The Board of Commissioners of Ohio County, West Virginia
Minutes of a Regular Session for Tuesday, June 2, 2026

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 Don Tennant
Facilities Director Melissa Marco
Director of Emergency Management Louis Vargo
Assistant Director of Emergency Management Anthony Campbell

Elected Officials present:
Sheriff H. Nelson Croft
Circuit Clerk Brenda Miller
County Clerk Michael Kelly
Assessor Tiffany Hoffman
Prosecuting Attorney Shawn Turek

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.

Delegations:

- Circuit Clerk Brenda Miller – Ms. Miller stated she still has not received her budget and asked when she was going to receive a copy. Last fiscal year, it took eight to nine months to receive the documents. Ms. Miller also stated taking away the healthcare stipend will be a hardship for many employees and needs reviewed before final implementation. She stated she has been working for the County for over 27 years and used to see working here as an honor and a pleasure. Now, we are not working together, there is no transparency, and while Elected Officials always had a say in policy making in the past, this time they were not consulted at all concerning the handbook. She further stated there is a lack of teamwork and respect for employees as they are losing greatly because this book changes policies related to vacation time and sick time. She can write a handbook concerning procedures, but she must follow the County policies. This book is way too drastic and, if implemented, employees will decide to seek employment at another location, and we will not be able to give these jobs away. She asked the Commissioners to respectfully reconsider the handbook and the drastic revisions.
- Assessor Tiffany Hoffman – Ms. Hoffman thanked County Administrator Randy Russell for attending the health insurance sessions but stated she was saddened that not one Commissioner attended any of the sessions to understand the ramifications of the plan. Regarding the new handbook, she cited several sections that in her eyes create issues – Section 1.1 she stated creates undo conflict; Section 2.6A states overtime must now be absorbed and she cannot pay her employees overtime. She cut a position to comply with the Commission's request to reduce 10% of their overall budget, but during peak seasons, she may need to pay overtime; Section 4.3C refers to the paid time off and she does not agree with the new policies as written. She stated there are no incentives to recruit new employees when needed and asked if the handbook would

be adopted today. Commissioner Wharton assured Ms. Hoffman the book would not be adopted today.

- County Clerk Michael Kelly – Mr. Kelly stated a meeting was to be held with all department heads and elected officials prior to this handbook being released and he, and his team just want to work for the taxpaying citizen. But, he emphasized, employees are 'pissed off' as he motioned to the crowd of people in the room. He stated everyone in the room was hired under the old handbook and should be treated as such. Commissioner Wharton interjected that this handbook is far from a done deal and he has heard the comments so far and has the back of staff and employees in the room. Commissioner Wharton has stated state code does not give the County Commission the power to override decisions made by Elected Officials. He stated the timing and release of the handbook was bad but a lack of revenue and being 135% over the threshold on health insurance prompted the Commissioners to start the process of introducing cost saving measures.
- Sheriff Nelson Croft – Sheriff Croft stated since he has the biggest budget in the County, he made concessions to his budget but feels the changes to tier 1 employees and the loss of the stipend is too drastic. As written, he has no intention of making his employees follow this handbook and will write his own.
- Prosecuting Attorney Shawn Turek – Ms. Turek shared the same concerns of the other County Elected Officials but also stated she has already lost a good employee because of the health insurance. She cites the lack of communication between the Elected Officials and the Commissioners has impeded her ability to effectively run her office. Commissioner Wharton stated the handbook would be reviewed and if it took 30-60 days to come up with an agreeable process, they would take the time.
- Bill Silgar – Mr. Bill Sligar stated when he accepted this position, he was offered a stipend that he has now considered part of his overall pay. He further said too many benefits were being reduced or eliminated, especially after not receiving the stipend. If he has to enroll in the County's insurance, it will cost the County drastically more to cover him under the policy than to pay him the stipend. He asked the Commissioners to reconsider the stipend and the long-term objectives they were trying to achieve.
- Emily Schrader – Ms. Schrader also stated she has lost her stipend and relied on the benefit. She asked without the extra funding she received for not taking the health insurance how was she was supposed to buy groceries, pay for childcare, and gas. She stated it is hard to attract dedicated employees, and this will ultimately hurt the County.
- Anthony McDaniel – Mr. McDaniel stated he is not here representing IAFF today and has been with the County over six years, taking a large pay cut to come here because the benefits were phenomenal. If the handbook is implemented, along with the changes to the health insurance and no cost-of-living increase, he would be making less than when he started in January 2020. He has gone backwards over six years with the changes. He brought up several issues: The PTO and Sick Leave time in the handbook is not clear. The recording policy is entirely too broad because West Virginia is a single party consent state. He also voiced concerns over the confidentiality of the medical cannabis policy, stating the language needed to be much stronger concerning leave time and asked if outside council had reviewed the handbook as written. He reiterated employees in the room were hired under the old handbook and inquired as to the paid time off policy. He also felt the recording policy should be reviewed for its lawfulness, should be used during safety discussions, discrimination discussions, and disciplinary procedures.
- Lisa Tyler – Ms. Tyler stated that taking her spouse off her insurance was a large burden that ultimately is now costing them two premiums, two copays, etc. She has essentially taken a pay cut because her husband had to go on another insurance provided by his company. She also stated the Tax Office budget has been cut to the point she will have to lay off an employee. She

stated they cannot run with four people, especially during peak times. The public will suffer because they will experience long wait times.

