The Board of Commissioners of Ohio County, West Virginia
Minutes of a Regular Session for Tuesday, August 19, 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
County Solicitor Donald J. Tennant
Facilities Director Melissa Marco
Director of Emergency Management Lou Vargo
Director of 911 Communications Rickie Pritt
Commission Staff: Michelle Olejasz

Elected Officials present:
County Clerk Michael Kelly
County 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 6:02pm. Those in attendance recited the Pledge of Allegiance to the United States of America.

II. Delegations

- Moundsville Honor Guard President Dave Schoenian thanked the Commission for their continued support through their donation. He stated in 2024 his unit attended & provided services in 157 events, which included 110 funerals & 47 other events. He said it takes $50,000 a year to run their organization, they service a 50 mile radius and 55% of their events have been in Ohio County. Veteran Schoenian went on to say their unit has attended over 70 events so far in 2025, including the Italian Festival here in Wheeling. One Veteran of the unit specifically mentioned the donation helped fund their defibulator. Several other members of the Moundsville Honor Guard were in attendance, shared their stories and thanked the Commission for their support & donation.

- David Grossman, attorney with a law firm from New York, spoke about the overpricing of medicines and how employers have been overpaying for insulin since 2003. His firm currently represents other municipalities & is encouraging us to join the litigation. There is no cost, risk, or fee to the County to participate. Also, he & his firm represent Public Service Districts in PFAS cases for those that pump water & test positive. There is a $40 billion dollar fund established. Anyone that pumps water is required to test. There would be no cost to OCPSD for test or otherwise. Mr. Grossman left his contact information.

- John Lucas with Zoll Equipment, where we purchase our rescue pumps, came to present Clinical Save Awards to Lou Vargo & others: Ohio Co. EMS Paramedics Tom Fledderus & Austin Slie and Valley Grove VFD EMTs Mike Klein, Kirstie Kalany & Brian Zink.

- Anthony McDaniel- got pulled away, no show

- Charles Roberts with WV Country Roads Festival spoke about the Grappling Tournament at this year's festival on Sept. 20, 2025 as a fund raiser for Ohio Valley flood victims and asked the Commission to be a sponsor by purchasing the awards for $3,525. Commission President Zach Abraham asked Mr. Roberts to leave the event information & his contact information, and he will be contacted.

- Bill & Becky Wright of our local D.A.V. (Disabled American Veterans) office thanked the Commissioners for their continued support in the form of donation. They shared details such as they drive many veterans to Pittsburgh for appointments and in 2024, they made 414 total trips with 270 of them for Ohio County Veterans & 144 Marshall County Veterans.

III. Approval of Meeting Minutes

- Commissioners reviewed revised minutes of regular meeting of Tuesday, March 4, 2025. Commissioners reviewed revised minutes of special meeting of Wednesday, March 12, 2025. Commissioners reviewed revised minutes of special meeting of Monday, March 24, 2025. Commissioners reviewed revised minutes of special meeting of Friday, March 27, 2025. Commissioners reviewed revised minutes of regular meeting of Tuesday, May 6, 2025. Commissioners reviewed revised minutes of special meeting of Friday, July 18, 2025. Commissioners reviewed revised minutes of special meeting of Tuesday, August 12, 2025.
- Commissioner Wharton moved that all the minutes be approved as submitted, seconded by Commissioner Nickerson, motion carried.
- The minutes for the special meeting on Tuesday, July 29, 2025 listed on the agenda were not presented for review as they were not completed in time for the meeting per Melissa Marco.

IV. Unfinished Business

- Melissa Marco reported that after further discussion with Paula Calvert, the Opioid Funding Community Grant does fit parameters. President Zach Abraham requested an itemized list, so this item was tabled for further information.

V. New Business

- Administrator Russell presented per WV Code, Ohio County Public Service District must present their request for a rate increase to the Commission for approval. The proposal is to raise their customer rates by 48%, making $44.09 the cheapest charge. Commissioner Wharton said the meeting regarding the rate change was advertised but no one came to speak against the change. The previous rates were too low for financing or grant funding. If the situation did not change, the Ohio County Commission would have to take over. Motion to accept the rate increase made by Commissioner Wharton, seconded by Commissioner Nickerson, the motion passed unanimously.
- & increase approved.
- Compensation of Election Officials- Administrator Russell presented the Commissioners with a request to increase the workers' rates to pay closer to what the other counties pay to entice new workers. Election Coordinator participated via phone and reiterated that statement. The request is to go from a total of $240, that is the maximum being paid currently to $300. If approved, there

would be a $13,800 budget revision to come later. Commissioner Wharton made a motion to approve the Election Official rate of pay increase, seconded by Commissioner Nickerson, the motion passed unanimously.

- Property Acquisition @ 700 Market St. Wheeling- Administrator Russell requested the approval of the Commissioners to purchase the building at 700 Market Street in Wheeling that would be used for storage of Election Equipment and other items. It's the Mountain Aire building with large access doors & other amenities that fit our requirements. President Abraham asked about any renovations needed on top of the $95,000 cost of the building and Mr. Russell stated there would be some minimal additional costs but did not have a number at this time. Commissioner Wharton made the motion to approve the purchase, seconded by Commissioner Nickerson, the motion passed unanimously.

- WV Energy Efficiency & Conservation Block Grant Program Application update- Per Melissa, the deadline was extended to August 29th. Two bids were received and both came in under the max if $37,000. One came in at $29,000 & the other at $32,000, so we can do it so Melissa will be submitting that application timely.

