

Wednesday, October 18, 2023, 2023

The second regular meeting of October 18, 2023, 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 Waldron; Chief Clerk Gromalski; and Solicitor Farley.

Public Comments/Questions concerning today's agenda – NONE

Motion to recess the Commissioners' Meeting to hold a Retirement Board Meeting.

A RETIREMENT BOARD MEETING was held.

Motion to adjourn the RETIREMENT BOARD MEETING and reconvene the Commissioners' Meeting.

MOTION: by Commissioner Waldron and seconded by Commissioner Schmalzle, to approve the October 18, 2023, Agenda.

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

MOTION: by Commissioner Waldron and seconded by Commissioner Schmalzle, to approve the October 4, 2023, Meeting Minutes.

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

MOTION: by Commissioner Waldron and seconded by Commissioner Schmalzle, to approve the October 11, 2023, Conference Minutes.

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

MOTION: by Commissioner Waldron and seconded by Commissioner Schmalzle, to approve payment from the **GENERAL FUNDS (County Bills)** in the amount of **\$549,483.48**.

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

MOTION: by Commissioner Waldron and seconded by Commissioner Schmalzle, to approve payment from the **BRIDGE REPAIR ACCOUNT** in the amount of **\$4,740.91**.

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

PERSONNEL

MOTION: by Commissioner Waldron and seconded by Commissioner Schmalzle, to hire **CHRISTINA CUBIE** as part-time Legal Secretary in Children and Youth Services for less than 1,000 hours per year, retroactive to October 16, 2023.

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

MOTION: by Commissioner Waldron and seconded by Commissioner Schmalzle, to hire **BRUNO RODRIGUES** as a full-time Driver in the Transportation for a 40-hour work week, retroactive to October 16, 2023, with benefits after 90 days.

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

Motion to recess the Commissioners' Meeting to hold a Salary Board Meeting.

A SALARY BOARD MEETING was held.

Motion to adjourn the SALARY BOARD MEETING and reconvene the Commissioners' Meeting.

OLD BUSINESS

MOTION: by Commissioner Waldron and seconded by Commissioner Schmalzle, to reject the awarding of the bid for the George Street Parking Project.

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

MOTION: by Commissioner Waldron and seconded by Commissioner Schmalzle, to open bids for Bennett Ave Building 1 Interior Renovations Project Electrical Contract.

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

Solicitor Farley announced there are two (2) bids. The first from CRL Electric in the amount of \$275,335 and the next bid from Northend Electric in the amount of \$220,000. I would ask this be tabled until the next meeting.

MOTION: by Commissioner Waldron and seconded by Commissioner Schmalzle, to table the awarding of bid for Bennett Ave Building 1 Interior Renovations Project Electrical Contract until the November 1, 2023 Commissioners' meeting.

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

NEW BUSINESS

MOTION: by Commissioner Waldron and seconded by Commissioner Schmalzle, to advertise bids for Fresh Bread and Baked Goods for the period of January 1, 2024, until December 31, 2024, on behalf of the Correctional Facility.

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

MOTION: by Commissioner Waldron and seconded by Commissioner Schmalzle, to execute the Family First Transition Act Invoice/Claim, on behalf of Children and Youth Services.

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

MOTION: by Commissioner Waldron and seconded by Commissioner Schmalzle, to execute the CAPP Grant-In-Aid 2023-2024 Grant Application for the period of July 1, 2023 – June 30, 2024, on behalf of the Adult Probation Department.

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

MOTION: by Commissioner Waldron and seconded by Commissioner Schmalzle, to execute the Section 504 Plan, on behalf of the Office of Human Services.

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

MOTION: by Commissioner Waldron and seconded by Commissioner Schmalzle, to approve the Pike County Home Program Payment Voucher in the amount of \$1,200.00 payable to Frank DeEsch, on behalf of the Office of Human Services.

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

MOTION: by Commissioner Waldron and seconded by Commissioner Schmalzle, to approve the 2018 CDBG Program Payment Voucher in the amount of \$1,200.00 payable to Ray Evans, on behalf of the Office of Human Services.

