

Commissioners' Workshop Meeting
Tuesday, August 16, 2005

I. CALL TO ORDER:

The Berks County Board of Commissioners met in regular session on Tuesday, August 16, 2005 at 10:30 A.M. in the thirteenth floor Board Room 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 County Administrator William E. Dennis, Solicitor Alan Miller, Esq. and Chief Clerk Terry Styer. The Commissioner opened the meeting with a moment of silence and Pledge of Allegiance to the Flag.

II. PRESENTATIONS/ PROCLAMATIONS/CERTIFICATES:

- Commissioner Schwank discussed the issue of Tax Reform in Pennsylvania and in particular the Blue Print for Tax Fairness information located on the CCAP (County Commissioners Association of Pennsylvania) at www.pataxfairness.info She described how this proposal could change taxing capabilities for Counties in Pennsylvania. She said a county-by-county analysis is available on the web site to view how changes in the tax structure could reduce real estate taxes in Berks County. The site also enables citizens to contact their legislators right from the web site. Also discussed was the Pennsylvania Caucus Plan, which is currently proposed to eliminate the School Real Estate Tax and replace it with a sales tax.
- Larry Shaub, CPA Partner with Reinsel, Kuntz Leshner – presented the 2004 Berks County Audit Report and discussed various aspects of the report with the Commissioners.
- Commissioner Gajewski presented a Proclamation for the 80th Anniversary of the Reading Chapter of AMBUCS (American Business Clubs). Bud Van Horn accepted the proclamation on behalf of his organization.

III. DEPARTMENTAL REPORTS / REQUESTS:

Budget Director:

- A. Adopt a resolution authorizing 2005 Budget Appropriations in the total amount of 600,000.00 per list dated August 12, 2005. Bob Patrizio presented the budget appropriations report.

Human Resources Director:

Beth Schiepan, H.R. Director presented the following:

- A. Adopt Resolution authorizing the Human Resource recommendations as per list dated August 16, 2005.

Human Resources Continued:

- B. Adopt Resolution authorizing the Human Resource Director to execute a contract with MetLife for the establishment of a Short Term Disability and Long Term Disability program in conjunction with recommended changes to the paid time off policy which will be implemented effective January 1, 2006 for Management/Confidential employees. Beth indicated that this first phase when approved, will be available to approximately 500 Management Confidential County Employees and noted that the program will preserve the current sick time employees have accrued as of 12/31/05. She said that bargaining sessions would begin with the unions to extend to coverage to those bargaining unit employees in the near future. Bob Patrizio indicated that this project could provide improved benefits for County employees and begin to freeze and reverse the \$12.2 million liability for accrued sick and vacation time at 12/31/04, which results from the current carryover policy. He said this should improve fund balance over time and increase productivity. In addition he said if we had a "use it or lose it" policy, as recommended at today's meeting, on 1/1/04 we would have paid out approximately \$1 million less in sick time in 2004 which would have covered the entire premium cost of \$480K for STD and LTD coverage for ALL eligible county employees not just management.

Purchasing Department

Contract Coordinator:

- A. Motion authorizing execution of Contract Agreements/ Amendments as furnished by the Contract Coordinator, per listing dated August 15, 2005 as presented by Candace Noll, Contract Coordinator.

IV. REPORTS OF COMMISSIONERS:

Commissioner Schwank

- A. Adopt Resolution authorizing Commissioner Schwank, as Chair of the Board, to execute Commonwealth of Pennsylvania, Department of Labor and Industry, Grant Recipients Release, Assignment and Closeout forms pursuant to the terms of Workforce Investment Act Grants totaling \$2,998,087.00.

Commissioner Gajewski

- A. Adopt Resolution amending the County's CDBG and HOME programs.
- FFY 2003 HOME Program eliminate \$18,970.00 from the County's Property Rehabilitation Program and the funds be re-allocated to the County's Homebuyer Incentive Program.
 - FFY 2005 CDBG Program to allocate 10,000.00 from the contingencies
 - FFY 2005 CDBG Program to allocate \$30,000.00 from contingencies.

