

Clinton County Government Study Commission Meeting
April 5 2006
Minutes

Call To Order:

Chairman Dan Harger called the Commission to order at 7:00 p.m. at the Clinton County Cooperative Resource 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, Ms. June Houser, Dr. Kathleen McQuaid, Mr. Richard Novosel, Mr. Terry O'Connor, Mr. Ernie Renninger, and Mr. Les Robinson. Ms. Coreena Meyer arrived at 7:03 p.m.

Excused was Dr. Robert Wise.

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

Approve Agenda:

Chairman Harger stated that the interview schedule had changes. The Jury Commissioners would be first, followed by the Auditors and then the District Attorney.

Mr. Hanna made a motion to approve the agenda as stated. Mr. Robinson seconded the motion. Ms. Gardner took a roll call vote whereby the motion to approve the April 5, 2006 Agenda was approved unanimously.

Meeting Minutes of March 29, 2006:

Dr. McQuaid made a motion to approve the meeting minutes of March 29, 2006 as presented. Mr. Hanna seconded the motion. Ms. Gardner took roll call vote whereby the motion to approve the March 29, 2006 meeting minutes was approved unanimously.

Reports:

Nothing to report at this time.

Communications:

Mr. Harger stated that he had reported to the Rotary Club the reasons behind the individual Study Commission members not giving presentations at this time. He told the Rotary that any and all members were welcome to attend any of the public meetings held by the Study Commission. The Rotary Club understood the reason for the decision and appreciated receiving a response back to their request.

Old Business:

Ms. Day stated that at the April 12 meeting the Clinton County Chief Clerk and Commissioner Harold Yost will be interviewed. This meeting is taking place at the Clinton County Courthouse. The Study Commission decided that the Commissioners would be interviewed on an individual basis.

New and Continuing Business:

Interviews:

Ms Carleen Leone and Mr. Fran Johnson, Clinton County Jury Commissioners, Ms. Nancy Crissman, Ms. Kay Madden and Mr. Robert Rooney, Clinton County Auditors and Mr. Ted McKnight, Clinton County District Attorney were present at the meeting to be interviewed on their job functions.

Jury Commissioners:

Chairman Harger introduced Ms. Carleen Leone, a long time Jury Commissioner and Mr. Fran Johnson one a newly elected Jury Commissioner. It is required that there be one Jury Commissioner from the Democratic party and one from the Republican party to ensure selection is made in a nonpartisan atmosphere.

The duties of the Jury Commissioners are as follows:

- 1500 names are randomly computer-picked from the voter and motor vehicle registrations files. The Jury Commissioners poll 1200-1300 individuals from the 1500 names pulled for consideration on a jury panel.
- A questionnaire card is sent to the individuals for them to return.
- Address, age and other identifying information is verified.
- The questionnaires are reviewed and sent to Court Administration.

- Reminder cards need to be sent out to the individuals selected.

The Jury Commissioners stated that a new jury is picked every other month. The process of selecting a jury panel takes approximately 5 weeks. The selection process is meticulous work and requires accuracy. There are only the two Jury Commissioners in their department. They do not feel their responsibilities can be performed electronically.

The Jury Commissioners stated that most of their responsibilities require involvement with the Court System of which they have a very good working relationship with the other Court employees. They stated there is very little contact with the County Commissioners.

The Jury Commissioners feel the basic structure of county government works. Mr. Leone stated the biggest challenges to Clinton County are establishing a strong economy and appropriate and adequate communication to the citizens of the County. Statements to the citizens need to be factual not political.

Mr. Leone, who had been a Township Supervisor for many years, stated that he did not find the current structure of the County to inhibit growth. He did point out though that his Township was a small one. Mr. Leone did not see a need for a CFO. He stated you cannot be spending more money than you are taking in. He felt, in principle, that the citizens having the right of initiatives and referendums are a good step. Mr. Leone stated he would like to see a long-range plan for Clinton County.

Auditors:

Chairman Harger introduced Ms. Nancy Crissman, Ms. Kay Madden and Mr. Robert Rooney, Clinton County Auditors. Mr. Rooney is the newest member of the three auditors.

The Auditors duties were reviewed as follows:

- Audit, adjust and balance all accounts for the County.
- Not a decision-making body and they handle no money.
- Perform monthly analyzes of accounts.
- Prepare charts on accounts to show increases and decreases.
- Home visits to tax collectors.
- Yearly audit.
- Yearly visits to the District Justices' offices.
- Each Auditor has there own accounts. There are 40 accounts in Clinton County.
- Auditors are audited yearly by an independent audit firm. This ensures a double-check system.