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

MOTION: by Commissioner Waldron and seconded by Commissioner Schmalzle, to approve the following Human Services payment Vouchers on behalf of the Office of Human Services: State Food Purchase Program in the amount of \$1,695.70; Emergency Rental Assistance Program 2.0 in the amount of \$69,654.76; and Human Services Development Fund in the amount of \$8,039.64.

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

MOTION: by Commissioner Waldron and seconded by Commissioner Schmalzle, to appoint **DOROTHY Y. LEES** to the Pike County Area Agency on Aging Advisory Council for a 3-year term, expiring December 31, 2026.

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

MISCELLANEOUS:

- PennState Extension Calendar of Events
- Lights On Afterschool- Cera Alber, Director of Programs and Outreach Green Trees Early Learning Center, Inc. – Cera Alber thanked the Commissioners for taking the time to have Green Trees Early Learning Center, Inc. here this morning. I am here with Mary Rebe, Center Director and Angela Smith, from 4-H Extension, which also supports Lights On Afterschool. Cera Alber continued that she also serves on the Commission for Professional Excellence and Early Childhood Education. I am a Pennsylvania Afterschool Ambassador, that's a new program that was just started through PSAYDN, which is the Pennsylvania Afterschool Youth and Development at Work. I have an afterschool child, she is 7 ½ years old and she has said some things about the afterschool programs and how it's impacted her life specifically (slides shown). The Pennsylvania State-Wide Afterschool Youth Development Network known as PSAYDN was founded in 2004 with the mission to provide sustainable, high quality, out of school times programs. The afterschool time program is a program that is wraparound care for children. It could be as young as kindergarten students all the way up through high schoolers and they provide a variety of different resources for families in our area and across the State. The main mission at PSAYDN is to provide high quality programming, acknowledgment to these programs and provide further programming because there's a lot of children in our State and around the Country that don't have access to high quality programs.

Lights on Afterschool is a rallying movement that started in the year 2000. It is to shine a light on the support of these programs. We are trying to literally and figuratively light up our children that are in these afterschool programs. This is some artwork that our children did at Green Trees recently (slide shown). We're also coordinating with the 4-H Extension that is going to be doing a display on the Extension lawn that I'm really excited about. There are other afterschool programs in our area such as GAIT Therapeutic Riding Center, Sunshine Station and the public school district; there are programs in our area, it's just raising the awareness and trying to see about funding for children that aren't available to the inner program currently.

Why should we shine a light on an after-school program? These are statistics taken in 2019, recently and when asking parents and family members what they feel the important benefits are that their children have received, these are the answers that they got. All in 70%-80% ranging from STEM learning to giving parents that are working families in our area just a general peace of mind of having this safe place for their children to be while they're at work, keeping kids safe and out of trouble, and giving them plenty of activities and resources to keep them on the right path, helping kids build life skills. A lot of these programs we look at the future of our children, where are they going, college tuition programs, children in other out-of-school programs and how they can continue to build on their own life skills. Also, helping children build their physical activity. I was very excited to propose the idea of lighting up local landmarks. This is one of the hallmark ideas of Lights On Afterschool to show that big shining light and shining that focus on out of school type programs. Other landmarks that have been lit up in the past include the Hershey Ferris Wheel at Hershey Park and the Empire State Building.

Cera Alber said we can continue providing support to these programs by shining a light on our local community landmarks. We have all of our children that have been doing these lightbulb art projects and continue doing a glowing theme next week for our weekly afterschool programs. They're going to be making things like that

glow in the dark slime, very messy but a lot of fun! We're going to make light up lanterns, incorporating this aspect of glowing and light into the curriculum for the children; other ideas, issuing a formal Proclamation and support of Lights On Afterschool and talking with your community members, seeing what our community needs. I know that there are so many children that don't have access to these afterschool time programs and that's what really what the focus is about, not just acknowledging the current programs, but the fact that for every one child there are four children that are on wait lists right now. That's just in our State of Pennsylvania. There are currently only two Early Learning Centers in our area that provide afterschool programs, ours being one of them. Thank you so much.

