

Regular Meeting #12 - 2020
Fairfield County Commissioners' Office
March 16, 2020

Emergency Meeting re: County Operations During the COVID-19 Pandemic

The Commissioners met at 9:00 a.m. to hold an emergency meeting to discuss county operations during the COVID-19 pandemic. Commissioner Levacy called the meeting to order with the following Commissioners present: Jeff Fix and Dave Levacy. Also present were Carri Brown, Rachel Elsea, Sheriff Phalen, Park Russell, Tiffany Nash, Judge Dave Landefeld, Dennis Keller, Jeremiah Upp, Branden Meyer, Valeda Slone, Rick Szabrak, Aunie Cordle, Jon Slater, David Uhl, Kyle Witt, Joshua Horacek, Jim Bahnsen, Judge Berens, Michael Kaper, Lisa McKenzie, Chief Lape, Sgt Collins, Tony Vogel, Todd McCullough, Judge Fields, Nikki Drake, Kelly Turben, Val Carpico, Jeff Barron, David Miller, Judge Vandervoort, Jackie Long, Loudan Klein, James Mako, Michael Orlando, Tom Lininger, Chris Wagner, Ginger Caito, Jake Tharp, Tony Ashton, and Judge Laura Smith.

Commissioner Levacy opened the meeting and welcomed everyone. Commissioner Davis was not able to attend the meeting although he wanted to attend very much.

Commissioner Levacy stated we are experiencing historic times with a pandemic.

Our Governor is demonstrating exceptional leadership. He is a national leader, setting the stage for many others. We are appreciative of Dr. Acton and the Ohio Department of Health. The President is also taking the pandemic seriously.

We need to heed the advice of the medical community.

Commissioner Fix stated we are in uncharted territory and he appreciated the cooperation of so many elected officials and department heads.

Ms. Nash for the Fairfield County Department of Health provided an update. She said that information is changing hourly. Last night, there were 361 cases under investigation with 140 negative tests and 37 confirmed cases. There are 21 persons under investigation in Fairfield County; there are 2 negative tests, no positive tests.

The Health Department is working with Jon Kochis, EMA Director, and FMC to make sure numbers are reported quickly and accurately. The Ohio Department of Health lab has limited testing but did get more agents to test.

We are all cooperating and collaborating as much as possible to promote health and safety.

It is in that spirit that we are acting today, with a plan effective March 18 and through April 8, as detailed in the attached executive summary and memorandum. We are giving the public a notice so that they are aware of buildings that are closed and how call in and online methods of service are promoted. We will place all information on our website and in social media.

We will be certain to communicate often with employees and supervisors.

The courts will be able to meet their constitutional responsibilities with the plan.

Law enforcement remains open. The Board of Elections remains open.

Other offices are closed to the general public and are providing services using technology and telephones.

The Sheriff indicated his concern was making sure there is not a problem in the jail with the inmates. He reviewed plans in place to limit contact.

According to Judge Fields, the judges have met with law enforcement. Law enforcement will take temperatures before arrests and transport to FMC if necessary. They will ticket non-violent crimes. The concern is with violent offenders, and the jail has a plan for this. Traffic flows in and out of the courts are waived. Jury trials have been postponed until April 21st. Drug testing has been stretched out to once a week.

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Judge Berens highlighted the measures taken by the county courts. Jury and bench trials are postponed through April 8th. Three trials will be done on the phone. They will take a second look at probationers and inmates to see if anyone can be released on a recognizance bond.

Judge Vandervoort reported everything is being done electronically (or by phone) that can be done as such. There are no juveniles in detention. Probation follow ups will be done by the phone.

Mr. Russell reported the work of Veterans Service is connected with the VA, which is open. The hospitals will limit activity which will decrease transportation services. There are steps in place to check those who are entering the building, such as observation of symptoms. They are going to use social distancing as much as possible.

Facilities is supporting all offices to make sure they have the information and supplies they need.

Service Master will continue to step up their cleanings including fogging of higher trafficked areas.

Mr. Upp stated the Engineer's Office is closed with doors locked except for scheduled appointments. This is not a big interruption because they do not a lot of foot traffic at this time of the year. He has reviewed and relaxed sick and vacation policies with staff, and that has been greatly appreciated.

Mr. Meyer reported that both title offices are closed, and they continue to work on plans for the courthouse, as far as providing services. The title offices will still do title work for dealers.

Economic Development is gathering a list of all restaurants still taking carryout and will advertise that. They are being supportive of businesses and helping to compile a list of resources.

Ms. Cordle reported they are doing a lot of the same things as others and are trying to overcome hurdles with teleworking for people. This is complicated because of multiple state supported systems in use. They are working on place a phone outside of the building for customers to use, as well. There are very few pay phones in the area.

Judge Vandervoort added the Guardianship Services Board have ceased face to face contact during this time.

Mr. Slater stated the office has met and is focusing on payroll and internal work. IT can be a challenge depending on how much work and resources are needed to facilitate working at home. Externally, there is a hard deadline on tax appeals for March 31st. They will determine how to do schedule those by appointment. They have asked the Tax Commissioner for permission to accept those electronically.

Mr. Pekar stated that all locations have limited access. They are switching over as much as possible to alternative work sites. Tomorrow's board meeting has been moved to a teleconference and will be livestreamed. They are also asking for an emergency resolution to authorize Mr. Pekar to take certain actions.

Mr. Witt emphasized the priority is public safety. They are taking steps to minimize the jail population. They will limit foot traffic and allow work from home. Mr. Horacek stated that Mr. Lininger, Ms. Brown-Thompson, and he are available for assistance.

