

Wednesday, October 20, 2021

The second regular meeting of October, 2021 of the Pike County Commissioners was called to order by Commissioner Osterberg at 11:00 a.m. at the Pike County Administration Building, followed by the "Pledge of Allegiance" to the flag.

PRESENT: Commissioners Osterberg, Schmalzle and Guccini; Chief Clerk Orben; Solicitor Thomas Farley.

Public Comments/Questions concerning today's agenda.

MOTION: by Commissioner Guccini and seconded by Commissioner Schmalzle, to recess the Commissioners' Meeting to hold a Retirement Board Meeting.

VOTE: Commissioners Osterberg, Schmalzle and Guccini voted 'aye'. Motion carried.

A RETIREMENT BOARD MEETING WAS HELD.

MOTION: by Commissioner Guccini and seconded by Commissioner Schmalzle, to reconvene the Commissioners' Meeting.

VOTE: Commissioners Osterberg, Schmalzle and Guccini voted 'aye'. Motion carried.

MOTION: by Commissioner Guccini and seconded by Commissioner Schmalzle, to approve the October 20, 2021 Agenda.

VOTE: Commissioners Osterberg, Schmalzle and Guccini voted 'aye'. Motion carried.

MOTION: by Commissioner Guccini and seconded by Commissioner Schmalzle, to approve the October 6, 2021 Commissioners' Meeting Minutes.

VOTE: Commissioners Osterberg, Schmalzle and Guccini voted 'aye'. Motion carried.

MOTION: by Commissioner Guccini and seconded by Commissioner Schmalzle, to approve the October 13, 2021 Commissioners' Conference Minutes.

VOTE: Commissioners Osterberg, Schmalzle and Guccini voted 'aye'. Motion carried.

MOTION: by Commissioner Guccini and seconded by Commissioner Schmalzle, to approve payment from the **GENERAL FUND (County Bills)**, in the amount of **\$934,562.93**, subject to further review.

VOTE: Commissioners Osterberg, Schmalzle and Guccini voted 'aye'. Motion carried.

MOTION: by Commissioner Guccini and seconded by Commissioner Schmalzle, to approve payment from the **PIKE COUNTY EMPLOYEES' HEALTH INS. FUND**, in the amount of **\$80,321.37**.

VOTE: Commissioners Osterberg, Schmalzle and Guccini voted 'aye'. Motion carried.

OLD BUSINESS:

MOTION: by Commissioner Guccini and seconded by Commissioner Schmalzle, to award the bid to Lattimore Construction for winter maintenance of County roads as follows: Brooks Road, Stone Quarry Road by Eureka and Tower Road - \$886 per application (plowing and sanding) and \$375 per application for sanding only; Old Owego Turnpike - \$460 per application (plowing and sanding); and \$256 per application for sanding only.

VOTE: Commissioners Osterberg, Schmalzle and Guccini voted 'aye'. Motion carried.

NEW BUSINESS:

MOTION: by Commissioner Guccini and seconded by Commissioner Schmalzle, to adopt Resolution No. 21-37, authorizing the submission of an application to DCED for funding through the CDBG Program.

VOTE: Commissioners Osterberg, Schmalzle and Guccini voted 'aye'. Motion carried.

MOTION: by Commissioner Guccini and seconded by Commissioner Schmalzle, to adopt Resolution No. 21-38, Fair Housing Resolution.

VOTE: Commissioners Osterberg, Schmalzle and Guccini voted 'aye'. Motion carried.

MOTION: by Commissioner Guccini and seconded by Commissioner Schmalzle, to approve the filing of the Pike County Public Library's Keystone Grant Application to complete the lower level of the Pike County Public Library, including all understandings and assurances contained therein; and direct and authorize Commissioner Matthew M. Osterberg, Chairman, as the official representative of the applicant to act in connection with the new application and to provide such additional information as may be required.

VOTE: Commissioners Osterberg, Schmalzle and Guccini voted 'aye'. Motion carried.

