to have ICE prisoners be moved to other locations. As you know, we spoke about this back in April and May, through the DA's and the Judge, they were able to furlough certain individuals so that they could have more room in there. There are also expenses that we had to incur by overtime, hazardous pay at the Correctional Facility, a number of expenses that we had to incur.

Reporter Chris Jones asked what is the number, ballpark figure of how much we lost from ICE? Treasurer Gilpin answered we won't know until the end, we don't know yet.

Reporter Chris Jones asked about the temporary Election job, what is that? Commissioner Osterberg responded it is to give Nadeen (Manzoni) and the staff another person down there. Nadeen can tell you how many mail in ballots she is anticipating, but it is going to take a lot of time and effort up to the election, to make sure all of these applications are processed so the people get their ballots in a timely fashion. Nadeen Manzoni said with the influx of the mail in ballots we need to keep up with the flow of the applications coming in and that is going to be a monumental task – mailing out close to 12K ballots, we're at 10K now. The State hasn't certified the ballot yet, so we are doing our best to prepare. There was also a hold up with the envelopes, so we couldn't even prepare envelope packets and add the ballots to them, because of changes that the Department of State and the Postal Service was late approving. We have a lot going on in a short amount of time and we need the extra help.

Reporter Chris Jones then asked about the sewer study/plan. He stated there has been a lot of negativity about it, the sign "Clean River, No Sewer", what do you think about that approach? Is that a viable idea? Commissioner Osterberg answered me, personally, no. I think we have to realize that sewage right now is contaminating somebody's groundwater. I know there are a lot of signs up and down in Milford here, but it's amazing that when you go into Matamoras, you don't see them. Our treatment in the Borough is done through the ground, I don't know if it's impacting the river, but it is impacting some type of groundwater. Right now when you have your septic pumped in Milford Borough, they put it in a truck and drive it to Matamoras and they process it and pump it into the river – it's kind of the same thing. Chris Jones then asked if the existing treatment plants are they putting effluent into the river currently. Matt said I would say not, I would say the DRBC/DEP and, in this case, the National Parks Service are regulating the river and monitoring it on a continual basis. We speak of the Delaware River as if this is the only plant that discharges into the Delaware River, but the nursing home does, the Delaware Valley High School does, the City of Port Jervis does and I think there are a number of facilities that spill into the Neversink River, which eventually ends up there. When you go further up the river, the Lackawaxen has a number of sewage disposal plants going into it, which eventually ends up in the Delaware River. When you read some of the best fishing is had on the Lackawaxen River, you wonder how this can occur?

Reporter Chris Jones asked what role does the County play so far in implementing this? Some County money went for the study or the County was the agency to get grants for it? Commissioner Osterberg explained that in the very beginning of all of this, there was some discussion with the County, before Steve (Guccini) and Ron (Schmalzle) were even here, about possibly using County land for some type of facility on the edge of town. It was not going to be the Santos Farm that is up by the road, but the Santos Farm down by the river, making some type of land swap with the Parks Service for the property where they were going to build the school. That was going to take an Act of Congress to get done, but we were still processing through that. In the midst of doing that, Westfall Township came to the Borough of Milford and said why don't you investigate bringing it to our plant – we have enough expansion. That is where this all started. The townships came to us and said, and through them, because we were discussing this, that they wanted to investigate doing a 537 Plan. The County has at its' disposal Act 13 funds and SRCP funds, which can be used for this. This is not anything unusual, SRCP funds can be used for planning directives. Act 13 money can be used for environmental purposes and obviously this can be used as an environmental purpose. We get those funds every year. Between Matamoras, Westfall, Milford Township and Milford Borough, the estimate came in that it was going to cost each one of them \$37K to be in this plan. Initially, it was Milford Borough, Milford Township and Westfall. Later on, as we were processing through this, Matamoras came forward and said we want to be in this. The County was able to allocate the funds for them to be able to do the plans. For many of these municipalities \$37K may as well be \$37M. By that point I believe Steve and Ron were both here, maybe Rich (Caridi) was still here, I don't know, they put in applications through Westfall and that's when the study began. The study for the 537 Plan was not voted on by the County Commissioners. Each municipality entered into an Intermunicipal Agreement with each other at their separate meetings – not at some meeting here in the Commissioners' Office. This is just an information meeting which is open to the public and has been, but each municipality and I think it was a unanimous vote, voted to continue with this 537 Plan. That is the important thing to remember here – this is a plan. It doesn't mean that once the 537 Plan is completed there is going to be somebody out in front of the building with a shovel in the ground – they're not. Then the whole process is going to be where the funding coming from? How do we make it affordable? DEP is not going to allow you to put sewers in if it's not affordable to the residents and the businesses. Municipalities around us like Hawley and Honesdale have sewers. When I go there it seems like their economy is doing pretty good – it doesn't look like the sewer has destroyed their communities. In fact, it's probably had the other direction. When you look at Hawley, it's the entire residential community, it's not just the commercial. Here, they're just initially talking about the commercial district. Will there be some residents impacted by it? Sure, they will be, I hope I'm one of them, because I think this is a valuable commodity to my property and my property value. It is an expense every month, Milford Landing has it and I owned a place in Milford Landing – it was \$60 a month. Some people are going to think that that's a lot of money, I didn't. That is a going rate in many areas including in Westfall and Westfall has a reasonable hook-up fee, so there you have it. Commissioner Guccini added that the portion of the money that came from the SRCP original bond, which I don't know what the number was, that was approved by the SRCP Board and recommended to us. The other this is really up to the municipalities. If they decide tomorrow they want to stop the whole process, they can stop it. Having lived here all my life, I don't understand this concept of we can just continue to pump the sewage into the ground and life will be fine. Where I live in Lake Wallenpaupack, we've had for 20

