

Wednesday, November 1, 2023

The first regular meeting of November, 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: by Commissioner Waldron and seconded by Commissioner Schmalzle, to approve the November 1, 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 18, 2023, Commissioners' 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 25, 2023, Commissioners' 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 **GENERAL FUNDS (County Bills)**, in the amount of **\$319,689.04**, subject to further review.

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

MOTION: by Commissioner Waldron and seconded by Commissioner Schmalzle, to approve exonerations as presented by Gina Rios, Tax Claim Bureau Director, for 96 properties sold out of the County Repository between April and July 2023.

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

PERSONNEL

MOTION: by Commissioner Waldron and seconded by Commissioner Schmalzle, to hire **CARMEN RIGAUD** as full-time clerk in the Prothonotary's Office for a 37.5-hour work week, effective November 6, 2023, pending drug test results, with benefits after 90 days. This is a replacement position.

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

MOTION: by Commissioner Waldron and seconded by Commissioner Schmalzle, to acknowledge receipt of a letter from Warden Lowe advising that he has hired, with Prison Board approval, **JUSTYN PHRANER** as full-time Assistant Director of Food Service for the Correctional Facility, for a 40-hour work week, effective November 13, 2023, with benefits after 90 days.

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

MOTION: by Commissioner Waldron and seconded by Commissioner Schmalzle, to acknowledge receipt of a letter from Warden Lowe advising that he has hired, with Prison Board approval, the following individuals as full-time Correctional Officers for the Correctional Facility for a 40-hour work week, effective November 13, 2023, with benefits after 90 days: **SABRYNA RYAN; RALPH STANCZUK; AND MICHAEL SUTTON.**

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

MOTION: by Commissioner Waldron and seconded by Commissioner Schmalzle, to acknowledge receipt of a letter from Warden Lowe advising that he has hired, with Prison Board approval, the following individuals as full-time Food Production Supervisors for the Correctional Facility for a 40-hour work week, effective November 13, 2023, with benefits after 90 days: **MARINA CASE AND PATRICIA WHITE.**

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 award bids for the Re-Bid Bennett Ave Building 1 Interior Renovations Project (EC) to North End Electric in the amount of \$220,000.00.

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

NEW BUSINESS

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: Emergency Rental Assistance Program 2.0 in the amount of \$300.00 and PHARE in the amount of \$3,511.22.

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 payable to Ray Evans in the amount of \$1,409.60, 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 payable to Recorder of Deeds in the amount of \$58.75, 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 2021 CDBG Program Payment Voucher payable to GateHouse Media in the amount of \$527.92, 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 payable to GateHouse Media Pennsylvania Holdings, Inc., in the amount of \$151.56, 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 payable to Frank DeEsch in the amount of \$600.00, 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 authorize the Chief Clerk to execute the Pitney Bowes State and Local Fair Market Value Lease Agreement.

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

MOTION: by Commissioner Waldron and seconded by Commissioner Schmalzle, to execute the Purchase of Service Agreement between Summit School, Inc., and the County of Pike, 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 Purchase of Service Agreement between Community Specialist Corporation and the County of Pike, 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 authorize the fiscal year 2023 third quarter payments from the Pike County Emergency Medical Services grant funds to Palmyra Township in the amount of \$65,000.00; Delaware Township in the amount of \$53,750.00; Blooming Grove Township in the amount of \$2,578.16; Lehman Township in the amount of \$93,368.20; and Porter Township in the amount of \$8,000.00.

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

Commissioner Osterberg announced that this is the continuation of the funding of the ambulance services in the County. I want to bring something to everybody's attention. We have a fund at Greater Pike Community Foundation that is used to provide the training for people to become EMTs. We have a lot of very generous residents and businesses in this County who are the ones that help us fund that and make sure it stays sustainable. In the beginning of that program, we had people like Bill Lovejoy and Jason Ohliger's law firm, they are the ones that started that with the funding. It continues with other groups. We just got a letter, and I think it's important that we recognize these committed residents. Right now, that fund holds \$70K in it and with this letter comes and we should basically thank Arlene Quirk and Sean Burger from Keller and Williams they donated \$3,800.00. They made that commitment last year and they're going to continue that. I bring that up because I think we need to stir the other businesses and other residents to understand how important this program is. No one in this County, if they want to become an EMT, pays a dime to get the training and they don't have to go further than Blooming Grove (Township) to get that training from our training staff. I just thought it's important that that gets out because businesses that do this, do this for all of us to make sure our County stays safe. I'd like to give them a shout out because I think they deserve it!

