

**ERIE COUNTY COMMISSIONERS**

**REGULAR SESSION**

**WEDNESDAY, APRIL 17, 2024**

**ALL PRESENT**

---

President Shenigo called the meeting to order at 9:30 a.m. and opened with the Pledge of Allegiance.

On motion of Mr. Shoffner and second of Mr. Old, Board **approves the March 18th and April 3, 2024 Erie County Commission Meeting minutes**; Roll Call: All Aye

**County Administrator re Various Issues.**

Gas Tax - gas tax collections for this month totaled \$274,000 versus \$279,000 this time last year. Year-to-date, gas tax collections total \$1.2 million, which is 4% higher than last year.

National Public Safety Telecommunicators Week - County Administrator Hank Solowiej noted that a proclamation has been created for National Public Safety Telecommunicators Week, April 14 - 20, 2024. This proclamation is to show appreciation to the Erie County Sheriff Dispatchers who are the front line of communications when citizens call 9-1-1.

Engineer's Salt Truck Equipment - Hank noted that Erie County still has not received word of getting EPA grant funds for the new salt truck equipment. Hank and the Engineer's Office would like to move forward with the purchase of this equipment as it will take some time to receive the equipment and get the trucks outfitted for the upcoming winter. This equipment includes: two 6,000 gallon storage tanks, four salt box/truck mounted brine pre-wet application systems, brine pretreatment system and a brine production system, which will cost between \$150,000 and \$170,000. Hank and the Commissioners agreed to move forward with getting firm quotes for the equipment and will use capital funds for this equipment request.

Survey Data Collector - Project Engineer Matt Rogers was present and asked the Board if they would reconsider approving the Survey Data Collector in the amount of \$12,000. This software is similar to a GPS unit that reads data. The current software is eight years old and still works, but it is outside in the elements and starting to lag time. The Commissioners still disapprove of this purchase as the current software is still in working order and is not used often enough to merit replacement at this time.

Township Road Program - Mr. Old stated he is pleased to see the Townships are continuing to utilize the \$1 million Township Road Program funds to repair and repave Township roads.

Infrastructure Grant Program - A new program has been created to provide additional improvements to Township infrastructure. The County has received \$2 million in requests, but \$1.23 million can be awarded this year.

**Public Hearing re City of Sandusky Water Rate Increase.**

County Administrator Hank Solowiej stated that, at this time, there is nothing more to present regarding the City of Sandusky's water rate increases. To review, Erie County has been analyzing the City of Sandusky's Water Fund the last few years to see what caused the fund to go from having a \$5 million surplus to being depleted. Hank stated he has made numerous public records requests to the City. He has received some of the information back, but he is still waiting on the entirety of the request. One of the documents he did receive back, shows a large amount of loans the City has taken out to pay for projects. Hank also noticed that the City is still using both the Water and Sewer Fund to support the administrative staff.

Hank invited City Manager John Orzech and Finance Director Michelle Reeder to attend the public hearing today and received no response. He also mentioned that, along with the City Manager and Finance Director, the Sandusky City Commissioners have been unresponsive to requests for explanations of what happened to the water fund balance.

Utilities Director John Rufo was present to answer additional questions that the Commissioners or guests in the audience may have. Mr. Rufo stated that his department is continuously working on their financial numbers internally to project how these increases will impact their budget. He stated the County water and sewer employees take pride in ensuring costs stay lower by completing projects in-house, as much as possible. The County will soon be mandated, through regulation, to do infrastructure upgrades. The large water rate increases will put us behind with the mandate from the State, and not allow us to complete various water capital projects.

Mr. Old stated that Erie County has spent years getting the County's financial situation in order. Mr. Old credited the Utilities Director John Rufo and staff for taking on projects in-house to save money, which has allowed the County to control spending. Mr. Old mentioned that Erie County is now in a place where our funds can be used to pay for projects without creating debt. These unforeseen increases of 15%, 15%, 3%, 3%, 3%, 3%, 3% over the next seven years, will make it impossible to proceed with all of these upgrades. Erie County would like to plan its financial future so financial investments can be made. Mr. Old stated he really was hoping a City representative would have been in attendance today to help the Board better understand the City's financial situation.

Mr. Shenigo noted that the Manager of Northern Ohio Rural Water (NORW) was present at the last public hearing, and stated his business has never been put in a situation where rates were raised at such a high percentage and with little notice or public input.

Mr. Shoffner stated that the County has spent more than 10 years getting its financial situation in order, and the County is preparing to make some huge infrastructure changes. Mr. Shoffner stated he does not have the confidence now to proceed with these projects, as we are faced with these massive increases in our water rates.

