The Board of Commissioners of Ohio County, West Virginia
Minutes of a Regular Session for Tuesday, November 4, 2025

Commission members present

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

Staff members present

County Administrator Randy Russell
Facilities Director Melissa Marco
Director of Emergency Management Louis Vargo
Assistant Director of Emergency Management Anthony Campbell
911 Director Ricki Pritt
Chief Deputy Kent Lewis
Accountant Becky Coyne
Michelle Olejasz

Elected Officials present

Assessor Tiffany Hoffman
Circuit Clerk Brenda Miller
Sheriff H. Nelson Croft

Call to Order / Pledge of Allegiance

- Commission President Abraham convened the meeting in Room 215 of the City County Building at 8:03 a.m. Those in attendance recited the Pledge of Allegiance.

Delegations

- None

Approval of Meeting Minutes:

- The minutes for the regular meeting on Tuesday, October 21, 2025, were presented for approval. Commissioner Nickerson moved to approve the minutes, seconded by President Abraham. Motion carried.

Grants:

- The Greater Good Charities – Ms. Marco sought the Commissioners approval to apply for a grant through the Greater Good Charities. While this grant does not provide monetary support, the Charity would visit the Ohio County Animal Shelter and work to develop architectural and engineering drawings to provide air conditioning to the kennel area which is needed due to the filtration system currently in place. Also, if awarded, the Charity would help the Shelter fundraise the money needed to install the system. President Abraham made a motion to apply for the service, seconded by Commissioner Nickerson. Motion carried.

- United States Department of Commerce – Ms. Marco explained this grant would be written to construct a new Annex that would house all of our emergency preparedness services under one roof. This grant focuses on disaster declarations in 2023 and 2024. During this time, the County received a disaster declaration for a flood on Wheeling Island. The 'Annex' would house the Sheriff's Department, Emergency Management, and 911, if awarded. The grant cap is $20,000,000.00 but Ms. Marco is seeking permission to write the grant for $15,000,000.00. The grant has a 20% match. Motion to approve writing the grant made by President Abraham, seconded by Mr. Nickerson. Motion carried.

- United States Department of Agriculture – Ms. Marco explained this was the most wide-ranging grant she has ever come across. For this grant, Ms. Marco is seeking the Commissioners approval to apply for an airport hanger in the amount of $5,000,000.00. The grant match is based on population and income levels in the area. For this grant, the match would be 15%. Motion to approve writing the grant made by President Abraham, seconded by Commissioner Nickerson. Motion carried.

- United States Department of Agriculture – Ms. Marco would like to write a second grant to the United States Department of Agriculture for a Community Hub at the Highlands. This 'Hub' would be located in the 'birdcage' and the concept would be refined as the grant was written. She estimates the cost to be $3,000,000.00 to build the 'Hub' with a 15% match that would be paid by the Ohio County Development Authority. Motion to approve writing the grant made by Commissioner Wharton, seconded by Commissioner Nickerson. Motion carried.

- United States Department of Agriculture – Ms. Marco would propose a third and final grant for a stage and seating area at the Highlands. This would be located next to the 'Hub' and could be used for community events, concerts, and employee lunch and dinner breaks. The cost is $1,000,000.00 with a 15% match that would be paid by the Ohio County Development Authority. Motion to approve writing the grant made by Commissioner Wharton, seconded by Commissioner Nickerson. Motion carried.

- Appalachian Regional Council – Ms. Marco is seeking approval to write a grant to provide water and sewer lines to proposed developments at the Highlands. This grant can be written for $500,000.00 and has no match. Motion to approve writing the grant made by Commissioner Wharton, seconded by President Abraham. Motion carried.

Community Grants

- United Way – The United Way will be holding their Building a Better Community Breakfast. Mr. Russell sought the approval of the Commissioners to make a $250.00 donation to the event. President Abraham made a motion to approve the donation, seconded by Commissioner Nickerson. Motion carried.

