

Wednesday, March 15, 2023

The second regular meeting of March, 2023 of the Pike County Commissioners was called to order by Commissioner Schmalzle at 11:00 a.m. at the Pike County Administration Building, followed by the “Pledge of Allegiance” to the flag.

PRESENT: Commissioners Osterberg and Waldron; Commissioner Schmalzle via ZOOM; Chief Clerk Gromalski; and Solicitor Farley.

Commissioner Osterberg asked if he could first have a motion to amend today’s Agenda to include, under **NEW BUSINESS**, we’ll make it #16, to adopt Resolution #23-16, a Resolution authorizing Chairman to execute a Tax and Revenue Anticipation Note of 2023.

MOTION: by Commissioner Waldron and seconded by Commissioner Schmalzle, to amend today’s Agenda to include, under **NEW BUSINESS** an additional item, #16.

VOTE: Commissioners Osterberg, Schmalzle and Waldron voted ‘aye’

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 March 15, 2023, Agenda.

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

MOTION: by Commissioner Waldron and seconded by Commissioner Schmalzle, to approve the March 1, 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 March 8, 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** in the amount of **\$705,399.11**.

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

MOTION: by Commissioner Waldron and seconded by Commissioner Schmalzle, to approve payment from the **PIKE COUNTY HEALTH INSURANCE FUND** in the amount of **\$79,763.82**.

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

PERSONNEL

MOTION: by Commissioner Waldron and seconded by Commissioner Schmalzle, to hire **EMILY MANSFIELD** as Communications Coordinator Grade 1 for the Conservation District, for a 40-hour work week, effective March 27, 2023, 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 promote **RICHARD WILHELM** to Transportation Dispatcher for the Area Agency on Aging, for a 30-hour work week, effective March 13, 2023.

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

MOTION: by Commissioner Waldron and seconded by Commissioner Schmalzle, to hire **FRANCES HLAVACEK** as Aging Care Manager III for the Area Agency on Aging for a 40-hour work week, effective March 20, 2023, with benefits after 90 days. This is a replacement position.

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.

NEW BUSINESS

MOTION: by Commissioner Waldron and seconded by Commissioner Schmalzle, to adopt Resolution No. 23-07, Declaring March 12 – 18, 2023, as AmeriCorps Week in Pike County.

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

Commissioner Waldron read Resolution No. 23-07 aloud.

Present were Dawn Houtaling from RSVP, Retired Seniors Volunteer Program, of Berks, Pike and Wayne Counties; via ZOOM, Robin Skibber, Director of the Pike Area Agency on Aging Office; and Mr. Wendell Kay from Wayne County was also present at meeting.

Dawn Houtaling said they are funded by a Federal Grant through Americorps and sponsored by Diakon Community Services. They work closely with Pike County Area Agency on Aging seeking to engage seniors aged 55 and over to volunteer with

enriching opportunities. Our focus in Pike County is to help seniors age in place and live independently. Our volunteers help meet some of the most critical needs: delivery meals to homebound seniors, assist at local senior centers and food pantries, calling seniors via our Senior Chat Program, fielding calls for Hands of Hope Program and counsel seniors on the Medicare PA Medi Program and volunteering Ombudsmen and serving Seniors Incorporated, assisting with the Salvation Army and American Red Cross and many other organizations. Volunteers are always needed. Everyday RSVP volunteers make it a priority to help improve the lives of others and strengthen the community. They strongly impact the organizations they serve through their dedicated service. In 2022 our 143 volunteers contributed 10,668 hours of their service for a financial impact of \$319,522.17. To honor them and recognize their service, we are holding our annual Volunteer Recognition Luncheon on Friday, April 28, 2023, from 11AM – 2PM at Ladore Camp Retreat and Conference Center, Carousel Dining Hall in Waymart, PA. You are all invited, and we would love for you to join us. She then introduced Program Director, Mary Grace Pedroso and Wendell Kay, the Chairman.

Wendell Kay said that if there are members present or watching and they would like to become volunteers, they could reach out to Dawn (Houtaling) at houtalingd@diakon.org (570) 390-4540 or go on the website, www.diakon.org and look for RSVP.