MOTION: by Commissioner Waldron and seconded by Commissioner Schmalzle, to adopt Resolution No. 23-42, Supporting Operation Green Light for Veterans, November 2023.

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

Commissioner Schmalzle read Resolution No. 23-42 aloud.

Commissioner Osterberg announced that Jesiah Schrader is the VSO (Veterans Service Officer) for the County, and he is going to give us an update on the Veterans Office. Thank you Jesiah.

VSO Jesiah Schrader thanked the Commissioners for having him today and presenting the Resolution. This is the second year that we have participated as a County. It's really nice to see the County buildings illuminated green in support of the Veterans and their families. It demonstrates that we need to meet the challenges that some of our Veterans have. It's nice that you are bringing awareness, and my office can help those Veterans. We've had a lot of growth in the last year. We are currently averaging five to six walk-ins on a daily basis to include our normal scheduled appointments. That's about doubled since a year ago.

Exactly a year ago, Karen Olsen, my Deputy Director, started today, if you see her, please wish her a happy anniversary. She has become fully accredited within this year to help administer Veterans' benefits to Veterans and their spouses. She has become a vital asset to our office and has been instrumental in obtaining benefits for Veterans and their families. In our current office, we represent 38% of our local Veterans, that's about a 3% increase from last year. We are seeing more of our Veteran population in our office.

July 2023 was the close of our monetary fiscal year and our office in Pike County increased our monthly monetary amount by \$1M. That is a total of \$8.8M that we brought back to the Veterans within our community. Another benefit that is helping Veterans in our community is our Real Estate Tax Exemption program that the Commissioners and my office created in March of 2023. This program has assisted over a dozen veterans and their surviving spouses to alleviate them of

real estate property taxes. I feel this is really important and I'm glad the Commissioners have approved those Resolutions. I testified near Philadelphia this past week in support of those Resolutions to be recognized across the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania, not just here in Pike County.

With the rapid growth that the Commissioners have recognized and seen, it is time for us to relocate. We're having a new building in Shohola we will be relocating to, hopefully before the turn of the year or the beginning of the year. This new building is much larger and suited better for our needs. It will provide space to provide classes and additional resources. We're going to have a designated professional for our Vet Center to come down and provide mental health services to our Veterans and spouses. I want to thank the maintenance crew for preparing the new office space and helping us in this seamless transition.

The Pike County Commissioners recognize and support the Veterans and I look forward to continuing working with the Commissioners to better assist our Veterans. I want to thank the Veterans for their service and wish them a Happy Veterans' Day.

Commissioner Osterberg added that the new location is also right next to Workforce Development. As you read in this Resolution, we talk about the transition for Veterans coming back from their service, they need help finding employment. They need training and that's all part of this. I think it's going to be a great space for the Veterans' services to be located. They're interconnected and I know Cindy Defebo, Workforce Development Director, is working toward developing programs to help the Veterans that come back to Pike County to transition into a better life here in Pike County.

Commissioner Waldron said he wanted to thank Jesiah for all the work he's done in the past year since we were able to lure you away and hire you in May of 2022. It's been great. We've been out in the community and all we hear is nothing but thank you, he's really doing a great job – from the Veterans and families of Veterans. We really appreciate it!

Commissioner Schmalzle told Jesiah to keep up the good work. I don't know if everybody knows this, but Jesiah is also a leader at the State level and serving his leadership here in Pike County telling everyone across the State about what we're accomplishing here in the County. Not only is there a Resolution that says we are proud of all of our Veterans, we're proud of the programs that we're offering. It's never been at a higher level than it is now and in the entire history of Pike County. Thank you for your leadership.

