

Clinton County Government Study Commission Meeting
April 19 2006
Minutes

Call To Order:

Chairman Dan Harger called the Commission to order at 7:00 p.m. at the Clinton County Resource and Education Center. The Pledge of Allegiance to the Flag was participated in by all present.

Roll Call:

Ms. Gardner took roll call as follows:

Present were Ms. Deb Day, Mr. Mike Hanna, Jr., Mr. Daniel Harger, Dr. Kathleen McQuaid, Ms. Coreena Meyer Mr. Richard Novosel, Mr. Terry O'Connor, Mr. Ernie Renninger, and Mr. Les Robinson.

Excused were Ms. June Houser and Dr. Robert Wise.

Pennsylvania Economy League representatives present were Mr. Gerald Cross and Mr. Charles Waters.

Meeting Minutes of April 12, 2006:

Mr. O'Connor made a motion to approve the meeting minutes of April 12, 2006 as presented. Mr. Hanna seconded the motion. Ms. Gardner took roll call vote whereby the motion to approve the April 12, 2006 meeting minutes was approved unanimously.

Reports:

Invoice Review:

Mr. O'Connor, Treasurer presented a correction to the invoices approved at the April 12, 2006 meeting for clerical expenses. Due to a miscalculation the clerical expense should have been \$128.25 instead of \$123.75. An additional payment of \$4.50 is being requested for approval.

Ms. Day made a motion to approve payment of the invoice correction totaling \$4.50. Ms. Meyer seconded the motion. Ms. Gardner took roll call vote whereby the motion to approve payment of the invoices was passed unanimously.

The Administrative Committee reported that interviews for the April 26, 2006 meeting are Mr. Charles Ankney, Clinton County Sheriff and Mr. Tom Bossert, Clinton County Commissioner at the Clinton County Resource Center.

The Administrative Committee has scheduled a public hearing for May 22 from 7:00 to 9:00 p.m. at Ulmer Planetarium at Lock Haven University. Advertising is being planned to promote participation at this public meeting.

Old Business:

Chairman Harger thanked those individuals who were interviewed at the meeting on April 19, 2006 for their participation. Dr. McQuaid asked if follow-up questions can be asked of individuals who have already been interviewed. Chairman Harger noted that additional questions can be asked of any individual interviewee.

New and Continuing Business:

Interviews:

Mr. Donald Walker, Clinton County Coroner and Mr. Richard Kyle, Clinton County Commissioner was present at the meeting to be interviewed on their job functions.

Coroner:

Chairman Harger introduced Mr. Donald Walker, Clinton County Coroner.

Mr. Walker stated the Coroner's responsibility is to investigate the cause and manner of any death in the county including deaths in a hospital or nursing home within 24 hours of admission and any suspicious deaths. The Coroner is also responsible for granting permission for all cremations in the County. This is a State mandate.

Mr. Walker stated the Coroner decides if an autopsy needs to be performed in the investigation of a death. The District Attorney can request the Coroner's Department perform an autopsy but the Coroner makes the final decision. A pathology autopsy is performed at Mount Nittany Medical Center and a forensic autopsy is performed in Allentown. Any blood work and x-rays are performed at Lock Haven Hospital. He stated that autopsies are a major budget expenditure being a couple thousand dollars an autopsy. Approximately 10-25 autopsies are performed yearly.

Mr. Walker stated the Coroner is on call 24 hours a day, seven days a week. He

has a Chief Deputy and three pay-per-call Deputies in his department.

Mr. Walker stated that he does try to cut costs in his department where he can but there is very little he can do to control the need for his services. He stated that a murder in the County is very time-consuming and expensive. Mr. Walker stated he performs his duties as inexpensively as he can without affecting the performance of his department.

Mr. Walker stated his working relationship with the Commissioners and Row Officers is excellent. He stated the Coroner is not on the Salary Board but he feels it is a good mechanism.

Mr. Walker feels there is no need to change the County Code. He stated that the County is geographically represented appropriately and that Row Officers need to be elected. He stated that if Row Officers were not elected the process would get too political.

Mr. Walker stated he is not in favor of a home rule charter. He also stated that initiative and referendum would not be a good tool for the citizens of Clinton County.

Mr. Walker feels the challenges facing Clinton County are taxes, job growth and infrastructure development.

Commissioner:

Chairman Harger introduced Mr. Richard Kyle, Clinton County Commissioner.

Mr. Kyle stated the main function of a Commissioner is leadership and making decisions in the best interest of the electorate of Clinton County. The Board of Commissioners has a full agenda in providing administrative oversight. He feels that you need to have a genuine interest in the future of Clinton County

Mr. Kyle stated he felt the County Code protects the electorate from any Commissioner becoming too powerful. He stated that the Code provides internal checks and balances.