Commissioner Osterberg added that his mother worked for the Area Agency on Aging office for many years. She found it very rewarding to do this type of service. Making sure seniors are taken care of in home, that they age in place and as she aged, the same organization that she worked for came to her aide. We appreciate what all of you do.

Joan Edel from Pike County Area Agency on Aging added how helpful RSVP has been for our seniors. Individuals who are in the Senior Chat Program are calling about it and saying how they can't get out, it's winter and they're lonely. I can now refer individuals to Dawn (Houtaling) and they get calls a couple times of week and they feel more connected to the community.

Commissioner Waldron added that being an appointed Commissioner, he has had a chance to serve on the Advisory Board for the Area Agency on Aging and has come to realize what RSVP is and all they do for the community and helping people age in their own homes is dignity right there. I've read some interesting books on that and the importance of trying to make that work (age at home) and we couldn't nearly do this without the volunteers and really do appreciate it.

Wendell Kay concluded by thanking the Commissioners and saying that their support has been very important to us.

Director Robin Skibber said via ZOOM that she is at the Senior Center in Blooming Grove with her staff and said thank you to the volunteers who help us every single day.

MOTION: by Commissioner Waldron and seconded by Commissioner Schmalzle, to adopt Resolution No. 23-08, Declaring April 2023, as Pennsylvania 811 Safe Digging Month.

VOTE: Commissioners Osterberg, Schmalzle and Waldron voted 'aye'. Motion carried.
Commissioner Waldron read Resolution No. 23-08 aloud.

Commissioner Osterberg introduced Mark Lipka, Supervisor of Pennsylvania One Call System. Mr. Lipka thanked the Commissioners via ZOOM for proclaiming April Safe Digging Month. Mr. Lipka said for the past 50 years, Pennsylvania One Call System priority has been to prevent damage to underground facilities and remote safety for all of our State groups: facility owners, project owners, designers and excavators. We've been busy the last couple of years, over a million dig notifications, equivalent of 6M plus notifications out to the public and to those facility owners out there. We really do appreciate your support, which keeps not only the utilities safe, but the professionals and communities in Pike County safe. Thank you.

MOTION: by Commissioner Waldron and seconded by Commissioner Schmalzle, to adopt Resolution No. 23-09, Designating March 2023, as Developmental Disabilities Awareness Month.

VOTE: Commissioners Osterberg, Schmalzle and Waldron voted 'aye'. Motion carried.
Commissioner Osterberg read Resolution No. 23-09 aloud.

Commissioner Osterberg announced Sara von Prime will speak about this. Commissioner Osterberg said I would like to note that this County has been extremely supportive of finding employment opportunities for people with disabilities. In this building we probably employ 6 or 7 people. We have a small work force that cleans the building in the evenings. Over on Bennett Avenue we have a project and it is going to be, what we are calling, a vocational training center. We're going to be working hand and hand with HRC, Human Resource Center. HRC does an incredible job and how we find employment opportunities for people in our County that work here. These individuals deserve a life in our community and deserve to have all the opportunities that all of us enjoy and we will continue to do that. Business owners in our community who are looking for workers, this is a great place to go. I urge everyone to reach out to HRC if you have a business and see what you can do with a small group workforce. There's lots of different opportunities.

Sara von Prime thanked the Commissioners and said March is Developmental Disabilities Awareness month and orange is the color of the month and we created shirts for everybody in the agency to wear. Carbon Monroe Pike Mental Health Developmental Services we do work to provide work for all of our individuals in the community. We have a couple of collaboratives, regional collaborative is one where we really strive to have families involved and get the individuals in the community. We often have sing-a-longs, and we have fairs. We also have an employment coalition and we're advocating exactly what HRC is doing to get our individuals in the community competitive employment. Currently, we are very proud that we have 120 individuals employed competitively. This is a goal we try to reach every year to get it (the number) higher and higher. We reached our goal early this year and are very proud of that. Thank you.

Commissioner Waldron said he didn't realize how much the County has employed people through HRC, but also our

hospitality groups found the opportunity to employ people at Woodloch and Settler's. It is such a positive – they appreciate the opportunity to be of service and to earn a living as other people would, but under the circumstances there are some jobs that they can do better than others and you guys have done a great job, thank you. We appreciate it.

MOTION: by Commissioner Waldron and seconded by Commissioner Schmalzle, to adopt Resolution No. 23-10, Recognition of Edward Kuhn - 100 Years of Age.

