

Operations Minutes September 14, 2021

The Berks County Board of Commissioners met Tuesday, September 14, 2021 at 9:30 a.m. via Microsoft Teams Live pursuant to due notice to Board members and the public.

The following matters were discussed:

Approval of the Minutes

The August 31, 2021 Operations Meeting minutes were approved as presented.

1. Role of the COVID-19 Health Advisory Panel – Christian Leinbach, Health Advisory Panel Members

Dr. Michael Baxter indicated the primary role of the Advisory Panel is to advise the Commissioners, but they see other needs.

Commissioner Leinbach noted that he has been in communication with several Doctors in the area, and they shared their concerns with how individuals are collecting their facts on COVID. Dr. Baxter indicated that the panel participants are some of the top experts in their field, along with the participation of the Department of Emergency Services.

Commissioners and Dr. Baxter discussed the value the Health Advisory Panel provided throughout COVID. Having critical members of the Health Advisory Panel providing medical data and medical advice week after week throughout COVID was very significant. The panel worked very closely with Stephanie Weaver, Public Relations Officer, to provide the most up-to-date medical data to the public.

Christine Sadler, Solicitor, cautioned on presenting general policies that can be utilized globally across the County. She indicated that other Counties and municipalities are always willing to share any data provided by the Health Advisory Panel.

Commissioner Barnhardt advised members of the panel that we are going to be looking to hire a firm to study the delivery of health and public health services in Berks County at the end of this month.

Dr. Baxter clarified that he is not looking to have the Commissioners tell school districts, businesses, and other municipalities what to do. The idea is for the panel to clarify the misinformation being provided to school boards, businesses, and others.

Brian Gottschall provided input into what the panel is seeking, and it is not necessarily a policy. He indicated that the panel is looking to give the public, businesses, or others the means to assist them in making their policies using credible information.

Commissioner Leinbach asked that Dr. Baxter and Brian Gottschall provide a document to the board, and legal will look at it to determine if we can pursue the additional role for the panel.

2. Hidden Heroes – Caregivers of Veterans - Elizabeth Dole Foundation – Ken Lebron and April Mulvey (Elizabeth Dole Current Fellow for Pennsylvania)

Ken Lebron spoke about Hidden Heroes and introduced April Mulvey, a Dole caregiver with the Elizabeth Dole foundation. April is one of the voices of the 5.5 million caregivers that are out there. Hidden Heroes is to raise awareness to the issue's military caregivers face every day. Working on establishing a national registry encouraging military caregivers to register at hiddenheroes.org. April gave a brief history of family members that have served in the military. The military runs very deep in her family and is very personal to her. April is the caregiver to her husband, who served in Kosovo. She indicated that her husband did his duty in the military, and now she is doing her duty by being his caregiver. She noted that although many veterans look fine when you look at them, no one knows what happens when the lights go out. She takes him to all his appointments, reminds him where he is going, helps him with medications, among other things. The Elizabeth Dole Foundation has been her support system. She would love Berks County to be the first steppingstone to support our Military and our Hidden Heroes.

Commissioner Leinbach indicated that he had met April earlier in the year and got to hear a more detailed version of her story. He asked Ken Lebron to state his case as to why he supports the proclamation/resolution. Ken stated he knows firsthand the struggles a veteran experience when they return home from duty. He endorses the Elizabeth Dole proclamation as presented for review for approval on behalf of all veterans and hidden heroes.

Commissioner Barnhardt stated he supports the proclamation but encouraged promoting it at a different function other than the Senior Expo.

Commissioner Rivera recommended we reach out to CCAP once the proclamation was finalized and ask other Counties to support it.

Commissioner Rivera motioned to authorize Ken Lebron to work with County staff to finalize the proclamation and list it for a vote on an upcoming Commissioners' Meeting. Said motion was seconded by Commissioner Barnhardt. Seeing no further discussion, the motion carried.