Reporter Chris Jones asked where Green Trees Early Learning Center is located. Cera Alber said we're across from the American Legion at the old Muir House (102 County Rd 2001).

Commissioner Osterberg thanked Cera Alber and said we certainly do support all of the programs and whatever we can do. I know that Angie (Smith) is on your team and that's a ball of energy from the County and that's a good thing – 4H is a good partnership with them. Whatever we can do, if there's Proclamations we need to render, just tell us what we need to do and we're certainly here to help you make sure you expand these programs.

- AEMT Training Expansion - Tim Knapp, OEM Director and Kyle Rohner, Operations Manager – Office of Emergency Management - Tim Knapp introduced himself and announced before he talks about training, he said he has a little return of investment in our students at the academy from the Rural EMS Initiative Fund. I have \$5,350.00 put back into our account and training more people. Commissioner Osterberg asked who that is from? Tim Knapp answered the Rural Initiative Fund, which is part of the EMS (Emergency Medical Services) of Northeast PA. Basically, they'll match us a certain amount of students which we should be getting some more back for some of the equipment we purchased as well. We try to hit them up for everything we can get.

Tim Knapp said he wants to give an update on what we have going on at the academy this year. We've run four professional certification classes and we've added two new classes of certification. Our Spring and Fall EMT (Emergency Medical Technician) class equal twenty-four students, which is a great number. We average about twelve to fifteen students per class. Our entry level program between the two classes we've had fifty-two students, and those numbers are really good too. We've done one hundred and fifteen trainings with seventeen hundred and fifty-two students attending. The CTE class from Wallenpaupack, the high school class, the Protective Service Academy, this year they have thirteen in their firefighter year and fourteen in their EMS year. In the beginning when we started this EMS venture, we said in order to get the best EMS process that we can have we need to start with the BLS (Basic Life Support) Program. I can assure you, Kyle and I review CAD all the time, the BLS problem is fixed and it's fixed good. I'm proud to say I'd put it up against any program in the State. It is that good. We also said at that time in order to get into the ALS (Advanced Life Support), we need to fix the BLS. I'm here to tell you that that's working as well. Lackawaxen now has a part time ALS unit on as an EMT. Delaware, who always had a paramedic, uses the EMT Program now and sometimes has an EMT on. I was in a meeting last weekend, and I heard that Tafton, Palmyra Township voted in favor of going with some kind of ALS as well. Now you're seeing the ALS. We have Lackawaxen, Lemant, Delaware and now Palmyra, you're starting to see these ALS Units come on board. With that, we had the same problem that we had with the BLS Program. In order to have some BLS Program, you have to have people that can work in the field, so we really had to up our training to get them to where they need to be. With the ALS coming on board or EMT, we're doing the same thing there as well. We are probably a couple of weeks away from being accredited, it's been a long haul, to be able to certify and teach people at the EMT level at the Academy. All the equipment has been purchased, we're just going through the logistics and I'm not the greatest with a lot of EMS terminology, so when they get preceptors and stuff like that, it's kind of hard to go through that process, but we are this close. Hopefully, late this year, early next year, you'll see your first AEMT (Advanced Emergency Medical Technician) class at the Academy. That's big, because if we're going to support these AEMT's, we need to produce AEMT's to do that. For those of you who don't know what AEMT is, it is a level right below paramedic, you have EMT, AEMT and then paramedic. Some of this stuff they do as an AEMT is they can do injections, they can administer certain types of medicine, they are regulated on what they can do – it is a form of ALS. You're seeing a lot of people switch or go to the AEMT. I've worked a lot with folks down in Lancaster/Lebanon region to try to come up with some ideas for it. They liked it and it was more useful for them because somebody didn't have to go to college for two years to become a paramedic. They were able to take a two-hundred-hour class to do it and get through it.

