

Huntingdon, PA

Tuesday, May 19, 2020

18-2020

The regular meeting of the Huntingdon County Commissioners was held on the above date and time in the Commissioners Office with the following present: Commissioners Sather, Walls and Thomas; Chief Clerk, Heather Fellman and Solicitor, Peter McManamon. Due to the COVID-19 outbreak, the following individuals were present via GoToMeeting: EMA Director, Joe Thompson; News Reporter, Kylie Hawn and visitors, Bill Hoover, Connie Berrier, Dean Fluke, and Peggy Stuller.

The meeting was called to order at 9:30 a.m. by Commissioner Sather. Chief Clerk 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 May 12th 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 no additions to the agenda.

Under announcements, Commissioner Walls commented that the Commissioners continue to lobby the Governor's Office, the Department of Corrections and the Department of Health to stop counting the inmate numbers toward the total positive COVID-19 cases for Huntingdon County. We are asking for clarification and cooperation. We do not believe that the County should be penalized by inmates who are incarcerated. We are certainly pushing for state legislators to try to get the Governor to work with us. Commissioner Thomas further commented that the Commissioners had a conference call with the Governor's Office and the Department of Health last Tuesday. They were very receptive in listening to what the County officials said. They are further urging the Governor's Office to reevaluate the list of businesses that can be open and consider allowing more businesses to open. Commissioner Sather commented that with Memorial Day weekend coming up, we should all remember the veterans that have served and the service members that are currently serving and on watch for us. The Commissioners had received notice that the flags for veterans' graves have not been shipped yet because of the COVID-19 outbreak. The Commissioner's Office and Veteran's Affairs Office have been on the phone and have been able to procure flags which we have been assured by the Veteran's Affairs Director will be here in time for Memorial Day.

Under Public Comments, Bill Hoover asked questions about the polling place consolidation plan. He wondered how that worked in terms of poll workers and voting machines. Heather Fellman explained that each precinct will still have separate machines and we are encouraging poll workers to enforce social distancing by setting up in separate areas of the room as spread out as possible. One of the main reasons for the consolidation is the loss of poll workers we are seeing throughout the County. Mr. Hoover asked if there is a greater chance of losing poll workers because of the consolidation than if we left the polling places as they are typically. Heather Fellman responded that we have been losing significant numbers of poll workers long before any plans for consolidation were discussed. The anxieties of those that work the polling places regularly are perfectly understandable and we do not fault anyone who has decided not to work this year out of concern or their health or the health of their families. We have had a small number of poll workers who have decided to refuse to work because of the consolidation, but they are a very small minority of our poll workers. Even if we have poll workers who agree today to work in a precinct, we have no guarantees that they will still be willing a week from now. We may very well have poll workers who will choose to drop out on Election Day. Because of the uncertainty that this situation has created, we have to do everything we can to ensure that we will not run into a situation where a polling place does not open on Election Day. With consolidated polling places, last-minute adjustments can be made to the poll workers

who are available to work in order to make sure that everyone who wants to vote in person has the opportunity to do so.

Connie Berrier thanked the Commissioners for trying to get the State to divide the counts of the virus from the prison and the counts out in the community. The high rate that is currently being reported is keeping us from opening, but I feel that it also given people in the community a false sense of security because we do not know the true numbers of people in the community who are infected.

Dean Fluke asked how many voters voted in Birmingham Borough in the last election. Heather Fellman responded that she does not have a breakdown of that in front of her. He further asked if the Commissioners will be paying poll workers who are not working. Heather Fellman responded that only those poll workers who are working on Election Day get paid.

There were no items to be addressed by the solicitor.

Under new business, Joe Thompson, EMA Director, provided a high-level update on operations throughout the County. There are 214 COVID-19 positive cases in Huntingdon County. Yesterday was the first day since April 27th that we have not had a new positive case. EMA estimates that, of those positive cases, approximately 24 of them are cases in the community. Huntingdon County will report its first two deaths from the virus today. EMA and the Planning Department have looked in the CARES Act Grant and have determined that it is unfortunately not a good fit for the County for reimbursements. There has also been a recent local disaster, the devastating fire last week in the Blair Building Apartments. 58 residents were safely evacuated. Emergency shelter has been provided where needed. The EMA office has made a disaster declaration through the Small Business Administration. The EMA office also continues to work on updating the Hazard Mitigation Plan. Huntingdon County has been awarded a hazard mitigation grant which will almost pay for the plan update. Finally, Mr. Thompson would also like to acknowledge National EMS week and offer thanks to EMS workers.

Connie Berrier commented that she is aware of a lady that needs an apartment who lost her home in the fire. She asked if there are many others who are still trying to find housing. Joe Thompson answered that there are 15-20 who are still looking for housing. There are a number of agencies that are helping with that, including the United Way, the Salvation Army, Area Agency on Aging, and the Center for Independent Living. Commissioner Walls commented that he was contacted by the United Way yesterday. They have received enough clothing donations. They are asking now that if people would like to donate they can contact the United Way or the Red Cross. Mr. Thompson commented that the Salvation Army is accepting donations of gift cards. Achieving Community Together (ACT), which is part of the CHAMP program, is also taking gift card and financial donations.

Dean Fluke asked if there was a match necessary for the grant that was discussed. Mr. Thompson answered that there is not a County match for the grant. It is 80% federally funded because it is a disaster mitigation grant, then the State matches the other 20%. We are receiving \$50,000. Mr. Fluke further commented that he hopes that the Commissioners will make sure the public is aware when there is a match for a grant. Commissioner Thomas noted that every grant that has had a county match that has come in front of the commissioners during his tenure as Commissioner has been publicly announced. There has never been a grant that the commissioners signed without letting the public know that there is a County match.

Kylie Hawn commented that the National Guard has been deployed to long-term care facilities to help mitigate the spread of COVID-19 in such facilities. Is that something that has been considered for the prison? Commissioner Sather commented that the Commissioner had a meeting yesterday with Senator Corman and Senator Ward and Representative Irvin's aide. That topic came up at that meeting in relation to a nursing home facility in Beaver County that received help from National Guard members. The process and procedures for getting that kind of aid was discussed. Joe Thompson noted that there are a number of steps that would need to be taken. Several weeks ago there was a broad-ranging discussion with the Department of Corrections and the Department of Health. The Department of Corrections advised at that time that such aid was unnecessary. If we receive an update advising otherwise, we are prepared to work with multiple agencies to make sure that aid is available.

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, seconded by Commissioner Walls and carried (Thomas, yes; Sather, yes; Walls, yes) to adjourn the meeting at 10:09 a.m.

Minutes prepared by Heather N. Fellman, Chief Clerk.

Respectfully Submitted,

Jeffrey Thomas, Secretary