VOTE: Commissioners Osterberg, Schmalzle and Waldron voted 'aye'. Motion carried.
Commissioner Osterberg read Resolution No. 23-10 aloud.

Commissioner Osterberg announced that there will be a private celebration at Marsch Kellogg American Legion celebrating this 100th Birthday of Ed Kuhn. He was very involved in our community in Matamoras and lived next door to my mother-in-law for 80 years. We're honored to do this and send everyone's regards when we see him on Saturday.

MOTION: by Commissioner Waldron and seconded by Commissioner Schmalzle, to adopt Resolution No. 23-11, Eliminate The Inclusion Of Veteran's Disability Compensation Towards The Financial Eligibility Guidelines For Veteran Real Estate Tax Exemption.

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

MOTION: by Commissioner Waldron and seconded by Commissioner Schmalzle, to adopt Resolution No. 23-12, Veteran Real Estate Tax Exemption for Non-War Time Veterans and Surviving Spouses.

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

MOTION: by Commissioner Waldron and seconded by Commissioner Schmalzle, to adopt Resolution No. 23-13, Veteran Real Estate Tax Exemption for Surviving Spouses of Service Members Killed in Action or in the Line of Duty.

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

MOTION: by Commissioner Waldron and seconded by Commissioner Schmalzle, to adopt Resolution No. 23-14, Veteran Real Estate Tax Exemption for Surviving Spouses of Deceased Veterans That Ultimately Died From Their Service-Connected Disability But Were Not "Permanent Service-Connection".

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

MOTION: by Commissioner Waldron and seconded by Commissioner Schmalzle, to adopt Resolution No. 23-15, A Resolution of the Board of Commissioners of Pike County to submit a request for revision of Community Development Block Grant Funding for Federal Fiscal Year 2020 to the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania Department of Community and Economic Development.

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 \$2,451.86; Human Services Development Fund in the amount of \$1,008.00; and Emergency Rental Assistance Program 2.0 in the amount of \$97,164.29.

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

MOTION: by Commissioner Waldron and seconded by Commissioner Schmalzle, to authorize the Chairman to execute the Request for Revision Letter to Mortgage Assistance Activity, 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 appoint **DAWN ALLISON** to the Pike County Children and Youth Advisory Board for a 2-year term, expiring 12/31/24.

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

MOTION: by Commissioner Waldron and seconded by Commissioner Schmalzle, to authorize the Chairman to execute the Equitable Sharing Agreement and Certification, on behalf of the District Attorney's Office.

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 Participation Package for the new proposed national opioid settlements with Teva, Allergan, CVS, Walgreens, and Walmart.

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

Commissioner Osterberg said this is a continuation of the lawsuit that we initiated probably 6 years ago and now all of this is coming to reality and we're getting settlements in the County, and this is the next phase. Last year we received settlements with certain pharmaceutical companies and now this is the next phase. We're continuing that course of making sure that we satisfy the needs of the people that haven't fallen into this disease in Pike County and the rest of the country.

MOTION: by Commissioner Waldron and seconded by Commissioner Schmalzle, to approve the Proposal for Professional Services between Hazardous Materials Abatement Consulting & Monitoring Services and the County of Pike.

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

MOTION: by Commissioner Waldron and seconded by Commissioner Schmalzle, to adopt Resolution No. 23-16, a Resolution authorizing the Chairman to execute closing documents for a Tax and Revenue Anticipation Note of 2023.

