

**Commissioners' Workshop Meeting
Tuesday, January 8, 2008**

I. CALL TO ORDER:

The Berks County Board of Commissioners met in regular session on Tuesday, January 8, 2008 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 Mark C. Scott, Esq. called the meeting to order with Commissioner Kevin S. Barnhardt, and Commissioner Christian Y. Leinbach in attendance. Also present were County Administrator, William E. Dennis, Solicitor Alan Miller Esq., and Chief Clerk Terry Styer.

Commissioner Scott opened the meeting with a moment of silence and the Pledge of Allegiance to the Flag.

II. DEPARTMENTAL REPORTS / REQUESTS:

Budget Department

- A. Adopt Resolution authorizing 2007 Budget Transfers in the amount of \$271,693.
- B. Motion authorizing Mark C. Scott, Esq. as Chairman of the Board, to execute Contract Agreements/Amendments as furnished by the Contract Coordinator Candace Noll, per attached listing dated January 4, 2007. Lisa Siciliano, Family Court Administrator presented an "emergency" request for a grant agreement intended to fund the Safe Haven Supervised Visitation Program as well as an agreement with Berks Advocates Against Violence (BAAV).

Human Resource Director

- A. Beth Schiepan as Human Resource Director presented the January 8, 2008 list of Human Resource recommendations.

Solicitor

- A. Resolution authorizing tax forgiveness for 2007 County taxes for Parcel ID No. 39-5305-09-17-8002 owned by the Governor Mifflin School District in the amount of \$199.03 including all penalties and interest.

III. REPORTS OF COMMISSIONERS

- A. Adopt a resolution appointing Commissioner Mark Scott to serve as the Commissioner Director for the Berks County Conservation District for a one year term.
- B. Adopt a resolution delegating signatory authority to the Executive Director of the Berks County Office of Aging to the State Civil Service Commission.
- C. Resolution authorizing execution by Mark C. Scott, Esq. Commissioner Chair of the Memorandum of Understanding between the City of Reading and County of Berks in regard to allocation of funds from the Edward Byrne Memorial Justice Assistance Grant in the amount of \$19,928.70 to be applied for overtime costs for Berks County Law Enforcement in support of the City of Reading crime fighting initiatives. Commissioner Scott asked First Asst. Solicitor Christine Sadler, Esq. to discuss this grant and explained that the County through the DA's office will meet with the City Policy Chief to discuss the proposed use of these grant funds and will attend a future Commissioners meeting for approval.

IV. REPORT OF THE COUNTY ADMINISTRATOR

County Administrator Bill Dennis presented his weekly report detailing 15 of the County's current issues and projects:

1. **Fiscal Year 2008 Budget update** – County Administrator Dennis indicated that there will be a need for discussions and future planning sessions to discuss items like the capital budget; county debt; prison expansion; the Community Corrections project which is projected to be open in Spring of 2008;
2. **Prison Expansion/ Community Corrections** – it was reported that problems have been encountered due to the use of older buildings for the new Community Corrections facility but this and other contract related issues have not altered the anticipated completion date which he stated is still in the Spring of 2008. The Solicitor did report that the County will seek the appointment of special counsel to deal with contract related issues on the Community Corrections project at the Thursday Commissioners' meeting.
3. **Utility Costs** – it was reported that the county will be considering performance contracting as a method to discover cost savings; in addition the county is reviewing the possibility of purchasing public water service for the North Campus buildings from the Western Berks Water Authority thereby avoiding the rate increases projected by the Reading Water Authority.

- 4. Funding Requests from RiverPlace and the African American Museum Project** – Administrator Dennis indicated that he has an informational meeting scheduled with the City Manager and Ken Pick to discuss the Museum project. Commissioner Leinbach stated his objections towards any “off budget – deficit spending” expenditures and that he would be opposed to any process where the financial details and long range plans are developed after the funding commitment. He added that he was not opposed to the RiverPlace project but would support withdrawing the County’s financial commitment of the \$625,000 for the Amphitheater project thus requiring the project to go through a proper process where the long range planning details are presented in advance. He also reflected on his concerns for the existing Band Shell in City Park which is already in need of improvements. Commissioner Barnhardt agreed that he was uncomfortable with both projects for the same reasons. Commissioner Scott reported that a recent conversation he had with an official from the Reading Area Community College indicated that they have reservations about moving forward with the project as well. He said projects like this could affect our ability to address other infrastructure needs of the county. He added that we could be contrasting these projects against fundamental needs presented by the County’s existing facilities including the County’s 62 bridges. The Commissioner then said that “Public Safety has to come before cultural and entertainment activities.” Regarding the Museum, he said that financial projections for the Museum show the initial cost at \$6 million with anticipated operation revenues and expenditures that would result in \$575,000 operating loss.
- 5. EMA/Communications Reorganization** – Administrator Dennis discussed the proposed relocation to the Direct Link building of both our Emergency Management and Emergency Communications Departments by informing the board that the negotiations with the owner have been positive. In addition to the relocation he said that this project will include a consolidation and reorganization of both Communications and EMA departments and the hiring of an Emergency Operations Director to over see the entire operation. He said that the county also faces a potential 40 – 50 million dollars in expenses to upgrade the County Wide Radio System at some point in the future.
- 6. Legislative Agenda** – Administrator Dennis stated that he will be asking the Department Heads to focus on preparing for the Commissioners, a “Berks County Specific” Legislative Agenda to take to Harrisburg or to present to the Berks County Delegation asking for legislative change for county government. Commissioner Leinbach said that the county is the one entity that can stand up to the State and Federal Government and we need to look for the right opportunity to take them to task with issues such as unfunded mandates. Commissioner Scott agreed and stated that especially if we enter into a recessionary economy noting that the revenue source of the State and Federal Governments (income taxes) were to stagnate while costs of services continue to rise, Counties could end up being their scapegoat.

