

**Commissioners' Board Meeting**  
**Thursday, July 28, 2005**

The Berks County Board of Commissioners met in regular session on Thursday, July 28, 2005 at 10:30 A.M. in the Board meeting room on the thirteenth floor of the Berks County Services Center, pursuant to due notice to Board members and the public.

Commissioner Chair Judith L. Schwank called the meeting to order with Commissioner Thomas Gajewski and Commissioner Mark L. Scott in attendance. Also present were the Chief Clerk Terry L. Styer, Solicitor Alan S. Miller, Esq., and County Administrator William E. Dennis. Commissioner Schwank then opened the meeting with a moment of silence and Pledge of Allegiance to the Flag.

**Approval of Minutes**

The minutes of the July 19, 2005 Workshop Meeting and July 21, 2005 Commissioner's Meeting were approved with a motion made by Commissioner Scott, seconded by Commissioner Gajewski and all voted yes to approve.

**Consent Agenda Items**

1. A motion made by Commissioner Scott, seconded by Commissioner Gajewski, and all voted yes to approve the following consent agenda:
  - 255.05 A. Resolution authorizing 2005 Budget Transfers in the total amount of \$51,900.00 and appropriations in the total amount of 11,000.00 per list dated July 22, 2005. Kim Grinage presented the budget report.
  - 256.05 B. Resolution authorizing the Human Resource recommendation as per list dated July 26, 2005. Commissioner Gajewski asked that the Resolution include language in Item 4 of the list that the services of the approved temporary part time position end when the Prison employee's leave of absence ends and returns to work.
  - 257.05 C. Resolution authorizing Judith L. Schwank, Chair of the Board, to execute The Emergency Food Assistance Program –TEFAP (Inventory – Reimbursement Request Form for the Third Quarter (April, May, & June) FFY 2004-2005, in the amount of \$14,768.69 for distributing 14,768.69 pounds of food at \$.10 per pound and to authorize Margaret Bianca, Executive Director, Greater Berks Food Bank for apply for the funds on behalf of Berks County.
  - 258.05 D. Resolution authorizing the County Treasurer to make six (6) monthly retirement fund contributions to the Berks County Retirement Fund throughout the remainder of 2005.

- 259.05 E. Resolution authorizing the opening of a checking account with Wachovia Bank for the Employee Thrift Plan.
  - 260.05 F. Resolution authorizing Judith Schwank, as Chairman of the Board, to execute a Grant Application by and between the County of Berks (Parks & Recreation) and the Pennsylvania Council on the Arts, for funding to support the Summer Concert Series (\$5,000.00) and for re-granting to the Berks Arts Council (\$5,000.00), for a total funding request of \$10,000.00 for FY 2005-2006.
  - 261.05 G. Resolution reappointing Lynn Millar to the CYS Board to a three-year term ending 12/31/05.
  - 262.05 H. Resolution reappointing Connie Archey to Reading Area Community College Board of Trustees to a six-year term ending 07/21/2011.
  - 263.05 I. Resolution reappointing Kathleen Dautrich to Reading Area Community College Board of Trustees to a six-year term ending 07/21/2011.
  - 264.05 J. Resolution requesting the Governor and Berks County delegations to the Pennsylvania House of Representatives and Senate work diligently and expeditiously to restore human service funds in order to be incorporated in the County's 2006 budget and that Counties be held harmless during this transitional funding year with no additional County match. Specifically, we are suggesting a minimum sixty million dollars (\$60,000,000) increase in the state's TANF Transition funding for 2005-06 with no restrictions on its use.
2. Motion authorizing execution of Contract Agreements/ Amendments as furnished by the Contract Coordinator, per listing dated July 22, 2005.

**Reports**

- 1. County Treasurer, Nelson Long CPA, presented his weekly Treasurer's report
- 2. County Controller, Sandy Graffius presented her weekly Controllers' report

**Non - Consent Agenda Items**

Commissioner Scott made a motion that was seconded by Commissioner Gajewski to approve the following non – consent agenda item with an amendment to change the deadline to August 15, 2005. Following a long discussion (see notes below\*) the motion passed unanimously.

