

**Public meetings are being held both in-person and by conference call. To participate in the meeting please dial 1-408-419-1715 or 1-408-915-6290 and enter meeting number 2468097683#*

Call to Order:

Commissioner Erb called the meeting to order.

Moment of Silent Reflection:

Commissioner Erb called for a moment of silent reflection.

Pledge of Allegiance to the Flag:

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

Roll Call:

Members Present:

Commissioner Erb, Commissioner Burke, Commissioner Webster, and Chief Clerk Hemminger.

Members Absent:

Solicitor Karn and Assistant Solicitor Muriceak.

Others Present:

Rebecca Robinson (Purchasing), Allison Senkevich (Commissioner's), Brandon Meck (Finance), Lindsay Dempsie (Finance), Heather Rininger (Records Management), Paul Shaffer (Public Works/Highway), and Amy Martin-Shanafelt (Blair HealthChoices)

Public Comment:

Commissioner Erb called for public comment. **There were no comments noted.**

Special Presentation on CCAP 2022 Priorities Toolkit:

Human Services Workforce Crisis – Commissioner Burke

Human Services encompasses all of the critical services that support the needs of our citizens and communities as impacted by drug abuse, mental illness, developmental disabilities, and child abuse and neglect. These are COUNTY responsibilities. While the state and federal governments provide funding for social services and reimbursement for portions of our CYF related costs, ultimately the county is responsible to ensure the delivery of services. This local responsibility and control is important because as local leaders we have a vested interest in ensuring that our most vulnerable citizens are cared for and we are more likely to have better knowledge of the specific needs of our community and where to direct funds. Human Services as an industry provides services that cannot be delivered without people. There is no automation that is possible to replace investigation of child abuse, mental health counseling and support, or substance abuse treatment, just to name a few.

As I shared in my presentation specific to Child Welfare back in May: a significant challenge existed prior to COVID in appropriately staffing these areas due to stagnant pay, increased costs of higher education, increased workload and stress due to low staffing combined with increased complexity of cases. It is not just sheer loss of numbers of employees that is a problem. It is a loss of the institutional knowledge and experience that is also a concern. Specifically, in Blair County we are facing the retirement of Ken Dean, one of our mental health program specialists. Due to higher case counts and Ken's level of experience, we had to create two new positions to replace Ken. We must find ways to recruit new employees to this industry and retain the ones we have so that we can build up the experience and knowledge that we are losing as the retirements of the Baby Boomer generation accelerate. We need to not only stabilize the workforce, but make it sustainable.

What solutions does the County Commissioners' Association propose?

First, we need to develop programs and partnerships to streamline human services recruitment efforts and create county employment pipelines. I have been working on this in the specific area at a local level with the Children & Youth Recruitment and Retention Workgroup that includes our Social Services Director Jim Hudack, key staff from the department, and other stakeholders. One of our goals is to partner with local colleges to educate them about what curriculum is needed, the internship opportunities available, and how to navigate the Civil Service application process.

Second, in the words of CCAP, we need "to permit professionals to operate within their scope of practice and expertise, regardless of regulator or degree requirements, to aid in service provision and delivery." CCAP was trying to be diplomatic. I will go on record and say that what I think they were trying to say is: Civil Service sucks. Chief Clerk Hemminger and I had a phone call with Senator Ward's office this week regarding some of our frustrations with the process of hiring through civil service. A best case scenario is a seven-week turnaround from the time we submit a job posting to civil service to when we receive a list of candidates from civil service. If the job posting involves a higher level position it has to be sent to an analyst to ensure that the candidate meets the minimum experience requirements which can add even more time to our wait. While the idea of merit hiring and providing preference to Veterans is extremely worthy, the amount of red tape and regulations that are currently involved have a chilling effect on the county's ability to hire in a timely manner. We frequently lose good candidates who find other jobs before we can give them an interview or an offer because of the hoops we have to jump through. It is one of the County's long term goals to exit civil service because of these issues. Reform of civil service to make it easier to apply and easier to hire would be a benefit to most of the counties in the Commonwealth as well as to the workforce itself.

Finally, we need to reduce and eliminate regulatory barriers to ease burdens on county human services staff. As I told you in May, Caseworkers complete an average of 2 hours of paperwork for every hour they spend with a family. This is backwards. Chief Clerk Hemminger had the experience this week of sitting with one of our caseworkers while they screened the calls coming in to report child abuse. One of the questions the screener has to

answer from each caller is about the military status and education level of all adults involved in the case. The report received is not complete unless this information is filled in, yet, how likely is it that a mandated reporter making a call is going to have this information? The purpose of asking for this could be something important or could be merely demographic. We don't know. But asking questions like this takes time and if the caller doesn't know we may be unable to complete a report to the satisfaction of the state. Another example is Child Line. The state operates a 24/7 hotline for reporting child abuse and mandated reporters are also able to file reports electronically via a web portal 24/7. In spite of this, the counties are required to have someone in the position of call screener during the hours we are open. This takes a trained caseworker out of the field where they could be investigating reports.

