

Commissioners' Workshop Meeting
Tuesday, October 11, 2005

I. CALL TO ORDER:

The Berks County Board of Commissioners met in regular session on Tuesday, October 11, 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, County 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:

Chip Karasin, Chair of the **Goal Two (2) Land Use Summit Sub Committee** (established in 2003 by the Berks County Community Foundation) opened the presentation with a submission of a formal written request to the Board to fund a Conservation Land and Agricultural Land Protection program for Berks County 2006 – 2010 (attached.) in the amount of \$40 million. She reminded the board that to successfully implement the County Comprehensive Plan 20/20 and the County's Greenway plan will take a considerable investment of funds which may even cause an increase in County Real Estate Tax, however it should be considered an investment towards the future because studies show that for every dollar of real estate taxes a municipality receives, it will need \$1.36 for services on residential development but less than \$.35 is needed for services required for farmland and open space. She said timing has never been better for acquiring matching funds from the State and Federal Government. She then introduced other conservation and farmland preservation representatives amounting to approximately 50 in attendance also echoing similar comments in support of the county borrowing – specific presentations were made by:

- ❖ Dr. Jim Thorne, Coordinator for the **Hopewell "Big Woods" project**
- ❖ Kim Murphy, Executive Director of the **Berks Conservancy**
- ❖ Rita Banning from Union Township representing six **Berks County farm families** who have farmed approximately 600 acres for the last 300 years.
- ❖ Mary Jane Stell – **Haycreek Watershed Association**
- ❖ Clyde Myers – **Penn State Cooperative Extension Service**
- ❖ Representatives from the **Monocacy Hill Conservation Association**
- ❖ Representatives from the – **Hawk Mountain Sanctuary**

Tami Hildebrand, Executive Director of the **Berks County Ag Land Preservation Board** read a letter from the Ag Land Preservation Board Chairman, Dr. Robert Ziegenfus where he discussed the fact that Berks County through its initial investment of a \$32 million bond issue in 1999 was able to draw down additional Federal and State matching funds to bring the total investment of \$65 million of Ag Land preservation funds to Berks County.

Letter from Dr. Ziegenfus continued:

He stated that it is imperative to maintain this \$6 million per year effort to continue the substantial progress achieved in farmland easements in the last few years.

Commissioner Schwank asked about the State's funding commitment. Ms. Hildebrand indicated that the funding amount is not known as yet but there is a possible increase in the tobacco sales tax and she has expectations of the Growing Greener II funding to increase from prior years but is unsure what Berks County's share will be. She agreed with the previous statements that the time is ripe and the county should commit to a \$40 million borrowing and aggressively pursue these competitive, matching funds while they remain available.

Commissioner Scott indicated that he fully supports a bond issue for farmland preservation efforts but expressed his disappointment that today's room of supporters of the farmland preservation program haven't been as active and able to participate in the recent zoning meetings in local municipalities where the farmland easement issues and agricultural zoning and preservation issues have surfaced such as Union, Exeter and Longswamp Townships. He then asked how many farms per year have been preserved. Ms. Hildebrand stated that the County has spent approximately \$9 million (including the match funds) per year and has preserved approximately 45 – 50 farms per year, with a total of 40,454 acres preserved as of August 5, 2005. She then reported that there is a current backlog of older applications, totaling 18,000 acres, and 30 new applications for 2006 which translates into 200 farms families, or 21,000 acres ready to "step up to the plate – when we are." She explained that 64,000 +/- acres would be the total by 2010 if Commissioners approve this 4-year bond assuming 5,000 acres are preserved each year and added to the 42,000 acres protected to date together with the 3,000 acres that are in the preservation-process right now, which were selected in 2004 & 2005 that have not gone to settlement yet.

Commissioner Gajewski expressed concern over the legislation that requires the Commissioners to certify the funds for preservation but grants authority to the Ag Land Preservation Board on the individual farm easements. Tami Hildebrand responded that there has been no change in the legislation regarding this. However, Commissioner Schwank interjected that the Ag Land Preservation Board had recently passed a resolution in an effort to comply with the County Comprehensive Plan 20/20 and avoid purchasing easements in planned future growth areas of the County. He indicated that there are a number of funding issues facing County government including state and federal funding cutbacks while other agencies continue to request additional funds.