Tim Knapp said we are still struggling with the National Registry, it's tough. There's no doubt about it. My son, two college degrees, two weeks ago told me after he took the National Registry, it was the toughest test he ever took in his life. He wasn't sure if he passed it, he did. That's a problem and that's a problem at the State level. We need everybody's help with it. I'm sure all of you have seen what they did with the State Police. You used to need a solid sixty college credits to become a State Trooper, now they waived that. You don't need those sixty college credits; we need to do the same thing with EMS. We need to make this National Registry optional – not mandatory. They say, "well nationally you can go here and practice and go there and practice". My son is a firefighter in Maryland. The first thing he has to do now, take a forty-eight-hour class in Maryland as an EMT and he's a National Registry EMT! National isn't National – the State Police are able to waive sixty college credits for a job that starts at \$80K a year, we should be able to do something with this National Registry at a job that starts at \$30K-\$35K a year. That's basically all I have.

Tim Knapp asked Kyle Rohner to tell us about next Wednesday, October 25th. Kyle Rohner said from 5PM to 7PM we're partnering with the Northeast Monroe and Pike County Servpro (through the Chamber of Commerce). They'll be doing a First Responder/Business Mixer at the Pike County Training Center. When asked by Tim Knapp how many departments will they represent, Kyle Rohner answered we're hoping all fifteen fire departments will be there. Tim Knapp added I think we have representation from every emergency organization in Pike County. That's where we're at there.

Commissioner Osterberg asked Tim Knapp on the AEMT, these scholarships, the money that you just handed to us, that funding will be used to train those individuals also? Tim Knapp answered yes. Commissioner Osterberg said just so we're clear how this gets paid for, this is that Initiative Fund through the Greater Pike Community Foundation which was formed three or four years ago. It has continually funded and paid for all the scholarships for anybody in this County who wants to become an EMT or now if they want to become an AEMT, it's all paid out of this fund with some hopeful anticipation that they're going to volunteer or serve in some capacity in the County. I want to make sure everybody understands, we train people, but that is sometimes a little difficult because they're younger people and they can't volunteer because maybe they're going off to college. The important thing is that we trained somebody to be an EMT. We trained somebody to be lifesaving for anybody because these types of emergencies can occur at any place in somebody's life. I just want to be make sure that we're clear that, while this program is expanding, that \$5K goes into that fund again. We are always asking for residents and the citizens, who are very generous, to donate to that fund, because this is what it's used for. Tim Knapp added if you want to take it a step further, some people have a fire department right next door to them. All of the CPR, First Aid, AED Training, we use in the fire service world, comes out of that fund as well. It's benefitting every Emergency Responder in Pike County.

Commissioner Osterberg said it's taken a lot of pressure off the local fire companies, all fifteen of them, who before this were funding that. Not only that, sending the individuals to, in many cases, down to Lehigh Valley. Now, Tim and all the people that work up there have become accredited, it's moved it here local, so now it's less time out of their lives to come and get trained. The men and women up there are working very hard at protecting the residents of this County. Tim said they have one that will be finishing up in November, another EMT class with twelve and I think there are six people from Milford in that class.

Reporter Chris Jones asked that check is coming from what source? Tim Knapp replied it's coming from the Pennsylvania Rural Initiative EMS Fund. Pennsylvania has a source, it's called the Rural Initiative EMS Fund. I can't remember the Act number. That comes from the State has a grant where they go out and try to encourage EMS in rural organizations. The City of Philadelphia can't get that grant money.

Reporter Chris Jones asked if that's going into this? Commissioner Osterberg answered the Greater Pike Community Foundation, we set up a fund there. If you remember, a number of years ago, there were a couple of individuals in our community who came here and generously started it. From that point forward, we have continually figured out ways to fund that. It does not get funded except I believe the American Recovery money, two years ago we took \$50K and put it into it so that it had a better head-start because we tried to get that number to be around \$100K mark. It starts to become self-sustaining. They managed to fund for us, as far as investing it, the requests go into them when Tim puts in a request after a training and a bill comes into him for the instructors, we submit a bill down there, they reimburse the County, which pays the individuals up there for all the training. Tim Knapp said if you took all the average EMT classes, it costs us about \$7K to run the EMT class. Commissioner Osterberg added so it's all covered.

