

For Release Wednesday, April 1, 2020

County of Berks / COVID19 Leadership Team Press Release

Berks County Announces Phase 2 Plans for Berks County Government

Reading, PA— 4/1/2020 — At 10AM the Berks County Commissioners announced their COVID19 Phase 2 Plan for Berks County Government. The Press Conference was held in front of the Berks County Services Center in Downtown Reading, PA.

Phase 1 Pause and Pivot

Commissioner/Chair Christian Leinbach outlined actions taken by the commissioners in Phase 1 Pause and Pivot. “Berks County acted early and decisively when faced with the COVID19 Health crisis.” Commissioner Leinbach outlined actions taken by the county. The County formed a COVID19 Leadership Team, directed Department heads to begin to take action to prepare for the crisis in the first week of March, approved an Emergency Declaration on March 12th, enacted a Public Health Emergency Policy for County Employees effective 3/18, closed the Berks Heim and Jail to visitors three weeks ago and opened the Berks COVID19 Help Center on 3/18/2020. Commissioner Leinbach noted that Phase 1 runs through April 14th.

Phase 2 COVID19 Plan for Berks County Government

Commissioner Kevin Barnhardt presented the Phase 2 Plan. Commissioner Barnhardt noted that Phase 2 will begin on April 15th and run through May 31st and involves at least 210 employees and may include as many as 400 plus employees by the time we reach April 15th. Phase 2 has several key planks.

1. These are furloughs and not layoffs. It is the hope and desire of the county to eventually bring these employees back to work.
2. Any employee furloughed may be called back to work at any time.
3. A Question and Answer form is available to furloughed employees and additional version will be available by the end of this week.
4. Employees will have a choice of using benefit time, filing for unemployment or applying for the Family First Act.

5. If an employee chooses unemployment, they are eligible for an additional \$600 per week for up to four months.
6. Employees that are furloughed are not permitted to do any work while on furlough.
7. Any furloughed employees will continue to receive health insurance through May 31st
8. Any furloughed employees will not be billed for their health insurance premium, spousal surcharge or parking by the county.

Commissioner Barnhardt also noted that starting April 8th the Commissioners along with the Berks COVID19 Leadership will be working on Phase 3 Recovery and Beyond. While we do not know what the future holds, the Commissioners are committed to NOT raise taxes. All capital projects are being placed on hold indefinitely and that includes the new jail. We will be looking at all areas of spending going forward, including and not limited to the Angora Fruit Farm, Agricultural Land Preservation funding, Library funding, additional funding request from RACC. Everything is on the table. We need to plan for the economic reality we may face. The Commissioners are committed to act responsibly and always keeping in mind the plight of our taxpayers.

###