Commissioner Schwank indicated that she strongly supports this preservation program and suggested that the next frontier for preservation should include open space in addition to agricultural land. She then reflected on the fact that land use regulations are only as good as those enacting the laws put preservation easements are the only secure way to accomplish perpetual preservation. She encouraged all supporters to continue to educate the public on the subject of future municipal expense avoidance by making this investment today.

Commissioner Scott suggested that the county consider a regional funding approach for the per acre price established by the Ad Land Preserve Boards future purchases. He explained that by regionalizing the price and allowing higher per acre purchases in areas such as the eastern part of the County facing tremendous development pressure and higher prices for a their land would make it feasible to preserve their farms vs. selling for development.

- Commissioner Gajewski presented a Proclamation for **Fire Prevention Week**. Accepting the Proclamation was Reading Fire Marshall Todd Jaeger and Lieutenant Kent Born.
- Commissioner Gajewski presented a Proclamation for **Robesonia's 150th Anniversary** – Oktoberfest Committee Chair, Miriam Snyder was present to accept.
- Commissioner Gajewski presented a Proclamation for **Domestic Violence Awareness Month** to Mary Kay Bernosky, Executive Director of Berks Women in Crisis.
- Commissioner Schwank presented a Proclamation to the **Reading Buccaneers** for their 2005 World Championship. Tom Moore, member of the Reading Buccaneer Drum and Bugle Corps was present to accept and showed video segment of their winning performance.

III. DEPARTMENTAL REPORTS / REQUESTS:

Budget Director:

- A. Adopt a resolution authorizing 2005 Budget Transfer in the total amount of \$1,194,675.00 per list dated October 7, 2005. Robert Patrizio presented this week's budget transfers.

Human Resources Director:

- A. Adopt Resolution authorizing the Human Resource Director to sign contracts with **Capital Blue Cross, Keystone Health Plan Central and Pharmacare** to provide administrative and pharmacy benefit services to the County of Berks for a period beginning January 1, 2006 and ending December 31, 2008 with an option for 2009 and 2010 for the administration of the County's Self-Insured Healthcare plan. This also includes the signing of a contract with **HealthTrak/Harris Health Trends** for delivery of a Disease Management Program, which includes the administration of a Health Risk Assessment for each employee. Total cost for three years is \$2,010,113.

- B. Adopt Resolution authorizing the Human Resource recommendation as per list dated October 11, 2005. Several questions were raised regarding the items on the HR agenda for the Coroner's Office. Dr. Bybel, County Coroner explained that these unpaid interns are currently working in his office, the wages for their positions to be paid are not part of his budget. He suggested that approval should be granted as this is a good educational opportunity for the students to study forensic medicine.

IV. REPORTS OF COMMISSIONERS:

- A. Adopt **Resolution 347.05** authorizing Commissioner Chair, Judy Schwank to execute Local Jurisdiction Waiver with respect to Federal Drug Control and System Improvement (DCSI) Program under the Special Victim Services Initiatives Funding program to be earmarked for Berks Women in Crisis to provide English and Spanish-speaking counseling/advocacy at the Courthouse during night, weekend and holiday hours. A motion was made by Commissioner Scott, seconded by Commissioner Gajewski and all voted yes to approve the resolution (attached to these minutes.)

Commissioner Schwank

Commissioner Gajewski

- A. Adopt Resolution appointing new members of the Workforce Investment Board.
- B. Adopt Resolution re-appointing existing members of the Workforce Investment Board.
- C. Adopt Resolution authorizing two on-the-job training contracts and subsidized employment agreements with **SMT Technologies** and **Labor Staffing**.
- D. Adopt Resolution authorizing payment of invoices under the following Community Development Disbursement Vouchers:
1. No. 1264-Property Rehabilitation Program-\$23,729.00
 2. No. 2164- Community Development Block Grant Program-\$133,613.80

Commissioner Scott

V. MISCELLANEOUS BUSINESS

Commissioner Schwank then instructed the Chief Clerk to move any future certificates, commendations and proclamations (unless they involve County Officials or Employees) to the end of the Commissioners agenda.

There being no further business, the meeting adjourned at 12:17 P.M.

Respectfully Submitted,

Terry L. Styer, Chief Clerk