Commissioner Osterberg introduced Rose Chiocci, the Executive Director of the library and Head Librarian. Commissioner Osterberg continued that Rose Chiocci just received one of the only three Certificates of Merit Awards from the Pennsylvania Library Association. Certificates of Merit are awarded to individuals making outstanding contributions during the last 5 years in Pennsylvania. She is active with conference planning for the Pennsylvania Library Association serving on the 2020 Conference Committee as Events Chair, moderating as very well received author panel and successfully winning the election to serve as the 2022 Conference Chair. Congratulations. Executive Director Rose Chiocci thanked everyone. Rose said it is almost 7 years ago – I feel like I've just started some days. We have been working on this Grant for about 5 years now. We have raised about \$120K, hopefully the project will only cost about \$250K, which the Keystone Grant is matching, so we're just about there. We will have to raise more money in the future for furnishings. Please, if you know anybody who is interested in donating to the library, to have basically a brand new children's room – it's 3,100 square feet and it's going to be absolutely beautiful. We're really excited to move the kids to their own section. Right now they don't really have a big place to play and learn and

ready. It's been a tough 2 years now with COVID, so we haven't been able to fundraise like we normally do. We've been largely dependent on Federal Grants and really generous local donors. We are so thankful, but the struggle continues. Hopefully next year we will see more fundraising back in place. For now, we're really dependent on our local communities. Thank you to everyone so far – we still need more as time goes on. Thank you to Commissioners – you have always been so generous and supportive of us.

We're going to build 2 more study rooms. Right now we only have 1 and it's generally booked - even through COVID, because it is private and you can shut the door and take off your masks in there. We're going to have 2 more downstairs and more computers and we are also going to have a stage (it's really low because it's for kids) and that is in memory of Gail Schuster . Gail passed away right before the new building opened (around 2012 or 2013) and her family and friends raised money for that stage and program. We're excited for it. Actually, moving the kids downstairs gives the teenagers more space upstairs, which is also really important and needed.

Commissioner Guccini added that his daughter-in-law runs the children's program in Hawley and the outpouring from the community in support has been remarkable. It's just been a really good thing to see. Rose Chiocci agreed and said we're always needed in times of trouble, especially with the internet. We did just receive a Grant of 25 Wi-Fi Hotspots and basically people can take these hotspots home and use them on their own devices and they'll have free internet. It's a pilot program for us so we're hoping it has a good first year and then we can continue it. It's not set up yet thought, but it's coming.

MOTION: by Commissioner Guccini and seconded by Commissioner Schmalzle, to execute the First Amendment to the Equipment Maintenance Agreement extending the term to December 31, 2022 between TuWay Communications and the County of Pike, on behalf of the 9-1-1 Communications Office..

VOTE: Commissioners Osterberg, Schmalzle and Guccini voted 'aye'. Motion carried.

MOTION: by Commissioner Guccini and seconded by Commissioner Schmalzle, to execute the Agreement to provide Professional Consulting Services between Maximus and the County of Pike for the Cost Allocation Plan for the years 2020-2021.

VOTE: Commissioners Osterberg, Schmalzle and Guccini voted 'aye'. Motion carried.

MOTION: by Commissioner Guccini and seconded by Commissioner Schmalzle to authorize the Chairman to execute the Memorandum of Understanding between the Advocacy Alliance and the County of Pike, to provide Guardianship services for the Courts.

VOTE: Commissioners Osterberg, Schmalzle and Guccini voted 'aye'. Motion carried.

MOTION: by Commissioner Guccini and seconded by Commissioner Schmalzle, to execute the Letter of Support to the Pennsylvania Housing Finance Agency for the County's PHARE application for a new housing subsidy program, on behalf of the Human Services Office.

VOTE: Commissioners Osterberg, Schmalzle and Guccini voted 'aye'. Motion carried.

MOTION: by Commissioner Guccini and seconded by Commissioner Schmalzle, to authorize the Chairman to execute Pike County Rental Assistance Contract #54, on behalf of the Human Services Office.