Mr. Old added that high utility rates will make Erie County less competitive. The increase in water rates will also limit the opportunities for companies to move to this region. Mr. Old is optimistic that the City is working through this issue to get it resolved. Mr. Old understands that the financial aspect of sewer and water is complex and he believes that in the past the City has not been managing funds properly, causing the oversight. Another public hearing will be set in the next month or two to ensure the City has plenty of time to investigate and resolve this money issue.

Resident John Kempton, 4120 Huntfield Drive, Sandusky, gave praise to the County Commissioners for holding the City accountable. He stated that he worked at the City's Water Department years ago, and everything was always accounted for. Mr. Kempton noted his friend, a former City Commissioner, stated this misuse of funds has been taking place since prior to COVID. Mr. Kempton appreciates the Commissioners' stewardship in looking into this matter.

Resident Marcus Harris, 3528 Jeanette Drive, Sandusky, mentioned a Sandusky Register article that states Erie County plans on up-charging the bulk rate by 590%. Mr. Harris would like to know the County's strategy and necessity of this serious upcharge. Mr. Harris also mentioned that the County Administrator published an assessment in the Sandusky Register regarding that the County's calculations of the water rates using miles as the metric. Mr. Harris believes using miles as the metric ignores the direct cost of facilitating the production of water. Mr. Shenigo asked if Mr. Harris worked at the City and Mr. Harris responded yes, but is attending this public hearing as a citizen. Mr. Shenigo stated that Mr. Harris must be privy to some of the city's financial information, and asked Mr. Harris if he could shed some light on these questions the Commissioners have regarding the misuse of the water and sewer fund.

Mr. Harris noted that City Manager Orzech and other political leadership are more able to speak about the questions that the Commissioners have.

Mr. Harris is only privy to the publically available documents. He believes the water and sewer fund issue is revenue related. Mr. Harris mentioned that the City's water costs total \$4.8 million, including production costs. Mr. Harris said \$1.2 million for water distribution divided by total amount of water pipe, totals \$9,000 per mile.

Mr. Shenigo stated Mr. Harris' numbers are incorrect and said that operating expenses in the Water Fund are almost \$8 million. Mr. John Rufo agreed with Mr. Shenigo and stated in order to calculate costs for both entities, water production costs need to be subtracted from the total costs first before the calculation is completed. John added that costs started at \$8 million and then subtracted \$3.8 million for water production at the Water Plant. When you calculate it the same for Erie County, Mr. Rufo subtracted the water purchase bulk price as a total and then you can compare apples to apples.

Mr. Shenigo stated water distribution is very costly because water pipes break and get old and the County is concerned that the City's priority is skateboard parks over fixing waterlines. The funds that were in the City's budget, which passed at the beginning of the year, appears to be depleted. Mr. Harris again reminded Mr. Shenigo that he is representing himself not the City at this public hearing.

Mr. Harris asked, in order to improve revenue streams, is there an opportunity for the County and the City to work together to sell water regionally. Mr. Shenigo stated that this is a great idea but Erie County has researched this possibility but found that the City of Elyria, City of Huron, Northern Ohio Rural Water, City of Norwalk and City of Bellevue all own their own water plants and the price of water they sell to their customers is cheaper than what the City of Sandusky and Erie County sell.

Mr. Shenigo has spoken with the General Manager of Northern Ohio Rural Water, who would purchase additional water from us, but he stated our water prices are significantly higher than what he purchases from other entities.

Mr. Harris thanked the Commissioners for allowing him, as an Erie County citizen, to be able to connect and discuss this issue.

Mr. Old stated Erie County is holding numerous public hearings for public transparency. All citizens have a right to know why there has been a dramatic decrease in the City's Water and Sewer Fund and why the need for dramatic increases in water rates. Mr. Old is hopeful that the issues will be corrected so both entities can move forward and work together.

There being no further questions, the public hearing was closed.

On motion of Mr. Shoffner and second of Mr. Old, Board adopts resolution entering into an Intergovernmental Agreement with **Florence Township Trustees**; Roll Call: All Aye (#24-130 - wedge coating on one mile on Harmon Rd, 1.17 miles on Burr Road, and .25 miles on Cable Road - \$111,111.11)

On motion of Mr. Shoffner and second of Mr. Old, Board adopts resolution executing payment of **Then and Now Certification** presented by the County Auditor pursuant to O.R.C. 5705.41(d)1, and authorizing the drawing of warrant(s) in payment of amounts due upon contract or order; Roll Call: All Aye (#24-131)

On motion of Mr. Shoffner and second of Mr. Old, Board adopts resolution authorizing the County Auditor to make **supplemental appropriations** re Unclaimed Monies Fund; 2303.201(B) Computers Fund; Juvenile - Computerization Fund; Drug Enforcement Fund; and Special Assessment Bonds Fund; Roll Call: All Aye (#24-132)

On motion of Mr. Shoffner and second of Mr. Old, Board adopts resolution authorizing the County Auditor to make **interfund transfers** re Workforce Innovation & Opportunity Act Fund; Childrens Services Fund; and Public Assistance Fund; Roll Call: All Aye (#24-133)

