

Huntingdon, PA

Tuesday, October 5, 2021

37-2021

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: Commissioners Sather, Walls and Thomas; Deputy Chief Clerk, Tracey Rhodes; Solicitor, Larry Newton; EMA Director, Joe Thompson; Wendy Melius from the Center for Community Action and Daily News Reporter, Kylie Hawn. The following individuals attended via GoToMeeting: CYS Fiscal Supervisor, Claudia Conrad and CYS Fiscal Tech, Chris Dixon.

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 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 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 Thomas encouraged all residents who are able to get the COVID vaccine. Commissioner Walls asked that everyone be extra vigilant during their morning commutes. With it being dark longer in the morning while kids are getting on the buses everyone should be extra careful. Commissioner Sather reminded everyone of elections dates and deadlines. The last day to register or make changes to your voter registration is Monday, October 18th. The deadline to apply for an absentee or mail-in ballot is Tuesday, October 26th. The election office began to mail ballots on Monday, October 4th. We encourage everyone to complete and return their ballots as soon as possible. The deadline to return completed ballots is Tuesday, November 2nd, at 8PM. Voters may return their ballots by mail or in person. Only the voter may return their own ballot in person. The County will not be using drop boxes.

There were no public comments.

Under matters to be addressed by the Solicitor, Larry Newton announced that on October 8th the General Authority will be meeting for a TEFRA hearing regarding a bond issue for Juniata College at 2PM. Following that meeting, there is a resolution that will be signed at a public meeting. We have received correspondence from the Attorney General regarding a class action lawsuit against pharmaceutical companies regarding the opioid crisis.

Under new business, Wendy Melius from the Center for Community Action requested consideration of approval to accept the 2021 Sub-Recipient PHARE Grant agreement. We received the award letter for \$200,000 for Huntingdon County. This funding is to help individuals and families at risk of homelessness

and for landlord mitigation. It was moved by Commissioner Walls, seconded by Commissioner Thomas and carried (Thomas, yes; Sather, yes; Walls, yes).

Wendy Melius also presented a copy of that annual report for Center for Community Action to the Commissioners. Some of the things that we have done with the Community Services Block Grant is to develop a scholarship program for those returning to school, either for post-secondary education and/or a training program. We have also started a vehicle assistance program that can provide up to \$2,000 for the purchase of or up to \$1,000 for repairs on a vehicle for those living at 200% of the poverty level. To qualify individuals must be employed at least 20 hours per week or have promise of employment for at least 20 hours per week or attending a post-secondary education program. Our retired senior volunteer program is still very active. We have tried to keep them engaged during COVID. Our homeless numbers are probably down from last year. That is due to the eviction moratorium. We are probably going to see an increase in that number. We have received a substantial amount of money through the CARES Emergency Rental Assistance Program. We have received over \$2 million for that program. The Home for Good program is wrapping up. We used the EG Code Blue program that was putting individuals and families into hotels during the winter months to keep them out of shelters during COVID. We have partnered with local churches for rental assistance and fuel assistance gap funding for individuals who need assistance but do not qualify for our other programs. The Early Learning Resource Center helps us provide daycare funding. We have 91 children ages 0-5 enrolled from 55 different families. Through the Homeless Assistance Grant from January to September we have served 3 families and 9 individuals. We have a lending library of technology available as well.

Chris Dixon, CYS Fiscal Tech, requested consideration of approval for a purchase of service agreement with Community Specialists Corporation for contract year July 1, 2021 through June 30, 2022. They offer residential and drug and alcohol services. This is a renewal from last year at the state-approved rates. It was moved by Commissioner Thomas, seconded by Commissioner Walls and carried (Mark, yes; Walls, yes; Thomas, yes).

Chris Dixon requested consideration of approval for a purchase of service agreement with Pressley Ridge for contract year July 1, 2021 through June 30, 2022. They offer foster care and residential services. It is a renewal from last year at the state-approved rates. It was moved by Commissioner Walls, seconded by Commissioner Thomas and carried (Walls, yes; Thomas, yes; Sather, yes).

Joe Thompson provided an update on COVID-19. Huntingdon County remains in the high rate of Community spread. Trends are showing a bit of a mixed picture and we are hoping ultimately it will be positive. At the state-level, the numbers have been leveling off. Over the past week, Huntingdon County has had 163 new confirmed cases of COVID, for an average of 23 per day. This is significantly lower than last week. Our percent positivity rate has jumped from 9.7% last week to 13.7%. The state rate increased just slightly. We are seeing a smaller number of new cases reported, but the PCR is climbing. We are hoping that that means something is leveling out. The total number since the start of the pandemic is 6,261. We have also had 2 more COVID-related deaths in the past week total of 146. Penn Highlands ER is continuing to see many people with COVID symptoms. There are eight patients currently in the hospital, one of which is in the ICU. There are some significant concerns that we are hearing from the local hospital. These concerns are common concerns that we are hearing from hospitals all over and they are things that the public should be aware of. Almost all regular inpatient rooms are full at our local hospital. The ICU only has one open bed. Not all of these patients are hospitalized due to COVID, but the hospital is seeing the strain. We are not telling you not to seek medical help at the hospital, but if you are just feeling a little under the weather we would encourage you to go to an urgent care facility instead of the ER or talk to your healthcare provider to determine if you need to be tested for COVID. There are no outbreaks reported at the hospital, long-term care facilities, prisons or jail. That leads us to believe that the increase in cases truly is in the community and not one of these closed facilities. Vaccine rates have stagnated in Huntingdon County. About 45% of the eligible population of the county has received the vaccine.

Joe Thompson provided an update on damage from Tropical Storm Ida. We hope to get notification soon from FEMA that we have officially been added to the disaster declaration. Then it will be another 3 to 4 weeks until information starts to come out about what we need to do at the local level to receive funding. Generally after that it will be 3 to 6 months before we receive the funding.

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 10:10 a.m.

Minutes prepared by Heather N. Fellman, Chief Clerk.

Respectfully Submitted,

Jeffrey Thomas, Secretary