VOTE: Commissioners Osterberg, Schmalzle and Guccini voted 'aye'. Motion carried.

MOTION: by Commissioner Guccini and seconded by Commissioner Schmalzle, to approve the Human Services Payment Vouchers from ERAP funds for \$42,481.43 and American Rescue Plan for \$51,402, on behalf of the Human Services Office.

VOTE: Commissioners Osterberg, Schmalzle and Guccini voted 'aye'. Motion carried.

MOTION: by Commissioner Guccini and seconded by Commissioner Schmalzle, to approve the 2018 CDBG Payment Voucher payable to Pike County Developmental Center for \$6,996.20 for July 2021-September 2021, on behalf of the Human Services Office.

VOTE: Commissioners Osterberg, Schmalzle and Guccini voted 'aye'. Motion carried.

MISCELLANEOUS:

- Penn State Extension Calendar of Events – November 1-15, 2021.

Questions and comments were opened to the Public and the Press:

Member of the public, resident of Pike County Greg Vittorio asked about health care. A lot of people are wondering what's going on with our search for urgent care in this County. I'm sure you're aware that Pike County is the only County in Pennsylvania that does not have urgent care and we're only 1 of 2 counties that doesn't have a hospital. Recently, I've known some people who have health issues and gone to our closes in-state hospital, Wayne Memorial Hospital, and because of them not having all of the necessary services, the people were directed to go down to Stroudsburg. They couldn't go to a closer hospital such as Bon Secours or Newton because their Pennsylvania health insurance wasn't accepted there. I know the Commissioners are working on getting urgent care, but I'd like to hear where we are with that.

Commissioner Osterberg answered they are continually working with many different medical providers. This has been a discussion for a number of years. There is not an easy answer because the way that the county is laid out. To work to get a provider for us which we believe that provider needs to be located someplace in the center part of the county, somewhere in the 739 corridor, around where the new Weis market is, because that is where the bulk of the population is. Both of the other Commissioners sit on Wayne hospital's different advisory boards, they are diligently working weekly on talking to Wayne Hospital. We are also speaking to other providers to try to bring into Pike County. It's a big expense and a large budgeted item for a hospital to come here. We've recognized that it's not easy because this part

of the county, even though some people's insurance isn't accepted, we gravitate toward Bon Secours or Newton (Hospital). When you get down to Lehman, they gravitate toward Stroudsburg because it's right there. When you get to the far western end of the county, they're only 20 miles or so from Scranton. It's even easier for them to commute to there. When you get into Palmyra and Lake Wallenpaupack, they go to Wayne (Memorial Hospital). To try and bring a medical provider into the center, they look at all of that. Let's just face what it is – it's all about money. We are sensitive to this and understand there is no urgent care. There's pretty big discussions going on right now between our offices and some of these providers. We don't want to get too deep into it, because some of it is confidential on the part of the providers that we're talking with. We hear what you're saying. We also know that know that not having a hospital or urgent care put great stress on our EMS services. Now the ambulances need to travel so far, in some cases an hour or an hour and a half dealing with transporting a patient. If we had something centrally located, that would help alleviate a lot of the stress on their end. You see what we've done to try and augment and put funds toward more and better EMS services – we are matching dollar for dollar that the townships do. It's their responsibility, but it's too big of a responsibility just for little municipalities. We recognize all of this. I live right behind the urgent care in Milford and when you talk to Atlantic Health, it had to do with finances. It had nothing to do with insurance issues, lots of different things and maybe, looking in hindsight, maybe it was the wrong location. Maybe the right location should have been up on 739 – even then 20 years ago, but that's hindsight.

I do know, I was just reading in the paper, there is an urgent care. It's not in-state, but there is an urgent care that is opening in Port Jervis, NY. They have the same issue. The nearest urgent care for people in Port Jervis, NY is Honesdale, PA or the other side of Middletown, NY. There's going to be one there that can satisfy some of the needs of this part of the county, but not for the center part of the county. When it comes to insurance, that's a difficult issue. We appreciate you bringing this to us.