7. **Reserve Center** – Administrator Dennis reported that the requirements for the county serving as the Local Redevelopment Authority (LRA) for the Naval-Marine Reserve Center have become difficult. He said that the Federal Government's requirements that the LRA consider the use of the facility for homeless purposes bring to light the question of how do we define homeless and noted that answers to that and other questions have to be demonstrated to HUD and they have to accept our definition. Commissioner Scott suggested that since the use for that facility appears to have evaporated, the county may want to look for a graceful way to withdraw from the LRA if that is possible.
8. **Financial Management Software** – Controller Graffius said that the vendors for this project have been narrowed down to two. Administrator Dennis stated that this will more than likely be the most important project we do and that it will affect the entire organization, so the implementation of the new software programs is critical. It was explained that the current financial software in use by the county was implemented in 1991 and talks to replace it began in 1996.
9. **North Campus Tower Site** – It was explained by both Administrator Dennis and First Assistant Solicitor Christine Sadler, Esq. that a cell tower construction is being negotiated with Nextel that will propose to upgrade the cell reception in the Counties facilities at north campus.
10. **Security Contract**- Administrator Dennis reported that the county is negotiating with our current security vendor for additional security guards serving the North Campus.
11. **Continuity of Operation Planning** – it was explained that the county is developing plans to deal with emergency shutdown of operations such as pandemic planning, etc.
12. **Civil Service** – George Kovarie, Director of Children and Youth services and Beth Schiepan, HR Director described the ongoing discussions with the Department of Public Welfare where the county served the State Civil Service Commission with a 120 day notice of the County's intent to withdraw from the Commission stating that the County would proceed with Berks County's independent, federally compliant, merit hire system. In example of this improvement, Mr. Kovarie explained that the County would now be permitted to obtain a written sample of the candidates writing ability – something he said was previously forbidden by the State Civil Service Commission. He said that too often candidates that meet the Civil Service Commission standards will still need additional, extensive training to bring them up to our minimum standards. When asked if this process could harm the county's funding from State Agencies, Mr. Kovarie indicated that it is possible but the County, through advice of legal counsel, has taken the position that since there isn't a provision in the County's agreement with the Civil Service Commission granting them authority, the county's position is that they remain an advisory service.

- 13. Antietam Lake** - it was reported that County Park Rangers are currently patrolling Antietam Lake property and that an agreement and policies are currently being discussed with Lower Alsace Township as the county prepares to proceed with the contracts on the dam repairs. Commissioner Scott suggested that we put the brakes on any new projects and move quickly as possible to address the necessary dam repairs.
- 14. Para-transit Services-** Administrator Dennis reported that he will be meeting with our Human Service Grants Coordinator and the State to perform a quality check on this entire program and will bring any recommendation for change to the board.

Commissioner Leinbach

Commissioner Leinbach suggested that the board consider working with the Reading Council of Churches to provide an opening prayer similar to their arrangement with Reading City Council. He also recognized Giorgio Mushroom as having won a gold medal at the PA Farm Show.

Commissioner Barnhardt

Commissioner Barnhardt said that he was asked for his projection of bold initiatives for 2008, saying that "I think we have 15 right here, and we don't have to come up with more." He then expressed his appreciation for the assistance provided to him on his first day and a half in office stating that everyone is working together and he expressed hope that it will continue during the next several years. He then thanked his colleagues and particularly Commissioner Leinbach who showed a truly bi-partisanship approach to County Government when he nominated Commissioner Barnhardt as Vice Chair of the board.

Commissioner Scott

Commissioner Scott reflected on what he described as the impediments to efficient operations that the Sunshine Law can present for governments attempting to run more efficiently but his goal as Chairman of this board was that the county would attempt to transact business efficiently while providing more open discussions with key departments such as with the weekly workshop meetings on an ongoing basis.

Commissioner Scott then read a letter thanking the County for financial support of the Union Township zoning proceedings and updating the board on the latest court proceedings related to this zoning dispute.

There being no further business the meeting adjourned at 11:56 AM.

Respectfully Submitted,

Terry L Styer, Chief Clerk