- Bethlehem Memorandum of Understanding for Weekend EMS Coverage- The request is for one officer, Saturday & Sunday, 9am-5pm, $30,000 for one year. Commissioner Wharton made the motion to approve, seconded by Commissioner Nickerson, the motion passed unanimously.

VI. Staff and Elected Official Reports

- Administrator Russell reported the following:
  - He along with Becky Coyne & President Zach Abraham attended State Auditors Training in Canaan.
  - Becky Coyne, Erin Alietta & Linda Yost attended the County Clerks Training for Elections also in Canaan..

- Stephanie Hockenberry, Marketing/Development reported the following:
  - Looking for grant opportunities
  - Working on updating the County's website
  - Working on new video for new residents
  - Continuing to update website for Flood Victims
  - Two upcoming fund raisers- August 23 @ Triadelphia United Methodist Church, 3pm-9pm & August 30 at The Highlands Sport Complex to honor First Responders, 12pm-9pm, Community Fun
  - Airport has Girl Scout tours coming up
  - Housing- housing still needed for displaced residents; a couple of families are looking to relocate here
  - Long Term Disaster Relief Committee still meeting and working to help those with needs

- Facilities Director Melissa Marco reported the following:
  - Prosecutor's office to be moved into their new space next week
  - Phase 15/former Wheeling Police Dept. area should be done mid-October then the first floor will be moved- Health Dept., Water Dept., Finance Dept., etc.

- Re-bid on Magistrate's Court building received & work is to start Sept. 2; 1 week to do the walls, painting to be completed the week of Sept. 8 with the working wrapping up in about a month once started
- Due to applying and receiving grants, the total savings is around $45,000
- 2 Porches- stone has arrived & will go down next week
- Had to move Tiffany Hoffman's Annex folks into a temporary workspace due to AC issues

- 911 Director Ricky Pritt reported the following:
  - Ricky reported that new hire Bruce Sommer is working out great so far.
  - He reported his department continues to move forward with the NextGen technology & it is coming along well
- Sheriff Nelson Croft reported the following:
  - His department is down 2 Deputies but they are testing in September
  - Running ads for recruitment- TV & billboards
  - Attended State Sheriff's Association meeting
  - Will participate Sept. 13 in a community event related to educate & combat overdoses- YMCA's "Glow Event"
  - Participated in National Night Out on August 5 at Wheeling Park's ice arena
  - Upcoming event on Sept. 16-18 Narcotics Assoc. Training with speaker from Texas; 75 officers in attendance staying at The Highlands; training will include roadside assistance when dealing with drug use & overdose
  - Found a vendor to cut costs monthly
  - Three candidates are doing their physical test on 8/20/25
  - Sheriff Croft asked the Commission to hire some civilians for part-time security for the courts; 24 hours per week or less, no benefits, no budget revision needed as $80,000 already budgeted, will pay into PERS. President Abraham made the motion to approve the Sheriff's request to hire part-time security for the courts, seconded by Commissioner Nickerson, the motion passed unanimously.
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- EMA/EMS Director Lou Vargo reported the following:
  - 464 cases for intake for FEMA
  - $4.9 million dollars distributed to Ohio County citizens
  - Valley Grove pop-up moved to Armory
  - FEMA here until Sept. 22
  - He attends the Long Term Relief Committee meetings
  - Still need Public Assistance Declaration, which might take 4-6 weeks to declare
  - Still in time-frame to get assistance; also to get reimbursed for overtime paid to Deputies and other monies paid out
  - Advising folks to thoroughly read their letters from FEMA if denied; look at reason for denial and they may just need to appeal & provide verification of information
- Finance
  - Administrator Russell directed the Commissioners to the following:
    - No Commitments
  - Payables- question about jail bill being double & Mr. Russell's reply was that it can be reviewed but it was correct and question about their being two bills for Oglebay Institute and per Mr. Russell it included 1 for the roof and 1 for the fund-raiser; Commissioner Wharton made the motion to approve the payables, seconded by Commissioner Nickerson, the motion passed unanimously.

- Administrator Russell directed Commissioners to the list of unpaid invoices being held for various reasons. No action required.
- Administrator Russell advised that there were no budget revisions
- City/County Jail Bill – covered previously

- Assessor
  - Administrator Russell directed Commissioners to the first list of sixty four (64) tax exonerations that have been recommended by the Assessor of Ohio County. Commissioner Wharton moved to approve the 64 exonerations, seconded by Commissioner Nickerson, motion approved unanimously. One extra exoneration was presented by President Zach Abraham. Commissioner Wharton moved to approve the exoneration, President Abraham seconded it, the motion passed unanimously
  - No Certificates of Re-Entry
  - Assessor Tiffany Hoffman gave an update on her office & their move. She also commented on how their time spent on the 4th floor together with the Tax Office ended up improving their overall relationships.

VII. Commission Board Reports

- None

VIII. Commissioner Comments

- None

Meeting adjourned at 7:25pm

Future Meetings

Monday, September 1, 2025, Labor Day, Courthouse Closed
Tuesday, September 2, 2025 at 6:00pm City County Building Room 215
Tuesday, September 16, 2025 at 6:00pm City County Building Room 215
Tuesday, October 7, 2025 at 6:00pm City County Building Room 215
Tuesday, October 21, 2025 at 6:00pm City County Building Room 215

Zachary T. Abraham, Commission President

Randel A. Russell County Administrator