Commissioner Schmalzle continued that he is on the Board of Trustees to Wayne Memorial Hospital and I can tell you that I speak loudly and clearly to them at each and every meeting and it has been my top priority since I've been here and I can tell you that it is all of our top priority – to bring better health care services into Pike County. We are really, really close to putting something in place in the very near future. We're willing to put money toward that in seed money. We're willing to offer land, utilities, whatever it would cost to do the studies. To do it some of this takes time. I'm a business person with no patience with how slow government works, but I can tell you that you are going to hear about something in the very near future that we think is the first step in putting an urgent care in Pike County and possibly 2 in the future. I can't tell you how many hours and meetings that we've been to in which everybody just like you are today came out and expressed the same concern. We hear it every day, all the time. We recognize it, we're on it and we will make it happen. One way or another – I don't want to put a time frame on it – soon. We are closer than we have ever been to putting something in place – bear with us and it's going to happen.

Commissioner Guccini added he is on a different board. I am on Wayne Memorial Community Health Center Board, which is affiliated with the hospital, but it's a different entity. They run the outpatient services around Wayne, Pike and Susquehanna Counties. We've been in discussions with them and actually had a board meeting last night when this topic came up. Just because I am on that board, we've also had discussions with a number of other providers – a lot of other providers. If somebody else is willing to do it sooner and better, that's fine with me. From a county standpoint, the one thing you should know is we have a plan to put money into this. To say to a provider we will help you with soft costs, planning and architects and all that stuff – engineering. We will, depending on where it is, if we can help you purchase land, we will do that. We are committed to doing this. It's a tough county, I grew up here and I never thought, from a personal standpoint, that there were any health care problems. Where I live I can go to Scranton, I could go to Honesdale and, if you live in Delaware or Lehman (Townships), you can go to Stroudsburg or you can go to New York from here, but you're right – there are insurance issues. There are for some people. It's one of the reasons, I think that the idea of a hospital here is quite problematic in terms of somebody coming in saying we can make money, even if it's a non-profit hospital, we can make enough money to bring in good doctors and good staff – it's quite problematic because you can go to other facilities.

Commissioner Guccini continued that the other thing is the urgent care, more diagnostic things, we need those. It's got to happen where the population centers are. Ron is correct - we've been working on it ever since I got here and they were working on it before I was here. I really do appreciate you coming. We need to hear from people and I do appreciate that – thank you.

Mr. Vittorio continued that he has another issue that's kind of related. It refers to the Pike County Correctional Facility. I know it's been a struggle with COVID and staffing and everything else, my understanding is that ICE (Immigration Custom Enforcement) is moving out and there is talk that Wayne County and Pike County are looking at merging in some way. In light of what you're saying about you're willing to offer hospitals land, do we really need that prison versus medical facilities? We have beautiful facilities there – the 739 corridor is very close. I've been up here since 1987, I remember when the jail was built. I remember when we got the contract with ICE. ICE is now building a detainee prison out in Centre County – they're not coming back. We have a \$13M ticket on our budget, almost 1/3 of our budget in 2021. If we can reduce that by either sending our prison people to Wayne and modernize and make that facility a place for a hospital or it could be a place for urgent care or drug rehabilitation. One of the reasons I am not a proponent of the prison there. What does it really do for the county? People come to visit people in a hospital. They stop and buy food, they buy gas and it promotes business in the area and it promotes more people coming to the area to see us. When you have a prison, especially when you have ICE detainees, nobody comes to visit. In fact, right now, you can't come visit anybody. We have this beautiful facility and there's related facilities – Office of Aging is there, all these things. I'm just throwing this out to you because we have a way to reduce our budget, sweeten the pot for some health care facility and say look – we have a building, property, we have the infrastructure, we can help you make this and it will be cost effective to you. Unlike you, I'm a business person, it's great to be a humanitarian, but you got to pay the bills. I'm just looking at it as a service to the community, possibly a reduction in our overall budget. Even if we didn't reduce the 1/3 of our budget, it would be reappropriated back to helping a medical facility or some other facility in that location – we're all winners. That's some of the things I'm just throwing out to you and I'd like to hear some comments of what you think of that scenario.

