

Minutes
July 31, 2018

Commissioners Present: Brian Robertson, Timothy Bechtol, and Mark Gazarek

Also Present: Lucinda Land, Chris Long, Sheriff Heldman, Captain Roger Treece, Becky Smith, Lt. Ryan Kidwell, Adam Witteman, Steve Wilson, Jim Maurer, and Alex Parker.

Commissioner Robertson opened the meeting at 9:30 a.m. in the Commissioners' 1st floor conference room. The Pledge of Allegiance was recited. Minutes from the July 26, 2018 meeting were read with Brian Robertson making the motion to approve, Timothy Bechtol seconded. Motion passed 2-0, Mark Gazarek abstained.

The Clerk presented the following resolutions for consideration:

Resolution #422-18 – Authorizing payment of the listed and/or attached purchase orders. Mark Gazarek made the motion to approve, Timothy Bechtol seconded. Motion passed 3-0.

Resolution #423-18 – 2018 Ditch Maintenance Recollections. Mark Gazarek made the motion to approve, Timothy Bechtol seconded. Motion passed 3-0.

Resolution #424-18 – Board of Hancock County Commissioners authorizes collection of maintenance assessments on the J.L. Elsea Single County Ditch to be collected in 2019. Mark Gazarek made the motion to approve, Timothy Bechtol seconded. Motion passed 3-0.

Resolution #425-18 – Appointment of Mary Beth Dillon, Kathryn Kelly, and Traci McCall to the Alcohol, Drug Addiction, Mental Health Services Board. Mark Gazarek made the motion to approve, Timothy Bechtol seconded. Motion passed 3-0.

Resolution #426-18 – Additional appropriation within the Auditor's certification-Commissioners to appropriate to Targeted Community Alternatives to Prison. Mark Gazarek made the motion to approve, Timothy Bechtol seconded. Motion passed 3-0.

Resolution #427-18 – Transfer of funds within the appropriation-Targeted Community Alternatives to Prison. Mark Gazarek made the motion to approve, Timothy Bechtol seconded. Motion passed 3-0.

Resolution #428-18 – Additional appropriation within the Auditor's certification-Commissioners to appropriate to ADAMHS. Mark Gazarek made the motion to approve, Timothy Bechtol seconded. Motion passed 3-0.

Resolution #429-18 – Repayment of advance from Special Improvement Ditch to the General Fund. Mark Gazarek made the motion to approve, Timothy Bechtol seconded. Motion passed 3-0.

Resolution #430-18 – Transfer of funds within the appropriation-Family First. Mark Gazarek made the motion to approve, Timothy Bechtol seconded. Motion passed 3-0.

Resolution #431-18 – Additional appropriation within the Auditor’s certification-Commissioners to appropriate to the General Fund. Mark Gazarek made the motion to approve, Timothy Bechtol seconded. Motion passed 3-0.

The Commissioners approved a travel request from the Auditor’s office. They signed the Explosive Gas Monitoring Report from the Sanitary Landfill. Mark Gazarek made the motion for each Commissioner to sign their respective copies of the Metropolitan Housing 2019 annual and 5 year plan, Timothy Bechtol seconded. Motion passed 3-0.

Lucinda Land had nothing to report.

Chris Long gave an update on the projects the Engineer’s office is currently working on.

Adam Witteman had nothing to report.

Sheriff Heldman stated he was in attendance to hear the Commissioners’ decision regarding additional funding for outside prisoner housing, as discussed on Tuesday, July 24, 2018.

Brian Robertson stated they received notice that Common Pleas Court will be paying a portion of the Targeted Community Alternatives to Prison grant money to the Sheriff’s office. This should help pay for August’s outside prisoner housing. Brian asked the Commissioners for their comment on the funding request.

Mark Gazarek reported the County does not have the funds available. The Sheriff, Judges, Prosecutor, Commissioners, and Community are all on the same team; wanting the criminals to serve their sentences in jail. However, sales tax numbers continue to decrease. Local stores have closed, several people purchase online, and because of those things, the amount sales tax brings in has continued to decrease. His focus is to keep the current County employees, which has become increasingly difficult because of competitive wages and/or benefits provided by area businesses.

