

APPROVED

LEHIGH COUNTY BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS Organizational Meeting

January 3, 2011

7:30 p.m.

The Organizational Meeting of the Lehigh County Board of Commissioners was held on this date in the Public Hearing Room of the Lehigh County Government Center with Dean Browning presiding as Chair.

Members Present: Commissioners Dean Browning, Thomas Creighton, Percy Dougherty, Glenn Eckhart, Gloria Hamm, William Hansell, David Jones, Sr., Daniel McCarthy, and Andy Roman.

Others Present: Valerie Hildebeitel, Deputy Clerk to the Board; Frank Kane, Chief of Staff, Catharine Roseberry, Deputy Solicitor; reporters Jenna Portnoy and Bernie O'Hare; and David Barilla, Clerk to the Board.

Commissioner Browning called the meeting to order. There was no Citizens Input at this time.

Nomination and Election of Chairperson of the Board of Commissioners for 2011

Commissioner Browning said the process is that names will be placed in nomination for the position of Chairperson. He said once it is apparent that we have all of the nominations he will entertain a motion to close nominations. He said we will then hear from the nominees, have discussion from the Commissioners, allow for public input, and then take a vote.

Commissioner Browning said he will remind those interested in running for the position of Chair that in order to be able to vote and participate in the discussion you must indicate that you will forego the additional salary that goes with the position of Chair.

Nominations

Commissioner Browning asked for nominations for the election of the Chairperson of the Board of Commissioners. Commissioner Dougherty nominated Commissioner Browning. Commissioner Roman nominated Commissioner Eckhart.

With no further nominations, Commissioner Browning asked for a motion to close nominations. Nominations were closed upon the motion of Commissioners Hansell and Dougherty and a unanimous voice vote.

Commissioner Browning said we will now hear from the nominees. He said earlier today he notified the Clerk to the Board that he will forego the additional salary that goes with the position of Chairperson. He said with that he is entitled to vote tonight and engage in discussion.

Comments from Nominees

Commissioner Browning said when he assumed the position of Chair in 2010 he felt there were three primary responsibilities to the position: attend and participate in all committee meetings; conduct the Board of Commissioners' meetings in a straight forward and even handed fashion, while ensuring they ran smoothly; and to interact with the administration and represent the views and positions of the rest of the Board. He said he will leave it up to his colleagues to judge how he has run the meetings, but he believes he has done a good job on the other two items.

Commissioner Browning said he has missed no committee meetings or Board of Commissioners' meetings in the last three years. He reviewed examples of raising the concerns of the Board or individual Commissioners with the administration including: holding an executive session regarding labor negotiations and developing legislation to place Gaming Fund dollars into the Stabilization Fund. He said he viewed it up to individual Commissioners to develop legislation and then build their own coalitions. He reviewed legislation brought by Commissioners in 2010.

Commissioner Browning said in 2011 he will take a less hands off approach, particularly in the area of starting the budget process early. He said at our last meeting Commissioner Hansell indicated his preference for the Commissioners to take a more proactive role in the budget process. He said if he is elected Chairperson of the Board, he intends to select Commissioner Hansell as Chair of the Administrative Committee. He said the specific idea is to start early in the budget process.

Commissioner Browning said he would also do the Board retreat differently in 2011. He said he would recommend the use of an outside moderator. He said we will also assign specific responsibilities, benchmarks, and timelines for the goals that we establish at the retreat. He said that was not done at this year's retreat. He asked for his colleagues support to re-elect him Chairperson of the Board.

Commissioner Eckhart said he will also forego the additional compensation as Chairman. He said he would like to work on three specific items. He said he would like to see the "leadership meetings" expanded from the Chair and Vice Chair to at least three Commissioners. He said he also believes those meetings should take place on Fridays to allow for those three Commissioners to disseminate any information five days prior to the next Commissioners' meeting.

Commissioner Eckhart said he would like to start the budget process much earlier, his thought is January. He said he has discussed several budget initiatives with a number of Commissioners.

Commissioner Eckhart said Commissioner Dougherty and Commissioner Jones have both spoken to him about changes to the Lehigh County Home Rule Charter that they would like to see initiated in the upcoming year. He thanked the Commissioners for their consideration.

Discussion

Commissioner Roman said if you look at the historical information on those who served as Chair; at one time that position was rotated on a regular basis. He said he believes that we have gotten away from that over the last seven to ten years. He said he thinks we need to go back to the tradition of rotating the gavel. He said as a Board we are only as good as the strength of our unity in terms of our working relationships. He said the Board is at a distinct disadvantage because we do not have the unity we should in terms of objectives and what we are trying to accomplish. He said it is important to recognize all Commissioners as leaders.

Commissioner Roman said Commissioner Eckhart served on the Salisbury School Board and the Salisbury Township Board of Commissioners and gained a wealth of experience and knowledge. He said we need to recognize that all Commissioners are leaders and have a breadth of experience. He said he would like to see the gavel rotated and have a more cohesive unit as a Board.

Commissioner Hansell said he believes that changing chairs every year leads to a lack of cohesion. He said he believes the Chair should serve for two years.

Commissioner Roman said there will be an election in 2011. He said he does not think a Commissioner should be Chair of the Board and a candidate for Commissioner at the same time. He said there are too many political overtones in that situation. Commissioner Browning said he appreciated Commissioner Roman's point, but that point was not followed in 2009.

