



DAUPHIN COUNTY BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS

WORKSHOP MEETING

TUESDAY, AUGUST 19, 2003 (10:00 A.M.)

MEMBERS PRESENT

Jeff Haste, Chairman
Lowman Henry, Vice Chairman

MEMBER ABSENT

Anthony M. Petrucci, Secretary

STAFF PRESENT

Robert Burns, Chief Clerk; Julia E. Nace, Assistant Chief Clerk; Bill Tully, Esq., Solicitor; Marie Rebeck, Controller; Robert Dick, Treasurer; Phil Spaseff, Recorder of Deeds; Bruce Foreman, Esq., Solicitor's Office; Carolyn Thompson, Court Administrator; Richie Martz, Executive Assistant; Kacey Truax, Executive Assistant; Jane Gordon, Executive Assistant; Gary Serhan, Deputy Controller; Diane McNaughton, Communications; Jennifer Kocher, Communications; Faye Fisher, Personnel Director; Edgar Cohen, Director of Facility Maintenance; Randy Baratucci, Purchasing Director; Garry Esworthy, Risk Manager; Melanie McCaffrey, Solicitor's Office; Greg Schneider, Budget & Finance; Jim Albert, Commissioners' Office; Deb Clayton, Grant Writer; Mike Pries, Director of Safety & Security; Kelly Wolf, Solid Waste; Yvonne Fuhrman, Solid Waste; Steve Chiavetta, Director of Registration & Elections; Barry Wyrick, Director of MH/MR; Sharon Ludwig, Personnel; Sue Pinti, Human Services; Steve Howe, Director of Tax Assessment/Tax Claim

GUESTS PRESENT

Andrew Dowling, Esq.; Loretta Barbee-Dare; Sharon Manton

MINUTES

CALL TO ORDER

Mr. Haste, Chairman of the Board, called the meeting to order at 10:00 a.m.

MOMENT OF SILENCE

Everyone observed a moment of silence

PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE

Everyone stood for the Pledge of Allegiance

APPROVAL OF MINUTES

Mr. Haste: We have for review the July 22, 2003 Legislative Meeting Minutes, July 22, 2003 Salary Board Meeting Minutes and the August 7, 2003 Workshop Meeting Minutes that we will entertain next week.

ELECTION BOARD

Mr. Haste: At this time I will turn the gavel over to the Chairman of the Election Board.

(The Minutes of the Election Board Meeting are on file in the Commissioners' Office.)

PUBLIC PARTICIPATION

Mr. Haste: We are at the point in time in our meeting for public participation. Is there anyone in the audience that would like to address the Board at this time? Hearing none we'll move onto the Personnel Packet.

PERSONNEL

Ms. Fisher: Good morning, Commissioners. There are several Salary Board items in today's packet. The first three are eliminating three secretary I positions in the Solicitor's and Chief Clerk's Offices. Then we have several Salary Board transactions for Emergency Management. There are several reclassifications. I won't go into each of them but if there are any questions, that I could possibly answer, I will try to do so. All the reclassifications for EMA have been approved by Commissioner Haste.

Mr. Haste: Mike was looking at his whole operation out there and came through with several recommendations on trying to improve his operations since he's going to have at least one if not two key retirements this year. Are there any questions for Faye?

Ms. Fisher: Moving onto the workshop agenda vacancy listing, there is one position listed under the vacancies approved by the President Judge that I would ask the Board to vote on and approve today. That is for a Judicial Law Clerk position. Then we have a new hire filling this position effective August 25, 2003. Commissioner Haste, this is the one that you okayed for the Board to vote on and approve today.

Mr. Haste: Please refresh my memory. I don't recall this one.

Ms. Fisher: This is the one that Richie asked you about last Wednesday or so. Just so that this new hire can begin employment on August 25th.

Mr. Haste: Where is this position at?

Ms. Fisher: Judge Bratton's Office.

Mr. Haste: He's without someone right now.

Mrs. Thompson: His law clerk is finishing on Friday.

Mr. Haste: Right, I remember now.

Ms. Fisher: The new hire to fill this position is listed on the workshop agenda new hires listing #1. So if we could ask the Board to vote on those two items.

Mr. Haste: Is there a motion?

Mr. Henry: So moved.

Mr. Haste: I'll second. All those in favor say, aye.

All: Aye.

Mr. Haste: Motion carries.

TRAINING PACKET

Mr. Burns: Commissioners, there are twelve items. It's requested that the Board consider approving items #1 & 2 today due to the dates of the events.

