

COMMISSIONERS' MEETING: TUESDAY, September 17, 2024, 1:00 P.M.

Location: Commissioners Meeting Room, Basement.

CALL TO ORDER:

Commissioner Kessling called the meeting to order.

MOMENT OF SILENT REFLECTION:

Commissioner Kessling called for a moment of silent reflection.

PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE TO THE FLAG:

Commissioner Kessling requested that those participating in the meeting please stand and recite the Pledge of Allegiance to the Flag.

MEMBERS PRESENT:

Commissioner Kessling, Commissioner Webster, Commissioner Burke, and Chief Clerk Socie.

OTHERS PRESENT:

Lori Guyer (Commissioners), Lindsay Dempsey (Finance), A.C. Stickel (Controller), Sam Dunkle (Court Administration), Brian Walters (Human Resources), Becky Robinson (Purchasing), Sue St. Martin (Tax Claim), Sarah Seymour (Elections), Mackenzie Caron (Blair Planning Commission), Judy Rosser (Blair Drug and Alcohol Partnership), Jodi Cessna, Mark Ickes, Patrick Schurr, and Erica Kilbride (Explore Altoona), Amy Mearkle (DeGrosso's Park), Dustin Delozier (US Hotel Tavern), Alice Oswald and Tara Eneedy (Altoona Community Theatre), Jane Sheffield (Allegheny Ridge Corporation), Dante DiAndrea (Southern Alleghenies Museum of Art), Jeffrey Cipriani (Hampton Inn Altoona), Victoria Miranda (The Casino at Lakemont Park), Christa Williams (Courtyard by Marriott Altoona), William Baumann (Microtel Inn & Suites), Donna Gority (Public), Kay Stephens (Altoona Mirror), Oliva Bosar (WTAD), and Nate Taylor (Public Access Channel).

EXECUTIVE SESSION ANNOUNCEMENT:

Chief Clerk Socie confirmed an Executive Session has not been held since the last meeting on Tuesday, September 10.

PUBLIC COMMENT:

Jodie Cessna, President of the Board of Explore Altoona, stated the hotel/bed tax is paid by tourists, not Blair County tax payers. The Commissioners representation has not been enough to make an informed decision on the future of Explore Altoona. Explore Altoona requested a meeting to discuss misinformation they were hearing. She did not hear back. Explore Altoona was not aware they were on the agenda. They found out through an external person letting them know. Explore Altoona is made up of every facet of tourism, from hoteliers, arts, trails, attractions, restaurants, museums, and outdoor recreation. As a long-standing successful organization, Explore Altoona has not received the respect they deserve.

Amy Mearkle, Director of Marketing and Events at DeGrosso's Amusement Park, stated that DeGrosso's Amusement Park is one of the larger tourism venues in the county. DeGrosso's has been a member of Explore Altoona since its inception. She is here in support of the importance of retaining the destination marketing representation. Tourism ranks 2nd in the state and county in revenue earnings. Removing the marketing representation would harm the economy and harm the visitors and businesses that rely on that visitor traffic.

Jeff Cipriani, General Manager of the Hampton Inn Altoona, stated Explore Altoona provides consistent marketing in the area, and he appreciates what Explore Altoona has done. He feels this decision was not thought through and will impact many people, as all businesses will be impacted. He believes while trails are beautiful, he has never run into anyone staying at the hotel because of trails. Trails do not generate money.

Mark Ickes, Executive Director of Explore Altoona, stated Explore Altoona has a strong track record of driving tourism in Altoona. Altoona is a small but mighty destination that is poised for immense growth. He feels that this decision was made without strategic analysis.

Patrick Schurr, Director of Partnership Development of Explore Altoona, stated he is passionate about the area, and Explore Altoona presents Blair County for the gem it is as a premier tourist destination.

