



BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS' WORK SESSION

Thursday, June 11, 2020, 5:00 P.M.

Virtual Meeting – BlueJeans

The Board of Commissioners held a public work session to the COVID-19 County Relief Block Grant application. Commissioner Michael Pipe convened the meeting at 5:00 PM on Thursday, June 11, 2020.

In attendance were Commissioner Michael Pipe, Commissioner Mark Higgins, Commissioner Steven Dershem, Administrator Margaret Gray, and Executive Office Supervisor Natalie Smith.

The Department of Community and Economic Development (DCED) released guidelines for the COVID-19 County Relief Block Grant (CRBG) program. The application is due on Tuesday, June 16, 2020 and Centre County is eligible for up to \$14,664,804 in grant funding. As recommended by the County Solicitor, Elizabeth Dupuis, the Board issued a press release announcing work session meetings to discuss the application and funding allocations. A legal notice is prepared for advertisement in the Centre Daily Times in accordance with the Sunshine Law. It was the consensus of the Board to advertise the meetings on Monday, June 15 at 1PM, Tuesday, June 16 at 10 AM and 4 PM.

In the absence of guidance, Administrator Margaret Gray has had limited conversation with individuals regarding expenditure of funds for expenses and services related to COVID-19. She has asked Director of Financial Management Tom Martin and Risk Manager Krista Davis to be forward thinking about expenses and funding opportunities.

Commissioner Pipe asked Commissioner Higgins for his thoughts about economic development. Commissioner Higgins announced that he has been working with the Centre County Planning Office to submit a grant request to create a loan pool for local businesses. It would require a 20% match which could be fulfilled through staff time. More broadly, he proposed grants for internal expenses, broadband expansion to rural areas, and small businesses of 100 employees or less. Another suggestion was to help restaurants build a street scape environment where they can serve customers outside. Commissioner Higgins spoke with the Penn State SBDC who may be willing to work with the County to assist with a grant pool. He also had conversations with the Moshannon Valley Economic Development Partnership and the Bellefonte Intervalley Chamber of Commerce. Small Business Development Centers can also receive funding and there are a variety of small business supports that the County could give.

Commissioner Dershem learned in conversations with Senator Corman's Office that the application is short and does not need to be highly detailed if it includes general information about how the County would allocate funding. He would like to consider personal protective equipment (PPE) for the County, nursing homes, and the hospital. For immediate expenses, Commissioner Dershem suggested contacting the municipalities to see what expenses they have incurred. With only a few days, the Board will not be able to get enough feedback from the community. Provided there is a general overview, more specific allocations can be made

after the County has the opportunity to further consider options. Commissioner Pipe agreed to submit a general application with some content, but will not include too much detail.

Commissioner Pipe suggested that Margaret coordinate with Director of Emergency Management Jeff Wharran to determine what types of PPE can be purchased. Margaret asked if this would include Penn State University. To help everyone succeed, Commissioner Dershem would like to provide PPE to anyone who needs it. A portion of this funding is received due to the student population and Commissioner Pipe is open to assisting the University through a donation or allocation. People have yet to recover from expenditures and Margaret noted other PPE expenses such as hand sanitizer, disinfecting wipes, masks and face shields. South Hills and CPI will also have PPE needs. Commissioner Dershem agreed that Centre County cannot buy too much and extra supplies can be placed in storage for future use. In addition to higher education, Commissioner Pipe stressed the importance of day cares. The Board agreed for Administrator Margaret Gray to contact each of the 35 municipalities to understand their projected expenses and what they have already spent related to COVID-19.

Commissioner Dershem suggested looking at the grant allocations based on category: municipalities, businesses, tourism, healthcare, etc. How much should be spent on each? The County is allowed \$200,000 for grant administration. Margaret suggested an additional person help Director of Financial Management Tom Martin to manage the expenditures of this grant.

The Commonwealth gave \$2.6 billion in funding; Commissioner Pipe explained that counties received \$625,000,000, school districts received \$150,000,000, higher education received \$72,000,000 and child care services received \$116,000,000. The county should be mindful of overlap in the county's distribution of funds.

For the application on Tuesday, Margaret proposed designating a percentage of the funding to each category. Commissioner Higgins does not expect local businesses to receive much of the State funding through CDFI's.

Administrator Margaret Gray left the meeting.

To make an impact, Commissioner Higgins recommended an allocation of \$8 to 10 million for economic development, small businesses, and tourism. For an expenditure such as behavioral health, he expressed concern about the ability to purchase services before December 30, 2020. Commissioner Dershem suggested about half of the county's allocation and agreed to \$7 million, saying the County response and planning is important and should not be overlooked. Commissioner Pipe would like to take care of those expenses and plan for the rest of the year, as it will help bring employees back. He was not comfortable with \$7 million so Commissioner Dershem suggested \$5 million, leaving \$3 million for municipalities and \$1 million for PPE. He then questioned what the Board should be considering but has not yet discussed.

Commissioner Higgins asked the Board about the expense of contact tracing and who will coordinate it. Commissioner Pipe noted that Margaret participated in a call earlier this week with the Department of Health who will start coordinating for counties without health departments.

Business costs, PPE costs and municipalities will be the larger allocations with broadband and MH/ID being a smaller allocation.

Commissioner Higgins projected \$2 million for municipalities, \$5 million for economic development and tourism, \$500K for behavioral health and broadband combined, and \$1 million in PPE, totaling about \$8.5 million. Commissioner Dershem noted that Centre Volunteers in Medicine may be able to use testing supplies or diagnostic equipment if they are an allowable organization.

Regarding the Grange Fair, Commissioner Pipe contacted DCED about ways to spend money on a fair that was cancelled in 2020. If the Fair advertised and paid administrative costs in preparation for the fair, funds could be used to reimburse those stranded costs. The Board may be able to create a line item for stranded costs in the tourism industry, but funds could not be used for lost revenues.

Commissioner Pipe suggested that funds could be donated to organizations that are already providing additional services for COVID-19.

In summary, Commissioner Pipe reviewed the proposed allocations of \$2,000,000 for administration, \$500,000 combined for behavioral health and broadband, \$1,000,000 in PPE, \$2,000,000 for municipalities, and \$5,000,000 for economic development, small businesses, and tourism.

On a motion by Commissioner Higgins, seconded by Commissioner Dershem, the Board voted unanimously to adjourn the meeting at 6:33 PM.

Respectfully Submitted,

Natalie Smith,
Executive Office Supervisor
Commissioners' Office