

Budget/Operations Meeting Minutes

February 27, 2020

The Berks County Board of Commissioners met in regular session on Thursday, February 27, 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 Chair Christian Y. Leinbach 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, Deputy Director of Budget and Finance Laura Jones, Chief Clerk - Maryjo Gibson, First Assistant County Solicitor J. Chadwick Schnee and Assistant County Solicitor Paul T. Bradshaw.

1. Agricultural Center Discussion – In attendance from the Berks County Conservation District were District Executive Dean Druckenmiller and Board Member Brian Boyer; Chief Information Officer Justin Loose and Acting Director of Facilities and Operations Matt Salkowski.

The discussion centered around the receipt by the County of a Request for Lease Proposal ("RLP") from the U.S. Department of Agriculture ("USDA") for office space at the Berks County Agricultural Center ("Ag Center"), and how to respond to the RLP. USDA currently leases space from the County for the Farm Service Agency (FSA) and Natural Resources Conservation Services ("NRCS").

It was generally agreed there is not enough room at the Ag Center to accommodate the Berks County Conservation District ("BCCD"), FSA and NRCS. Because of the very close working relationship between BCCD, FSA and NRCS, these agencies believe it is imperative they remain housed in one facility. There are also concerns by the County that we cannot meet the USDA's requirements under the RLP, and BCCD said before they are able to respond to the RLP they need clarification of some of the requirements. The County and BCCD agreed to separately send letters to USDA asking for a 60-day extension to respond and for clarification of certain terms and conditions of the RLP.

As a result, the Commissioners directed a letter be sent to the USDA requesting a 60-day extension in responding to the RLP, and asked for legal review of the RLP by the Solicitor's Office. The Commissioners also agreed to retain Muhlenberg Greene Architects, who previously performed a study on the facility, to review the RLP to determine what requirements the County can and cannot meet, and directed Ron Seaman, Paul Bradshaw and Matt Salkowski to meet regularly with Muhlenberg Greene.

Commissioner Leinbach and Commissioner Rivera also support starting the submission process. Commissioner Barnhardt is not ready to begin the RLP process until we know if the County can meet the requirements.

2. YRF Follow-up discussion –
Ms. Sadler reported she and Commissioner Barnhardt met with representatives from YSC and Baseballtown Charities to discuss the proposals submitted for the YRF. Ms. Sadler said there are still some outstanding issues that need to be settled.
The Commissioners directed Ms. Sadler to finalize the deal and proceed with a 15 to 20-year lease.