Meeting attendee, Kevin Holian, asked if any of our state universities give college credit, like they do in New York, for military service?

VSO Schraeder answered that when an individual exits the military there are classes they took while in service, do translate into college CEUs (Continuing Education Units) and they can use them towards their education. Depending on what they are going to school for, will determine what those benefits can be used for. Monetary wise, they have the GI Benefit which is Federal, and many schools provide the Yellow Ribbon Program.

MISCELLANEOUS:

- PennState Extension Calendar of Events
- Court Appointed Special Advocates (CASA) program update, Dawn Allison, Executive Director –

Commissioner Osterberg introduced Executive Director of CASA, Dawn Allison and she said she's going to give a little update on the progress that we've made at CASA. We are coming up on two years since we opened in Pike County. We are the CASA of Pike County Program which is Court Appointed Special Advocates. We recruit volunteers who are sworn in by the Court. They go through training and are sworn in by the Court and they are appointed to advocate for our foster children, any children in the dependency system. They are appointed to advocate for the children on a one-on-one basis which does give us a lot of time and a lot of dedication. It's very, very helpful to the Court in making recommendations and decisions on how a child should move forward. We also work hand in hand with Children and Youth Services on case planning and supporting their decisions.

Since we started in January, we have nineteen advocates that are sworn in right now. From January 2023 to September 2023, they have logged in over 1K volunteer hours and they have completed over 270 hours of additional training and provided over sixty-five reports that have been used by Judge Gaughan in Dependency Court hearings. Right now, we are serving thirty-three children and there are forty-nine children presented to the program. We do have sixteen children on our waiting list, and we are always recruiting and trying to train new volunteers. I have four new volunteers in the training program right now that will be sworn in by the Court the first week of December, so we'll be able to appoint them to more children. If anyone is interested or if you're talking to anyone that you think might be a great advocate for a child, it's between ten and fifteen hours a month, and that can change the life of a foster child. I can begin training classes at any time when there are enough volunteers, otherwise we typically would schedule one in the Spring.

The State average right now, the CASA Program normally represents 35% of the children in care and one of the last counts, Pike County was representing 80% of the children in care with the CASA Program. Unfortunately, we have more needs than we have advocates, so that fluctuates a little bit. We're probably about 70% right now, but we have seen tremendous outcomes for the children with just additional support and a one-on-one relationship. I think that we bring a lot to the table when we work with the caseworkers through Children and Youth, and it gives another set of eyes and ears to the Court to make solid decisions so these children can move toward permanency and the family can move toward healing.

In two years, we have accomplished a lot. The State is very happy with the progress that Pike County has made, and the community has been amazing. With very little outreach, we haven't done a lot of outreaches, we have some news articles and speaking engagements and the community members have just stepped up and volunteered from all directions. We are very grateful for that. Continue to spread the word, anybody that you know that would be a good advocate for a child, have them call me (570) 296-9827. Hopefully, by the end of 2024, we'll be closer to our goal of 100% of the children served.

Commissioner Osterberg thanked Dawn Allison and she thanked the Commissioners for supporting the program.

Reporter Chris Jones asked what kind of background checks do they do?

CASA Director Dawn Allison answered they do the regular clearances – FBI, State, Sex Offender, and Children and Youth run clearances. All the typical clearances and criminal checks are run. They go through extensive training. The initial training program is thirty hours and then Court observation and they are required to do an additional twelve hours a year of continuing education credits. We've done two target programs now. We just completed one that's been the public in conjunction with High Mark. We did this through PA CASA and that was with a focus on health care advocacy. Having children in the foster care system is challenging and a lot of health care needs are not met. The advocates that I have right now did additional training on a health care advocacy piece and we were able to improve a significant amount of health care being provided to the foster children.

Reporter Chris Jones asked which part is your office in this under the Court?

