The Board of Commissioners of Ohio County, West Virginia
Minutes of a Regular Session for Tuesday, December 16, 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 Tennant
Facilities Director Melissa Marco
Director of Emergency Management Louis Vargo
Assistant Director of Emergency Management Anthony Campbell
Chief Deputy Kent Lewis
Senior Fiscal Advisor Becky Coyne
Julianne Latynski
Michelle Olejasz

Elected Officials present:
Sheriff H. Nelson Croft

I. Call to Order/Pledge of Allegiance

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

II. Delegations

- Doug Patterson, Ohio Valley Trail Partners- Mr. Patterson presented information from an Ohio County Commission meeting in 2009. This information included a permit from the West Virginia Department of Highways and a commitment from the Ohio County Commission to help maintain the trail. Mr. Patterson asked the Commission to continue partnering with the Ohio Valley Trail Partners to achieve their goals of extending the trail, completing repairs, and assigning a new manager. He estimated their goals to take 100 manhours and cost $10,000.00 in repairs & maintenance costs. Mr. Tennant asked if the permit was still valid and stated some research would have to be completed. Commissioner Wharton stated he feels the partnership is well worth the investment, but more information is needed to move forward. Mr. Patterson also inquired if bike lanes would become available at the Highlands Shopping Complex if the new interchange would be built. Mr. Russell explained the idea had not been vetted.

III. Approval of Meeting Minutes

- The minutes for the regular meeting on Tuesday, December 2, 2025 were presented to the Commissioners for approval. Commissioner Nickerson made the motion to accept the minutes, seconded by President Abraham. The motion passed unanimously.

IV. Grants

- West Virginia DEP, Brownfield Grants- Ms. Marco attended a seminar in New Martinsville regarding the Brownfield Program. Applications are being accepted starting in January 2026. Phase one of the grant must have an area designated. The areas being looked at are the Wheeling-Ohio County Airport and the County Farm. Phase one takes three (3) months to complete & phase two takes six (6) months to complete. There is no match with this grant.

- U.S. Department of Justice, Office of Justice Programs- Ms. Marco stated she will work with Joanie Hill to apply for a deferred maintenance grant for the jail. There is no match for this grant.

- Stephanie's All-Stars Grant- Ms. Marco reported she recently met with our Regional Economic Development Partnership (RED) about this grant for ballparks destroyed in the flood back in June, 2025. Ms. Marco, by talking with RED and community partners, knows the volunteer support would be in place to rebuild the parks, but funding is an issue.

V. Community Grants

- None

VI. Unfinished Business

- Previously Tabled
  - Oglebay Institute- arts, history, and nature activities: Per Administrator Russell, no further info yet.

VII. New Business

- Wheeling Island Tree Maintenance and Removal- Administrator Russell introduced Julianne Latynski, Arborist with the WVU Extension Office. Ms. Latynski spoke to the Commissioners regarding trees on Wheeling Island that are over matured and need pruned. The job was put out for bid, and the winning bid was from Laroche Tree Services located in Bellaire, Ohio for $78,515.00. Ms. Latynski is requesting the Commissioners' approval to use previously approved grant funds to pay for this project. President Abraham made the motion to release the approved grant funds to move forward with the project, seconded by Commissioner Wharton. The motion passed unanimously.

- Holiday Schedule for CY2026- Administrator Russell presented the Commissioners with the list of holidays for calendar year 2026 for their review and approval. President Abraham made the motion to approve the list, seconded by Commissioner Wharton. The motion passed unanimously.

- Pay Periods and Pay Dates, Schedule for CY2026- Administrator Russell presented the Commissioners with the list of pay periods & pay dates for calendar year 2026 for their

review and approval. President Abraham made the motion to approve the list, seconded by Commissioner Wharton. The motion passed unanimously.

- Elections, Consolidation of Precinct 12 into Precinct 11- Administrator Russell explained to the Commissioners that per WV State Code, Precinct 12 needs to become ADA compliant and upon extensive research, this would be virtually impossible. Upon review, consolidating Precincts 11 and 12 appears to be the best solution. Also, with the total registered voters combined from both precincts being under the threshold per WV State Code, Precinct 11 is the best option. The next step, with the Commissioners' approval, would be to hold a public meeting. The meeting would be scheduled for February 3, 2026. Mr. Russell is requesting the approval of the Commissioners to move forward. Commissioner Nickerson made the motion to move forward with the public meeting and proposed consolidation after the public meeting, seconded by Commissioner Wharton. The motion passed unanimously.