Reporter Preston Ehrler said you said that we're moving passed BLS to ALS, which is great, can you give us a comparison or contrast to the current state of our BLS throughout the County in the various Municipalities from five, ten, years ago, when it needed attention to where it is now? Tim Knapp answered we always said we need to fix the BLS problem. We had problems just like the rest of the State has. The State of Pennsylvania has an EMS problem. With the plan we moved forward, after all the studies were done and everything else. We knew we had to boost our BLS. The days of waiting for twenty minutes for somebody to respond is over. These are all career staffed units, they're on the road. It was getting to the point during the EMS crisis where my phone would ring constantly 'we're tired of going here, we're tired of going there'. Now, everybody understands it's a County-wide initiative so if they have to go someplace else, so be it, that's where they have to go. Kyle Rohner added he thinks the mutual aid was a lot less. Commissioner Osterberg said everybody has skin in the game now. Everybody's involved, everybody's services are up and running. That was a problem before, when there was less mutual aid. It wasn't anybody's fault; it was just that there was not enough volunteers at that time to service the County. Now, with this with a paid staff we have personnel out there ready to go at a moment's notice, whether they're on call or not, but they're there. As we've said, with any of this stuff, we may only need at this time in Pike County, a number of ambulances, but you never know when there's going to be a major accident on Route 84 or anyplace where you're going to need a whole group to come. There is ample mutual aid now and no one feels like they're doing more than the next person. Tim Knapp said it's been a team effort. I will say I see the ambulance squads are all getting along better, and they see each other more often. Everyone has the same share in the game, so it makes a big difference. Commissioner Waldron added they're not hurting for money nearly as much as they were before because the County coming to the table and saying we will match the contributions of each Municipality. Regardless of whether they have ambulance service, because if they can take money from the general fund or better yet, through the ambulance tax, then the County will match that money. It's a commitment of up to \$2M, a little over \$2M. I've been around to a lot of Municipalities lately and they're talking about exactly why they can now afford to make it work – with paid staff and more

ambulances. A couple of Municipalities up at the other end of the County don't have staff, they're giving that money to the ones that do. That's why everyone is getting along better. It was a tough struggle to make it work with volunteers or a minimal amount of money. Tim Knapp also said one of our biggest strongholds, and they were tough, they thought this wasn't needed, this, that and the other thing, and now every time I see them at a meeting, they thank you. They didn't understand it and the complexity of it. We are so happy right now we don't get those phone calls anymore.

Commissioner Schmalzle said five years ago when you (Reporter Preston Ehrler) asked if I could picture in time and I say this over and over again, it wasn't broken, it was broke. We needed money, it was broke for both financial reasons and for talent and volunteerism going in. I think that's a good way to assess it five years ago. It wasn't broken because we had a lot of good volunteers, but not enough of them and they could not afford to continue to stay in operation, it was broke.

