

Operations Minutes October 27, 2020

The Berks County Board of Commissioners met Tuesday, October 27, 2020 at 9:30 a.m. via Microsoft Teams Live pursuant to due notice to Board members and the public.

The following matters were discussed:

1. Chesapeake Bay Countywide Action Plan for Berks County update – Ashley Showers, Assistant Director of the Berks County Planning Commission, Dean Druckenmiller, District Director of the Conservation District and Tami Hildebrand, Director of the Berks County Agriculture Department.

Ms. Showers was appointed County representative for coordinating the Countywide Action Plan (“CAP”) effort by her colleagues, and reported since their last appearance before the Board, they had one meeting with the Department of Environmental Protection (“DEP”) to discuss what is required for the CAP and what is expected upon the CAP’s completion. The main purpose of the CAP is to prepare a list of BMP’s that need to be installed to meet the recommended reduction goals for nitrogen and phosphorus.

Ms. Showers said there is \$100,000 provided by DEP for development of the CAP, but must be shared with other counties. The Berks team will be meeting with representatives from Chester and Schuylkill counties to discuss working together on the development of the CAP.

Ms. Showers also reported the County received the Clean Water Technical Toolbox document from DEP which provides recommendation how the County will reduce the nitrogen and phosphorus loads for Berks County.

In closing, Ms. Showers said following the meeting with Chester and Schuylkill counties, the County team will meet to determine the next formal steps, including a meeting with DEP to review the Toolbox document.

2. Berks Cares Grant program recommendations – Educational Services, Public Health Services, Municipalities and Authorities, and Nonprofits – Pam Shupp Menet, Deputy CAO and Economic Development Director

Ms. Shupp Menet reported after a very extensive needs assessment to determine community needs resulting from COVID-19 and the negative impact on organizations, municipalities and businesses, the County successfully put out through the New Start Program almost \$12 million to small businesses.

Thereafter, applications were put out to educational groups, public health organizations, not for profits and municipalities/authorities that met the CARES Act eligibility requirements and set aside \$19 million for that effort. Applications were received for funds requests in the range of \$6 million. Four citizen volunteer committees (23 people) were formed to perform a thorough review of the applications. After an intensive review of the 140 applications, and determination of which organizations met eligibility requirements, the amount required to fund the awards was \$4.561 million; \$2.105 million to educational groups, \$1.112 million to public health organizations, \$780,828 to not for profits, and \$563,426 to municipalities/authorities, and the recommendation of the committee is for the Commissioners to award and make available \$4.561 million to 132 applicants.

Commissioner Barnhardt clarified the balance of funds originally allocated to this program will be used to offset expenses incurred by the County, and to reduce the potential tax increase because of what the County has already spent on COVID-19.

Commissioner Rivera asked if the committee noticed any need in the community that was not addressed yet. Ms. Shupp Menet responded no, but non-profits were most difficult because we could not replace lost revenue for them due to lack of their ability to hold fundraisers.

Commissioner Barnhardt said the committee discovered that Downtown Revitalizations efforts, the Convention Center Authority and COCA had needs that could not be addressed through this program, and he will discuss those organizations next.

After discussion, Commissioner Barnhardt motioned to allocate \$4.561 CARES Act funds to 132 worthy applicants and publicly make this available to the public and the Board of Commissioners for review and encourage the Board to use the balance to help reduce the County's cost incurred relating to COVID-19. Commissioner Rivera seconded the motion. At this time, Ms. Shupp Menet corrected the number of applicants from 132 to 128. A friendly amendment to the motion was made by Commissioner Barnhardt to correct the number of applicants from 132 to 128. Commissioner Rivera also asked to include that the balance of funds can be used by the County for its expenses or if there are any extraneous applicants that did not fall into the form or function of the CARES Act funds. All agreed to the motion as set forth. The motion carried.

Ms. Shupp recognized one of the organizations that is an economic driver in the community and has been significantly negatively impacted is the Santander Arena. The Santander Arena had requested CARES Act funds in the amount of \$508,000 and submitted a detailed breakdown of costs to allow for safe reopening of the Arena, included social distancing equipment, signage, new touchless ticket scanners, contactless payment processing, touchless bathroom fixtures, HVAC Air purification improvements, etc. The request based on the justification of expenses to bring the Arena in compliance can be justified under the CARES Act.

Ms. Shupp Menet said the recommendation and request to the Board of Commissioners is to provide the \$508,000 to the Convention Center Authority from the CARES Act money for work to be completed for a safe reopening plan under the CDC and DOH guidelines. Commissioner Barnhardt motioned to spend up to \$508,000 to reimburse the Santander Arena for expenses incurred to properly prepare to reopen. Said motion was seconded by Commissioner Rivera. The motion carried.