- Work with a financial advisor as needed.

- Officially and accurately verify all accounts.
- Report to the Department of Economic and Community Development

In the current fiscal year, the auditors were given 167 days by the County Commissioners to complete their tasks. This is a reduction from the previous year.

The Auditors work closely with the Treasurer's office and report directly to the President Judge. Their working relationships with each other and other officers are very good. They have very little contact with the County Commissioners.

The Auditors stated the Chief Clerk oversees and works with the custodian, actuary and financial group that handle the retirement funds.

The three Auditors are the only employees in the office. They have access to CPAs and Accountants if needed. The Auditors feel there is no need for an elected controller or the hiring of a CFO. They are making use of modern technology; accounts are being maintained on a computer spreadsheet.

Mr. Rooney presented a handout which listed several counties including Clinton County, neighboring counties, similar counties to Clinton County and counties with a home rule charter. The listing included the number of employees and salaries for each of these counties in the auditing/fiscal department. It was noted, however, that the duties of an auditing/fiscal department in a home rule county are very different compared to the duties of Clinton County's Auditors.

The Auditors felt that eliminating the individual tax collectors would be beneficial to the County. They also felt that there is adequate geographical representation for all citizens of Clinton County.

Mr. Rooney stated he was in favor of the citizens exercising the right of initiatives and referendums.

District Attorney:

Chairman Harger introduced Mr. Ted McKnight as the District Attorney.

Mr. McKnight stated:

- Safety of Clinton County citizens is the #1 job of the District Attorney.
- The District Attorney is the Chief Law Enforcement Officer for the County.
- The DA prosecutes felonies and misdemeanor in Clinton County.
- The responsibilities have gotten more difficult and time consuming.
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- A Victim's Bill of Rights has been enacted and there is a Victim's Advocate who works full time in the District Attorney's office to help victims in Clinton County. The DA has to conduct business in an ethical and professional manner; doing the right thing for the right reasons.

Mr. Knight feels the County Commissioners have too much control over the budget for the District Attorney's office. He stated that making the District Attorney a full time position actually saved the County money. He feels County costs could have been handled differently. He stated that the County Commissioners fail to recognize that they are not in a position of power over the row officers. Mr. Knight also stated that government cannot be run like a business.

Mr. Knight is not in favor of the citizens having the right of initiative and referendum but that an informed electorate is needed.

Mr. Knight was asked if his budget would be ready for another expensive murder trial. He stated that he reviews the costs of a trial with the Commissioner. The District Attorney's office runs cheaper than a private office. Mr. Knight stated the Public Defender's office has an open checkbook.

Mr. Knight stated he is in favor of a regional police department. He does feel that the position in charge of the regional police department should not be an elected official but a civilian. He stated a regional police force would give better protection to all the citizens of Clinton County.

Chairman Harger thanked the Jury Commissioners, Auditor and District Attorney for their participation in the interviews and service to the County.

Dr. McQuaid requested both the District Attorney and the Auditors who had written statements to please forward the written notes to the Study Commission. It was agreed that the written statements would be emailed to the Commission Secretary.

PEL Response:

The PEL reported that Mr. Lipez, from the local radio station has not contacted them as of this date to schedule a Talk Back program. The PEL asked the Commission Secretary to contact Mr. Lipez for them.

The PEL reported that Doug Hall from the County Commissioners Association is scheduled to attend the May to meeting at the Courthouse. The PEL is still working on a time for home rule charter county representatives to meet with the Study Commission.

The PEL gave the Commission revised questions concerning the issue of

initiatives and referendums. The PEL will be providing the Commission an overview of the information received so far from the Commission's interviews.

Invoice Review:

Mr. O'Connor, Treasurer presented the following invoices for payment:

\$17.75 - Toner
\$22.60 – Express advertising
\$40.35 - Invoice Total

Ms. Day made a motion to approve payment of the invoices totaling \$40.35. Ms. Houser seconded the motion. Ms. Gardner took roll call vote whereby the motion to approve payment of the invoices was passed unanimously.

Public Comment:

Nothing to report.

Comments from Members:

Nothing to report.

Adjournment:

Dr. McQuaid made a motion to adjourn the meeting at 9:40 p.m. Mr. Hanna seconded the motion.

Deb Day, Secretary
Clinton County Government Study Commission

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