

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: Commissioners Sather and Walls; Deputy Chief Clerk, Tracey Rhodes; Alicia Grove from the Center for Community Action and Daily News Reporter, Kylie Hawn. The following individuals attended via GoToMeeting: Commissioner Thomas; CYS Fiscal Tech, Chris Dixon and Gary Kuklo from Mount Union Borough.

The meeting was called to order at 9:30 a.m. by Commissioner Sather. Tracey Rhodes 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 were no additions to the agenda.

Under announcements, Commissioner Walls reminded the public of the electronics recycling event at the Fairgrounds this Saturday at 9AM. There will be a charge for some items. This service is provided by a grant at no cost to the County. Commissioner Thomas encouraged everyone to get the COVID vaccine if you have not already done so. Commissioner Sather reminded everyone to watch out for school children commuting to and from school.

Under public comments Gary Kuklo of Mount Union Borough Council commented that he is receiving feedback from his community that there are several properties that have been up for sale for so long because of the liens and back taxes due on them. He wants to know if there is a plan to start moving some of these properties to a judiciary sale and start clearing them. Some places have been sitting vacant since 2008. Solicitor Newton responded that yes, there were 12 or 13 properties sold last night at the sale. There were many other properties that had no bidders. Many of those properties had taxes due. The next steps for the director of the Tax Claim Bureau is to schedule these for a judicial sale. At a judicial sale, the tax claim bureau has to give notice to all junior lien creditors. As long as the junior lien creditors get notice, the property is basically sold free and clear of all junior liens. That is a matter that can be addressed directly with Susan Harry. At some point there is going to have to be a schedule to get some of these properties cleared at judicial sale. Mr. Kuklo commented that he is hearing from his community that they feel there is no repercussion for not paying your taxes. Once you get past two or three judicial sales, there is no repercussion. You can go without paying taxes forever. Tax income from properties went down over the last year so it is impacting our budget. That is my concern from the borough standpoint. Commissioner Walls commented that he thinks we do need to look at those properties and get them turned around and occupied. We need to make them into productive properties so we can get them back on the tax rolls. Solicitor Newton commented that he will pass along Mr. Kuklo's contact information to Susan Harry so that she can talk to him directly about this issue.

There were no matters to be addressed by the solicitor.

Under new business, Alicia Grove from the Center for Community Action requested consideration of approval for the TEFAP agreement. It was moved by Commissioner Thomas, seconded by Commissioner Walls and carried (Thomas, yes; Sather, yes; Walls, yes).

Sid McConahy from Mission Critical Partners requested consideration of approval for Resolution 11-2021 for Huntingdon County to co-locate equipment at the Bald Eagle tower site owned by Blair County. Commissioner Thomas commented that this is related to and required for the RACP grant. It was moved by Commissioner Walls, seconded by Commissioner Thomas and carried (Sather, yes; Walls, yes; Thomas, yes).

Joe Thompson, EMA Director, provided a COVID-19 update and an update on the status of the disaster declaration for Tropical Storm Ida. Huntingdon County remains in the high rate of community spread of COVID-19 with the Delta Variant being the primary driving force of the current high infection rates. We are averaging 19 new cases per day in Huntingdon County, which is an increase from previous weeks. It is expected that our numbers in Huntingdon County will continue to rise. Unfortunately we have had 4 new COVID-related deaths in the past two weeks. At Penn Highlands there are currently 8 inpatient COVID patients with one in the intensive care unit. This is the highest number Penn Highlands has had since February. The majority of new cases is among unvaccinated people. Statewide cases of COVID in children comprise up to 30% of all new cases. In Huntingdon County, there were 25 school-aged children diagnosed with COVID in the first week of September and so far since mid-August there have been 59. The local ER has been flooded with patients with COVID-19 symptoms. SCI Smithfield has 13 inmate cases and 3 staff cases. Juniata College has had a total of 7 cases so far this school year. Statewide unfortunately the rate of new cases is currently outpacing the rate of recoveries. There is no new information for schools. No reports from our local long-term care facilities. We will be following up with several agencies over the coming weeks. Due to increased demand for testing we have heard that there is a shortage of rapid tests at Penn Highlands. There is a vaccination clinic this Friday at the Mount Union Senior Center and at Penn Highlands Huntingdon on Monday. The vaccine is also available at doctors' offices and pharmacies around the county. If you have questions about the vaccine, please talk to your doctor or pharmacist or contact the State Department of Health. We are aware that you can still get COVID if you are fully vaccinated. Infections may happen in a small proportion of people but when those infections happen they are much milder. The total percent of eligible people in Huntingdon County who are fully vaccinated is 44% or 18,366 people. Commissioner Thomas and Joe Thompson both expressed their concern over low vaccination rates in our county. Commissioner Thomas further commented that low vaccination rates lead to virus mutation that endangers both vaccinated and unvaccinated people. There is a third variant out there also and it is just a matter of time before it reaches us here. EMA remains available to assist with information and PPE.

Joe Thompson also provided an update on Tropical Storm Ida. The state's request for a Federal Major Disaster Declaration has been approved. Huntingdon County was not originally included but we remain eligible to be included in the declaration if warranted by the result of damage assessments. That said, there is a required minimum threshold damage amount. It is about \$175,000 in public property damage that we must report and document to be included in the declaration. We are working on this documentation now and if we meet that threshold federal funding would be available to us for response efforts. If any municipalities have had flood damages from Ida, they should contact the EMA office as soon as possible. A municipal contact is necessary for follow-up. We are scheduled for a PEMA/FEMA damage assessment tour next week. The EMA office is doing everything we can to report all eligible costs to PEMA. Huntingdon County is currently not declared eligible for assistance for individuals and business owners and is unfortunately not expected to qualify for that level of funding.

Mike Hanna from Tri-County Drug and Alcohol thanked the Daily News for the article they published about the Disaster Declaration not being renewed for our organization. We still have an opiate problem and it is something that we will have to deal with. My message, at the end of the day, is that through the disaster declaration we received funding and were able to provide programs and services specifically targeting opiates and stimulants. This was good but we deal with addiction regardless of substance of choice. We will keep working and try to make a difference. Narcan is readily available if needed. Please contact our office if you have a need. Commissioner Thomas asked if there is still expected to be funding for these programs without the disaster declaration. Mr. Hanna responded that he expects to continue to see federal funding available. If anyone needs help we will provide help or point them in the right direction to get the help that they need.

There were no matters for action, information and discussion.

There were no Veteran's Burial Allowances.

There being no further business, it was moved by Commissioner Thomas to adjourn the meeting at 10:02 a.m.

Minutes prepared by Heather N. Fellman, Chief Clerk.

Respectfully Submitted,

Jeffrey Thomas, Secretary