On motion of Mr. Shoffner and second of Mr. Old, Board adopts resolution entering into an agreement with **Kreimes Co., Inc.**; Roll Call: All Aye (#24-134 - The Meadows at Osborn Park Courtyard Concrete Project in the amount of \$29,000)

On motion of Mr. Shoffner and second of Mr. Old, Board adopts resolution entering into an agreement with the **Erie County Metropolitan Housing Authority**; Roll Call: All Aye (#24-135 - providing funding for Tenant-based Rental Assistance program through CHIP Program)

On motion of Mr. Shoffner and second of Mr. Old, Board adopts resolution entering into a Right of Entry Agreement with **Omni Fiber, LLC**; Roll Call: All Aye (#24-136 - installing fiber at The Meadows at Osborn Park and DOES)

On motion of Mr. Shoffner and second of Mr. Old, Board adopts resolution **declaring a real and present emergency and authorizing the execution of an agreement with Schindler Elevator Corporation** for purchase and installation of a new in-ground hydraulic jack for the Erie County Services Center elevator; Roll Call: All Aye (#24-137)

Hank noted that the above resolution is considered an emergency because there is only one elevator at the Services Center, and it is inoperable, which restricts and limits the access Erie County citizens have to certain county offices. The cost to replace the elevator part is less than \$125,000, therefore the replacement does not need to be bid out.

Board approves Revised Auditor's Certificates for **Sandusky Steel** in an additional amount of \$10,100.00 re recycling services at DOES.

Board approves Revised Auditor's Certificate for **Go Green Landscaping** in an additional amount of \$45,241.00 re providing lawn care and ground maintenance services for DOES.

Board approves Revised Auditor's Certificate for **Link Computer Corporation** in an additional amount of \$53,549.79 re providing a Muni-Link billing system for DOES.

Board approves Revised Auditor's Certificate for **Aramark Correctional Services, LLC** in an additional amount of \$135,000 re providing inmate food services at the Jail.

Board approves Revised Auditor's Certificate for **Blue Technologies, Inc.** in an additional amount of \$100.00 re providing a maintenance agreement on a Lexmark XM1145 printer/scanner/fax for Erie County Sheriff's Office.

Board approves Revised Auditor's Certificate for **Board of DD** in an additional amount of \$100,000 re implementing the Help Me Grow: Ohio's Birth to Three System/ Part C Component for the Erie County Family and Children First Council.

Board executes **Proclamation** declaring the week of April 14 - April 2, 2024 as National Public Safety Telecommunicators Week.

Board executes **Certificate of Appreciation** to Nancy McKeen on her retirement from Board of Elections.

Board approves two Equipment Outlay and Request Forms for **Engineer's Office** re two Gormann Rupp 4" trash pumps in the amount of \$8,012.00; and two Dell Precision 5820 computers in the amount of \$4,891.54.

Board authorizes expenses for **Chris Doerner, Tom Reising, Brendan Dufault, Brion Ronto**, Engineer's Office, attending Work Zone Traffic Control & Safety Workshop in Toledo, Ohio on 5/14/24 in an estimated amount of \$150.00.

Board authorizes expenses for **Jack Farschman**, Engineer, attending Land Records Modernization Conference in Westerville, Ohio, on 5/21/24 in an estimated amount of \$199.00.

Board authorizes expenses for **Ellen Schirg**, Land Bank/Regional Planning, attending Land Bank Conference in Akron, Ohio, on 4/25/24 in an estimated amount of \$182.00.

Board authorizes expenses for **Judy Johnson**, Clerk of Courts, attending OCCA Title Seminar in Lewis Center, Ohio, on 4/18/24 in an estimated amount of \$39.00.

Board approves Personnel Action Form for **Information Technology** re **Caleb Goodwin**, Network System Administrator, longevity increase effective 4/21/24.

Board approves Personnel Action Form for **ECDJFS** re **Deeann Carter**, from part-time Grant Funded RESEA Workforce Specialist to Telephone Operator 2 effective 4/15/24.

Board approves Personnel Action Forms for **The Meadows at Osborn Park** re **Susan Old**, full-time LPN, employment effective 4/16/24; and **Shallon Roth**, full-time STNA, resignation effective 4/17/24.

Board approves Request for Recruitment re **Seasonal Maintenance positions (4) for Engineer's Office/Highway Department**.

Received letter from Safe Harbour Domestic Violence Shelter re **first quarter statistics for 2024**.

Received copy of memo to Erie County Budget Commission Members from Alyssa Heater, Finance Manager, re **2024 Revised Estimated Resources**.

On motion of Mr. Old and second of Mr. Shoffner, Board **adjourns** at 10:30 a.m.; Roll Call: All Aye

Emp  
Meet24-14