- President Abraham interjected and stated the health insurance system is broken and the Commission has experienced a 50% increase. He stated they are currently spending six million dollars a year on health insurance, while the overall budget is $24,000,000.00. If they would have accepted the 50% increase under Blue Cross, the total would be $8,000,000.00 instead of $6,000,000.00. He stated they met with the health insurance broker over eight weeks, and they have to make decisions that are not always popular. He said the handbook has not been revised since 1993 and it has been reviewed by legal council and vetted in West Virginia State Law. The paid time off matter was a way to contain costs, which again is not popular.
- Shane Redd – Mr. Redd stated he is the Chief Deputy for Real Estate and removing his wife from the health insurance policy has cost his family thousands of dollars. He was not provided with any other options and voiced his disappointment that not one County Commissioner attended any of the health insurance meetings. He stated there is growing discontent between employees and Commissioners and voiced that something as easy as the Christmas Party on the fourth floor was a morale booster that abruptly ended.
- Jessica Klinger – Ms. Klinger also voiced concern she had to remove her husband from the health insurance policy. She stated she called the state of West Virginia and talked to an employee about the PERS Program and Tier 1 employees. She stated they told her there is absolutely no cost to the County Commission for Tier 1 employees to bank their sick time towards retirement, so she questioned the need to remove the benefit from the handbook and the employees.
- Charlene Geyer – Ms. Geyer inquired what else the Commission was doing to try to raise funds towards the overall County budget. Ms. Hoffman stated business personal property has declined, while President Abraham stated coal severance hit the County extremely hard and sometime they may have to look at raising taxes. Ms. Hoffman also stated oil and gas has left the County and they cannot assess pipe, leased equipment, and there has been a decrease in the number of wells drilled.
- Ms. Shawn Turek asked if a meeting could be set to review the handbook before implementation is considered. It was decided the Elected Officials and Departments heads would gather with the County Commissioners on June 15, 2026 at 6:30 p.m.

Approval of Meeting Minutes

- The minutes from May 19, 2026, were read. Commissioner Wharton made a motion to approve the minutes, seconded by President Abraham. Motion carried.

Community Grants:

- The American Legion submitted a request for $16,600.00 for their van program. The County Commission has supported this program for the past five years but after this morning's discussion and hearing their concerns, a motion to table the request was made by Commissioner Wharton, seconded by Commissioner Nickerson.

New Business:

- Ohio County Employee Handbook – A motion was made to table any decision on the handbook by Commissioner Wharton, seconded by President Abraham.
- Ohio County Employee Group Health Insurance, Stipends – A motion to table any decision on the stipends was made by Commissioner Wharton, seconded by President Abraham.
- Board Appointments –
    a. Wheeling – Ohio County Health Department – County, District 1, Rep – Matthew J. Wood, D.O.

b. Ohio County Fire Board – Timothy Campbell, Citizen Member and Don Howard, Fire Association Member Stone Church VFD
c. Northern Panhandle Home Consortium – After discussion, the County Commission nominated Jeremy West, a Senior Vice President from WesBanco to serve on the Consortium.
d. Ohio County Solid Waste Authority – Mitchell Haddad
e. Ohio County Development Authority – Zachary T. Abraham, Jim Murray, Eriks Janelsins, Wiliam "Tanner" Russell, Randy Russell, and Mary Pockl

- The entire slate of board appointments was approved by Commissioner Wharton, seconded by President Abraham. Motion carried.

Staff and Elected Official Reports:

- County Administrator – Mr. Randy Russell reported the Jail Bill is up to date. There are no exonerations to report.
- Fiscal Officer – Ms. Rebecca Coyne presented the payables. There were no questions on the payables. A motion to approve was made by Commissioner Wharton, seconded by President Abraham. Motion carried.
- Facilities Director – Ms. Melissa Marco reported the final architectural punch list will occur on June 4. We are just waiting for the final reports to come back to ensure the equipment tested as it should. Once the documents are received, the project is complete. The Wheeling-Ohio County Airport Tower Project will commence tomorrow when we meet with the contractor Allegheny Construction.
- Sheriff's Office – Sheriff Croft reported the department received a $1,000.00 check from Happy Tails after Prosecutor Sheri VanTassel contacted them. The donation is greatly appreciated.
- EMA Director – Director Vargo reported the Long Term Committee is still meeting and they still have 23 open cases. They have distributed $761,000.00 from the long term care committee and another $40,000.00 from Catholic Charities. Habitat for Humanity has also built a house in the area with plans to build another one. A stream restoration meeting will be held with Dave Weaver, Mr. Vargo, and the West Virginia Stream Conservation Board.
- 911 – Mr. Pritt stated the two employees completing EMS Training are almost complete.

The next meeting will be held on June 16, 2026.

There being no further business to discuss, the meeting adjourned at 9:20 a.m.

Zachary T. Abraham, Commission President

Randel A. Russell, County Administrator