3. City of Reading Landbank – Michael Rivera
Shannon Calluori – Director of Planning of Hailstone Economic, LLC.
Sara Hailstone – Principal of Hailstone Economic, LLC.
Ernest Schlegel – Chairman of The Reading Redevelopment Authority
Jamal Abodalo – Director of Community Development Services, City of Reading
Melissa Krishock – Solicitor of The Reading Redevelopment Authority

Jamal Abodalo, City of Reading, spoke about some of the programs and tools the City has in place and some of the gateways the City is trying to concentrate on cleaning up some abandoned properties. Mr. Abodalo presented the board with a map of some concentration areas: Schuylkill Avenue, Eight St., and Franklin St. The land bank was established by PA Act 153 of 2012 and amended in 2018. The City of Reading wants to make the land bank one of

their programs available to the City and is looking for the board's approval. He handed the remainder of the presentation to Shannon Calluori, Director of Planning of Hailstone Economic, LLC.

Shannon explained that the City of Reading has many tools to fight blight and wants to add the land bank as one of their programs. A land bank is a blight tool that allows you to convert vacant, abandoned, tax-delinquent, and foreclosed properties into productive reuse. Purchasing properties ahead of the public process is a huge benefit. Land banks' costs are code enforcement, property maintenance, acquisitions, dispositions, demolitions, and taxes owed by property owners. It is not mandated, but 5% of delinquent real estate principal can be collected and donated to the land bank for annual revenue.

Commissioner Leinbach asked if the 5% collected is from all delinquent taxes or only tied to the properties in question. Mrs. Calluori explained that although it is not a mandate, they can collect 5% delinquent across the board in the City of Reading.

Commissioner Barnhardt inquired if Act 153 also gives the County to charge up to \$15 for each Real Estate transaction which can be another source of funding. Mrs. Calluori agreed that it could be another source of funding. Mrs. Calluori handed the presentation back to Mr. Abodalo.

Mr. Abodalo emphasized that David Hunter devised the housing strategy the City is using, and the City uses it daily. Mr. Abodalo is looking to establish a committee to start putting the components together to determine how to use the land bank tool.

Commissioner Leinbach indicated the land bank would not take a property from a homeowner but instead focus on properties abandoned by homeowners. Their goal is to acquire properties that could be beneficial to the community under very tight restrictions. He raised concerns with a \$15 fee that can be collected upon settlement. Inquired what members are being considered for the steering committee, and Ernest Schelegel, Chairman of The Reading Redevelopment Authority, recommended Ken Pick. Both Commissioner Barnhardt and Commissioner Leinbach agreed that Ken Pick would be a great choice but would not be the most available person. Commissioner Leinbach suggested Commissioner Rivera work with Mr. Abodalo and come back with a recommendation.

Commissioner Barnhardt suggested that if we move forward, we should consider the real estate transfer of \$15 for the first couple of years to have dollars upfront. It will take several years to accumulate revenue and can permanently be phased out down the road. He asked if American Rescue Plan dollars qualify for this program, to which Mr. Abodalo indicated that they are looking into that.

Q&A Question See attached

Mr. Abodalo stated that Hailstone Economic are being paid for the strategy and if there is a transaction for the Land Bank they do not benefit from the transaction.

Commissioner Leinbach indicated that the board allows Mr. Abodalo and Commissioner Rivera to come back to the board with a recommendation that incorporates the support of City

of Reading Land Bank, County Participation and the member being recommended to the committee.

4. Coordination of Freight Transportation Activities in the Multi-Regional Corridors of I-78, I-80 and I-81 – David Hunter, Executive Director and Alan Piper – Planning Department

Alan Piper updated the Board after submitting the scope of work to PennDot in May. In June, PENNDOT informed us that they were proposing to fully fund the study. PENNDOT will cover \$350,000 and Berks County's share of the cost is \$13,401. The purpose of this study will be to document, identify origins, routes and destinations of traffic moving throughout our County.

