

**Clinton County Government Study Commission Meeting**  
**May 24, 2006**  
**Minutes**

**Call To Order:**

Vice-Chairman Mike Hanna 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, Mr. Daniel Harger arrived at 7:45 p.m., Kathleen McQuaid, Ms. Coreena Meyer arrived at 8:11 p.m., Mr. Richard Novosel, Mr. Terry O'Connor, Mr. Ernie Renninger, Mr. Les Robinson and Dr. Robert Wise arrived at 7:10 p.m..

Excused was Ms. June Houser.

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

**Approve Agenda:**

***Mr. Renninger made a motion to approve the agenda as presented. Mr. Robinson seconded the motion. Ms. Gardner took a roll call vote whereby the motion to approve the May 24, 2006 Agenda was approved unanimously.***

**Meeting Minutes of May 17, 2006:**

***Mr. O'Connor made a motion to approve the meeting minutes of May 17, 2006 with the change of contingency to contingent under the Greene County section as requested by Dr. McQuaid. Mr. Robinson seconded the motion. Ms. Gardner took roll call vote whereby the motion to approve the May 17, 2006 minutes was approved unanimously.***

**Reports:**

**Invoice Review:**

Mr. O'Connor presented an invoice for cassette tapes totaling \$9.76.

***Ms. Day made a motion to approve payment of the invoice totaling \$9.76. Mr. Hanna seconded the motion. Ms. Gardner took roll call vote whereby the motion to approve payment of the invoice was passed unanimously.***

**Public Comment:**

Vice Chairman Hanna introduced Steve Poorman a local businessman and concerned citizen. Due to the time limitations at the Public Hearing Mr. Poorman is speaking to the Commission tonight.

Mr. Poorman feels the machine is broken. He stated there is a serious problem with how the County is managed particularly in upper management. Upper management does not have the financial understanding required to make the best decision for Clinton County. Commissioners do not need to be accountants but they do need someone who understands financial reports. He feels the growth in County employees, their healthcare structure and pension fund needs to be investigated. Mr. Poorman stated he has investigated and found the numbers reported by the County officials do not match the actual numbers on paper.

Mr. Poorman reviewed the history behind ACT which was at the forefront of the Study Commission being developed. ACT had offered to the Commissioners to establish a volunteer Citizens Advisory Committee comprised of knowledgeable local leaders to advisory the County leadership. He stated ACT had a detailed list of recommendations for the Commissioners and asked to meet with them with no response from the County leadership. Mr. Poorman acknowledged that there was disagreement on who should be on the Citizens Advisory Committee and that the public did not like the idea of a few non-elected citizens telling the elected citizens what to do.

Overview of statements as follows:

- Commissioners kept saying the County finances were fine when they were not.
- County salaries when up significantly when the average citizen's wage in Clinton County did not.
- Not getting enough bang for our buck in upper management: Could hire a CEO, 2 CPAs and a full time lawyer for what the County is spending.
- Clinton County has the 13<sup>th</sup> lowest population and the 26<sup>th</sup> highest salaries.
- Need to utilize business methods in operating the County.
- Deficit blamed on litigation.
- Commissioners need to be full time not running a personal business on the side.
- Commissioners need a mandatory amount of time in the office.
- Performance evaluations need to be performed on County employees; raises were given without an evaluation.

- Role back County salaries.
- Establish an operating reserve fund.
- Use accrual accounting.
- System is at fault for County government not working.
- Clinton County offices need to be open Wednesday afternoons or on Saturday mornings; only County to close on Wednesday afternoons.
- There is not enough good communication with the citizens.
- Commissioners do not encourage participation by the citizens.
- District Attorney needs to be full time.
- Do not use attorneys from outside the County.
- Reduce health care insurance costs.
- Explore privatization of the prison operations; private company will operate more efficiently than the government.
- Sell golf course.
- Explore selling Susque-View.
- Get reserve back from Solid Waste Authority.
- County needs to consolidate spaces; maintenance of all the County property will come into play in the future.

Mr. Poorman feels the District Attorney and the murder trials are being improperly blamed for the budget deficit. He reviewed the history of the County suing itself twice due to not wanting the District Attorney to hire an additional attorney for the murder trials. He hired a litigator instead of mediator, lost the case, appealed the decision and lost again.

Mr. Poorman stated the opening of the County employees' union contract was unnecessarily. No one opens up a contract to increase wages. Rational given by the Commissioner is bizarre. County employees are not underpaid as stated by the County leadership.

Mr. Poorman feels the Commissioners do not communicate the citizens. Usually the citizens find out after the fact. He also feels that they retaliate against citizens who speak out against the County government. Politics is getting in the way of rational thinking needed to operate a successful business. He stated there is too much political force in the running of the County. Commissioners are elected on a popularity contest. Clinton County has elected Commissioners who have filed for bankruptcy and run their businesses into the ground. The Commission noted that a home rule charter can require qualifications for row officers.