Donna Gority, President of the Board of Arts Altoona, stated Explore Altoona is comprised of tremendously experienced staff and board members. They offer marketing tools and resources that Arts Altoona normally would not have. The marketing reaches out to periphery counties to pull people into Blair County. She believes that Blair County stands out because of the work Explore Altoona does.

Kay Stevens, Altoona Mirror News Reporter, stated she would like to hear further discussion as to why the decertification of Explore Altoona is on today's agenda.

COMMISSIONER COMMENT:

Commissioner Kessling called for Commissioners Comment. There were no comment.

Resolution 437-2024:

a. Payment of the following three-3 Warrant Lists:

EFFECTIVE DATE	WARRANT NUMBER	AMOUNT
9/17/2024	240917WW	546,958.12
9/17/2024	240917CY	527,442.62
9/17/2024	240917SS	262,107.15

b. Ratification of the following three-3 Warrant Lists:

EFFECTIVE DATE	WARRANT NUMBER	AMOUNT
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9/09/2024	240831PC	27,996.57
9/09/2024	240909FS	2,438.96
9/12/2024	240912HR	31,381.12

c. 2024 Budget Transfer: To cover maintenance on county vehicles:

From	\$	To
01103HW-44730 Highway	\$600.00	01103BM-44830 Building Maintenance
01103HW-44730 Highway	\$250.00	01151-44830 Sheriff

d. 2024 Budget Transfer: To cover charges from Burgmeier's Hauling:

From	\$	To
01160-44030 Court Administration	\$742.44	01161DD-42840 MDJ DeAntonio

e. 2024 Budget Transfer: To cover the annual audit expenses:

From	\$	To
01101GCO-44020 General County Operations	\$1,000.00	08607-44020 Fort Roberdeau

f. 2024 Budget Transfer: To cover the fire extinguisher inspection at the 911 center:

From	\$	To
01103BM-44710 Building Maintenance	\$391.45	44122-44710 911

g. Bridge #33/Old Mill Run Bridge Replacement Project:

Requesting approval of ECMS submission Invoice #3, Part 1, Preliminary Design, in the total amount of \$47,036.38, received from Keller Engineers. Expenses are 95% reimbursable and will be paid from the Marcellus Shale Legacy Fund.

h. Employments: Burk, Trinity E., FT, Case Manager, Domestic Relations, \$15.20/hr., effective 9/16/2024. Martin, Jennifer L., FT, District Court Administrative Support, MDJs, \$11.58/hr., effective 9/16/2024. Sullivan, Terrence B., FT, Accounts Payable Coordinator, Controller, \$14.78/hr., effective 9/16/2024.

i. Resignations: Ralston, George, FT, Deputy, Sheriff, \$16.14/hr., effective 9/13/2024. Burns, Crystal, FT, Telecommunicator, 911 Center, \$19.53/hr., effective 7/30/2024. Carowick, Robert, FT, Corrections Officer, Prison, \$21.53/hr., effective 8/26/2024.

j. Termination: Browell, Mathew, FT, Corrections Officer, Prison, \$22.66/hr., effective 9/11/2024.

k. Status Changes: Kirsch, Kelly, FT, Parole and Probation Officer, Adult Parole & Probation, \$18.15/hr., to FT, Supervisor - APO Altoona, Adult Parole & Probation, \$1,730.95 biweekly, effective 9/4/2024.

Motioned by Commissioner Kessling, seconded by Commissioner Webster, and unanimously approved to adopt Resolution 437-2024.

STAFF REPORTS & SPECIAL BUSINESS:

Blair County Drug and Alcohol:

Judy Rosser requested approval of the FY 24-25 Intermediate Punishment Probation with Restrictive Conditions Grant #43927 and Intermediate Punishment Plan between the County of Blair and the Pennsylvania Commission on Crime and Delinquency, in the total award amount of \$315,000.00, for the period of July 1, 2024 through June 30, 2025.

Resolution 438-2024: Approving the FY 24-25 Intermediate Punishment Probation with Restrictive Conditions Grant #43927 and Intermediate Punishment Plan between the County of Blair and the Pennsylvania Commission on Crime and Delinquency, in the total award amount of \$315,000.00, for the period of July 1, 2024 through June 30, 2025.

