

Huntingdon, PA

Tuesday, December 21, 2021

46-2021

The regular meeting of the Huntingdon County Commissioners was held on the above date and time in the Commissioner's Office with the following present: Commissioners Sather, Walls and Thomas; Chief Clerk, Heather Fellman; Solicitor, Larry Newton; EMA Director, Joe Thompson; EMA Administrative Assistant, Doug Heart; Planning Director, Jim Lettiere; Community Development Administrator, Stacia-Fe Gillen; Celina Seftas from the Conservation District and Daily News Reporter, Kylie Hawn.

Attending via GoToMeeting: guest, Joan Rogers.

The meeting was called to order at 9:30 a.m. by Commissioner Sather. Prayer was led by Commissioner Sather and the Pledge of Allegiance to the flag was led by Commissioner Walls.

It was moved by Commissioner Walls, seconded by Commissioner Thomas and carried (Sather, yes; Walls, yes; Thomas, yes) to approve the minutes of the previous meeting.

It was moved by Commissioner Thomas, seconded by Commissioner Walls and carried (Walls, yes; Thomas, yes; Sather, yes) to approve payment of bills.

There was one addition to the agenda: consideration of approval to designate Keller Engineers as the County Engineer. It was moved by Commissioner Walls, seconded by Commissioner Thomas and carried (Thomas, yes; Sather, yes; Walls, yes) to add this item to the agenda.

Under announcements, Commissioner Thomas urged residents to get the COVID vaccine and the booster, if eligible. He also encouraged residents to allow their children to be vaccinated against COVID. Commissioner Walls encouraged residents to have a safe and enjoyable holiday season.

There were no items to be addressed by the solicitor.

There were no public comments.

Under new business, consideration of approval was given for Resolution 18-2021 which is the resolution for the 2022 TAN in the amount of \$1.75 million. Commissioner Walls commented that this TAN will have to be paid off by December 28, 2022. Commissioner Sather commented that this funding is tax-exempt at an interest rate of .45%. The TAN is through F&M Trust. It was moved by Commissioner Thomas, seconded by Commissioner Walls and carried (Sather, yes; Walls, yes; Thomas, yes).

Celina Seftas from the Huntingdon County Conservation District presented the Conservation District and Farmland Preservation Program Annual Report. Campbell Farm easement has been completed permanently preserving 226 acres in Franklin Township. This is prime agricultural land in an area that is prone to development. This is the 11th easement in the County. The total acreage is now up to 1,392 acres of permanently preserved farmland in the county. While we were working with this landowner, we realized there was an opportunity to do some restoration work on the farm. New streambank fencing was installed and riparian buffer was planted. All of those things work together to reduce erosion from the farm, protect the streambanks, and provide shade for the stream for the aquatic life. This was done in partnership with US Fish and Wildlife Service and the Chesapeake Conservancy, which provided really quick turnaround on funding for the project, the Department of Agriculture's Bureau of Farmland Preservation and the Federal Natural Resource Conservation Service. The Conservation District also worked on many other projects throughout the county. We installed 5,890 feet of fencing and water troughs for a prescribed grazing system in Cromwell Township. By getting the cattle to rotate around pastures it helps with

