



## BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS WORK SESSION MINUTES

Thursday, June 3, 2021, 1:00 P.M.

Virtual – BlueJeans

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### I. CALL TO ORDER

The public meeting of the Board of Commissioners was convened at 1:01 PM by Chair of the Board Michael Pipe.

In attendance were Commissioner Michael Pipe, Commissioner Mark Higgins, Administrator Margaret Gray, Deputy Administrator John Franek Jr., Executive Office Supervisor Natalie Smith, and Staff Assistant Jillian Savage.

County personnel present included Dave Lomison, Chad Joyce, and Travis Walker.

Guests present included Corey Troutman, and Kim Stank.

### II. PUBLIC COMMENT

There were no comments received from the public.

### III. COVID-19 PLANNING AND RESPONSE

American Rescue Plan (ARP)

Administrator Margaret Gray reported that on May 24, 2021 the United States Department of Treasury released guidance pertaining to the American Rescue Plan.

Kim Stank of Zelenkofske Axelrod LLC stated that the United States Treasury has already adjusted the original guidance and has issued a second set of guidance. Throughout 2021, the guidance is expected to evolve and change rapidly.

Kim stated that the first installment of Centre County's \$31.5 million ARP allocation has been received. The funds must be obligated by December 31, 2024. The ARP establishes a segment of funding entitled The Coronavirus State and Local Fiscal Recovery Fund for the following uses:

1. To respond to the COVID-19 public health emergency or its negative economic impacts; including assistance to households, small businesses and 501c3 nonprofits, or aid to impacted industries such as tourism, travel, and hospitality.

The use of "Non-profit" is expected to be defined in an FAQ considering the guidance later references 501c3 Non-Profits.

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The Board discussed the grant awarded to The Happy Valley Adventure Bureau (HVAB) for hospitality industry promotional programs at the May 25, 2021 Board of Commissioners meeting. The program will need to ensure it falls within the guidelines considering HVAB not a 501c3.

2. For the “provision of government services” to the extent of the revenue reduction due to the COVID-19 public health emergency.

The guidance does define Revenue Reduction. This will be based on whole government revenue to be compared to the overall revenue of 2019, as well as an inflationary rate of 4.1. CARES Act monies will be allowed to be removed from these calculations. The Board discussed the impact of different revenue streams on the calculations, including excess revenue.

3. For optional hazard pay for certain essential workers with a maximum of \$13.00 per hour or \$25,000 per individual.
4. To make necessary investments in water, sewer, or broadband infrastructure.

In regard to broadband infrastructure requirements, the guidance does specify upload speeds of between 20 mbps and 100 mbps and download speeds of 100 mbps.

The Board discussed the following possible initiatives, with the stipulation that funding cannot be provided retroactive to March 2, 2021:

1. County Government
  - a. Centre Crest Renovations – Components of the renovation, including New HVAC systems, would be eligible for ARP reimbursement, however, the entire renovation may not be eligible.
  - b. Revenue Reduction/Loss – This will be determined by the calculations of whole governmental revenue. These funds are to be used towards general government services and may not be used towards the creation of a stabilization fund, or to pay off pension liability. More guidance is needed to determine expenditures eligible within this category.
  - c. Hazard Pay – Funding for this category maybe provided retroactive to January 27, 2020.
  - d. Return to Work Incentives – Sign on Bonus– Kim stated that assistance can be provided to unemployed workers. This assistance can include job training, assistance with child care and transportation to and from a job site or interview, and incentives for newly employed workers. Additional guidance is needed for this category.
  - e. Salary Adjustments – Salary adjustments may be considered a general governmental service and therefore be eligible for consideration with the Revenue Reduction funds.

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- f. Health Insurance Payroll Deductions – These deductions and other related costs may be considered a general governmental service and therefore be eligible for consideration with the Revenue Reduction funds. The Board discussed the Revenue Reduction calculations, and strategies to determine the best use of the funds.
- g. Mental Health Court – Documentation will need to demonstrate the increased need for a Mental Health Court is perpetuated by the COVID-19 Pandemic.

### 2. Public Health Response

- a. Vaccination Provider Assistance – A formula will be designed to identify providers and determine reimbursement allocations. Vaccination related expenses eligible for reimbursement also include cleaning and hiring of additional workers.
- b. Covid-19 Testing Site – Reimbursement for operation of the site in March 2021, in the amount of \$266,000.
- c. County Public Health Office – Commissioner Pipe requested research on entities that perform studies on the benefits of forming a County Health Office.
- d. Vaccine Incentive – The Board discussed gift cards to local establishments for County employees as a possible vaccine incentive.
- e. Mental Health Support – Margaret suggested speaking with County Mental Health staff to determine how to proceed with this initiative for the residents of Centre County.

### 3. Economic Development

- a. Tourism - At the May 25, 2021 Board of Commissioners meeting, the Board approved a grant in the amount of \$49,000 to HVAB for hospitality industry promotional programs. The Board requested a presentation on the program be made at the June 17, 2021 Work Session and the July 6, 2021 Board of Commissioners meeting.  
  
The Board discussed using ARP funds to supplement pandemic related grants for the Tourism Grant Program.
- b. Small Business Grant – Commissioner Higgins proposed a grant of approximately \$3 million to provide for a grant program for Centre County small businesses that were affected by the pandemic. Eligible businesses will demonstrate they were affected by the pandemic similarly to travel, tourism and hospitality industries, including a 24% decline in revenue due to the pandemic.

The Board discussed contracting with SEDA Council of Governments (SEDA-COG) for the administration of the program.

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- c. Paid Internship Program for Entrepreneurs – Commissioner Higgins proposed that local businesses affected by the pandemic be connected with Penn State students who are able offer assistance in a variety of areas. The Idea Garden, a 501c3, would handle the administration of the program.
4. Broadband – The Board discussed hiring an employee, or contracting with a qualified entity, to handle Broadband projects.

The Board discussed the positions of a communications coordinator, and a grant coordinator that the County does not currently have. ARP funds may be able to be used to reimburse the County for time county employees dedicate to ARP. Creation of an ARP designated pay code was discussed to accurately track ARP related time for employees who have split responsibilities.

Margaret announced the next ARP work sessions will be Thursday, June 17 and Tuesday July 6. Comments are to be submitted by July 9, Counties must submit the first interim report to the United States Treasury by August 31, and the first quarterly project and expenditure report is due October 31.

IV. DISCUSSION ITEMS

V. QUESTIONS FROM THE PRESS

VI. ADJOURNMENT

On a motion by Commissioner Higgins, seconded by Commissioner Dershem, the Board voted unanimously to adjourn the meeting at 2:55 PM.

ATTEST:

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Margaret N. Gray  
Administrator