Reporter Preston Ehrler asked, initially, was there a Municipality in the County that turned down the money and, if so, have they come around and taken the money? Commissioner Osterberg answered I think they all have come around. I'm not saying they would turn it down. I remember one said they were just not prepared to figure out how they were going to solve the problem for themselves. As we've said from the very beginning, all we are is just a funding mechanism for this. We're not here to take over or operate EMS services, that is solely on, the responsibility of the Municipal leaders. Why some of them took it in the beginning and some didn't? I think it wasn't anything except for they weren't ready yet to figure out where they were going to put the funds. If a Municipality doesn't have an EMS service located within it's boundaries, now what they need to do is they need to come to terms of who it is who is going to service their Municipality. Again, that's not up to us to dictate who comes into what, it's going to be a neighboring one, you wouldn't have someone driving thirty miles, but it's up to them to figure that out. I think they have a list of who their responders are in their Township. I believe everybody now is taking some portion of the money, whether they're taking their full allotment we don't scrutinize it that much. That's up to them – they know the money is on the table, they just need to show they're taking their two mils and putting it where they need to put it so we can put our two mils in that same spot. Commissioner Waldron added that many of them had like a half mil and a number of those Municipalities have increased it to two mils especially the ones didn't have a full-time staff. I was just where they agreed they were going to vote to do that. Reporter Chris Jones said there is going to be a Referendum on the ballot. Commissioner Waldron agreed and said some Municipalities, yeah. Tim Knapp added there's lots of legislation out there to raise the millage to 1.5 and it's waiting in legislation. I think you'll see that pass. Commissioner Waldron said it's more than half a mil requires it, however there was some reluctance, but they are realizing there's a benefit there. Commissioner Osterberg said he thinks the next step that needs to occur, but this is much heavier lifting than anyone here in this room can do, and that is talking to the State, insurance and Medicare about raising the reimbursement rates that they give the ambulance services. I know that's constantly been talked about in Harrisburg, we hear that from our State and Federal legislators, but you can imagine how big a lift that is. That's why we couldn't just sit here and wait for that. When you hear from the ambulance services what they actually get from insurance, if they get anything in some cases, they need to think about raising that. When it comes to Medicare, that's a national issue, not a Pike County or even a State issue, those are questions for the people in Harrisburg. We have raised them, and I know all the people in Tim Knapp's field have raised that all the time, it's constantly been raised, but we can't control that, we can only do what we can do and we're doing it.

PRESS & PUBLIC COMMENTS/QUESTIONS/ADJOURNMENT

Reporter Chris Jones asked under New Business CAPP Grant-In-Aid, the acronym, what's that? Chief Clerk Gromalski answered it is the County Adult Probation Program.

Reporter Chris Jones asked about Section 504, the next one, what's that? Disabilities? Chief Clerk Gromalski answered that's handicapped accessibility.

Meeting attendee asked if Pike County has a Coordinated Disaster Plan in case something big happens? Commissioner Osterberg answered we do. The meeting attendee asked can you give it to citizens so we can know and tell our neighbors? Commissioner Osterberg answered it's on the website, Tim can you speak to that? Director Tim Knapp explained that they have an Emergency Action Plan in Pike County. It gets updated every two years. We have given it out to Municipalities that want it. It is available, if you have an email, I can give you a copy of it. That plan is not on the website because sometimes you don't want all your cards out, I'm not saying someone is going to create a disaster. The meeting attendee said somebody told me I would be able to look at it and know what to do. That's what I'm asking – if I could tell my neighbors if something happens? Director Tim Knapp replied, you could probably look at the Hazardous Mitigation Plan. That would give you that option – that is on the website (www.pikepa.org). You can go on there and look at that. Solicitor Farley asked Director Tim Knapp if each Township/Borough also has their own plan? Director Tim Knapp asked the meeting attendee which Municipality they live in? The meeting attendee answered Westfall. Director Tim Knapp said Westfall has a plan, I signed off on that years ago so you can check with Westfall, and they can give you a copy of their plan. As far as a master plan, we don't give that out to the public.

Meeting attendee John Hellman said he is the Vice President of Advocacy for the Triversity Pride Center. On October 9th a Pride flag was burned and LGBTQ folks were called satanic and sexual deviants of the far-right cult Church of Rod and Iron's Freedom Festival here in Pike County. This morning our Executive Director filed a police report because yesterday he was almost run over while holding transgender Pride flags while the driver was audibly laughing

right outside Triversity's office. Over the last several weeks there have been over twenty sightings of our painted rocks, which feature messages of love and support, most of them painted by our LGBTQ kids and teens, destroyed all over the County. Back in May, on Mothers' Day, when the banner stating 'Proud Boys We're Everywhere' was hung across from the DV High School the Pennsylvania State Police told us at Triversity that the banner hanging along with rhetoric on social media and other signs that they could not share with us indicated that anti-LGBTQ sentiment in the area were escalating to the point where there might be some imminent issue including violence. It seems that we are on the pathway toward that prediction given that escalation this month. I was wondering if the Commissioners had a comment on this? In particular, if there is any movement or action on the task force on hate in Pike County that we discussed in June?

