

Commissioners' Workshop Meeting August 22, 2006

I. CALL TO ORDER:

The Berks County Board of Commissioners met in regular session on Tuesday, August 22, 2006 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.

II. PRESENTATION

Commissioner Schwank asked Detectives Delp and Stewart from the Berks County District Attorney's office to provide a presentation of crime maps that depict the location and numbers of various types of criminal activities in the county from 2003 to the present, as reported by County Police Departments. (it was noted that those areas covered by State Police and the City of Reading were not included.) The Detectives noted that the majority of the crimes seemed to flow around the areas surrounding the city and along the corridors of Rte. #422 and #222, which Commissioner Scott noted were the heaviest population zones as well. Commissioner Schwank then expressed gratitude to Commissioners Scott and Gajewski for each of their efforts and direct involvement in promoting regionalization. She suggested that these concepts for regionalization of police services should continue either through the regionalization of existing police departments perhaps organized by school district boundaries and/or by considering the establishment of a county police department for more efficient use of police equipment and services and better deployment of police officers.

Commissioner Schwank expressed appreciation for the County's municipal police departments and stated that they are currently performing an outstanding job for our citizens. She also mentioned the County's recent efforts such as the Sheriff's office Central Processing / Booking Center and the County Detectives Crime Mapping project all help to provide services to those departments, while the long term problem of police protection and crime reduction remains. As part of the long term evaluation, she suggesting establishing a study group to evaluate to options for Police Protection in the county and suggested that the Center for Community Leadership be involved.

Commissioner Scott read the following prepared statement he had drafted for Mayor McMahon's recent Crime Forum held at City Hall. *"High profile tragedies, such as the murder of Officer Wertz, have punctuated the intervals of continuing decline of Reading, and of public safety generally throughout Berks County."*

Commissioner Scott continued: *"In every outrageous instance the indignant public clamors for some ill-defined and dramatic change of policy to assure an end to the carnage, and politicians seeking to avoid blame and eager to appear as leaders issue sanctimonious denunciations of the evils infecting the community offer promises of equally vague reforms, initiatives, grants, loans, legislation, and etcetera. I know this routine all too well. With the passage of time, our frustrations vented with great but temporary passion, the public and their leadership lapse back into complacency - a complacency that only encourages and predicts the next high profile tragedy; nothing changes.*

Tragedy offers us an opportunity for reassessment and insight. But that opportunity is all too often squandered in a sea of emotion that overwhelms reason and analytical thinking. May I suggest that somehow we instead must hoard our grief and our indignation and release it slowly in the form of focused determination to rationally and honestly confront the challenges facing law enforcement in Berks County. We owe that determination, more than our grief to all the victims of crime, living and departed.

The persistence and virulence of crime in this City and, increasingly throughout Berks County are a complex function of many factors. Cultural practices, demographics, education, low income and employability, substance abuse, mental illness, and family dysfunction all conspire to create those who are or will be perpetrators and predators. Law enforcement's ability to deter and apprehend this population is in turn a function of management expertise in tactics and deployment, officer training and compensation, information gathering and technology; communications, equipment and witness cooperation. Clearly, our crime problem is not merely a matter of insufficient uniformed manpower.

Dramatic improvement in law enforcement cannot begin unless and until we obtain a comprehensive county-wide inventory and analysis of our current policing resources, how effectively they are deployed, at what cost. Once this is determined we need expert, unbiased recommendations as to how we should organize manage and equip our forces for maximum efficiency and impact. The analysis and recommendations should be provided by a politically detached police consulting firm possessed of a national reputation and complimented with financial expertise. I believe the report derived of this effort could provide the foundation for sweeping reforms within law enforcement statewide, and could inspire the legislation necessary to provide communities such as ours with options for better organization and performance.

The analysis I am recommending has been described by best-selling authors who were the cops who turned around public safety in New York and elsewhere. These experts know best how to improve our fragmented enforcement efforts. They can give us an honest, detailed assessment, and recommendations that transcend petty turf battles and political rivalries. Obtaining their objective input is essential to meaningful, practical reforms that will increase public confidence in public safety throughout Berks County."