Mr. Haste: Are there any questions for Bob on the training packet? Is there a motion to approve items #1 & 2?

Mr. Henry: So moved.

Mr. Haste: I'll second. All those in favor say, aye.

All: Aye.

Mr. Haste: Motion carries.

PURCHASE ORDERS

Mr. Baratucci: You all should have received your purchase order packet yesterday. There are no additions or changes at this point. There are just a few budget items that I will review with Mike Yohe when he gets back tomorrow. We'll get those corrected for next week. If you have any questions, I'll be happy to answer them otherwise it is there for your consideration for next Tuesday.

Mr. Haste: Are there any questions for Randy?

DIRECTORS

Mr. Haste: Are there any Directors that would like to address the Board at this time? Seeing none we'll move onto Items for Discussion.

ITEMS FOR DISCUSSION

Mr. Haste: We have items A through F. I see item A needs to be voted on today. I know we have some folks, Steve Howe and the Treasurer, are prepared to have a discussion on Item F.

- A. Approval of the August 11, 2003 letter to the Controller from the County Solicitor that reiterates the Commissioners contractual obligation as stated in the Agreement of March 31, 2003 between the County and Buchart-Horn, Inc.
(*NEEDS VOTED ON 8/19/03)**
- B. Application for federal assistance for a Family Group Decision Making Conference (FGDMF) to the Dept. of Health and Human Services for the Dauphin County Human Services Agency.
- C. Change Order #131 with L. R. Costanzo Co., Inc. for Courthouse renovations in the not to exceed amt. of \$19,838.86.
- D. Appoint Gene Joy to the Children & Youth Advisory Board.
- E. Dauphin County Mental Health/Mental Retardation Program Mental Health Annual Plan for FY04/05.
- F. Discussion of tax bills which were mailed to Harrisburg City residents and have been returned by post office to County Treasurer.

Mr. Haste: Item A, Bob.

Mr. Burns: Item A is a letter that the Solicitor has prepared for the Controller just reiterating the contractual obligations with the construction manager. The Solicitor has asked that the Board authorize that the letter be sent to the Controller.

Mr. Haste: Bill do you have anything?

Mr. Tully: There was some concern as to the wording of the contract resolution before. The Controller was concerned as to whether that was a mandate from the Board of Commissioners to pay for the disputed construction on the front of the Courthouse which was later changed and removed. So they need direction from the Board as to whether that should be paid or not. That would resolve the outstanding dispute with Buchart Horn.

Mr. Haste: Are there any questions for Bill? Is there a motion?

Mr. Henry: Motion that we approve Item A.

Mr. Haste: I'll second. Discussion? All those in favor say, aye.

All: Aye.

Mr. Haste: Motion carries. Do you wish any discussion on Items B through E?

Mr. Henry: No.

Mr. Haste: Item F. Steve would you please come forward? We'll vote on this next week but I think we need to discuss it. It has come to my attention that there have been numerous phone calls to Bob Burns. Bob, do you want to brief us on what has been going on.

Mr. Burns: I've gotten a lot of calls, Commissioner, and I've talked to Treasurer Bob Dick and Steve Howe, from taxpayers in the city who have received their tax bills recently and they are now in the penalty period. In essence they are asking the Board to allow them to pay at either the discount rate or the flat rate. Their bills were mailed, I understand on or about February 1st as they always are by the County. For whatever reasons the property owners didn't receive them most likely probably because they moved. The bills came back to the County and Treasurer Dick ultimately tracked down their current address and remailed it. But, as I said, they are now in the penalty phase and the taxpayers are asking the Board for some relief. Many of them take the position that they did notify the post office that they moved. They feel they did everything they needed to do. It is now before the Board to see if there is any consensus on what position the Commissioners would like to take.

Mr. Howe: Let me give you a brief history on the process of the tax bill mailing. We, the County, contract with a mail specialty company and a printing company, being Gamcon, to produce all of our tax bills in conjunction with a cooperative agreement with the