Commissioner Gajewski continued:

- B. Adopt Resolution authorizing payment of invoices under the following Community Development Disbursement Vouchers:
1. No. 1256-Property Rehabilitation Program-\$14,404.81
 2. No. 506-Home Grant Program-\$893.00
 3. No. 2152-S-Emergency Shelter Program-\$4,900.00
 4. No. 2153- Community Development Block Grant Program-\$15,845.49
 5. No. 2154- Community Development Block Grant Program-\$163,395.53
 6. No. 1257- Property Rehabilitation Program-\$16,834.57
- C. Adopt Resolution authorizing On-The-Job Training contracts and subsidized employment agreements as per list dated 08/05/05.
- D. Adopt Resolution approving the execution of an application to be considered for a 10-county pilot group with CCAP (County Commissioners Association of PA) to initiate the new Human Resources services model for county human services agencies. Included with this application is a commitment of \$75,000.00 if the County is selected to participate. Beth Schiepan, HR Director explained that if selected to participate, Berks County may be in a position to replace the use of the Pennsylvania civil services system for hiring requirements with this model program as designed by CPS Human Resource Services. There was a long discussion among Berks County Human Service Agency department heads currently required to utilize the PA civil service system. George Kovarie, CYS Director, Ed Michalik, MH/MR Director and Kathy Frey, Deputy Director, Office of Aging participated in the discussion suggesting that this program seems to have the potential of saving time and money and therefore support the County's participation in this study.

Commissioner Scott

- A. Adopt Resolution approving execution of a Contract Agreement, by and between the County of Berks (Adult Probation) and the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania Board of Probation and Parole, in connection with the reimbursement of 2004-2005 County Supervision Fees; Contract ID – 06-04/05-SF, (PA Bureau of Probation and Parole Act 35 program). Roger Luckenbill, Director of Adult Probation explained this annual reimbursement agreement.
- B. Adopt Resolution approving 2006-2007 Integrated Children's Service Plan. The system would encompass all child serving systems co-located and cross trained to perform child welfare, juvenile justice, and behavioral health case management and referral services.

Commissioner Scott Continued:

Ed Michalik explained this program which is proposed to be a multi-faceted, easily accessible, integrated system including prevention that will provide options for children and their families, schools, professional stakeholders, and community members to create and coordinate resources in a proactive, timely fashion in order to enhance and promote the healthy functioning of children and their families in the Berks County Community. The program would encompass all child service systems co-located and cross trained to perform child welfare, juvenile justice, and behavioral health case management and referral services.

V. MISCELLANEOUS BUSINESS

County Controller Sandy Graffius presented her weekly report from the prior week ending August 12, 2005 as the Commissioners meetings for that week were cancelled.

CITIZEN COMMENT/BUSINESS FROM THE FLOOR

Carlos Zayas, citizen from the City of Reading stated his concerns for the County facing discrimination accusations if the civil service process were eliminated. Mr. Zayas also complained about the lack of notice for the Election Board meetings, which are advertised (but not always held) for each Thursday at noon "as needed". His complaint was he should not have to phone the Elections' office to determine if a meeting was scheduled or not.

Tom Herman union representative, expressed concerns that ending the PA civil service process would bring back issues such as political patronage in the County's hiring process. He encouraged the board to have all questions answered before proceeding with this program.

Kate Kauffman, resident of Tilden Township objected to recent discussions regarding the possible re-assessment for Berks County. She said that the process would only hurt the older citizens and that the real issue lies with our state legislators to devise a solution that is fair to everyone.

Commissioner Scott stated that he was originally inundated with phone calls from constituents such as those in the Amity Township area who were complaining about the disparity of the County's property assessment. He stated that the other property owners with the older assessments who are overwhelmingly against a re-assessment for the county generate now generating the phone calls his office is getting. He reflected on the two proposed tax reform discussions currently active in the State Legislature

He said that the "coefficient of dispersion" in the County isn't as bad as many counties across Pennsylvania and while the county has reached what he described as a flash point of 20% differential for assessments verses property values, it could be in large part due to what he described as a real estate property value bubble. He said upon reconsideration of his recent comments supporting a reassessment he felt that investing the county's tax dollars in a rather costly process at this time of "speculative property values" could cause a shift of property assessments to the other direction.

Commissioner Gajewski stated that he agreed with Commissioner Scott adding that the rate of acceleration of property values varies greatly across the county. He said the recent complaints of this disparity of values is not typical but seems to be found in a particular high residential growth area of the County. He said that we need our state legislators the change the law to change the way we finance county government.

Commissioner Schwank thanked Ms. Kauffman for coming in and encouraged her and all citizens to contact their state legislators about a long-term solution to this issue that continues to be a hindrance to sustainable economic growth as well. She reminded citizens to log on to the CCAP site for the ability contact state legislators with sample letters right on the web site.

There being no further business, the meeting adjourned at 12:25 PM