Timothy Bechtol agreed with Mark’s sentiment. He provided two short term solution proposals: advising the Judges and Prosecutor to not exceed the number of beds available in our current jail, and holding midyear budget discussions with departments that receive money from the General Fund in order to maximize the available funds. Long term, Timothy suggested working towards replacing the current .25% that is specified for flood mitigation with .2% sales tax that would be specified for safety/security. If that were to happen, Hancock County would still be 4th lowest in the state for sales tax rate, and lowest in Northwest Ohio. He views this as the best solution.

Brian Robertson concurred with Mark Gazarek and Timothy Bechtol. According to the local Judges, the jail would need 240 beds to meet current needs. He stated the County can no longer kick the can down the road. Unfortunately, the nonmandated agencies are likely facing budget cuts. That means for several groups they will not receive a state funded match. Such agencies include Soil & Water and the OSU Extension. These groups provide necessary programs for the community and the effects could be catastrophic. Currently, the quality of life is being challenged in our community, but the Commissioners were elected in order to make the tough decisions. Brian asked Lucinda Land for an update on sales tax regulations.

Lucinda Land stated in September, 2017 ORC changed to tenths for collection of sales tax (ex. .1%), however in March, 2018 it was changed for collection of either tenths or quarter percent. Hancock County has the ability to collect an additional .25% under .021. The guidelines specify this collection for General Fund or Criminal Justice. Hancock County has the ability to collect an additional .5% under .026. The guidelines specify this collection for a specific project. She advised the Commissioners of the timeline necessary in order to begin collections.

Brian Robertson stated as of today, the additional funds are not available for outside prisoner housing. If the Commissioners would decide to defund the nonmandated entities, it would only free up enough money to comply with the request from Job & Family Services for Children Services, but not any other requests. He said there needs to be continued dialogue about the future.

Timothy Bechtol asked Lucinda about the process after the hearings are held to discuss sales tax. Lucinda said the Commissioners could take action on the matter at the 2nd hearing. Once action is taken, that begins the 65 day timeline. Collection would begin at the beginning of the quarter that follows the 65 day waiting period. She also reminded the Commissioners that it is too late to prepare a sales tax proposal for the November ballot. Brian Robertson asked, if the tax were to be enacted, does that action require a unanimous vote by the Board or a majority vote? Lucinda stated it requires a majority vote. Timothy stated he is in favor of moving forward with the hearing process. Brian Robertson said he would like to take this information under advisement. Lucinda will provide a timeline to each of the Commissioners for their review.

Meetings/Reports

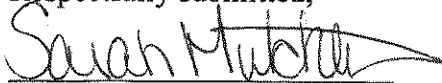
Mark Gazarek reported his continued efforts in supporting law enforcement's ability to redact personal information from public records in order to maintain their safety. He has been in contact with CCAO and the Secretary of State's office regarding this issue.

Timothy Bechtol interviewed with WLIO and WTOL on Thursday to discuss the jail overcrowding issue. He also walked in the Vanlue Fest parade.


Brian Robertson met with Judge Routson on Friday. He is continuing his efforts for strategic planning. Also, Brian met with a Hancock Public Health board member to discuss their frustrations over obtaining a new facility. Brian requested an executive session to discuss potential real estate acquisition.

At 10:10 a.m. Brian Robertson made the motion to enter into executive session to discuss potential real estate acquisition, Timothy Bechtol seconded. A roll call vote resulted as follows: Brian Robertson, yes; Timothy Bechtol, yes; Mark Gazarek, yes. At 10:47 a.m. Brian Robertson made the motion to come out of executive session with no action taken, Timothy Bechtol seconded. Motion passed 3-0.

Respectfully submitted,


Sarah Mutchler, Clerk


Reviewed and approved by:



Brian J. Robertson



Timothy K. Bechtol



Mark D. Gazarek

7-31-18

In response to our Sheriff's notification that the \$400,000 that we budgeted for out-of-county housing of inmates is projected to be totally used up in 7 ½ months of this calendar year.

I listened carefully to what our Sheriff & his staff had to say about the situation. I listened to what our Prosecutor & judges have offered to help remedy this situation. And I have listened to various members of the public who shared their thought with me.

