

Operations Minutes

July 28, 2020

The Berks County Board of Commissioners met on Tuesday, July 28, 2020 at 9:30 a.m. via Microsoft Teams Live, pursuant to due notice to Board members and the public.

The following items were discussed:

1. Berks County 2030 Strategic Plan of Action – Christian Leinbach
Today's discussion focused on the creation of a working group and a leadership team. The County will lead the effort through the Berks County Planning Commissioner. David Hunter, Executive Director, will be the point person for contact purposes. Participating groups will be the County of Berks, City of Reading, GRCA, Berks County Industrial Development Authority, Reading Development Authority, Berks County Planning Commission, representatives of large and small businesses, representatives from local municipalities outside of the City.
City officials attending, Frank Denbowski, Jamal Abodalo, Pedro Cortez and Jeff Waltman, reported the City is in the process of preparing an RFP to hire a consultant for its Downtown Plus Strategic Plan, and will cooperate and collaborate with the County Plan.
After a lengthy discussion, it was agreed the first step would be to organize and create a working group to determine how to move forward and the next steps. Mr. Hunter suggested he send invitations to the suggested list prepared by Tom McKeon to begin the working group to discuss the scope of work. Mr. Hunter recommended the group meet Monday afternoons, bi-weekly, beginning August 10, 2020. A leadership group would be set up after a scope of work is prepared and should consist of Reading/Berks stakeholders.
Commissioner Barnhardt said CARES Act funds cannot be used. Ken Pick responded CDBG funds can be used for part of the budget, and Commissioner Rivera said the Small Business Alliance could also offer some funding.
It was agreed that August 10, 2020 is scheduled as the kick-off meeting of the working group. David Hunter will send invitations.

2. Berks County BUILD Application – ESI Proposal –
David Hunter and Alan Piper presented a proposal from Econsult Solutions, Inc (ESI) effective through August 5, 2020, to assist the County in preparation of an application for a BUILD (Better Utilizing Investments to Leverage Development) Application for Berks County Transportation Improvements. Alan Piper reported the grant funds could be used for two major projects, the middle section of Rout 222 and the 422 West Shore By-Pass reconstruction. Mr. Piper reported he has reached out to PennDOT for their support of the County's intent to apply, but at this point in time, PennDOT is not willing to offer their support.
The Board believes engaging in a consultant is premature at this time, and the County should focus on obtaining PennDOT support. If we obtain PennDOT support by November, the county could file a grant for the May 2021 application process. Mr. Piper reported the County has until early November 2020 to apply, and will continue to work with PennDOT for its support.

3. Discussion on holding Town Hall Meetings–

Stephanie Weaver reported based on public comments at Commissioner Meetings from some members of the public not being able to “attend” daytime meetings, she was asked to look into the possibility of holding Town Hall meetings in the evening as another avenue for the public to communicate with the Commissioners. Stephanie asked the Commissioners what the purpose of the meetings would be; would they be topical or open forum, how often and how long would the meeting last.

Commissioner Barnhardt is not opposed to and would support Town Hall meetings if they are specific to a specific topic or area of the County, but does not see the need to expand what the Commissioners do every Thursday.

Commissioner Leinbach agrees with Commissioner Barnhardt that if the Commissioners decide to hold Town Hall meetings, there should be topical to a specific issue and have a time limit and specific to the number of questions. Commissioner Leinbach agrees that Microsoft Teams Live should be used as the tool to have Town Hall meeting.

Commissioner Rivera agrees to holding Town Hall meetings, but should be held on a specific topic and

Stephanie was directed to put together a general outline and parameters for the Commissioners to review and comment.

There being no further business, the meeting adjourned at 11:30 P.M.

Respectfully Submitted,

Maryjo Gibson, Chief Clerk