Mr. Kyle is not in favor of a home rule charter. He does not believe there needs to be a separation of administrative and executive powers. He stated that a separation of these powers would result in a lot of talk with very little action being done.

Mr. Kyle stated that the County is controlled by the State and the mandates

handed down by the State legislators. Changing the structure of County government would not change the effect the State mandates have on a County. There is no flexibility to a State mandate. Mr. Kyle stated that 60-70% of the County budget goes to State mandates for Social Services which are Children and Youth Services, Domestic Relations and Adult and Juvenile Probation. Mandates are money allotted and time allotted. Mr. Kyle stated the Commission should review the County Cost Allocation Plan.

The Commission asked if the County has accepted a grant with partial funding that when the funding was withdrawn was the services too costly to the County. Mr. Kyle could not think of any situation like that at this point in time. He did state that when accepting a grant the Board of Commissioners need to look at the overall ramifications of that grant.

Mr. Kyle does not feel there is a need for a County Manager that the Board of Commissioners works well for Clinton County. The Commissioners relationship with the Row Officers is good. Mr. Kyle feels that the Row Officers need to be elected and that the County should keep the local tax collectors. He stated many older citizens like the concept of a local tax collector.

Mr. Kyle stated that the Commissioners cannot interfere with the District Attorney's budget if there is a provision for special prosecution in the budget. If there is not a provision for this than the District Attorney needs to review this with the Commissioners. The State legislator gave the District Attorneys in PA the option to go full time if they felt their County situation required a full time DA. It was noted that the Strategic Plan monitors the high level load for the District Attorney's office.

Mr. Kyle did feel that in searching for additional revenue for the County the possibility of assessing college students a yearly fee should be investigated. He stated that many students are classified as low or moderate income and receive the Public Defender's services through the County.

Mr. Kyle stated that the County does not need a separate Human Resources Department at this time but that could change in the future. He stated that some Counties have a separate Human Resource Department just for Court Services.

Mr. Kyle stated he feels that Clinton County will need to hire a full time CFO in the future. Right now the Fiscal Consultant is working well but that the time will come for a full time CFO. Clinton County has access to Mr. Weiss, Fiscal Consultant, a Senior Accountant and a Junior Accountant and bills the County hourly for services. The group also does work for Northampton and Lehigh Counties.

He feels the CFO should be appointed not elected due to the need for certain

qualifications for this position. The money it would cost to hire a CFO will be well spent on behalf of the citizens. The County Code does not require the Board of Commissioners to hire a CFO that decision is left to the discretion of the Board. A CFO could help in reducing the length of the learning curve for newly elected Commissioners.

The Commission asked if there should be Auditors or a CPA firm. Mr. Kyle stated they perform two different functions. The Auditors audit individual accounts performing checks and balances throughout the year. They perform necessary functions at a low cost. It was noted that a Controller could perform more functions than an Auditor. The audit by the outside CPA firm is required by the State.

The Commission asked if there was a County Residency Rule for the employees. Mr. Kyle stated that there was not but it might be a good idea.

Mr. Kyle stated the Clinton County Prison should be revenue neutral. The increase in starting salaries was needed due to the high turn over rate at the prison. The constant training and educating of employees is very expensive.

The County is self-funded for health insurance in a consortium with three other counties and a fourth county will be joining the consortium.

Mr. Kyle stated that the MIS and GIS Departments are essential to Clinton County. He stated that the hiring of the electrical engineer who is certified in the Novell Network is vital to the growth of Clinton County.

Mr. Kyle does not feel that tax caps are a good idea. He feels a more equitable solution can be found. He stated the County Code does hinder the raising of revenue other than through property taxes.

Mr. Kyle stated that Clinton County is geographically represented. He feels that when you are elected geographically you tend to be too focused on your region.

Mr. Kyle feels that a regional police and fire department would not be good for Clinton County and the citizens would not rally behind this idea.

Mr. Kyle stated that in theory initiatives and referendums are a good idea but in practice they would not work. The general public does not receive enough information to make some of these decisions.

Mr. Kyle stated the challenges to Clinton County are growth and infrastructure development.

PEL Response:

The PEL reported that a home rule charter can provide for county-wide services to be adopted. A municipality has the right to opt out of the regional service if they already have the service.

The PEL stated that the logistics and ground rules for the public hearing on May 22 need to be developed. The Administrative Committee will be completing this at their next meeting. Letters are going to be sent to local clubs, townships, boroughs and cities to send representatives to the hearing.

The PEL pointed out that Mr. Kyle was suggesting that a CFO be appointed due to the need for certain qualifications. They also noted that the Row Officers need certain qualifications too.

The PEL stated that seed monies for mandates do not change with the structure of the County but the way to receive capital can change.

Adjournment:

Dr. McQuaid made a motion to adjourn the meeting at 10:20 p.m. Mr. Hanna seconded the motion.

Deb Day, Secretary
Clinton County Government Study Commission

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