

Operations Minutes May 12, 2020

Pursuant to due notice to Board members and the public the Operations meeting was held via Microsoft Teams Live at 9:30 a.m..

Participating were Commissioner Chair Christian Y. Leinbach, Commissioner Kevin S. Barnhardt, Commissioner Michael S. Rivera, Executive Assistants Mary Buerer, Jessica Blausner and Barbara Lopez, Chief Administration Officer Ronald R. Seaman, County Solicitor Christine M. Sadler, Human Resources Director Jessica Weaknecht, and Maryjo Gibson, Chief Clerk. Also participating were Heather Berger, Application Specialist & Trainer and Producer, Lori Schneider, Implementation Specialist, Tim Smith, Enterprise Manager, and Row Officers, A. Dennis Adams, Treasurer, Mary Kozak, Recorder of Deeds and Larry Medaglia, Register of Wills.

Commissioner Leinbach noted only questions/comments related to a specific Agenda item will be accepted.

1. Update on Publicity Campaign and Costs –
Commissioner Leinbach reported media costs to date total \$28,517 which includes the new campaign to promote the Do Your Part-Stop the Spread campaign.

2. County Seal – Possible Student Design contest and partnership with BCIU -
Commissioner Barnhardt proposed that because the County emblem dates back to 1752 and students are out of school and working remotely from home, he thought as a community engagement project, students in grades 1 to 12 could design a new county seal depicting our County presently. Commissioner Barnhardt suggested the Art Teachers judge and recommended their choices to the Commissioners, and to reach out to the BCIU for assistance.
Commissioner Leinbach asked for a motion if the Commissioners want to move forward.
A motion was made by Commissioner Rivera to authorize Commissioner Barnhardt to take the lead and reach out to the BCIU to engage students in a contest to design a new county seal. Said motion was seconded by Commissioner Barnhardt, and the motion carried.

3. Small business loan program.
Commissioner Rivera reported he and Ken Pick, Berks County Redevelopment Authority, are working on a small business loan program named Berks County Restart Fund to issue loans ranging from \$2,500 to \$10,000, and would be handled by a third party.
Ken Pick reported they are recommending NHS (Neighborhood Housing Services) of Greater Berks as the third party, and will use COVID money, CARES Act money and about \$400,000 from the aeroponics projects, CDGB program funds and money from local lenders. It will be zero interest, and available to businesses with 8 or less employees with a start date of July 1.

Commissioner Rivera said this program could help 200-250 businesses. The Commissioners were interested in getting this program up and running sooner than July 1 because small businesses need the help now, and asked Ken if Berks County can front the money, until the funds come from the federal government. Mr. Pick replied the July 1 date was based on when the HUD funds would be available, and said the County could put the money up front. Commissioner Leinbach asked if there was a motion to approve fronting the money for the known amount which is \$1,408,202. Commissioner Rivera made the motion. Said motion was seconded by Commissioner Barnhardt, and the motion carried. The Commissioners asked Ken to reach out to NHS today and find out when they can be up and running and begin accepting applications for marketing purposes. Commissioner Leinbach will prepare a press release when it is appropriate.

4. Transfer of responsibilities for the following items from Brian Gottschall to Commissioners as follows:
The following responsibilities will remain on the Leadership Team master list, but will be handled by the Commissioners as follows:
 - Homeless (COVID-19 increased ramifications) – Commissioner Rivera will continue to handle the homelessness issues along with Dr. Ed Michalik and the Berks Coalition to End Homelessness. Commissioner Rivera reported they are able to assist about 300 families, and there is money available when the eviction deadline comes due.
 - Helping Harvest (Funding shortfall) – Commissioner Barnhardt will follow up with Helping Harvest.
 - Economic Recovery – Commissioner Leinbach will bring economic recovery up in the Chamber call he will be on tomorrow, and report back to group next week. The Commissioners agree they need to formulate a plan when the CARES funds are received.

The Commissioners will provide status reports to the COVID19 Leadership Team on their respective duties.

5. Extending the Furlough – In light of the Governor moving the Stay at Home Order to June 4, the Commissioners agreed to extend the existing furlough through June 30. Commissioner Barnhardt motioned to extend the existing furlough conditions, including benefits, co-pays, etc. from May 31 to June 30. Jessica Weaknecht will first notify department heads, elected officials and the Courts following by a notification to employees.

6. Discussion on forming a relationship with Dr. Cooper, an Epidemiologist, and the Reading Hospital Infectious Disease Group.
Jess Weaknecht and Brian Gottschall have had discussions with Dr. Cooper and will have a follow up call with Dr. Cooper today, and will provide a report to the Commissioners.

7. Commissioner Leinbach suggested having a press event tomorrow afternoon to present to the media and public where the County stands relative to the research the County has done regarding the possible reopening of business in Berks County. The County has received clear answers on the licensing and insurance issues.
The Commissioners will invite the Mayor and the Chamber to participate.
BCTV will also stream the press conference live on the County's website.
The Commissioners also decided to hold these press conferences weekly every Wednesday.

Questions/Comments:

Berks County Register of Wills Larry Medaglia called and asked for clarification on extension of the furlough; is it the intention of the Commissioners to keep the buildings closed as present.

After discussion, Mr. Medaglia agreed to reach out to the other elected officials and determine what access they will require as we move forward with reopening, and will make a recommendation to the Commissioners.

The call ended at 11:10 A.M.

Respectfully Submitted,

Maryjo Gibson, Chief Clerk