

Operations Minutes February 2, 2021

The Berks County Board of Commissioners met Tuesday, February 2, 2021 at 9:30 a.m. via Microsoft Teams Live pursuant to due notice to Board members and the public.

1. Emergency Rental Assistance Program – Ken Pick and Peter Battaglia, Berks Redevelopment Authority, and Commissioner Michael Rivera.
Mr. Pick reported the Berks County Redevelopment Authority (“BCRA”) will be administering the \$12.5 million in Emergency Rental Assistance Program (“ERA”) funds. These funds will be made available to Berks County residents to only households that are obligated to pay rent on a residential dwelling. This does not include homeowners with mortgage payments. The BCRA will be partnering with the Berks Coalition to End Homelessness, and applications for this round of funding will be accepted and received through an on-line system. Additionally, not more than 10% of the funds may be used for administrative costs. Mr. Pick is hoping to begin the program March 1, 2021, noting the Coalition to End Homelessness will be hiring additional staff to handle the program.
Commissioner Rivera reported this program has less guidelines than the previous rental assistance program, and can be tailored to better meet the needs of Berks County. There are two amendments proposed by CCAP to SB 109 that would allow counties to use up to 10% of the funds for administrative costs instead of the 2% allowed by the State, and the second amendment to the bill would include \$145 million for the hospitality industry, i.e. hotels and restaurants.
Commissioner Rivera noted counties with populations of 200,000 or more will receive the funds directly from the U.S. Department of Treasury, and the State is also receiving monies from the U.S. Treasury which Berks County may be able to get.
At this time, Commissioner Rivera made a motion that the Board of Commissioners support the two amendments to S.B. 109, and notify the Berks County delegation about the County’s support by email correspondence. Said motion was seconded by Commissioner Barnhardt, and asked the BCRA to contact the Commissioners if there is anything the County can do to assist in getting this program up and running by March 1, 2021. Additionally, Commissioner Rivera and his Executive Assistant Barbara Lopez will prepare the email for distribution to the Berks Delegation. The motion carried.

2. Tri-County Passenger Rail Update – Commissioner Leinbach reported that as a result of the study by the Greater Reading Chamber Alliance, and ongoing meetings he has attended with Commissioners from Montgomery and Chester counties throughout the last year, they believe it is time to consider putting together a Tri-County Passenger Rail Committee, and asked his colleagues to support the formation of a Tri-County Passenger Rail Committee. Commissioner Leinbach said the committee would have no special authority other than vetting proposed Berks County rail routes from Berks to DC and Berks to New York via Montgomery and Chester counties, determining if it is viable and what the next steps would be, the recommending those steps back to the respective counties. Each county would appoint three members to the Committee for a total of nine members. The follow up meeting is scheduled for February 22, 2021 at 3:00 p.m. where

each county will be asked if their County supports the formation of a Committee, and who will each county appoint.

Also, it will be determined the need for other entities to be part of the group for informational purposes, i.e. SEPTA, Amtrak, GRCA, and a discussion on the core objective of the committee and its structure.

Pam Shupp Menet added in the July 2020 study were specific next steps regarding the structure of how the committee moves forward, and the technical issues that must be addressed to move forward with the initiative. In addition, the group should undertake a blue print study, and engage in an environmental impact study. This will be a long term commitment, and is monumental for the community and businesses.

Commissioner Barnhardt recommended South Central Transit Authority should be considered for one of the committees, as well as RATS and PennDOT.

For purposes of the discussion, Commissioner Leinbach made a motion that Berks County support and participate in the formation of a Tri-County Passenger Rail Committee, and name three members; and further recommends both technical support for Berks County and more broadly other key players that should be at the table.

Said motion was seconded by Commissioner Rivera. The discussion continued.

Commissioner Barnhardt suggested Matt Boyer of Commuter Services, who represents Berks County in the southeast region, would be a key player and should be part of a committee.

The general consensus of the Board is this is a good next step at this time to form a committee and will support a formation of Tri-County Passenger Rail Committee.

Ms. Shupp was asked to get permission to post the July 2020 Rail Study.

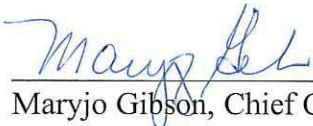
Seeing no further discussion, the motion carried.

3. For informational purposes, Commissioner Rivera was made aware of a property located in a County municipality (not the City) that might be condemned, and provided a representative in the municipality contact information for the Berks Coalition to End Homelessness to make sure no one in that building will wind up being homeless.

Comments – None

There being no further business to come before the Board, a motion was made by Commissioner Barnhardt to adjourn. Said motion was seconded by Commissioner Rivera. The motion carried and the meeting adjourned at 10:17 a.m.

Respectfully Submitted,



Maryjo Gibson, Chief Clerk