VIII. Staff and Elected Official Reports

- Administrator Russell had nothing further to report.

- Facilities Director Melissa Marco reported the following:
  - The lintels on annex building are progressing. Angelina Stone and Marble has now moved down to the second floor. Weather permitting, we hope to complete the project in two weeks.
  - The HVAC project is still on target to be completed January 20, 2026.
  - Apron at Airport - work continues on Phase 2.
  - Tower at Airport- bids will be opened in February 2026 and work will begin in March 2026.
  - To date, Ms. Marco is working on fifteen grants, mostly pertaining to infrastructure improvements.

- Sheriff H. Nelson Croft reported the following:
  - Highlands calls from November 27, 2025 to December 15, 2025
    - Total Calls 132
    - The calls ranged from numerous traffic stops, three burglar alarms, 14 false business alarms, 60 foot patrols, three shoplifting cases, two traffic contacts that led to arrests, and two hit & runs.
  - The FLOCK system on Black Friday at The Highlands had 28,000 readings. The first six days it had hits on a stolen vehicle, a stolen license plate, one missing person and one abduction.
  - Saturday's Salvation Army Red Kettle collection competition went very well.
  - The weekend shopping event where law enforcement personnel shopped with kids was very successful.

- EMA/EMS Director Louis Vargo reported the following:
  - Mr. Vargo's group also participated in the Salvation Army's bell ringing.

- 911 Director Ricki Pritt not in attendance; Administrator Russell stated he had nothing to report in his absence.

- Finance- In Becky Coyne's absence, Mr. Russell directed the Commissioners to the following:
    - Payables- The list was presented to the Commissioners. There were no questions. President Abraham made the motion to approve the payables, seconded by Commissioner Nickerson; the motion passed unanimously.
    - Unpaid invoices- The list was presented to the Commissioners. The Commissioners presented no questions or inquiries. No action required.
    - Mr. Russell advised that there were no budget revisions.

- Assessor
    - Administrator Russell directed Commissioners to a list of six tax exonerations. They have been reviewed & found reasonable. President Abraham made the motion to approve the exonerations, seconded by Commissioner Wharton. Motion approved unanimously.
    - No Certificates of Re-Entry

IX. Commission Board Reports

- None

X. Commissioner Comments

- Commissioner Nickerson noted he also rang bells for the Salvation Army.
- President Abraham asked Stephanie Hockenberry to give an update on the County's Growth & Retention efforts:
    - A new recruitment video will be released the first quarter of 2026.
    - Marketing Strategy is being updated; filming wrapped up on December 6, 2025.
    - Santa visited Small Business Saturday; 125 people participated; small bags were distributed promoting shopping local.
    - Update given on continued work with Long Term Disaster Committee including resources still available for those in need by contacting the United Way.
    - A memorandum of understanding was signed with Wheeling University regarding Federal Work Study students completing internships in government positions.
- President Abraham commented on and showed those in attendance the Project Best Award presented to the Ohio County Commission. The award was presented to the Commission for working with Cattrell Companies on the HVAC project which Ms. Marco is spearheading.

The meeting adjourned at 8:40 a.m.

Future Meetings

December 24, 2025 – Christmas Eve, Courthouse Closed at 12:30pm
December 25, 2025 – Christmas Day, Courthouse Closed
December 31, 2025 – New Year's Eve, Courthouse Closed at 12:30pm

January 6, 2026 – County Commission, Regular Meeting at 8:00am
January 19, 2026 – Martin Luther King Day, Courthouse Closed
January 20, 2026 – County Commission, Regular Meeting
February 3, 2026 – County Commission, Regular Meeting at 8:00am
February 3, 2026 – Board of Equalization and Review at 9:30am
February 17, 2026 – County Commission, Regular Meeting at 8:00am
February 17, 2026 – Board of Equalization and Review at 9:30am

Zachary T. Abraham, Commission President

Randel A. Russell County Administrator