Downtown Revitalization Projects –

Commissioner Barnhardt reported at the October 13, 2020 Operations Meeting, the County had agreed to support Downtown Revitalization Organizations up to \$250,000 from County general funds who did not meet the criteria of CARES Act funds.

Today Commissioner Barnhardt asked the Commissioners to amend that amount to support the following Downtown Organizations, who did not meeting the criteria, and who are actively involved in promoting economic development in their communities in the amount of \$188,417: Our Town Foundation (Hamburg), Building a Better Boyertown, West Reading Community Revitalization Foundation, Kutztown Community Partnership and Northeast Berks Chamber of Commerce. BOSS 2020 (Sinking Spring) reported they were not able to document any losses and was not appropriate to request funds.

Commissioner Leinbach asked if there was a motion to support Commissioner Barnhardt's request.

Commissioner Barnhardt made said motion. Commissioner Rivera seconded the motion. The motion carried.

COCA Request – Commissioner Barnhardt reported COCA has published the Response Magazine for the past two years as part of SOS Berks Opioids Coalition, and has exhausted its grant monies and applied for CARES Act funds. Their request was denied because the expenditure for the publication is for the fall/winter edition and does not fall in the March-September time frame criteria. COCA is requesting \$21,696 to support publication of 3,500 Response Magazines for the current mailing list and 50,000 postcards to inform residents about available services. Commissioner Barnhardt put forth a motion for the Board's support of COCA's request, COCA of \$21,696. Said motion was seconded by Commissioner Rivera. The motion carried.

3. Berks County Economic Development Budget –
Pam Shupp Menet, Deputy CAO and Economic Development Director, presented the proposed Economic Development Budget for 2021. Ms. Shupp said it is important to continue to reach out to community partners in order to undertake the County's economic development strategy. The Commissioners have been a long time supporter of the Greater Reading Chamber Alliance and many other partners, and will be undertaking Berks 2030 in conjunction with business stakeholders and the Berks County Planning Commission. Ms. Shupp Menet said Berks County is an agricultural friendly community and has made a commitment to growing the Ag business, continue our strong relationship with the Berks County Agriculture Department and Berks Agricultural Resource Network (BARN). It is important to attract good businesses who are committed to Berks County and keep Berks County businesses in Berks County. Ms. Shupp Menet reported international inquiries have not slowed down, and she will be doing some site visits in the near future. We will need to set aside some dollars for the economic development strategy along with our community partners. We will also be engaging township and boroughs to help them continue to implement and improve their Main Street Programs.

Ms. Shupp Menet concluded it is important to engage meaningful partners as we move forward in 2021 and to put together the best budget for Berks County.

Commissioner Leinbach said it is important to pull together a better defined longer term relationship between County government and GRCA, and for that to be successful, there needs to be a clear understanding of Ms. Shupp Menet's duties in relation to what GRCA is doing, so there is not a duplication of efforts. Before we respond to GRCA, we need to understand where we are from a budget standpoint.

Commissioner Barnhardt considers it a marriage with the Chamber, where Ms. Shupp Menet will continue to do what she did under the umbrella of the Chamber for the County.

After discussion, a motion by Commissioner Rivera to put \$750,000 in the Commissioners' Budget as a line item, and the allocation to GRCA will be determined based on the

Commissioners and Ms. Shupp Menet ultimate agreement with GRCA on a contract; and further to send a letter to GRCA requesting a response in the form of a contract proposal that covers the activities and strategies set forth in said letter. Said motion was seconded by Commissioner Barnhardt. The motion carried.

4. Dog Law Discussion –

Commissioner Rivera received a call from Fred Strathmeyer, Deputy Secretary for Plant Industry and Consumer Protection, Pennsylvania Department of Agriculture, regarding proposed legislation to advance a dog license fee increase, that hasn't happened in 24 years, and asked the County to provide a letter of support for the legislation. The annual dog license fee will increase from \$6.50 to \$10.00 (the national average) and the lifetime license from \$31.50 to \$49.00. Commissioner Barnhardt supports sending the letter of support. Commissioner Leinbach asked for a motion.

Commissioner Rivera motioned to send a letter of support to the State legislators for House Bill 1504 and Senate Bill 663. Said motion was seconded by Commissioner Barnhardt. The motion carried.

5. Commissioner Rivera sent an updated list for the New Start Grant Program to the Commissioners for review. and questions.

Commissioner Barnhardt said Pam Shupp Menet and Paul Bradshaw are looking into the additional administrative fees. No action was required.

Comments - None.

There being no further business, the meeting adjourned at 10:58 A.M.

Respectfully Submitted,

Maryjo Gibson, Chief Clerk