municipalities. The municipal bill and the county bill are all included on the same tax bill. For postage savings reasons, we mail those on a bulk basis and rely on the recommendations of Gamcon as to how we do that mailing. Typically, mailing costs on our letters is 37 cents. Because of the agreements that we have with all the municipalities and the bulk rates we get for postage purposed from the post office, we mail tax bills somewhere in the neighborhood of between 26 & 27 cents per envelope rather than the typical 37 cents because of the bulk rate. We receive a considerable savings which we are able to pass along to the taxing authorities. As part of that process, there are various orders that you can place on the envelope for the post office to follow in the event that there is an address change. In these particular cases, in past years the post office has always been instructed to basically forward the piece, whatever the mail piece is, to the proper owner or to the owner of the addressee at whatever current address the post office has on record. In order for us and all of our tax collectors to maintain accurate information as far as mailing addresses are concerned we then ask the post office to send us or all the tax collectors back a three by five post card that basically says here's the change of address that we have on file in order to update our records. For that process, we pay in the neighborhood of 50 cents per piece for that to come back to the individual tax collectors. Gamcon recommended for 2002 billing purposes that we make this particular change. We didn't get it implemented because we had a tremendous amount of envelopes left over from prior year billings. So, we did not make the change in 2002 but we were able to implement it for 2003. That change was simply a direction on the envelope that said to the post office "return the envelope to the tax collector with a sticker or a label attached to the envelope giving the new address that the post office has as a forwarding address." Then it became the responsibility of the tax collector who received the piece back to re-mail it for whatever the mailing charges are. Particularly 37 cents rather than 50 cents for the post card that we got back from the post office. I don't know any further detail as to how Treasurer Dick's office performed. I'm not privy to that information. I know all the other tax collectors when they got these pieces back in February would simply readdress the envelope with the proper address to the property owner, stick it back and mail it at 37 cents and that was the end of it. For whatever reason I don't know what Mr. Dick's explanation is and I have to accept that. This didn't get done in the Treasurer's office until sometime mid July. That caused the property owner not to receive their tax bill until sometime around the beginning of August. As you know the discount period for taxes is February-March, the flat period is April-May, 5% penalty is June-July, and 10% penalty is August through the end of December. That raises the question that is being brought to Mr. Burns as to why these folks are not able to pay their tax bill in the flat or discount period when they have just now received it for the first time in August.

My recommendation would probably be in order to quickly resolve the situation is that if someone brings to the Treasurer or any of the tax collectors the question of why I just got my tax bill with that explanation, the tax collector surely knew they just mailed it because they are obligated to send to us a change of address form that's dated. So, they have already completed hopefully the change of address form that they'll have some record of. They know when they re-mailed that piece, they would simply be

instructed to accept the payment at whatever you would choose, the flat or discount amount.

Mr. Dick: Mr. Howe is right that on the envelope it had returned service requested which was different from previous years which did come back to us. We had approximately out of the 20,000 mailed out 2,500 returned to us. There were some addresses that you cannot find. The people have moved and we can't find them at all. This has happened year after year. As you know a new system was instituted. It was not a trial and error system. We had to live with it. There were some bugs to be worked out which we worked out. We were short one person and Mr. Howe loaned us Hillary Wenrick who ultimately I hired. I'm not sure that Mr. Howe was real happy with that but she is a good worker. She has done a bang up job in the office.

Mr. Howe: So much for interdepartmental cooperation.

Mr. Haste: She still works for the County, we are all one family.

Mr. Dick: This system that is in requires us to scan the bills first before the money is even deposited. In the event that there is a large check such as a three or five million dollar check we deposit it and then go ahead and scan the bills and if there are adjustments to be made, we make them. In the past because we process the taxes for the other 39 tax collectors, we took their word for it and then made adjustments later on after the bills were scanned. Usually they were finished by the end of July beginning of August. That did not happen this year because of the new system that made us scan the bills first even before the money was deposited. So there was a very, very heavy workload. When we got around to it and some people take offense to that, that's when we started going through the 2,500 envelopes to determine which addresses we could find. Be reminded of something, this one is 4717, if something was printed 4771 the post office would send it back for whatever reason they would not forward it. We have to search out and try to find those people. Well we are just now getting around to that because of the heavy workload. Yes, there are a lot of phone calls that I referred to Bob and the Commissioners' office hoping we would get some sort of discussion that we have going today to make a determination what to do in the future.

I don't have the authority as you know to take it in a discount or flat if it is in a penalty phase. I must take the current payment. That's why I referred it back to the Commissioners' Office and the Chief Clerk.

Mr. Burns: Is that by law or policy?

Mr. Dick: That's by law.

Mr. Burns: I guess then the question would be, can the Board change that? Can they give you the right to accept the discounted payment or flat fee if it is in the penalty?

Mr. Dick: I believe the Commissioners can for extraordinary circumstances which of course, I think this is.

Mr. Haste: It sounds like in your explanation one of the reasons that you did this was to try to save some funds, 37 cents versus 50 cents.