From a legal opinion last year, Dr. Brown reminded everyone that should only one Commissioner be available, the County Coroner can serve in the role of County Commissioner on a temporary basis.

Mr. Bahnsen stated that the first-class collections are finished so there is no need for payments en masse at this time. He does not believe they are equipped to handle cash. They have contacted the bank to see if charges can be waived for bank checks; he stated he knew banks were having leadership meetings to see if they will keep lobbies open.

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Dr. Brown stated the CSEA will accept cash for child support payments at the Chestnut Street Payment Center. They will not turn the cash away for families at this time, for as long the Chestnut Street Payment Center can stay open.

Mr. Bahnsen continued to report they do not have laptops in the Treasurer's Office which will allow their employees to work from home. There are issues with employees who have autoimmune disorders, and they are working on the options there. The state association has reached out for direction on what functions Treasurer's must provide. They have asked for an AG's opinion.

Chief Lape appreciates the collaboration with the courts. The jail population as of 9:00 a.m. is 283. He stated that any way to reduce that population would be beneficial.

Sgt. Collins added that they split their video court rooms, adding another room, so they should be able to handle scheduling for court appearances.

Mr. Conrad stated IT appreciated everyone's patience.

Ms. McKenzie stated they are working on a list of all title search agencies they work with on a daily basis. They will need to get with the Auditor's Office as they work closely together. They are required to process documents within a certain amount of time and will strive to meet deadlines.

Judge Smith reviewed the issues they are experiencing and stated they were similar to the other courts.

Mr. Vogel stated that the Utilities response is covered in provided document. They are working on social distancing and will accept payments at the drive-thru at the office in Carroll.

Mr. McCullough stated that the Dog Shelter is following the outline in the packet. The Dog Shelter has everything they need to care for the dogs in their care.

Judge Fields added that all specialty dockets have been suspended.

Ms. Drake reported that they work closely with Ohio Dept of Ag and USDA. The Dept of Ag has all field workers working from home. We will know more about the USDA soon.

Mr. Martin stated they at the City had an internal staff meeting and will be meeting again. They are able to test temperatures in the field. They are concerned about their departments and will be meeting with their departments today. They will basically be closed to the public.

Ms. Caito provided an update on the County Parks. Events at the parks are canceled. Most employees can work from home.

Mr. Klein stated that everything for RPC is outlined in the packet. The meeting on April 7th will be livestreamed. Thanks to Carri for taking care of that. The office will have one person staffing it.

Ms. Ashton stated Ms. Myers is on a state call regarding how to best serve clients at this time.

Judge Fields mentioned that providers must be under stress as well. He asked everyone to keep those providers in mind.

Dr. Brown stated they remain in contact with ADAMH (and other boards) and are offering support and help. She commented that many non-profit organizations are taking extra efforts of precaution. Jon Kochis with EMA has contact groups to help non-profits, too.

Human Resources is doing what they can trying to work outside of the office as much as possible, limiting face to face meetings.

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Today, we will also be proposing a resolution to declare Fairfield County a state of emergency. Last week, we passed a resolution for emergency purchasing capabilities.

Administrative approval of contracts and invoices will continue without pause. On April 1, the limit for these processes increase to \$100,000. The bidding threshold does not change but for the emergency items needed.

When Jon Kochis, EMA Director is able to return from his meeting at Fairfield Medical Center, he will give us an update. If there is news to report, we will do so by email. We will update our website, and we will continue to communicate as much as possible.

In the future, next steps will be communicated by email and telephone. The Commissioners may need to take stronger steps to close a building even to employees, and that would be communicated electronically. Every appointing authority and department head should continue to review continuity plans. Employees need to be sure their contact information is up to date in ESS for the Fairfield Alert System. (A notification similar to a weather alert will be used as needed.)

The memo from today includes guidance for supervisors and employees, as well. We will send out additional information as we believe it is helpful.

Commissioners' Regular Meeting

A regular meeting of the Fairfield County Board of Commissioners was held on Monday, March 16, 2020 beginning at 10:06 a.m., with the following Commissioners present: Jeff Fix and Dave Levacy. Also present were Carri Brown, Rachel Elsea, Staci Knisley, Dennis Keller, Joshua Horacek, Todd McCullough, Jeremiah Upp, David Miller, Branden Meyer, Aunie Cordle, Jon Slater, Chief Lape, Sgt. Collins, Jim Bahnsen, Todd McCullough, Mark Conrad, Amy Brown-Thompson, James Mako, Loudan Klein, and Jeff Barron.

Pledge of Allegiance

Commissioner Levacy asked everyone to rise as able, and he led the Pledge of Allegiance.

Announcements

Commissioner Levacy asked if there were any announcements.

There were no announcements.

Public Comment

Commissioner Levacy asked if anyone from the public who would like to speak or offer comments.

There were no public comments.

Approval of the Commissioners' Resolution

On the motion of Jeff Fix and the second of Dave Levacy, the Board of Commissioners voted to approve the Commissioners' Office resolution to declare a state of emergency in Fairfield County based on the Ohio Department of Health's Order issued by Dr. Acton relating to the COVID 19 virus; see resolution 2020-03.16.a.

Discussion: Mr. Levacy stated it was important to note the brilliance of this document and that other counties and cities were modeling their documents after this one. He thanked Dr. Brown for working so hard on it. Dr. Brown thanked the elected officials and department heads for their collaboration. She encouraged everyone to continue thinking about continuity of operations and ways to adjust during these challenging times. She thanked the Commissioners for their leadership.

