



BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS' WORK SESSION

Tuesday, June 16, 2020, 4:00 P.M.

Virtual Meeting – BlueJeans

The Board of Commissioners held a public work session to the COVID-19 County Relief Block Grant application. Commissioner Michael Pipe convened the meeting at 4:00 PM on Tuesday, June 16, 2020.

In attendance were Commissioner Michael Pipe, Commissioner Mark Higgins, Commissioner Steven Dershem, Administrator Margaret Gray, and Executive Office Supervisor Natalie Smith.

County Personnel present included Human Service Administrator Natalie Corman, David Lomison, and Krista Davis.

Guests present includes Mel Curtis, Amy Wilson, Kevin Price, Bruce Pellegrino and several guests by phone.

Administrator Margaret Gray provided an update on the current status of the COVID-19 County Relief Block Grant (CRBG) program application. The county continues to receive and accept recommendations and proposals from a variety of businesses and associations across the county. Today, the Board will discuss the seven major categories for allowable expenditures set forth by the guidelines including personal protective equipment, response and planning efforts, behavioral health and substance use treatment services, broadband deployment, tourism, nonprofit assistance programs, and businesses with fewer than 100 employees.

Margaret then shared the questions included on the grant application. The county does not have to attach dollar amounts with the application that will be completed in the second phase.

- What does the county hope or plan to accomplish with this project and funding?
- How does the county plan to accomplish it?
- What will the county use the funds for?

To date, Commissioner Pipe said that the county has received excellent feedback. The county wants to be open and transparent with the grantee and that they understand the grant requirements.

Reading some of the Federal guidelines, Commissioner Higgins explained that all monies have to be expended by December 30. He has received inquiries by creating a loan program, however the loans would need to be paid back by the end of that term. He sees this better as a grant program where the county purchases personal protective equipment (PPE).

Commissioner Dershem said the first priority for this project will be an accounting and gate keeping process for the grant. He would like to look at business and economic development, tourism, healthcare and human services, education, nonprofits and broadband. Not just to keep the community safe and operational, but to help it survive the pandemic and continue operating.

The total grant is \$14,664,804 with \$200,000 allowable for administration costs, leaving a remaining \$14,464,804 for programmatic costs. Administrative costs will be used for, but are not limited to staff, consultants, grant administrators, and auditing.

Commissioner Pipe opened the meeting for public comment.

Amy Wilson of the MidState Literacy Council stated that in the United States it is estimated that people have a fifth grade science education. What they are finding is that individuals are not understanding what COVID19 is, how it is transmitted, or how to stay safe. Two areas that she would like see funded are broadband and the MidState Literacy Council.

Kevin Price proposed using some funds to help students in the county catch up on their studies. Experts have said that students are 30-50% behind in reading and math due to the pandemic. He has a 501(c)3 tutoring company and an afterschool tutoring program would be a good idea to help K-12 students get caught up. Commissioner Pipe announced that today, the Governor released word of \$157,000,000 for school health and safety grants that are available. This will hopefully go to school districts throughout Centre County. He added that the school districts can use funds for educational purposes and the county may be able to offset other costs such as PPE and disinfecting. Commissioner Higgins added that the county wants to be as effective as possible with the grant, so if there are organizations that have other funding sources within the CARES Act it might be best to utilize those sources first.

Bruce Pellegrino of Sensor Networks, Inc. reported that they did not cut back or lay off any employees. From this program, he would like to see funding that would help them to become more competitive and anything that they can do to come out of this recession stronger than before. If offered the opportunity to apply for a grant, they would.

Mel Curtis of the YMCA of Centre County said they are not seeing much of a change in some areas, and others are getting worse. Through the hunger program, they have already provided nearly 130 ton of food to local communities. Before COVID-19, one in four children were facing food insecurity. That has increased to one in seven children since the start of the pandemic. As people are laid off or losing their jobs, they continue to pay their mortgage and utilities, which leaves less money for food. As part of the feeding program at the YMCA they are doing enrichment programs for the kids. MidState Literacy has been excellent and the YMCA has a lot of books they have provided to distribute. The Snow Shoe and Pine Glenn area recently lost Hull's Market, there are a lot of seniors in that area and shut-ins. At one time there were over 200 volunteers, but as people get called back to work the YMCA will need more assistance to get food to the underserved areas. Within the grant application, Commissioner Pipe said they will be including community food programs for the YMCA, food banks and food pantries. One of the goals of the CARES Act is to support low to moderate income families and Commissioner Higgins feels what the YMCA is doing is very much what the program is intended to do. Commissioner Dershem agreed and said there are a lot of needs that outlying areas that will benefit from mobile outreach programs such as this.

Public comment can be submitted to BOC@CentreCountyPA.gov or by calling 814-355-6700 and on social media platforms Facebook and Twitter @CentreCountyGov.

On a motion by Commissioner Higgins, seconded by Commissioner Dershem, the Board voted unanimously to approve the application to the Department of Community and Economic Development for the COVID-19 County Relief Block Grant in the amount of \$14,664,804.

On a motion by Commissioner Higgins, seconded by Commissioner Dershem, the Board voted unanimously to adjourn the meeting at 4:47 PM.

Respectfully Submitted

Natalie Smith,
Executive Office Supervisor
Commissioners' Office