- 265.05 J. Resolution authorizing the Assessment Appeals Board to extend the deadline to file an appeal for property assessment from August 1<sup>st</sup> to ~~September 1<sup>st</sup>~~. August 15.

\* Duane Rashlich, Director of the Assessment Office explained that the appeal date was shortened from September 1<sup>st</sup> to August 1<sup>st</sup> in 1997 by the Commissioners to provide some administrative assistance to the Board of Assessment Appeals that they be better able to hear all the Assessment Appeals in a timely manner and meet the mandatory deadline of October 31<sup>st</sup> for reporting the assessments to the County's Municipalities and School Districts. He then said that numerous laws have recently impacted his department from a workload standpoint including the Homestead Act and now the Clean and Green Law changes. He requested that the Commissioners allow the deadline for filing assessment appeals to remain at August 1<sup>st</sup>. Commissioner Scott stated that we need to make some accommodations to our citizens and that despite the fact that his original motion was for 30-day extension he would be willing to offer a compromise of 15 days. Both Commissioners Gajewski and Schwank supported this amended extension. Commissioner Schwank added that the county needs to provide accurate information and suggested that Duane contact the County I.S. department to upgrade his web site with downloadable forms and information regarding assessment appeals.

#### **Citizen Comment/Business From The Floor**

Christina Stott, and several Residents from Amity Township attending the meeting to voice strong concern regarding the recent County and School Real Estate Tax increases and especially what they felt are the inequities of the current assessment of properties in the County. She complained that the new homebuyers are being misled by the Real Estate Development Community regarding the anticipated real estate tax bill for newly constructed homes. The group was also frustrated by what they believed was unfair assessment as older homes in the same neighborhood that are equal or higher in value are assessed at a lower rate than the newer homes. They wanted to know if the County was considering re-assessment?

Duane Rashlich was asked to explain the legal constraints placed on the county assessment offices and the attempts to create uniformity to the assessment of properties with the State approved common level ratio and the future of a reassessment of the County. Mr. Rashlich explained that because the last countywide reassessment was performed in 1992 and implemented in 1994 many of the county's properties carry an assessed valuation as old as 1992 property values. The law, he said, required the county to assess newly constructed homes at 100 percent of their purchase price but the same buyer that purchased a 15-year-old home for the same price would only be assessed on the 1994 value. It is for that reason that the average assessments in Berks County are approximately 80 percent of market value with would allow the Assessment Appeals Board to grant a 20 percent reduction in assessed valuation of a property but only if the property owner files an appeal. He explained however, that the law does not permit a county to automatically drop all new home assessments to 80 percent of market value.

*Citizen Comment continued:*

Mr. Rashlich indicated that he was asked to provide funds in his 2006 budget to begin the process of a county-wide reassessment but cautioned that the process is several years of hearing appeals and may not go into effect until 2009. He also mentioned that the projected costs for a county with 165,000 property parcels would be approximately \$5 – 6 million.

Commissioner Scott then informed the Mrs. Stott that many county residents are elderly and living in those homes that have not been reassessed since 1994 and may be negatively impacted by a countywide reassessment. He suggested that many county property owners would blame the increase in new homes, which in turn creates a demand to for additional services by the local municipalities and school districts, which then creates the necessity to raise additional taxes to pay for those demands for school and municipal services. He questioned if it is fair to make those older homeowners responsible for the impact this growth in the residential communities has created. He said that as a Commissioner he would be hearing the same complaints from his older constituents that the younger ones are expressing today.

Commissioner Gajewski stated that reassessment is a long-term project with a temporary fix. He said that this is why we need more immediate relief such as a meaningful tax reform that is responsive to the needs of the county and is based on earned income and or sales.

All three of the commissioners expressed their desire to address this multi-faceted issue in the most fair approach possible. They all agreed that much of the change needs to be addressed at the State level and encouraged all citizens to contact their state legislators to encourage them to take action on tax reform. They were also encouraged to file an appeal at the Assessment Appeals board and be sure to obtain all the necessary documentation prior to their hearing.

There being no further business, the meeting adjourned at 11:00 A.M.

Respectfully Submitted,

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Terry L. Styer, Chief Clerk