

The regular meeting of the Clearfield County Commissioners was held on Tuesday, January 14, 2020 with Chair Scotto conducting the meeting. The following were in attendance: Commissioners Sobel and Glass; Heather Bozovich, Solicitor; Tom Adamson, Controller; Kelly Williams and Willie Null, Clearfield County Conservation District; Jim Churney, Executive Director – North Central Regional Planning and Development; Lisa Kovalick, Community Development Specialist; Jeff Corcino, Progress/Courier; Jessica Shirey, gantdaily.com; Yvonne Lehmann, WOKW Radio; Lisa McFadden, Chief Clerk.

Minutes of the previous meeting of January 6, 2020 were approved by motion of Commissioner Sobel, seconded by Commissioner Glass; motion carried unanimously.

Controller Adamson presented the following bills for approval: General Fund, \$897,486.99; Liquid Fuels Funds, \$9,893.96; 911 Fund, \$447.88; Communities Development Block Grant, \$2,838.36; Domestic Relations Fund, \$1,039.95; Children & Youth Fund, \$132,265.44; Operating Reserve, \$500,000; Motion to approve the bills by Commissioner Glass, seconded by Commissioner Sobel; motion carried unanimously.

Personnel Changes

New Hires – Paula Gallaher, Department Clerk II/Clerk of Courts, effective 1/6/20.

Transfers – Andrew Brown, Adult Probation Officer-Collections to Supervisor-Collections, effective 1/1/20.

Separations/Retirements

Jessica Stavola, Part-time Telecommunicator/911, effective 1/6/20.

Olivia Sylvester, Part-time Corrections Officer/Jail, effective 1/9/20.

Commissioner Glass commented that he would like to see the practice of retroactively approving hiring employees until the Commissioners have had a chance to review. Chair Scotto commented that sometime the action is needed for payroll purposes. Approval of the personnel changes by motion of Sobel, seconded by Commissioner Glass; motion carried unanimously.

Public Comment

Old Business

Chair Scotto asked for a motion to correct the salary of the Solicitor as it was incorrectly stated at the previous meeting. The salary should have been stated as \$52,395 not \$52,329. Motion to make the correction by Commissioner Sobel, seconded by Mr. Glass; motion carried unanimously.

New Business

Lisa Kovalick attended the meeting to discuss Ordinance #2020-#1 to implement ACT 152. Ms. Kovalick provided the following information:

“Clearfield County is not alone in the fight on blight. The presence of derelict structures are found across the Commonwealth and the United States. The article “Mitigating Neighborhood Blight” addresses it here “Blight and the presence of vacant and abandoned properties have profound negative impacts on our communities. Blighted properties decrease the property values of surrounding properties, erode the health and local housing markets, pose safety hazards and reduce tax revenue. In addition, has negative effects on crime rates, causes social challenges and environmental issues”, “Vacant blighted properties make people feel less safe and less proud of their neighborhoods”. Following the Great Recession, our office (Planning & Community Development) completed a Housing Needs and Market Study in 2012. Municipal officials in twenty four (24) of Clearfield County’s fifty one (51) municipalities identified three hundred thirteen (313) blighted properties. This accounts for 47% of the municipalities in Clearfield County.

When asked what they thought the reason for blight was. There answers in order of significance were:

- 1) Absentee property owner and landlord’s lack of maintenance,
- 2) Property owner deceased and family not maintaining property,
- 3) Elderly property owner not being able to maintain,
- 4) Fire damage or foreclosure,
- 5) Bankruptcy and/or maintenance too costly for homeowner.

Following the outcome of the housing study, the commissioners created a “Blight Task Force” and from that, a Blight Study was conducted in 2014. Top Tier Strategies include:

- 1) A public education process about the tax sale process be conducted for the public,
- 2) Municipalities may enact an ordinances that requires absentee property owners to provide contact information for a local manager of the property,
- 3) The County may conduct a feasibility study for establishing a land bank.

Other Effective Strategies identified include:

- 1) Blight prevention a consumer-oriented maintenance “how-to” guide,
- 2) Municipalities enact ordinance requiring code inspection prior to the sale of properties,
- 3) Municipal efforts to deal effectively with blighted properties.

Some of these strategies have been completed and effective, as municipalities have continued to learn more on how ordinances can help with blight prevention. Our office has created a consumer-oriented maintenance guide with simple how-to maintain your home tips.