CASA Director Dawn Allison answered we are a County Department. Commissioner Osterberg added they are actually under the Commissioners' Office, but the direction she gets comes from, in this case I believe, Judge Kelly Gaughan through the Courts. It's not really a Department of the Court. Commissioner Waldron said it is a separate program, separate from these other agencies, but interacts a lot with Children and Youth and the Court. Commissioner Osterberg added it is listed in the whole format of the County under the Commissioners' Office, we hire and deal with all of the funding and all that.

Commissioner Osterberg announced that Mr. Jones is retiring. Chris you've done some really great work in this County, and we've benefitted from your professionalism. I've been interacting with you for as long as you've been there (Pike County Dispatch), which is twenty-seven years? Reporter Chris Jones answered yeah, twenty-six and change. Commissioner Osterberg continued, it's now time for you to retire and I think it's important that the public knows that and thank you for what you've done.

Commissioner Schmalzle also thanked Reporter Chris Jones for all of his work and during some lonely meetings, being one of the few people that joined us. We will miss you. You can continue to come.

Reporter Chris Jones responded thanks for the invitation. I got a really nice commendation from publisher Sue Lloyd, and she mentioned a lot of interesting things that you don't think about day to day when you're working. The fact that my kids spent a lot of time in the office and that I met Nikki Jones, my wife, through the office; personal things like that, that you don't really think about. Once you pull that all together, wish me well and just working on who is going to be at least an interim editor to just keep the Dispatch going. She (Sue Lloyd) also mentioned that we went through, like everybody, with COVID, the economic setbacks, we had some rival media that tried to work into our bailiwick and we survived and thrived, it's a miracle that it's still going. Commissioner Osterberg added we all know newspapers are difficult already, but it's been there for a long time. Reporter Chris Jones said you go out there and they say, 'Wow, you're still doing this, congratulations'. One fellow last year, a professor, said you're our heroes, he's a writer. That's what I'm taking with me. Thanks a lot.

The Commissioners thanked Reporter Chris Jones. Commissioner Waldron added that he always did balanced coverage too. I didn't know you that much before I became Commissioner, but it has been good working with you!

PRESS & PUBLIC COMMENTS/QUESTIONS/ADJOURNMENT

Meeting attendee, Gina Mancato, said she likes coming in and watching all the presentations and learning a lot about what you do, but when I'm at home and can't make it to the meetings, the recordings, I can't hear anything of what you are saying or half the time I can't hear the presentations. Can you work on something to get a better recording to put online?

Commissioner Schmalzle replied absolutely. That's good input.

Meeting attendee, Gina Mancato, asked if you could put that on the Pike County page? Not just what they record, I think that it's important that the public can hear everything.

Commissioner Schmalzle answered okay, thank you, and added that they don't go home and watch it.

Commissioner Waldron then stated that at the last public meeting a question came up about the Commissioners' commitment to follow through on some concerns that were raised back in May/June with regards to hate language going around and some, possible, threatening actions with regards to the LGBTQ community and other minority communities. We did follow through on that. I mentioned at the last meeting that I've been in contact with the State Police. They have an Office of Community Engagement, and we had a ZOOM meeting on Monday with Captain Brown and Seargent Tim Greene, as well as two other State Troopers. They are going to come and do a presentation about concerns they do have within our community and other communities, not just Pike County, at our public meeting on December 6th. We indicated that I was asked about that by somebody from Triversity at the last meeting and I just wanted to bring that up. We're following through on that. We're not going to take any action, but we want to hear. As we tried to explain, they understand it, but this is something we can legislate or spend money on specifically, but it is something we can try to make people aware. They (PSP) agree that awareness is a good thing. I'll let them (PSP), they're the professionals if you will with regards to this issue, so we'll let them deal with it. They are going to be here on December 6th.

THE NEXT REGULAR MEETING OF THE PIKE COUNTY COMMISSIONERS WILL BE HELD ON WEDNESDAY, NOVEMBER 15, AT 11:00 A.M. IN THE PIKE COUNTY ADMINISTRATION BUILDING.