Commissioner Leinbach inquired into whether the study will look at our freight and short line operators that come through the County. Mr. Piper indicated that yes, the study will be a multi freight study.

5. Children and Youth Services – Trust Beneficiary – Christine Sadler and Brandy Neider, Director

Christine Sadler informed the board that back in 2020, the County was informed they were the beneficiaries of the trust of Noni J. Fischer. Although we do not know the trust's total benefit amount, we recently received correspondence from the law firm representing the trust indicating they are willing to make a partial distribution to make to the Children Youth Services now. Brandy Neider, CYS Administrator, was present and informed the board she met with staff to develop ideas on how the funds could be used.

Neider indicated that they want to use the bulk of the money to establish the Noni J. Fischer trust. The trust can be used to fund children's activities for out-of-home care, foster care, group homes, etc. This will give children the opportunity to do activities they usually can't do because of funding.

Commissioner Leinbach indicated he would like us to investigate moving the money forward in perpetuity, whether by investing or explore other ideas.

Christine Sadler indicated that she spoke to Bob Patrizio, Chief Financial Officer. He noted that we might not generate a good income by investing a certain number of dollars.

Commissioner Rivera recommended that we look at all other funding sources before using the funds from the trust.

Commissioner Barnhardt motioned to authorize the execution of the Receipt, Refunding, and Indemnification Agreement concerning the Estate of Noni Fischer, including the establishment of a trust in her honor and a review committee for disbursement of the funds. Said motion seconded by Commissioner Rivera. Seeing no further discussion, motion carried.

6. Courthouse and Services Center - Appointment Only Policy – Christian Leinbach and Ron Seaman

Mary Buerer, Executive Assistant to Commissioner Leinabch shared a recent conversation with Nathaniel Guest, Vice President Colebrook Railroad, in which Mr. Guest expressed his disappointment in not being allowed access into the building because he did not have an appointment. Mr. Guest was in the building for a meeting in the Commissioners' Boardroom but was stopped by Security. Barbara Lopez, Executive Assistant to Commissioner Rivera, shared her experience with some public members stopping her for assistance due to not being allowed into the building because they did not have an appointment.

Jonathan DelCollo, Prothonotary indicated that he will be removing the appointment only policy once the major renovations are completed in his department. Mr. DelCollo suggested the Security Guards a basic county government education, and it can assist them with directing the public.

Commissioner Barnhardt motioned to drop the appointment-only policy, but SGI Security personnel must ask visitors their business in the buildings before granting access. Coordinate with SGI to incorporate an orientation class to do basic County government training. Said motion was seconded by Commissioner Rivera. Seeing no further discussion, motion carried.

7.

- a. Approval of the payments and electronic transfers as set forth on the Controller's Office vouchers dated September 7, 2021. – Christine Sadler
- b. Approval of the employee payroll dated September 14, 2021.
- c. Acceptance of the proposal from Berks Fire and Water for emergency clean up at the Beidler House due to flooding.
- d. Authorize execution of Mortgage Satisfaction between Pomeroy's Associates, L.P and County of Berks concerning 600 Penn Street, Reading, PA subject to final review and approval of the Berks County Solicitor- Bob Patrizio
- e. Authorize execution of Mortgage Satisfaction between Greater Berks Development Fund and the County of Berks concerning 600 Penn Street, Reading, PA subject to final review and approval of the Berks County Solicitor- Bob Patrizio

There being no further comments or questions, Commissioner Barnhardt motioned to approve all items listed under item number seven. Said motion was seconded by Commissioner Rivera. Motion carried.

Commissioner Barnhardt and Commissioner reminded everyone of next week's meeting taking place at 7:00 PM at the Wyomissing Public Library with a maximum of 50 participants.

There being no further business the meeting adjourned at 11:41 a.m.

Comments - None

Respectfully Submitted,

Carmen Torres, Chief Clerk