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

MISCELLANEOUS

- Working Pike Job Fair – Commissioner Osterberg announced that April 4th is the Working Pike Job Fair and we always support this and it started about 8 years ago.
- PennState Extension Calendar of Events-March – Commissioner Osterberg said you will note Mental Health and First Aid and Substance Abuse Problems and Penn State Extension is doing a seminar on this in April.
- Veterans Affairs Presentation – Jesiah Schrader, Veterans Affairs Director – Director Schrader thanked the Commissioners and the Veterans of the community thank you for the Resolutions which include Veterans that were once excluded. I've been the Director for 10 months and we've had over 600 Veterans come into the office. We do County, State and Federal benefits. With our compensation benefits, we've filed over 70 claims, with 36 have been adjudicated; pension benefits, DSE benefits, the County benefit and tax exemption programs and filed grants for temporary assistance that resulted in awards of over \$8K in benefits to our Veterans in our area. Currently, our monetary amount that the State has been tracking over the last 10 months, our County brought in over \$2.8B in Veterans' compensation. Karen, our Deputy Director is on her way to becoming a Veteran Service Officer that will allow us to process that much more claims for Veterans when she becomes certified. Myself, in addition to being in the County and community organizations, I am also currently on the State's Veterans Council and the War Council since I've been appointed the Vice President of Pennsylvania County Directors Association. With the Vice Presidency, there are 47 different counties that I'll be assisting and helping with Veterans' programs. With the new Resolutions the previous tax exemption granted by the State is only for Veterans who are 100% service connected, that served during war time and also meet a financial eligibility. Financial eligibility is also inclusive of the Veteran's compensation that they are receiving. The new Resolution will eliminate that monetary amount that the Veteran receives to help all Veterans better qualify for the tax exemption. It will open up peace time and wartime Veterans to this tax exemption and their surviving spouses. Individuals killed in action or line of duty they also don't meet the criteria presented by the States and this will also include their surviving spouses in this tax exemption program. As to Veterans that are not total-permanent that ultimately die from their service disability, their surviving spouses will be able to file for this tax exemption. These Resolutions will be posted on-line and we are willing to answer any questions and make appointments for filing of these benefits. Commissioner Osterberg asked if Director Schrader can define what 'wartime' is, what are the dates now? Director Schrader answered the Federal Recognition of Wartime Service is WWII, the Korean Conflict and the Vietnam era. A lot of Vietnam era fall out of that criteria by about a couple of months it closes in 1975 and reopens in 1990 when the Gulf War started. There's a lull that the Federal Government recognizes as 'peacetime' and that would exclude those Veterans from this tax exemption. With this new Resolution being passed, it's going to include them. Commissioner Osterberg asked if the tax exemption was a real estate tax exemption? Director Schrader answered correct. Commissioner Osterberg added that we already have individuals benefitting from and it will broaden that amount. Director Schrader answered we have already 148 individuals that are currently receiving this benefit. Commissioner Waldron said he knew there was exemption for property taxes, he just didn't realize there were nuances of who qualifies and who doesn't and for the small amount of money we will be giving up in property taxes, it does significantly help these Veterans. We appreciate that you brought this to us because otherwise we might not have known about it. Thank you.

PRESS & PUBLIC COMMENTS/QUESTIONS/ADJOURNMENT

Reporter Preston Ehrler asked Commissioner Osterberg if he could tell us a little bit about the County's reaction to closing these loopholes for the Veterans?

Commissioner Osterberg replied that we recognize the service that people have put into this country and when this was brought to us by Director Schrader, I didn't know that there was that loophole, and I don't think Tony or Ron knew. We need to do this and make sure that this County recognizes the needs of our Veterans in this community. A large part of our population, we have a lot of Veterans residing in Pike County and a number of them are disabled from their service in the military. We feel, as a community, this is something we can give back. It's probably not enough, considering what some of them have given up as you heard with the reading of the Resolution for Mr. Kuhn, he lost his leg. These are people who really suffered during wartime. Again, they could have suffered during what the government classify as 'non-wartime'. There are things that can go on during non-wartime than can injure people while there serving this country.

Reporter Preston Ehrler asked if he could get a little bit more granular about what exactly this does? Commissioner Osterberg answered it will eliminate the property taxes for them for County, School and Municipalities. There are a number of people that receive 100% exemptions on their real estate taxes. Those individuals will now make an appointment and apply to Director Schrader at the Veterans' Administration Office for the tax exemption, and it will be processed through the State and then it will come down to the County Assessment Office.

Reporter Preston Ehrler asked if it is known how many people this will effect countywide? Commissioner Osterberg said Director Schrader would know better than he would. Director Schrader answered currently about 100 currently qualify and this will only be a couple of dozen or so more.

THE NEXT REGULAR MEETING OF THE PIKE COUNTY COMMISSIONERS WILL BE HELD ON WEDNESDAY, APRIL 5, 2023 AT 11:00 A.M. IN THE PIKE COUNTY ADMINISTRATION BUILDING.