

Budget/Operations Meeting Minutes February 20, 2020

The Berks County Board of Commissioners met in regular session on Thursday, February 20, 2020, at 2:00 P.M. in the Commissioners' Boardroom, 13th floor of the Berks County Services Center, pursuant to due notice to Board members and the public.

Commissioner Vice Chair Kevin S. Barnhardt called the meeting to order with Commissioner Kevin S. Barnhardt and Commissioner Michael S. Rivera in attendance. Also present were County Solicitor Christine M. Sadler, Chief Administrative Officer Ronald R. Seaman, Chief Financial Officer Robert Patrizio, Chief Clerk Maryjo Gibson and .

1. A discussion on a County-wide Joint Economic Strategy Study was held today. In attendance was John Weidenhammer, Board of Directors of Greater Reading Chamber Alliance and President of Weidenhammer Systems Corp., Barry Schlouch, Berks County Planning Commission Member and CEO of Schlouch, Inc.; Jamal Abodalo, Director of Community Development, City of Reading; Tom McKeon, Planning Commission Chair and Executive Director of Berks County Redevelopment Authority; David Hunter, Executive Director of the Berks County Planning Commission, Ashley Showers, Assistant Director and Elizabeth Burkovich, GIS Analyst; Katherine Hetherington Cunfer, Director of Government and Community Relations, Greater Reading Chamber Alliance.

Mr. Schlouch began the conversation by offering his ideas on developing a County-wide joint economic strategy plan, and where the focus of that study should be. Mr. Schlouch recommending starting with a three to five-point plan that everyone can wrap their arms around.

Mr. Weidenhammer said the focus of the plan should also be on the community and economic development that provides a safe, clean environment and insures an adequate supply of good jobs and high-level wages. Mr. Weidenhammer said the Comprehensive Plan adopted in January is a good plan and should be a framework for where the County can go. He also agreed with the short-term plan then moving on to a mid-term plan. Mr. Weidenhammer noted many projects are also vying for the same federal and state dollars, and the study should focus on revitalization of the City and urbanization of the suburbs, while making sure we get the best use of the land.

Mr. Abodalo stated he is committed to the success of the City, and bringing both small and large business back into the City. Mr. Abodalo said the support of the County is crucial to making this happen.

Mr. McKeon said that any plan or study should refer back to the County's Comprehensive Plan, and there is a need to get the message out to the community and local municipalities about the County's Comprehensive Plan. Mr. McKeon

stated the Planning Commission Board is supportive of going ahead with this study.

Mr. Weidenhammer stated GRCA is also on board.

Commissioner Barnhardt suggested the short-term plan should start with three to five RCAP projects, and a mid-term plan of 18 to 24 months to develop an economic development strategy.

Mary Buerer, Executive Assistant for Commissioner Leinbach, provided comments on Commissioner Leinbach's behalf. Commissioner Leinbach is favorable to the joint effort, but everyone must be on board, and suggested hiring a consultant to facilitate the process. Commissioner Leinbach is of the opinion the County should help fund the plan and the Planning Commission should be the point of leadership.

Mr. McKeon suggested convening a steering committee of all the agencies to make recommendations on the RCAP projects to the Commissioners, then the Commissioners will send their recommended projects to Harrisburg.

Commissioner Rivera agrees with the short and mid-term strategies plan put forth.

There was general consensus by the Board to support an economic development strategy. I was also agreed the committee would have 30 days to review, rank and rate the projects and report back to the Commissioners.

There being no further business, the meeting adjourned at 3:35 P.M.

Respectfully Submitted,

Maryjo Gibson, Chief Clerk