As we work together, with all 50 municipalities of Clearfield County, we linked these two studies together and determined that Blight Prevention would serve the consumers of the county. In December 2019, our office applied for HOME funds to help conquer blight proactively.

Our office continues to be inundated with inquiries and requests for assistance to help municipal officials and members of the public, remove blighted structures. Grant funding is minimal and restricted with state and federal regulations that impede projects from moving forward.” (continued)

Ms. Kovalick asked the Board to consider implementing Act 152 of 2016 and explained the funding to assist with the demolition of structures. The funding will be imposed as a nominal fee on the recording of deeds and mortgages. The fee of \$10.00 will create funds in the amount of \$40,000 to \$50,000 a year that would be used to assist municipalities and non-profits with raising blighted properties. Solicitor Bozovich explained that the Ordinance will need to be advertised and on display then acted on at the next meeting. (No action needed at this time)

Kelly Williams asked the Board to consider approval of Resolution 2020-#2 urging the Reauthorization of Collection of Fees to the Abandoned Mine Land Reclamation Fund. Ms. Williams explained that the Surface Mining Control and Reclamation Act went into place in 1977 and is set to expire at the end of 2021 if approved the collection of these funds would be extended through 2036. Ms. Williams stated there are over 600 abandoned mine sites in Clearfield County. These funds are very important to Clearfield County to continue to repair open mine shafts and portals, dangerous high walls (man-made cliffs), open pits, mine fires, unstable waste piles, abandoned buildings and equipment, subsidence. Projects such as the Lancashire #15 Active Treatment Plant, Hollywood Active Treatment Plant Potts Run Passive Treatment System and also and numerous other DEP Bureau of Abandoned Mine Reclamation projects such as surface reclamations. A most recent project using these funds was the Pine Grove Waterline extension project in Lawrence Township, without those funds this most needy project would most likely not have happened. Motion to adopt Resolution 2020-#2 Urging the Reauthorization of Collection of Fees to the Abandoned Mine Land Reclamation Fund by motion of Commissioner Glass, seconded by Commissioner Sobel; motion carried unanimously.

Solicitor Bozovich presented the PA SAVIN Maintenance and Service Agreement. Ms. Bozovich explained that PA SAVIN is a program that notifies victims that their offender is being released from a correctional facility. Motion to execute the agreement by Commissioner Sobel, seconded by Commissioner Glass; motion carried unanimously.

Commissioner Sobel explained that this is simply certifying the funds available for the Farmland Preservation Certification of County Funds for 2020 Program Year in the amount of \$3,222. Chief Clerk McFadden explained that the funds are obtained from land that had been previously enrolled in the Clean and Green Program but then sold and removed from the Clean and Green program and the roll back of taxes for the same. Motion to execute the certification by Commissioner Sobel, seconded by Commissioner Glass; motion carried unanimously.

Chair Scotto announced the following appointments to the following:

Susan Williams – Clearfield County Recreation & Tourism 4 - year term to 12/31/23

Lynn Dennis – Community Connections – 3-year term to 12/31/22.

Shawn Arbaugh – Clearfield County Solid Waste Authority – 5-year term to 12/31/24

Robert (Bob) Strouse – Local Emergency Planning Committee (LEPC)

Susan Williams – Curwensville Lake Authority to fill an unexpired term to December 31, 2020. Motion to approve the appointments by Commissioner Glass; seconded by Commissioner; motion carried unanimously.

Openings remain on the County Planning Commission and Community Connections Advisory Board. Commissioner Glass spoke that one of the appointments made on January 6, 2020 had to regretfully pass on the appointment due to employment conflict.

Solicitors Report

Solicitor Bozovich updated the Board that she has provided all of the documents with respect to the Tax Anticipation Note to CBT Bank, are being reviewed, and is awaiting approval and a closing date.

Ms. Bozovich requested that the Board enter into Executive Session for the purpose of litigation.

Motion to move to executive session at 10:26 by Commissioner Sobel, seconded by Commissioner Glass; motion carried unanimously. No action was taken and the Board returned from Executive Session at 11:00 by motion of Commissioner Glass, seconded by Commissioner Sobel; motion carried unanimously.

Motion to adjourn the regular meeting by Commissioner Sobel, seconded by Commissioner Glass; motion carried unanimously.

Lisa McFadden, Chief Clerk