Commissioner Gajewski added that mutual aid agreements could serve as possible solutions to assist in police department crossing municipal boundaries and that would not have to wait for a study to be completed. He also suggested a study undertaken should include options for a countywide police department among other outcomes.

Anthony C. Garipoli, Sr., President of the Berks County Fraternal Order of Police (FOP Lodge #71) read a prepared statement expressing support for the concept of a Berks Countywide Police Department and encouraged the Commissioners to conduct a study by stating that "Criminals do not have any boundaries nor should the Police." As a 20 year veteran of the Central Berks Regional Police Department, Mr. Garipoli stated the following examples of benefits derived from regionalizing police services:

- Eliminate duplication of services
- Increased staffing levels for better community protection, more effective deployment of officers and improved officer safety and better response times
- Ability to specialize ie – K-9 patrol, narcotic / bomb dogs, criminal investigators, bomb squads, school resource officers
- Improved criminal intelligence sharing

Chief Brian Heister Police Chief for Cumru Township and Past President of the Berks County Chief's of Police Association indicated that the Association supports a study and expressed a willingness of the County's Police Chiefs to be at the table for the discussion of a county police force. Chief Frank of the Douglas Township Police Department also stood in support of a regionalization study.

The following individuals presented similar comments regarding the issue of crime and potential for a county-wide police department:

Mark Gillen, Citizen from Mohnton Borough said he enjoys the more personal experience of having the borough maintain an independent police department. He emphasized the importance of building community consensus.

Thomas Kanuck, Birdsboro Councilman, suggested contacting other communities of similar size and make up to learn from their successes.

Citizens of the City of Reading provided additional comments:

Edward Terrel, Marketing Director for Weed and Seed, encouraged that the development of quality jobs would assist in the reduction of crime in the city. He also said that any police department should understand and become reflections of the diverse community they work in and suggested that any study committee formed include representation of this diversity.

Rev. Charles Whiteside offered to create a location for the city youth to go for sports, homework assistance and computer learning skills to assist in keeping them off the streets.

Nancy Lee, objecting to the hiring of outside consultants suggested that the citizens need to work on community pride.

Tito Rivera discussed the social barriers in the city as a deterrent to positive change. He said that more understanding of the numerous cultures represented in this county is critical to the success of this change.

Tina M. Stief, resident of the city and mother of a murdered child expressed comments regarding crime in Berks County and added that people who witness crime need to come forward. She said that there needs to be more witness protection programs and assure that witnesses feel safe so more citizens become involved.

II. DEPARTMENTAL REPORTS / REQUESTS:

Budget Department:

- A. Adopt Resolution authorizing 2006 Budget Transfers in the amount of \$44,700 and 2006 Appropriations in the amount of \$22,050 per listing dated August 18, 2006. Bob Patrizio presented the budget report.

Planning

- A. Adopt Resolution to appoint Patricia Pingel and Noel Karasin to the Open Space and Recreation Council for 4 year terms ending 8/31/2010.
- B. Adopt Resolution approving Parts Two and Three of Natural Land, Farmland and Open Space Conservation Program. (Parts Two and Three are the Municipal Land Protection Program and the Private Conservation Organization Grants.) Shannon Rossman, Planner and Glen Knoblauch, Director of the Berks County Planning Commission presented this phase of the program for approval and added that the vote for its approval will be held to next week.

Solicitor

- A. Resolution authorizing execution of Addendum to Lease Agreement with the Township of Exeter for office space for Magisterial District Court 23-2-03. Alan Miller, County Solicitor presented this agreement for approval.

Workforce Investment Board

- 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 the Workforce Investment Act Grants for the SPCO program which serves welfare recipients to help them transition from public assistance to gainful employment these PA Dept. of Labor Grants funds total to \$1,798,914.00.

III. PRESENTATION:

Commissioner Schwank presented a Certificate of Recognition to Judith M. Rabena, as Pennsylvania's 2006 National Distinguished Principal as chosen by the Pennsylvania Association of Elementary School Principals.

There being no further business the meeting adjourned at 12:25 P.M.

Respectfully Submitted,

Terry L Styer, Chief Clerk