Commissioner Waldron responded that he was contacted by the Program Director, and I know that Triversity had given a statement about what happened at the Freedom Festival. That was recorded, as I recall, right? Meeting attendee John Hellman answered that's right, there was a journalist that recorded video and he had an eyewitness account saying that the flag was put in the fire. Commissioner Waldron continued that that kind of hate does not belong in the County, but to say it doesn't exist, there's obviously evidence to the contrary. Certainly, it even came up when we were discussing the issue about acknowledging Pride Month back in June. After that situation was not completely resolved we said we should do a task force, but we should also bring the State Police because we had met with an undercover policeman who indicated some of the things that he was aware of, but he was not authorized to do any kind of presentation. We took it to the next level, we tried in August to schedule a presentation with the State Police which they indicated they would do, but there was a change of management involving the Community Affairs Office in Harrisburg. I think I indicated to you that Lt. Ron Brown indicated that they would be willing to do that, it's probably not something they can do. When I asked if we could do it even during this month, he said I'm not sure if we can do that. I didn't want to politicize it, but we're looking to try to do it at our mid-month meeting in November. I tried to get word back yesterday to see if that was a definite, I did not get that answer. We certainly want to do it because when we met informally, with you and a couple of other people, we said let's get the word out to the public that this isn't just one advocacy we're claiming there's something going on. The State Police recognized this was a problem and therefore needs to be addressed. People are allowed to have free speech, but they're not allowed to cause potential violence to people. If that's going to happen, we're going to do whatever we can to stop it. We can't legislate it, but we can make people aware. I'm going to make sure we do this, if I win this year, with the Pennsylvania State Police and then roll that out and say who wants to be involved with this task force. Obviously, Triversity is a good kind of thing to have membership on that, but we want to have a diverse group. We do believe there are some really good religious organizations that are anti-hate that can be involved in it. We'd like to have them involved and some other community leaders. I think we acknowledged that some people don't even know this is going on. That's hard to ignore – what happened up there. I'm sure there were some well-meaning and non-violent people there, but somebody was up there and certainly the one who was doing the most talking is known for spewing hatred, that's just the way it is. There's no place for that. I wish we could stop it, we can't but we can make people aware. We have to because yes, I'm certainly familiar where Triversity is concerned, that even walking down the street is kind of a thing. Thank God nothing's happened, but that doesn't mean it couldn't; it definitely did.

Meeting attendee John Hellman said something almost happened yesterday, he almost got run over. Commissioner Osterberg said he hopes the Police Department was notified. I've stated this before, there's no place in this County for hate. Tony (Commissioner Waldron) has said exactly what we were talking with the State Police about. No one wants to see anyone get hurt. We have a difficult time with freedom of speech, we may not like the words that people use, that's way beyond what we can control. We certainly do not want to see anybody get hurt in this community or for any reason to be calling people and identifying people in any format of whether they are anti-LGBTQ, anti-religious, racist or whatever it is that you're going to say about somebody – remember this: words matter. When you make those comments publicly you attack somebody's credibility. I've lived here for fifty years, Ron (Commissioner Schmalzle) is here his whole life, I don't know of those people. I know goodhearted people in this community, but when we start to identify people because they're in some group or whatever, then that is really going to be harmful. I think we need to remember that. I'm glad you called the police. You should've called them yesterday, I'm just saying you need to call the police when it happens, you can't call them twelve hours later because that's not fair to the police department either. They have a job to do – that's all I'm going to say on that. If somebody feels threatened, call 9-1-1, call the police department and tell them what's going on. Don't wait, because that's not right, that's not fair. Then it's going to question, why'd you wait? I'm with Tony, we're waiting to hear what the State Police have to say about it. We'll wait to hear what groups like Unity in the Community have to say about this. We're just waiting to hear what the State Police have to say.

Reporter Chris Jones asked where do you draw the line between political expression and hate? Burning the flag is a political expression. During the Vietnam War they did it every day, burn the United States flag. Commissioner Osterberg said I agree with you, as long as you don't make comments and say that you're going to physically hurt somebody.

