

Operations Minutes December 1, 2020

The Berks County Board of Commissioners met Tuesday, December 1, 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. Bid4Assets Agreement for On-Line Sheriff's Sale Auctions –
Sheriff Eric Weaknecht attended the meeting seeking approval from the Board of Commissioners to move forward with an Agreement with Bid4Assets, Silver Spring, Maryland, to provide internet advertising and auction services for Berks County Sheriff's Sales. Sheriff Weaknecht said Bid4Assets is an online real estate auction site operating since 1999, and works with the U.S. Marshal Service, and state and federal agencies. Currently Lehigh and Montgomery counties and the City of Philadelphia are using Bid4Assets for Sheriff's Sales. The Sheriff would like to begin using Bid4Assets in January 2021 and currently has 63 properties for sale, but anticipates when the mortgage foreclosures moratorium ends due to COVID, the Sheriff expects that number will dramatically increase. Bid4Assets provided website services including organizing, posting, hosting and servicing advertised properties. There is no fee to the County; Bid4Assets receives a 1.5% fee for each property that sells and there is a \$35 bid deposit, a \$35 payment processing fee. The Sheriff anticipates continuing using Bid4Assets after the COVID pandemic passes because of the cost savings and efficiencies in running Sheriff's Sales.
County Treasurer A. Dennis Adams said he is also considering Bid4Assets for Tax Claim Sales and has a demonstration setup.
After discussion, the Commissioners believe this is a common sense approach to Sheriff's Sales and will dramatically lower the cost of Sheriff's Sales. The Board supports the proposal, but asked the Sheriff to have legal review to make sure the County is not violating the Third Class County Code regarding on line auctions. The agreement has already been reviewed by legal in all other aspects.
2. 2021 Enterprise Replacement Vehicles – Matt Salkowski, Director of Facilities & Operations and Sheriff Eric Weaknecht.
Mr. Salkowski reported in March of this year he was working with Enterprise to upgrade the County's fleet vehicles, but when COVID hit it was decided to pause the program and restart in 2021. Mr. Salkowski has been working with Enterprise representatives, and has submitted a budget based on replacing all vehicles 2012 and older.
Sheriff Weaknecht is concerned with his aging vehicle fleet. He has 15 vehicles with 1.4 million miles. Due to COVID, the Sheriff reported his deputies are now driving great distances instead of flying, and also making more trips in order to following distancing mandates and safety of individuals. It is incumbent he has good reliable vehicles. The Commissioners asked the Sheriff to provide a list of vehicles that need replacing to Matt Salkowski, and for Matt to review that list and get back to the Commissioners with his recommendations at the December 15, 2020 Operations Meeting.

3. 2021 Taxes - Discuss the timing of the collection periods, i.e. discount, flat and penalty periods – Berks County Treasurer Dennis Adams and Deputy Treasurer Linda Weaver. Mr. Adams reported last Spring the Board, by resolution, decided to extend the flat period for County taxes until September 30, 2020, and instead of waiting until next Spring would like to know the Board’s intent for 2021. Mr. Adams is recommending the County go back to the original deadline of March/April for the discount period; May/June for the flat and July through December 31 for the penalty period. Mr. Adams said all local municipalities agree to go back, but have not yet had a conversation with the City. Linda Weaver said her research shows the change in extending the deadline did not have a major impact on collections, which will be in line with 2018 tax collections. Commissioner Barnhardt would like everyone, including the City, on the same page, while being cognizant of taxpayers’ struggles. Mr. Adams will contact the City for their input and will notify all municipalities of the proposal to go back to the original tax schedules. Mr. Adams said if the City disagrees, we might have to issue two sets of tax bills, but the data showed it really didn’t make that much difference. The Commissioners support moving forward.
4. Downtown Revitalization Organizations Funding Presentation – Deputy CAO and Berks County Economic Development Director Pamela Shupp Menet and Commissioner Kevin Barnhardt.

In October the Commissioners approved allocation of County general funds supporting five Downtown Revitalization Organizations who did not meet the criteria for CARES Act funds, and who are actively involved in promoting economic development in their communities in the amount of \$188,417. Today, representatives from those organizations provided brief updates on how those funds are assisting their revitalizing efforts.

Mark Ratcliff – West Reading Community Revitalization Foundation –\$50,000. Mark reported the Foundation is working hard to raise money for special events and has not been able to run a single event since COVID. A number of businesses have gone online and by appointment only. 2021 will be important to re-energize the community.

Jillian Magee - Building a Better Boyertown –\$50,000. Jillian reported Boyertown is looking to showcase the town and businesses, including social medial consultations.

Deena Kerschner – Our Town Foundation –\$50,000. Denna reported Hamburg has a very strong Main Street program and is currently seeing very low vacancies with 6 new businesses.

Lori Donofrio-Galley - Northeast Berks Chamber of Commerce - \$19,417. Lori said the Northeast Chamber just celebrated 30 years. The number of new members is lower, but member renewals have remained consistent. They are also offering a 3 month extension on a membership.

Sandy Green - Kutztown Community Partnership (Northeast Berks Main Street Foundation) - \$19,000. Sandy reported they are focusing on bringing inside outside for 2021 and creating outdoor spaces for people to gather safely.

Overwhelmingly, everyone agreed that COVID has prohibited Main Street and Downtown programs from holding most if not all outdoor events and fundraisers which have greatly impacted their revenue.

5. Update on New Start Grant Program – Commissioner Rivera reported funds are being released to approved businesses, and asked Pam Shupp Menet to provide more detail on the numbers and amounts. Ms. Shupp Menet reported 133 business have been funded to date for almost \$4 million; another 204 are ready to be funded and have submitted their documents for another \$4.2 million, and there are still documents out that total almost \$500,000. In the end, it is anticipated that 480 businesses will be supported.

Comments - None

There being no further business, the meeting adjourned at 10:43 a.m.

Respectfully Submitted,



Maryjo Gibson, Chief Clerk