Citizens Input

Joe Hilliard, Lehigh County resident, said when a Commissioner votes they have a duty to represent the constituents who elected them to office. He said there is a perception that Commissioner Browning is the fifth Democrat vote which is contrary to what he campaigned on.

Hilliard asked if Commissioner Browning will vocally oppose the creation of a bi-county health department. Commissioner Browning said on 12/15/10 he brought forward an ordinance requesting that Lehigh County pull out of the bi-county health department. He said that bill was tabled by a vote of five to four. He said a majority of this Board has indicated that they want to go forward with a bi-county board of health. He said from here it is up to the Administration to determine how that will be funded.

Stan Bialecki, Lehigh County resident, said that bill was tabled. He said the Commissioners did not vote in favor of a bi-county health department they only voted to table the bill.

Commissioner Hamm said she can not believe the threats, the promises and all of the things have gone on behind back doors. She said the Chair receives an additional \$1,000 in salary. She said the Chair gets one vote like any other Commissioner. She said the

Chair represents the Board at events and attends our meetings. She said attendance and knowledge of issues are very important to her. She said the fact that this has become a dog-eat-dog fight is an embarrassment.

Bob Romanchek, Lehigh County resident, asked the Board to exercise its influence to maintain the viability of Queen City Airport. He encouraged Commissioners to visit the facility. He said he believes Commissioner Browning has run very professional meetings.

Vote

Commissioner Browning was elected Chairperson of the Board of Commissioners for 2011 by the following vote: Commissioners Creighton – Commissioner Browning; Dougherty – Commissioner Browning; Eckhart – Commissioner Eckhart; Hamm – Commissioner Browning; Browning – Commissioner Browning; Hansell – Commissioner Browning; Jones – Commissioner Eckhart; McCarthy – Commissioner Browning; and Roman – Commissioner Eckhart. The clerk announced six votes in favor of Commissioner Browning and three votes in favor of Commissioner Eckhart.

Nomination and Election of Vice Chairperson of the Board of Commissioners for 2011

Nominations

Commissioner Browning asked for nominations for the election of the Vice Chairperson of the Board of Commissioners. Commissioner Hamm nominated Commissioner Hansell. Commissioner Eckhart nominated Commissioner Roman.

With no further nominations, Commissioner Browning asked for a motion to close nominations. Nominations were closed upon the motion of Commissioners Eckhart and Hamm and a unanimous voice vote. Commissioner Browning asked for comments from the nominees.

Comments from Nominees

Commissioner Hansell said he was appointed to this position about 11 months ago and views it as public service. He said he has spent the last 50 years in local government. He said he is 99.9% certain that he will not be seeking election.

Commissioner Hansell said if the Board feels it would be helpful to lead the process of a year long budget review, he would be happy to do that and will work with the Administration. He said when he was interviewed for the position he said it would be a pleasure to work with each and every Commissioner and an honor to serve the citizens of Lehigh County. He said both of those statements are still true.

Commissioner Roman said as Vice Chair he would be grateful for the Commissioners vote of confidence. He said he believes that this year will require additional leadership to look at things differently, especially with regard to the budget. He said we may have to look at systemic change in how we do things. He said Six Sigma has been discussed in the past and he would be happy to be part of the effort to make that happen.

Discussion

Commissioner Eckhart said Bill Hansell will be an excellent Administrative Committee Chair. He said Commissioner Roman has experience with local government and is committed to making changes. He said we need to focus on changing one to three items this year and with that we can make a big difference.

Commissioner Dougherty said he has always been a firm believer in having the Chair and Vice Chair from different political parties. He said he will break from that tradition this year and vote for Commissioner Roman. He said he would like to see the leadership meetings expanded to the Chair, Vice Chair and Bill Hansell as Administrative Committee Chair.

Vote

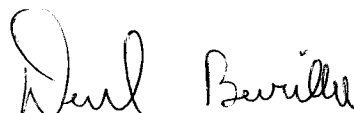
Commissioner Hansell was elected Vice Chairperson of the Board of Commissioners for 2011 by the following vote: Commissioners Dougherty – Commissioner Roman; Eckhart – Commissioner Roman; Hamm – Commissioner Hansell; Browning – Commissioner Hansell; Hansell – Commissioner Hansell; Jones – Commissioner Hansell; McCarthy – Commissioner Hansell; Roman – Commissioner Roman; and Creighton – Commissioner Roman. The clerk announced five votes in favor of Commissioner Hansell and four votes in favor of Commissioner Roman.

Schedule of Meetings for 2011

Commissioner Eckhart made the following motion: that the Lehigh County Board of Commissioners meet twice each month during calendar year 2011 as required by the Lehigh County Home Rule Charter. The Board will meet on the second and fourth Wednesdays of the month at 7:30 p.m. in the Public Hearing Room of the Lehigh County Government Center with the following exceptions: the second meeting in November will be held on Tuesday, November 22, 2011 and the second meeting in December will be held on Wednesday, December 21, 2011. The motion was seconded by Commissioner Hansell and approved by a unanimous voice vote.

There were no Commissioner Announcements. Under Citizens Input, Stan Bialecki, Lehigh County resident, said he thinks the idea of holding the “leadership meetings” on Friday is a good one. He congratulated Commissioners Browning and Hansell.

The meeting adjourned at 8:10 p.m.



David Barilla, Clerk to the Board