The State legislature needs to take a very hard look at the regulations pertaining to Human Services and how they are being enforced by the various state agencies that oversee them and at the entire Civil Service system and how it is being administered. We need to place greater value the entire Human Services industry by investing in college programs to prepare young people to enter these fields and by increasing the wages associated with these positions.

UNFINISHED BUSINESS:

Adoption of Resolutions:

Resolution 218-2022: A resolution approving an Affordable Housing Trust Fund Program Disbursement, in an allocation not to exceed \$150,000.00, for the establishment of the Sustainable Housing Program, to be administered through the Blair County Department of Social Services. Said allocation will provide funding of three-3 projects up to \$50,000.00 per project to create affordable housing opportunities within Blair County.

Motion by Commissioner Erb, seconded by Commissioner Webster and unanimously approved to adopt Resolution 218-2022.

Resolution 219-2022: A resolution approving Change Order #1, received from John Claar Excavating, Inc., for the Fort Roberdeau Pavilion Renovation Project, increasing the total bid amount from \$40,732.00 to \$41,387.86 (an increase of \$655.86) for the installation of 26 ga. metal roofing panels in lieu of shingles.

Motion by Commissioner Erb, seconded by Commissioner Webster and unanimously approved to adopt Resolution 219-2022.

Resolution 220-2022: A resolution approving seventeen (17) FY 2021-2022 Contract Amendments between the County of Blair and the agencies listed below, extending the contracts terms and conditions until August 31, 2022 as stated in Article 1, Section B of said contracts:

- Big Brothers Big Sisters
- Blair Community Action Program
- Blair Family Solutions, LLC
- Blair HealthChoices
- Blair Senior Services
- Cen-Clear Child Services
- Center for Community Action
- Child Advocates
- Contact Altoona
- Family Services, Inc.
- Health, Opportunity, Purpose and Empowerment
- NAMI
- Peerstar LLC
- Skills of Central PA
- United Way
- UPMC Altoona
- UPMC Western Behavioral Health of the Alleghenies

Commissioner Erb noted his abstention to Blair Community Action Program and UPMC Altoona contracts due to him being a voting member on the board.

Commissioner Burke noted her abstention to the Blair Senior Services and the United Way contracts due to a conflict of interest.

Motion by Commissioner Erb, seconded by Commissioner Webster and unanimously approved to adopt Resolution 220-2022 with the abstentions as noted.

Resolution 221-2022: A resolution approving a Forever Media, Inc., Stay & Play Summer Promotion with commercial air schedule on WALY 103.9 of 35:60 second commercials with live promotional mentions, directory listing and Fort logo on the landing page of ForeverAltoona.com, in the total amount of \$600.00, to be paid from advertising funds in the Fort's county budget.

Chief Clerk Hemminger clarified that the Stay & Play Summer Promotion is a Forever Media initiative, not a Fort Roberdeau initiative.

Discussion followed.

Motion by Commissioner Webster, seconded by Commissioner Burke and unanimously approved to adopt Resolution 221-2022.

Resolution 222-2022: A resolution approving a Schlesinger Communications agreement for a Fort Roberdeau radio advertisement campaign promoting the Fort’s Star Spangled Event, in the total amount of \$525.00, to be paid by the Fort Roberdeau Association.

Discussion followed.

Motion by Commissioner Webster, seconded by Commissioner Burke and unanimously approved to adopt Resolution 222-2022.

Resolution 223-2022: A resolution approving the submission of a Notice of Intent – Requesting Election Security Grant Funds, in the total amount of \$9,717.62, to be used for expenditures related to the 2022 election and implementation of SUREVote.

Motion by Commissioner Webster, seconded by Commissioner Burke and unanimously approved to adopt Resolution 223-2022.

Resolution 224-2022: A resolution approving a County of Blair Agreement for Purchases under Bidding Threshold between the County of Blair and Burgmeier Hauling, Inc., for on-site shredding service at the Courthouse and Records Center location, based upon the fee schedule set forth in Exhibit A, for the period of June 1, 2022 through May 31, 2023.

Motion by Commissioner Webster, seconded by Commissioner Burke and unanimously approved to adopt Resolution 224-2022.

Resolution 225-2022: A resolution approving a quote received from Paul Carnell’s Auto Repair, in the total amount of \$915.00, for repair of county owned car #19 (Assessment), damaged in an accident. Said cost to repair is cheaper than the \$1,000.00 insurance deductible.

Motion by Commissioner Webster, seconded by Commissioner Burke and unanimously approved to adopt Resolution 225-2022.

Old Business:

Natural Gas Pricing:

Continued discussion concerning contract options, pricing and recommendations for the county’s Natural Gas Suppliers.

Current 2.813 blended rate

Contract Term	05/25/22	06/21/22	06/28/22
12 months	7.320	5.85	
24 months	6.050	5.37	
36 months	5.450	5.20	
42 months	n/a	n/a	
48 months	n/a	n/a	

Chief Clerk Hemminger clarified that updates will be provided at the Tuesday Commissioner’s meetings and not Thursdays.

Commissioner Erb requested background narrative from Mike Polosky before updates are provided at the Commissioner’s Meeting on Tuesday, 6/28.

New Business:

None

Adjourn:

Meeting Adjourned,

Nicole M. Hemminger, Chief Clerk