The Board of Commissioners of Ohio County, West Virginia
Minutes of a Regular Session for Tuesday, October 21, 2025

Commission members present:
Commission President Zachary T. Abraham
Commissioner Randy Wharton
Commissioner Donald A. Nickerson, Jr.

Staff Members present:
County Administrator Randel A. Russell
Facilities Director Melissa Marco
Director of Emergency Management Lou Vargo
Assistant Director of Emergency Management Tony Campbell
Chief Deputy Kent Lewis
Fiscal Officer Becky Coyne
Michelle Olejasz

Elected Officials present:
Assessor Tiffany Hoffman

I. Call to Order/Pledge of Allegiance

- Commission President Abraham convened the meeting in Room 215 of the City County Building at 8:00am. Those in attendance recited the Pledge of Allegiance to the United States of America.

II. Delegations

- None

III. Approval of Meeting Minutes

- The minutes for the regular meeting on Tuesday, October 7, 2025, were reviewed by County Commissioners. Commissioner Nickerson noted that Senator Chapman's last name was misspelled. With that correction made, Commissioner Nickerson made the motion to accept the minutes, motion seconded by President Abraham. The motion passed unanimously.

IV. Grants

- American Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals. Administrator Russell advised County Commissioners that Ms. Marco was able to locate a grant opportunity in the amount of $61,500.00 available through om the American Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals that could be used to purchase outdoor kennels and related accessories. He stated there is no match required for this grant opportunity. Administrator Russell requested approval to make application for this grant. President Abraham commented it would be a good idea and

moved to approve the request, motion seconded by Commissioner Wharton. The motion passed unanimously.

V. Community Grants

- Opioid Funds.
    - Wheeling Housing Authority. Administrator Russell advised County Commissioners that the Commission office had received an opioid fund grant request from Wheeling Housing Authority in the amount of $104,100.00 The proceeds of this grant would be used to create two Case Management / Community Navigation Specialist positions and provide the necessary office equipment. These positions will with work in collaboration with partner agencies to provide case management, crisis intervention and service coordination for individuals and families affected by opioid use disorder or co-occurring health issues. This grant covers the costs for one year Wheeling Housing Authority has provided the financial documentation showing that they have the wherewithal to sustain the program beyond the first year. The request is well thought out and appears to check all the boxes of the intended use of the opioid settlement. The administration recommends approval for this opioid grant request. Commissioner Nickerson noted that based on the information provided the request does qualify, and President Abraham reiterated it was just for the first year and not recurring. Wheeling Housing Authority Representative Shelly Miller advised the County Commissioners that Wheeling Housing plans to start executing the process by December 1, 2026. The goal is to eliminate barriers and keep those served housed. The agency does work with the City of Wheeling and will work with West Virginia First Foundation to help with funding in the future but have not applied for funds from them at this time. Commissioner Wharton stated this is one of the few programs that has a plan to sustain after the first year and he is in favor of this grant. Tina Morris, a grant writer for Wheeling Housing Authority, advised that in the future these positions will fall under another agency which will receive funding through West Virginia First Foundation, in collaboration with the City of Wheeling Crisis Response Unit. The County Commissioners commented that this was a well thought out grant application. Commissioner Wharton made a motion to approve the grant application, motion seconded by President Abraham. The motion passed unanimously.

VI. Unfinished Business

- The Highlands SDEX Bonds Refunding/Refinance Update. Administrator Russell presented County Commissioners with an updated schedule for The Highlands SDEX Bonds Refunding and Refinance. Financial information on this special district excise tax has been submitted to the rating agency for further review. Mr. Russell and Development Authority Finance Director Cody Koehler had a call with the rating agency on Friday to discuss the SDEX bonds. The decision from the rating agency is expected by November 4th. Administrator Russell stated that he is expecting the bond offering to go market before Thanksgiving and closing on the issue the first week in December. Administrator Russell requested that President Abraham be available prior to the December 2nd meeting for a pre-closing. No further action is required.

VII. New Business

- Building Custodial Matters- Administrator Russell requested that this matter be discussed in Executive Session. President Abraham advised that issue would be taken up at the end of the agenda.

- Grant Writer. Administrator Russell requested that this matter be discussed in Executive Session. President Abraham advised that this issue would also be taken up at the end of the agenda.

VIII. Staff and Elected Official Reports

- County Administrator. Administrator Russell reported the following:

    - West Virginia State Tax Department is requesting dates for the Board of Equalization and Review Hearings for February 2026. Based on Commission Meeting dates, February 3rd & 17th were discussed as the 16th is a holiday. Based on availability it was decided that the Board of Equalization and Review Hearings would be tentatively scheduled for February 3, 2026 immediately following the County Commission meeting, with an alternate date of February 17, 2026, immediately following that County Commission meeting.

    - Notification was received from FEMA that Ohio County's Public Assistance application with FEMA for debris removal was approved and the County should see those funds by the end of the week. FEMA provides granting funding for 75% of these projects. Ohio County will seeking reimbursement for 25% of these costs from the Governor's Contingency Fund.