Motioned by Commissioner Kessling, seconded by Commissioner Webster, and unanimously approved to adopt Resolution 438-2024.

Elections:

i Sarah Seymour requested approval to ratify the termination of the contract with ElectionIQ effective May 8, 2024.

Resolution 439-2024: Approving the ratification to terminate the contract with ElectionIQ effective May 8, 2024.

Motion by Commissioner Kessling, seconded by Commissioner Burke, and unanimously approved to adopt Resolution 439-2024.

ii. Sarah Seymour requested approval of the Quote received between the County of Blair, on behalf of the Blair County Board of Elections, and William Penn Printing to print the November 5, 2024 Presidential Election ballots in the total amount of \$22,238.10.

Resolution 440-2024: Approving the of the Quote received between the County of Blair, on behalf of the Blair County Board of Elections, and William Penn Printing to print the November 5, 2024 Presidential Election ballots in the total amount of \$22,238.10.

Motion by Commissioner Kessling, seconded by Commissioner Burke, and unanimously approved to adopt Resolution 440-2024.

Children, Youth and Families:

Commissioner Kessling, on behalf of Mindy Hostler, requested approval for the submission of the ACT 148, 4th Quarter Expenditure Report, to the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania, for actual expenditures and revenue for the period of April 1, 2024 through June 30, 2024.

Resolution 441-2024: Approving the submission of the ACT 148, 4th Quarter Expenditure Report, to the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania, for actual expenditures and revenue for the period of April 1, 2024 through June 30, 2024.

Motioned by Commissioner Webster, seconded by Commissioner Kessling, and unanimously approved to adopt Resolution 441-2024.

Department of Emergency Services:

Chief Clerk Socie, on behalf of Mark Taylor, requested approval of an agreement between the County of Blair and the City of Altoona Fire Department, a state-certified Hazardous Materials Response Team, to continue to provide Primary response coverage to the County of Blair until the agreement has been terminated. This certification is a requirement of Act 165 and the current Pennsylvania Emergency Management Agency (PEMA) Emergency Management Directive for Certified Hazardous Material Response Teams in Pennsylvania.

Resolution 442-2024: Approving the agreement between the County of Blair and the City of Altoona Fire Department, a state-certified Hazardous Materials Response Team, to continue to provide Primary response coverage to the County of Blair until the agreement has been terminated. This certification is a requirement of Act 165 and the current Pennsylvania Emergency Management Agency (PEMA) Emergency Management Directive for Certified Hazardous Material Response Teams in Pennsylvania.

Motioned by Commissioner Kessling, seconded by Commissioner Webster, and unanimously approved to adopt Resolution 442-2024.

Tax Claim:

Sue St. Marin requested approval of the Agreement of four-4 Judicial Sale Title Search/Bring-down Services Agreements between the County of Blair and the law firms/realty services listed below to conduct Title Searches on Judicial Sale Properties and Bring-down Searches on Upset Sale Properties needed for completion by December 27, 2024, in the amounts as advertised in Resolution 213-2023:

- Rea, Rea & Lashinsky
- Mears & Adams
- Sullivan Law Office LLC
- Poor, Stokan, Huff, Kormanski & Naugle

Resolution 443-2024: Approving the Agreement of four-4 Judicial Sale Title Search/Bring-down Services Agreements, including After Hour Agreements, between the County of Blair and the law firms/realty services listed below to conduct Title Searches on Judicial Sale Properties and Bring-down Searches on Upset Sale Properties needed for completion by December 27, 2024, in the amounts as advertised in Resolution 213-2023:

- Rea, Rea & Lashinsky
- Mears & Adams
- Sullivan Law Office LLC
- Poor, Stokan, Huff, Kormanski & Naugle

Motioned by Commissioner Kessling, seconded by Commissioner Burke, and unanimously approved to adopt Resolution 443-2024.