Mr. Howe: Correct.

Mr. Haste: What type of savings are we talking about?

Mr. Howe: I'm not prepared to tell you that. It's 13 cents per item. If Mr. Dick receives back 2,500, I'm sure the tax collectors, the other 39, probably receive an equal number in total. So if we get 5,000 pieces back, were probably talking about \$700-800. In the cooperative billing agreement that we have with all the municipalities, it's our obligation as the County and I guess my ultimate obligation to try to keep those costs down as much as we can with the municipalities. In being able to mail at whatever postage savings that we can do, that's where we receive the tremendous amount of savings. We are actually able to mail each individual municipality's bill for them on their behalf including their tax for around 50 cents per item. The reason we can do that, print the tax, provide all the accounting services to the municipalities, as well as supplies, for 50 cents is because we get that tremendous savings by doing the postage as we do it.

Mr. Haste: Only thing that I would ask is, is the \$700 worth not getting.....I don't know where this puts us with the collection rate. Although, I guess if you delay it you have it in the flat you're getting a little bit more than the discount, but I think if we could before next week before we make a decision on it, Mr. Tully, if you could take a look and see what we can and can't do as a Board. But for next year I think we need to do one of two things, either we need to go back to the address service requested. \$700 doesn't seem like a whole lot of savings for the headaches that we have. Or we need to plan when these come back and we know that we've had this experience that 2,500 could come back, that we have staff available as they come back whether it's the Treasurer's Office or somewhere else, I don't really care who it is, because we all have an obligation to get that back in, that we have the staff available so they get put out right away.

Mr. Howe: To my knowledge this has never been a problem with any of the other tax collectors. It's never come up in any of the discussions.

Mr. Haste: I can understand because they don't have the volume.

Mr. Howe: They don't have the volume of what the Treasurer's Office does.

Mr. Haste: I think that becomes the issue.....the volume and how do we deal with that. Do we deal with it right up front and go back to the address service requested or do we have staff available to make sure they get out immediately. I guess as we approach next year's budget and planning process we need to have that resolved.

Mr. Dick: On this system some of the tax collectors were suppose to scan their own bills. That was the initial thought which didn't happen this year. If it's in place next year, Steve, that would help at least the tax collectors. It won't help my office with the city bills.

Mr. Howe: It wouldn't help with the city bills. It would help though the overall volume that your office receives from the tax collectors from what they've collected. We'll look at that. The only other consideration that we need to allow for is regardless of your decision the post office changes it's rules and regulations on almost a daily basis. I don't know if that other service is still available. That may be one of the other reasons that the recommendation of Gamcon was to make the change. I will have to check with those folks. We don't in our office attempt to keep up with the postage regulations at all. That's a professional's job. I can't keep up with the regulations. We would need to make that inquiry of Gamcon to see if that service is still available.

Mr. Haste: You sort of have an inside track there, do you know?

Mr. Dick: I think it is available, the address request. If you put nothing on the envelope, at least it would be forwarded to the current address. But then we would not...

Mr. Haste: Then you wouldn't know the current address though.

Mr. Dick: This could go on year after year after year.

Mr. Howe: We found when we started this about 15 years ago, if not a little longer, there had been no process in place to get current addresses from the post office for forwarding purposes. We have addresses and mailing bills that were 20 years old that had never been updated. So when we did this first process, we got a tremendous number of address corrections back from the post office. It was well worth the money at that point for whatever we spent. Now as postal regulations change, I don't know what the cost is per card back any more. I'm sure it's not 50 cents. There was a tremendous increase in rates for other than first class postage also. Those are things we have to look at.

Mr. Haste: Either way we need to have this resolved for next year whether we do it on the envelope or whether we have staff available. Is there anything else?

SOLICITOR'S REPORT

Mr. Tully: No changes since the final report submitted yesterday.

Mr. Haste: Are there any questions for Bill?

COMMISSIONERS' COMMENTS

Mr. Haste: Is there anything that you would like to bring up at this time?

Mr. Henry: Not I.

PUBLIC PARTICIPATION

Mr. Haste: This is the last opportunity for the public and alumni to address the Board.

ADJOURNMENT

Mr. Haste: Is there a motion to adjourn.

Mr. Henry: So moved.

Mr. Haste: Second. All those in favor say, aye.

All: Aye.

Mr. Haste: The meeting is adjourned.

Respectfully submitted,

Robert Burns, Chief Clerk/Chief of Staff

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