- Facilities Director Melissa Marco reported the following:
    - The work on the pavers of both porticos on the County Courthouse are now complete, which is earlier than expected, as we had till December 31st to complete it
    - Finance & Water Department moved into the former Wheeling Police Dept.
    - Health Department will move into the old Prosecutor's office, which will be finished at the end of this week and when that is completed the project will be finished
    - Lentils on the Annex will begin November 3 which will cause some parking issues out back; she will give updates on that
    - Magistrate's building project will be finished soon
    - In reference to Shelly Miller talking about hoping they work with the Crisis Intervention Team at Wheeling PD, we are hoping they also work with the Sheriff's Dept. because of a grant we asked for through WV First for $242,000 that also deals with similar issues
    - Application for 2026 Courthouse Facilities Improvement Grant has been submitted and should be finding out results mid-November; the County has only been denied once before

- Chief Deputy Kent Lewis reported the following:
    - Three Deputies in firearms training being completed w/Guntry with no out of pocket expense

- FLOCK License Plate Reader- working on getting The Highlands installed by the upcoming holidays
- Two deputies were exposed to gas on GC&P Road during a response to a call. They are back to full duty. Per Lou Vargo, one of the EMS employees had to stay overnight for observation. The gas was odorless and did not meet any chemical properties. It was a good collaborative response
- Still down 2 Deputies- 1 candidate is going through the hiring process but got notice that 1 more is retiring (Lt. Kittle)

- EMA/EMS Director Lou Vargo reported the following:
  - FEMA still helping weekly during the Government shutdown
  - Almost $7million has gone to individuals; they are still waiting on documentation for some cases
  - Clarification of "Public Assistance"- it is for public entities
  - Bel-O-Mar has been helping EMA, and all have been working with Triadelphia Volunteer Fire Department because they had a lot of damage
  - Special mention of Rev. Mike Palmer as he has received national recognition for his efforts. He hasn't stopped as he & his congregation were serving 800 meals a day, and they are still serving meals & helping get supplies to people. He has a great congregation!

    President Abraham asked if we got a list of folks who received help yet and Lou said he would follow up & get it to him

    Commissioner Wharton spoke about Community Foundation struggling to get Case Managers. Lou agreed and said they need volunteers

    Commissioner Wharton said he talked to Suzie at Project Best and with winter coming the need is for furnaces

    President Abraham asked if any ads have been run for case workers and/or volunteers and it was said that Shelby is the PR person at WV First

    Lou commented that most recovery programs go at a much slower pace and Suzie & Stacy have been doing a great job.

    Lou shared an example of someone getting help. A guy that lost all of his tools in the flood went through this process and was able to get new tools. He was an example that the system does work.

- 911 Director Ricky Pritt reported the following:
  - The week of Oct. 6, he & others attended a conference in Bridgeport, WV and 2 more dispatchers became CIT certified, making that a total of 5 for his department
  - At the end of next month all should be switched over to NextGen; tentatively the final stage is week of November 24th
  - President Abraham asked if being CIT certified is mandatory and Ricky stated that it is not, but he is trying to get all his dispatchers certified

- Finance- Becky Coyne directed the Commissioners to the following:
  - Payables- The list was presented to the Commissioners. There were 2 inquiries for clarifications regarding vendors which Becky answered. President Abraham made the

motion to approve the payables, seconded by Commissioner Nickerson, the motion passed unanimously.

- Unpaid invoices- a list of unpaid invoices being held for elected official's approval or department manager approval before paying. No questions/inquiries. No action required.
- Becky advised that there were no budget revisions
- City/County Jail Bill – Administrator Russell stated the City has reconciled their portion of the Northern Regional Jail invoice for the period of October 2024 through April 2025. We are awaiting payment. The City currently has invoices for the period May 2025 through August 2025 for reconciliation. They will be receiving September 2025 today. Commissioner Nickerson commented on the $125,000 bill and how important it is.

- Assessor
  - Administrator Russell directed Commissioners to the list of 63 tax exonerations to reduce taxes in the amount of $8,565.40; 54 are to correct incorrect assessments made at the State level and 9 are to correct incorrect assessments for files. The exonerations have been reviewed & found reasonable. President Abraham inquired further how they were determined and Assessor Tiffany Hoffman explained they were working on making sure they were not double billed. Commissioner Nickerson moved to approve the Exonerations, all but two he needed to abstain from, and they were seconded by President Abraham, motion approved unanimously.
  - No Certificates of Re-Entry

Regular meeting adjourned at 8:33am; Executive Session began shortly after

*Coming out of Executive Session, President Abraham stated no decision were made regarding either issue.

IX. Commission Board Reports

- None

X. Commissioner Comments

- Commissioners discussed changing times of upcoming meetings and decided on 8:00 for all of the regular meetings through the end of this year.

XI. Future Meetings and Important Dates

November 4, 2025	County Commission, Regular Meeting at 8:00am
November 11, 2025	Veterans Day, Courthouse Closed
November 18, 2025	County Commission, Regular Meeting at 8:am
November 27, 2025	Thanksgiving Day, Courthouse Closed
November 28, 2025	Day After Thanksgiving, Courthouse Closed
December 2, 2025	County Commission, Regular Meeting at 8:00am
December 15, 2025	County Commission, Regular Meeting at 8:00am
December 24, 2025	Christmas Eve, Courthouse Closed at 12:30
December 25, 2025	Christmas Day, Courthouse Closed
December 31, 2025	New Year's Eve, Courthouse Closed at 12:30

Zachary T. Abraham, Commission President

Randel A. Russell County Administrator