Commissioner Osterberg said we have looked at the other option of going to Wayne. Logistically, there were studies done, because of where our County Seat is located and where the jail is located, it was not financially practical. The better solution is the discussion we're having right now with Wayne coming here. We still have contracts with ICE. Back to the property up there – we hear what you're saying with the property up there. We're incentivizing (medical providers) them with money, we've also been out there for as long as I've been here, telling any medical provider that if they want to come to Pike County, we will give them land on 739 at that facility, which has water and sewer, to build a facility. That's still on the table. There's some people still contemplating it, but again, it comes down to a financial commitment for these big medical providers. Back to the correctional facility, we've looked at that. We need to have a correctional facility. We could farm them out, but we did the study. If we farmed them out, the amount of travel, because they have to come back every week to go to court. There's a lot of other parts in there. It's not just about people that are in jail and they just stay in there for whatever their term is. They have to come back and forth and go to court. We looked at both of those and, even with Wayne County, this has been the most practical way to do this. If Wayne can come join us, this can save both of us some money. We're going to continue with our contract with ICE right now, as small as it is. We have looked at the land to use for medical purposes and we still have that on the table. We have money and we have land, we have water and we have sewer. All of those medical providers that we've talked to we have offered that to them on the plate.

Commissioner Schmalzle added that one of the things that they've told us is changing a building built as a corrections facility or a prison into what they need, they believe it would be more practical to start from scratch. It's hard for us to understand and take it in when the cost of building things is at an all time high, but that's what they're telling us. We certainly have looked at that. It seemed to make really good sense to us, until we brought people in and they said we're not interested in doing that. We hear you and your perspective on this is exactly the conversations that we're having each and every day and we'll continue going down the road. It is a large part of our budget – that operation out there. If we can't continue to generate revenue, we have to drastically change that operation so that it isn't that big a part of our budget. I think that is pretty self-explanatory. This has been a difficult time out there and the restructuring of debt and finances has helped us get through into the next 2 or 3 years. We recognize that has to become more self-sustaining in order to move into the future. The overall movement of not incarcerating and not putting people in prison is something that we see as well and we have to react to it. It's too large of a facility for our own operation – it was built to do other things at the time. That whole philosophy has changed and we're going to react to that and make sure that financially we come up with a plan that makes the most sense.

Commissioner Guccini started with: we had hired a consultant to look at our operation to look at our possible undertaking of Wayne County and the consultants from Lehigh Valley said jails are built to be jails, the idea that for people who aren't engineers or architects to repurpose it isn't that easy. I'm not saying it can't be done, but it's kind of problematic. Commissioner Guccini concluded with about 15 or 20 years ago they built a fairly large, new juvenile detention facility in Lehigh Valley. Changes to the juvenile system, because of changes in philosophy, they finally reached the conclusion that they were just going to close that. I think they closed it 10 years or so ago. They spent a lot of money to build it and it is still vacant. Ron is correct, he has hit all the right notes and I don't have much to add to that – I just wanted to throw that out there as well.

MOTION: by Commissioner Guccini and seconded by Commissioner Schmalzle, to adjourn the Commissioners' Meeting.

VOTE: Commissioners Osterberg, Schmalzle and Guccini voted 'aye'. Motion carried.

ADJOURNMENT: THE NEXT REGULAR MEETING OF THE PIKE COUNTY COMMISSIONERS WILL BE HELD ON WEDNESDAY, NOVEMBER 3, 2021, AT 11:00 A.M., AT THE PIKE COUNTY ADMINISTRATION BUILDING.