Commissioners:

- i. Chief Clerk Socie requested approval of the Reimbursement Agreement (R24090008) between the County of Blair and the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania, acting through the Department of Transportation, for Bridge 81 and authorizing the Chief Clerk to sign said agreement.

Resolution 444-2024: Approving the Reimbursement Agreement (R24090008) between the County of Blair and the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania, acting through the Department of Transportation, for Bridge 81 and authorizing the Chief Clerk to sign said agreement.

Motioned by Commissioner Kessling, seconded by Commissioner Webster, and unanimously approved to adopt Resolution 444-2024.

- ii. Commissioner Kessling requested the decertification of the Convention and Visitors Bureau of Blair County d/b/a Explore Altoona as the recognized Tourism and Promotion Agency, certify a new Tourism and Promotion Agency, and directs Sherry Socie, Chief Clerk, to distribute draft resolutions to the governing bodies of cities, boroughs, townships within the County's plan for decertification of the current TPA and the certification of a new TPA.

Resolution 445-2024: Approving the decertification of the Convention and Visitors Bureau of Blair County d/b/a Explore Altoona as the recognized Tourism and Promotion Agency, certify a new Tourism and Promotion Agency, and directs Sherry Socie, Chief Clerk, to distribute draft resolutions to the governing bodies of cities, boroughs, townships within the County's plan for decertification of the current TPA and the certification of a new TPA.

Commissioner Burke stated she received legal counsel from the County Solicitor that she needed to abstain from voting on this item.

Commissioner Burke added that she shares some of the concerns expressed by some of the members of the public concerning communications regarding a request for a meeting. She wishes a meeting would have occurred, but it did not.

Commissioner Kessling stated that everyone thinks there will not be a TPA and all promotion and tourism will stop, and that is entirely not true. He continued by reading the following written statement:

The TPA was created by the County and it is funded almost entirely by bed tax. This year the TPA will receive almost 1 Million dollars in bed tax money.

Our decision to move to decertify the TPA is purely a fundamental change to not only market our current assets such as DelGrosso's Park, Altoona Curve, etc., it is also focused on asset development.

We have spent the past 9 months discussing this and trying to find a path forward that does not negatively impact the taxpayers, yet enables us to develop, promote and create additional and new assets. We believe in doing this, we will create more interest in Blair Co. which will bring more people into our community to stay in our motels, eat in our restaurants and shop in our local communities.

We have talked in length regarding the development of trails. We held a public meeting which had over 60 people in attendance telling us the Commissioners, we need to do something. We have neighboring counties who have and continue to foster, build and promote trails and ask us, when are you going to join us, we could make this a regional place for people to come and stay.

For the past 9 months, this has been discussed in the Chamber's Transportation Committee and I Chair the Transportation Trail Sub Committee that has also discussed this in length. Members of the local TPA sit on many of these committees where this has been discussed.

Recently I received numerous calls regarding the TPA and the Commissioners decided it would be best to have a meeting with all of the parties who had questions to dispel any rumors of false claims. Due to scheduling conflicts with the TPA, this was never held, nor the TPA provide a suitable date, even when asked to do so.

The TPA then sent numerous certified letters to the Commissioners requesting a meeting with "only" the members of the TPA. It was communicated to the TPA this could not occur because it was something we would be voting on.

We want to be clear, this action in no way punitive, nor does this have anything to do with the Explore Altoona Board members or its staff. We as well as many members of this community believe this to be a positive move for this community and to further build assets that will promote growth in our county.

Motioned by Commissioner Kessling, seconded by Commissioner Webster, approved to adopt Resolution 445-2024 with the abstention as noted.

OLD BUSINESS:

Commissioners:

None.

Adjourn:

Motioned by Commissioner Kessling, seconded by Commissioner Webster, and unanimously approved to adjourn today's meeting.



Sherry Socié, Chief Clerk