By my calculations, at a similar rate of usage, we would need an additional \$250,000 to ensure the same amount of inmate housing out of the county for the remainder of this year 2018. I have not found \$250,000 in our county budget just waiting to be used for this purpose that mainly benefits other counties' budgets. If we had an extra \$250,000 available, we wouldn't have had to borrow as much money as we are to renovate the justice center here in the next few months.

Even if we were able to fund any part of that additional \$250,000 – all we would be doing is postponing the inevitable and run out of the funds closer to the end of the year instead of now.

In addition to not being able to adequately house all the current inmates in our justice center or out-of-county, we are going to have to empty one cell block at a time while the multi-faceted renovation take place within the justice center over the next few months.

This says nothing yet about the very quickly depleting fund for outside medical expenses of our inmates housed in other counties or the amount of overtime being accrued with all the transportation costs.

I have a couple short-term and long-term proposals to help us deal with the financial shortfall that we are currently facing:

First, here in the short-term:

We need to advise the judges and the prosecutor that we simply cannot exceed the number of beds available within the justice center for the remainder of 2018. We can no longer fund the extra resource of housing inmates in other counties for the rest of this budget cycle. It is not up to the commissioners' office to determine how to manage the population of the justice center.

The judges and the prosecutor will have to determine who serves their sentences now and later as space becomes available during the remainder of this year. It is my understanding that delayed sentencing has been used in this county in the past. Again, this is just one on my short-term proposals.

Secondly, here in the short-term:

I would ask that we schedule mid-year budget reviews with each county office, agency, & department who receive money from our county general fund. The purpose of these meetings is to discuss where each group may be predicting they could come in UNDER budget for the remainder of THIS calendar year. We need to be made aware of and maximize those dollars as we prepare to systematically renovate the justice center and further deplete our ability to house our maximum number of inmates during the renovation period in the next few months. This is not a money grab to strip any of our general fund entities of the funds already budgeted to them for this budget cycle. We are all on the same team here: it's called Hancock County.

I believe it's our job as commissioners to help each general fund recipient find ways to support each other when we have occasional outstanding needs – such as the current over-crowding at the justice center.

We are going to need whatever funds can be made available to house that select number of inmates away from the justice center during the forthcoming renovations.

Then, in the long-term:

We need to work with our County Auditor to calculate what amount of funds could be generated from a 2/10th% sales tax replacement when the current 0.25% sales tax for flood mitigation projects expires at the end of this year. I would offer that this 2/10th% be designated specifically for safety & security measures of the county so that it could be used for justice center & court facility improvements – for new construction and ongoing renovations – as well as increased staffing to operate these improved facilities.

Replacing the expiring 0.25% sale tax with a lesser 2/10th% sales tax would still place us as the 4th lowest sales tax rate among all 88 counties in Ohio only behind Butler, Wayne, & Stark Counties. And it would still give us the lowest sales tax rate among all the counties in all of Northwest Ohio.

As long as we continue to budget as we have been for capital improvements primarily based on what is *left over* at the end of the previous budget cycle, we are never going to get beyond having just enough funds to pay our most critical bills. And we will soon not even be able to cover those expenses at the current rate of annual increases to our county expense line items.

Hancock County's long-standing history of operating within the state's lowest sales tax bracket and routinely postponing deferred maintenance projects for our county facilities has led us to the situation we are facing here today:

- Borrowing \$1.5 m to renovate our current justice center
- No conclusive financial plan to fully fund the construction of a new Probate/Juvenile Court Building
- No funds available to even help Hancock Public Health find or build an adequate facility
- Our inability to fully fund various county programs, agencies, & departments (Kids in Care @ JFS, Soil & Water, OSU Extension, Raise the Bar, Adult Probation, & others)
- No funds available to help our county's villages like Arlington rebuild their main street through their town

Our continuation of a very modest sales tax is our very best option to more properly fund our much-needed county expenses because of the attraction this area has for regional tourism, commercial trade, and employment – all coming in from outside our county.

I am a fiscal conservative. But I am not about to stand by and watch our county programs continue to go unfunded, our county staffs continue to be depleted as they seek out more competitive wages elsewhere, and our county facilities fall into continued disrepair all in the name of saving some 25 cents for every \$100 spent.

We can do better than this and we don't have to break the bank to do it.

*Timothy K BECHTOL
Hancock Co. Commissioner*