manure distribution and regrowth of those pastures. It is a great benefit for the farmer's production as well as an environmental benefit of less runoff to our streams. This is one of the focus areas in our County-wide action plan. We have completed several of these projects before. We completed one this year and we hope to complete more in the coming years. We also installed roof runoff controls to help keep clean water clean when it runs off the barn instead of running through manure-laden areas before making its way to our streams. We worked on stream bank restoration, installing over 4,000 feet of streambank fencing and 2100 feet of streambank stabilization. Those go hand in hand to protect our streambanks. When we get high water events, it allows the stream to escape the banks, to slow down, and prevent erosion. We also planted over 20 acres of new riparian buffers. By planting native trees and shrubs along our streambanks we are able to provide stability for the soil to hold on during high water events and also provide shade to the stream for our trout habitat. We have applied for 5 more of these restoration projects for 2022. Our office completed 89 technical assistance contacts. To track our progress, we have monitored water quality at 23 stream sites and our staff is certified to enter this data into the state's Department of Environmental Protection database. We are very confident in the data we are collecting to be able to track those improvements. Our staff put together an informational outreach flier and distributed over 450 of those to help educate municipalities and contractors understand their permitting requirements for construction projects. We also distributed 150 erosion and sedimentation control plan templates so that townships would have those for residents and contractors that are planning projects with earth disturbance. We reviewed and approved 14 erosion and sedimentation plans for projects under an acre and 6 National Pollutant Discharge Elimination System (NPDES) Permits for projects over one acre. We completed 44 site inspections for these projects as well. We completed projects with 7 municipalities this year for a total of 1.9 miles of road improvements focusing on drainage for dirt and gravel roads. We are planning two stream crossing improvements for 2022. Those projects require a lot more permitting and planning. Looking at the funding brought into the county, we look at the project money that is brought in and actually spent. Some grant money comes in and is spent over the course of several years. We are reporting on just the money spent for 2021. We had over \$231,000 for farm and riparian buffer projects and \$354,000 for dirt and gravel and low volume road projects. We were happy to see that that amount of funding could be brought into the county. We were recently awarded \$311,000 for implementation of our county action plan in 2022. We are looking at starting a cover crop incentive program. There are a lot of farmers in the county that use cover crops but in order to help those that have not been able to implement that yet we want to make an incentive program looking at multi-species cover crops. We also want to expand the prescribed grazing program because it has great environmental benefits and production benefits to the farmers. We are also planning for general funding for agricultural best management practices for farms with some resource needs. We recently received funding from the Southern Alleghenies Planning and Development Commission to continue with our consultant and to hire interns to verify more of the best management practices that farmers are already doing. We are also looking at construction of a manure storage system and a silage leachate system. Those are both best management practices on farms to keep those nutrients out of the streams and also use them as a resource. We do have a pending application to the Growing Greener Program for 5 more streambank stabilization projects and we are seeing interest in those programs grow. The Commissioners congratulated the Conservation District on the work that they have accomplished. Commissioner Walls noted that sometimes people can become very concerned about runoff when there is discussion of new CAFOs. We have several in the county and I believe they are a good way to sustain a family farm. Have you had ongoing issues with runoff from those operations? Ms. Seftas answered that they have not had any ongoing issues. Hog barns and any CAFO operation are the most highly regulated form of agriculture that you can get into. They have to have a DPDES permits just to build a hog barn. Throughout the construction process there are erosion controls and runoff controls post construction. Then when you look at the agriculture side, they have to have nutrient management plans written by a certified nutrient management plan writer and it has to be reviewed by the Conservation District. It also goes in front of the Conservation District Board for board action. They also have to get a CAFO permit from the Department of Environmental Protection. There are multiple layers of oversight for these operations. There is also an annual status review for all of the CAFO farms. There is an odor management plan from the State Conservation Commission. The Conservation District also responds to any complaints that we get about runoff or any spreading concerns. Overall the farmers do a great job of spreading in times when their crops can use the manure and in ways to try to reduce the smell as much as they can. Commissioner Thomas asked how many farms are in the Ag Land Preservation Program. Ms. Seftas responded that there are 11 farms currently preserved. She also discussed the upcoming annual tree sale. That will be launched in January. It is a way for residents to buy low-cost tree seedlings to plant on their own properties. We look at doing a diversity of species each year and species for wildlife and pollinators.

Jim Lettiere, Planning Director, requested consideration of approval for a transfer of funds for the 2017 CDBG Allocation. The total amount of the requested transfer is \$306.73. These funds will be transferred from the Comprehensive Plan Phase 3 account to the bill payer account. The transfer is to cover over-expenditure of the Borough's 2017 CDBG allocation. DCED and HUD requires the repayment of those monies from a non-federal source back into the account. The deadline is March 15, 2022. There was a balance in the Huntingdon Borough curb cut project of \$1,706.70 that we had to forfeit back to HUD. We did not have a project to complete in time by that deadline. It was moved by Commissioner Walls, seconded by Commissioner Thomas and carried (Walls, yes; Thomas, yes; Sather, yes).

Stacia-Fe Gillen, Community Development Administrator, requested consideration of approval for change order number one for the MUMA West Water Street Water Line Replacement Project. This project is a fiscal year 2018 project. This change order is to give the project an extension. The project is substantially completed however part of the project requirements is that the grass needs to grow in, which it has not done since it is December. The area has been seeded, we just need to wait until spring when they grass grows in to close out the project. There was also a decrease in the overall project budget due to cost of materials and supplies being lower than anticipated. The original contract price was \$91,343 and the new contract price is \$75,400.50. It was moved by Commissioner Thomas, seconded by Commissioner Walls and carried (Thomas, yes; Sather, yes; Walls, yes).