Unfinished Business

None

New Business

- Ohio County Commission Compensation Study – Mr. Dave Evertsen, with Municipal Solutions, joined via Zoom to outline some of the highlights of the Compensation Study the County recently completed. They reviewed job descriptions and classifications, retention, job titles, and proposed a classification system for job roles. The study will be shared with Elected Officials later in the week to receive feedback.

- Ohio County Ten Year Comprehensive Plan – Ms. Marco received an Appalachian Regional Council Grant for $50,000.00. Of this, $15,000.00 can be used to complete a comprehensive plan. Survey questions have been developed, and the survey will be mailed, placed on our website, and we will hold town halls. The survey must be completed by March to comply with the grant.

- Circuit Clerk, Employee Discussion – Ms. Brenda Miller asked if this agenda item could be moved to the end of the meeting and be placed in Executive Session.

Staff and Elected Officials Reports

- County Administrator – Administrator Russell commented on the jail bill. County Solicitor Tennant commented that the incarceration rate is increasing because some Magistrates are only accepting cash bonds. Circuit Clerk Brenda Miller agreed to this point and offered to provide numbers for the Commissioners to review. Mr. Russell also received a request from Triadelphia asking if the Commission would look at an ordinance to tie down Conex boxes. County Solicitor Tennant commented that further discussion would be needed and he would do some research before the next meeting.

- Facilities Director – Ms. Marco reported the back parking lot is closed for work on the Annex. The lintels are being repaired and should take about two weeks to complete. The HVAC project is progressing, and we recently completed our last move for the project. The project will be wrapped up in January 2026 approximately four months ahead of schedule. The south and west porticos are completed, and the final report will be submitted to the Courthouse Facilities Improvement Authority. We should hear about the 2026 grant in late November.

- Sheriff's Department – Sheriff Croft and Chief Deputy Lewis met with Brian Taylor at the Highlands to work out a holiday schedule for the Deputies. Extra patrols will be provided at peak times to allow for a pleasant shopping experience. Commissioner Wharton thanked the Sheriff's office for being proactive in setting up these patrols. He also stated the Highlands was unique for shoppers in that it offered a Maintenance team that could easily deal with situations, and a medical team is located on site. The Sheriff also completed a safety assessment at Wheeling Country Day School and met with a fleet company that may be a good fit for the department. Further meetings will be needed.

- EMA / EMS – Director Vargo commented due to the government shutdown, the National Guard is organizing food distribution. Director Vargo and Deputy Director Campbell will join a call to ensure the supplies are being distributed equitably. Director Vargo also reported that Bel-O-Mar and FEMA are working on eleven applications and the overall total distribution to the municipalities is up to $4,700,000.00.

- 911 – Next Gen is progressing quickly. On November 14, pre-testing will occur, and the week of November 17 will be used for setting up the cutover. The final cutover date is November 24, 2025.

Finance

- Ms. Becky Coyne presented the payables to the Commissioners. There were no questions regarding the payables. Commissioner Wharton moved to approve the payables, the motion was seconded by President Abraham. The motion passed unanimously.

- Unpaid Invoices – A comprehensive list was provided to the Commissioners. No action is required.

- Budget Revisions – None.

- City / County Jail Bill – This issue was addressed earlier in the meeting and there have been no changes since the last update.

Assessor

- Mr. Russell directed the Commissioners to seven exonerations recommended by the Assessor, in an amount totaling $4,898.32, all of which reduce taxes. The administration has reviewed the exonerations and found them to be reasonable. Commissioner Nickerson made a motion to approve the exonerations, with the exception that he stated he needed to abstain from one. The motion was seconded by. The motion carried.

Commission Board Reports

- Ohio County Fire Board – At the meeting held on October 29, 2025, Mr. Larry Helms was voted as Chairman.

Executive Session

On a motion made by President Abraham, seconded by Commissioner Wharton, the Commission went into an Executive Session pursuant to West Virginia Code §6-9A-4.

On a motion made by President Abraham, seconded by Commissioner Wharton, the Commission exited Executive Session at.

No action was taken following the Executive Session.

Commissioner Comments

None

Adjournment

There being no further business to discuss, the meeting adjourned at 9:25 a.m.

Zachary T. Abraham, Commission President

Randel A. Russell, County Administrator