Reporter Chris Jones asked, members of Congress in Washington are constantly confronted on the street. I can show you a bunch of pictures where hate is spewed at them: placards, statements, they trap and trail along beside them, any comments on any of that? Commissioner Waldron answered it's unfortunate that the world's gotten so divisive, I heard a politician say this yesterday 'we signed on for that, but our families didn't', or other people in the community didn't sign on to say it's okay to hate us. If you hate somebody because you don't agree with their politics, I guess we're allowed to do that in this Country. If you hate people just because of whom they have a relationship with or how they worship or what color their skin is, that's horrible. We've got to try to at least make people aware because there are people in our community that don't know there's anything going on like this. If they knew about it, they might do

something, but if you don't know about it, you can't fault them for not doing something. If you say I don't think it's funny to make fun of somebody because when you start that slippery slope of saying it's okay to just say oh I'm going to say something nasty about somebody who is gay or somebody who is black. That starts a slippery slope where it's okay to do even more to ostracize them. Kids learn that. They bully, we hear about that, heard about it at Triversity meetings that I've been at, but also we've heard about it from the schools. They acknowledged that. I have represented the Wallenpaupack School District for over twenty years, my daughter teaches there, and she says yeah we have to try to guard against that. Quite frankly, for whatever reason, the LGBTQ community has been picked on even more than some other communities recently, the last couple of years. One could look to what's happened in Washington to say that might be a factor, but whatever it is it seems like that's been an issue. However, we have a minority population in this County of black people, and I know that. Matt told a story about a family he met this Summer, and their children have a hard time dealing with other people in school. You know what, an eight-year-old doesn't innately have that, they're learning it from somebody else. The school is trying to deal with it and we can't tell the school what to do, but we know they are and we appreciate it, their job is tough. There are other things we can do about it. The adult community doesn't have that advantage of saying kids you can't behave this way. We can't make people behave nicely, but we can try to at least point out when it's not being done the right way and maybe some people will say, you know what I didn't think that was funny – Tony. I'm walking away from you because you made some adverse comment about somebody who's gay or something like that. You have to try to stop it a little bit because that might lead to more civility.

Meeting attendee Mary Rebe the Center Director in Milford and I also represent the Pennsylvania Advisory Council for Directors and Center Directors in the area. I want to say that every conversation that you guys have had today has absolutely been about building relationships and the foundational steps that everyone has to take when they grow. We're talking about this idea of how we've been diversified and how people can have very wildly different opinions about things. All of those things are innately nurtured and created through infancy on through birth and if you want to talk about how to create those changes, the way to create those changes is to start at that fundamental level and start really investing in those early childhood programs that are recognizing that, yes, we treat everyone fairly and with self-respect regardless of what that is. I agree with you. When you get into public schools and further education that's not the time to really build those. The time to build those is earlier on and even when you talk about things like learning in classes and all of those things really begin in early childhood. I know this is probably not the place to mention early childhood, but I encourage you guys to look into that. As far as a Proclamation could say we are interested in making sure that Pike County represents those issues. Fundamentally, children have the right to choose those things and fundamentally that this is where we're building it. In order to prevent those issues that come on in the future. I always talk about this acronym, you know, are you a teacher? I don't like saying that because it's very all encompassing, but I always tell people that I'm an NDS. What is an NDS? An NDS is a Neuro Development Specialist. I help children like a brain surgeon, except the brain surgeon has a brain that's broke. I'm an NDS, I help build those brains so that they're never broken. I help to build them further. I just want to mention that. I know that you guys are against, probably not the right place to mention that, but when you guys talk about relationships within your community, relationships within the community for LGBT and for EMS, all of those things are built in early childhood.

THE NEXT REGULAR MEETING OF THE PIKE COUNTY COMMISSIONERS WILL BE HELD ON WEDNESDAY, NOVEMBER 1, 2023 AT 11:00 A.M. IN THE PIKE COUNTY ADMINISTRATION BUILDING.