years now off and on, algae bloom which everybody is aware of. That is not because we now have some properties around the lake with central sewage, it's because in the 1950's, 60's and even early 70's, when that area was expanding, a standard septic system was a 55 gallon drum buried in the ground. That doesn't work. I know that more modern in-ground systems are better obviously, but we just can't continue to do it. It's an environmental disaster. I have a good friend who passed away some time ago who was an engineer and lived in the Greentown area with his family for 150 years, he would say people would come to him and ask if he could guarantee that these in-ground systems he was designing won't fail. He would say no, I can guarantee that they will fail – it's the nature of the beast, maybe 10 years from now, maybe 13 years from now, but they are going to fail. I just feel that it's something we have to do, but it's not up to us. We have just a little about a money and having a meeting space. The municipalities decide.

Reporter Chris Jones said some Milford Borough residents say that the geology of Milford Borough is very good for in-ground, it's all rubble and sand, well if it's not broke don't fix it type of thing. Commissioner Schmalzle said it sounds like they think they have some scientific evidence of that and I don't think that there is any. I have operated sewer plants that go into the Lackawaxen, go into Lake Greely and go into the Upper Delaware and I can tell you the only oversight of any systems are the license systems. I think that is very important to note. Honestly, driving in this morning and seeing a sign that says "Clean River, No Sewer", I can't imagine how you can create a sign like that and think that's true – it's exactly the opposite. It's very difficult for me and especially sitting in the birthplace of Conservation in an area that we preach to people that the best part about this area is the greenest and the cleanest and the natural part of it and we're destroying it by not properly taking care of our sewer.

Reporter Chris Jones said somebody said that those signs are a "red herring" basically – the target is the development of property here. Commissioner Osterberg said he didn't know if that's the case, but I know some people don't like change. The other thing is there is economic development to be had with this. There are facilities in this Borough that are suffering right now because of it and I know we can all say that's their problem, not our problem. In the whole scheme of things, it's all of our problem, because if these things cease to exist, it does have an impact on everybody else that is in our Borough economically. It also allows the properties to redevelop into other uses that then can become more viable businesses, but right now certain structures in the town and commercial district are limited to what their use it because of their septic. They can only operate as an office building because that's it, the enforcement and sewage laws in the State are not going to allow them to put in some other type of use. If you look at what the County has done here -we have taken 2 prime pieces of real estate in the back here with single family homes on them, which can never become single family homes right now, and put it in an enormous sewage treatment facility in the back of it. The impact that has on the Borough and on the County and on the school district, because maybe if those buildings weren't in the back and the County didn't need them, could be put back on the tax rolls. Right now the only thing they can be used for is office buildings. There is a limited use of property and property is pretty expensive in this town now. We're taking a 400 sq. ft. or 500 sq. ft. in the backyard and tying it up to processing sewage, what is that property worth when a lot in this town is a residential and selling in excess of \$100K for 9,600 sq. ft. If you were able to put a bigger addition on your house, you can follow it all the way through and get a reassessment and you pay more taxes. Isn't that better for the value of your property? Sewers add value to your property, there is no doubt about it. You can talk to every realtor, they're going to tell you that central sewage adds value to property values – isn't that what we all want? We want our properties to go up in value. It still remains to be seen, there doesn't seem to be this concern with the environment in other locales, except for here. People in Westfall aren't saying anything, people down on Rose Lane really like the sewers.

A member from the public asked regarding transportation, how has that been impacted since the COVID virus? Commissioner Osterberg answered they have been limited to amount of travel that they can do taking people shopping because they were more focused on the number of people in the buses and vehicles and more focused on making sure people got to their medical treatment and doctor appointments. I think it has gotten a little better with that and I know they're still struggling with that because we are low on drivers and that causes problems. Many of the drivers we have are senior citizens and they are concerned about being around people during the COVID virus. I know Robb (Ruiz) and his office staff have been working diligently to try to get people to shopping but, mainly, to their doctor appointments. I believe it is getting a little better, we just hired another driver. The same member of the public asked in terms of the size of the buses, what is policy on how many people will be on that bus? Commissioner Guccini answered he was not sure, he could find that out. The public member said the reason she wanted to know because if there is a policy, is it being monitored or have you had issues with some of the drivers not showing up or problems with the buses being suitable? Is that an issue. Commissioner Osterberg said we just got new vehicles and Penn DOT provides us with those vehicles and some of the larger buses are being taken out and we are using smaller micro-vans. We would have to ask Rob (Ruiz). Commissioner Guccini added that in the beginning of the COVID issue, Penn DOT pretty much shut the Transportation Department down, except for medical emergencies. Those restrictions have been eased, but it doesn't really matter from a practical standpoint, if you can't find a driver. In terms of the numbers, I don't know how many people can be on buses, etc. I will say that Penn DOT regulates pretty much everything and I would be shocked if they didn't regulate that as well. I will try to find that out for you, I just don't know.

THE NEXT REGULAR MEETING OF THE PIKE COUNTY COMMISSIONERS WILL BE HELD ON WEDNESDAY, OCTOBER 7, 2020, AT 9:00 A.M. IN THE PIKE COUNTY ADMINISTRATION BUILDING.