Dr. McQuaid stated Mr. Poorman is engaging in a personal attack of the Commissioners. Vice Chairman Hanna warned Mr. Poorman not to engage in any personal attacks; he is being borderline right now.

Mr. Poorman stated the voters overwhelming felt there is a need to change. The 36% increase in taxes could have been the last straw. Over the last 7-8 years the County leadership has made many strange decisions. Mr. Poorman stated the Study Commission has a hard task. It is always hard to change and make difficult, tough decisions.

Dr. McQuaid asked Mr. Poorman to provide the Commission Members with the name of his firm, some background and a list of clients. She asked him why he wanted to speak at tonight's meeting when there had been ample time at the public hearing he attended. Mr. Poorman responded that he did not have all the information gathered together for the hearing that he is reviewing at this meeting. He stated he has done work in real estate development, cancer care companies, Charlie Chips, Gibbles, DEP, Department of Revenue, cities, townships and boroughs.

Mr. Poorman stated he was involved with investors looking at buying the prison in Greene County. The project turned out to be more expensive than either side wanted. Mr. Hanna asked if he private-run prisons have the same employee turn around rate as ours does. Mr. Poorman stated he did not know but that private prisons cost less to run. Dr. McQuaid stated studies show the same turn around rate for private and public prisons.

Mr. Robinson asked Mr. Poorman how he would restructure the County government. Mr. Poorman stated he feels too strongly to make impartial decisions on this but there does need to be professional management and oversight of elected officials. Mr. Poorman noted that good ideas have been presented for both sides of the fence. Mr. Poorman stated how are homeowners and the elderly with median incomes going to keep paying for all this. The County government needs to be held accountable.

Mr. O'Connor stated that we need to be careful merging business with government. Mr. Poorman stated that what he really means is using the techniques of business to run the County. Business should not influence the government but their practices should be used to run the government. Mr. Poorman stated government needs to be more imaginative.

Mr. Poorman noted that the County does have good people but that he has found that 80% of the time when an organization fails it is due to upper management. He stated the Commissioners need CPAs and advisors to look into the numbers before decisions are made.

It was noted by several Commission Members that the Commissioners do put in a lot of time in running the County government. The Commission asked is shorter terms might be the answer. Mr. Poorman did not think so due to the two year

learning curve for Commissioners. It was suggested that maybe more Commissioners would be the answer due to the dissipation of power.

The Commission asked Mr. Poorman about the homeowner reassessment. He stated that reassessment is just another tax increase; the only real issue is whether to perform the reassessment inhouse or with an outside firm.

Mr. Richard Morris remarked on the following:

- Commissioners do work full time.
- Popular will always get elected,
- Allegheny County has sued itself 9 times.
- Private prisons do not work in Britain; be careful.
- County Home is a refuge of last resort.
  - How do you replenish an operating reserve if you use it; tax increase waiting to happen.

Mr. Harger asked Mr. Morris that if the Commission delivers decent ideas on how to improve the County government is he willing to consider them. Mr. Morris stated yes.

Mr. Alan Black asked if the Express was notified of Mr. Poorman speaking tonight; they should have been notified. It was noted that Mr. Poorman speaking here tonight was finalized at the last moment and that the Express was aware that a Commission Meeting was being held on this date. Some Commission members had concerns that they were not notified ahead of time either.

Mr. Black believes you cannot compare the cities of Williamsport and Lock Haven. Mr. Poorman noted they both are 3<sup>rd</sup> class cities.

Mr. Black suggested again interview Jeff Weiss, Clinton County financial advisor.

### **Communication:**

Ms. Day reported that a site visit to Lehigh County has been scheduled for June 8, 2006 for 10:00 a.m. Any Commission Members who would like to participate in the site visit should contact Ms. Day.

### **New and Continuing Business:**

Mr. Harger thanked Dr. McQuaid for setting up Ulmer Planetarium for the public hearing.

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Mr. O'Connor noted that presenting our findings to the average citizen of Clinton County is going to be a big task for the Commission. It was noted that 18 people attended the first public hearing and 8 attended in Renovo.

Mr. Hanna has emailed the PEL specific questions which were tabled until the next meeting. Also the readings of the written comments from the public were tabled until the next meeting.

The next three meetings will be used to focus on the opportunities and needs of Clinton County government. The PEL noted that most of Mr. Poorman's comments were political issues not structural. It appears there needs to be a separation of power and checks and balances.

The PEL reviewed the timeline for making a decision and the further time involved depending on what the decision the Study Commission makes for the future of Clinton County.

Mr. Harger noted there still is time for additional interviews. It was once again suggested that the Director of Social Service Programs should be interviewed.

The PEL told the Commission Members to get focused, put together items to change or not to change, what additional information you need to make an informed decision and look at what you yourself thinks at this point in time about the County government.

**Adjournment:**

**Mr. O'Connor made a motion to adjourn the meeting at 9:26 p.m. Dr. McQuaid seconded the motion.**

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Deb Day, Secretary  
Clinton County Government Study Commission

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