Consideration of approval was given to designate Keller Engineers as the county engineer for 2022. Commissioner Walls noted that there is no retainer. The County only pays if services are used. It was moved by Commissioner Walls, seconded by Commissioner Thomas and carried (Sather, yes; Walls, yes; Thomas, yes).

Joe Thompson, EMA Director, requested consideration of approval for the PEMA Planning Grant Agreement for the Hazard Mitigation Plan update. This grant would pay 100% of the fees related to the Hazard Mitigation Plan update. We estimate that the fees will total between \$50,000 and \$55,000. The grant agreement stipulates that we will do the update in four years, which is one year earlier than required, but if we take this grant then we are guaranteed the funding to ensure completion. It was moved by Commissioner Walls, seconded by Commissioner Thomas and carried (Walls, yes; Thomas, yes; Sather, yes).

Joe Thompson requested consideration of approval to designate Doug Heart as the agent authorized to communicate with the State on behalf of the County for the PEMA Planning Grant Agreement. It was moved by Commissioner Thomas, seconded by Commissioner Walls and carried (Thomas, yes; Sather, yes; Walls, yes).

Doug Heart, EMA Administrative Assistant, presented an update on COVID-19. He noted that the numbers are somewhat better this week than they were last week. The number of new cases per day in Huntingdon County for the week ending 12/18 was 28 which is down from 33 the previous week. SCI Huntingdon reports 0 inmate and 10 staff cases. SCI Smithfield reports 52 inmate and 9 staff cases. There is nothing new to report from the schools. There were 29 cases among school-aged children in the county from 12/8-12/18. During that same time period there were 10 cases in children aged four and under. There are currently 7 in-house COVID cases at Penn Highlands. This is down from 16 the previous week. 4 are in the med surge unit, 1 is in the ICU (no ventilators are in use), and 2 are in the behavioral health unit. The Emergency Department is running at approximately the average volume currently. COVID hospitalization for the state dropped to 4,527 from 4,694 the previous week. The incident rate per 100,000 for the county has also dropped to 385 from 401 last week. The state's number went up to 337 from 321. PCR for Huntingdon is at 9.8% which is down from 10.8% last week. The state stayed steady at 14.4%. There is nothing significant to report from long-term care facilities. They are doing well with only a few cases among staff members. This has not caused significant problems with staffing. Currently the total number of people partially or fully vaccinated in the county is 22,736, which is about 50.4% of the total population. 6,410 boosters have been given, which accounts for about 31% of fully vaccinated individuals. 3 COVID-related deaths were reported in the county for the week ending 12/18. There have been 191 COVID-related deaths in the county overall since the beginning of the pandemic. There were 86 deaths in 2020, with the first COVID-related death in the county being reported on 5/20/2020 and there have been 108 deaths in 2021. There has been a shift in the dominant variant. Omicron is here and we have confirmed cases in Central PA. The Delta Variant accounts for 26.6% of cases, Omicron accounts for 73.2% and other variants account for .1%. We do not know what it means yet that Omicron is now the dominant variant. We are continuing to monitor this situation. Commissioner Walls asked how they are determining what variant someone has. Stacia-Fe Gillen provided some additional information. PCR tests show different lineage of the disease. They are not looking at each test that gets done, but they test a certain percentage of the PCR tests to determine the variant. She also shared that her brother lives in the Netherlands and over there the Omicron variant is spreading like wildfire. They are on lockdown because it is so bad and their hospitals are so overrun. That is even with a 90% vaccination rate among their public. With Omicron, the booster seems to make all the difference. She urged members of the public who are eligible for the booster to get it. Kylie Hawn noted that it took 3 months for the Delta variant to become the dominant variant and it has only taken 3 weeks for the Omicron variant to become the dominant strain. Omicron is highly transmissible.

There was nothing discussed under matters for action, information and discussion.

There was 1 Veteran's Burial Allowances.

There being no further business, it was moved by Commissioner Walls to adjourn the meeting at 10:36 a.m.

Minutes prepared by Heather N. Fellman, Chief Clerk.

Respectfully Submitted,

Jeffrey Thomas, Secretary