

Blue Ribbon Commission Meeting Minutes

Date: January 21, 2025

Time: 5:00 p.m.

Location: Ritter Public Library, 5680 Liberty Avenue, Vermilion

Welcoming Remarks – Co-Chairman Mike Parker

The meeting was called to order by Co-Chairman Mike Parker at the Ritter Public Library. He welcomed the commission members and attendees and requested that all present introduce themselves. Mr. Parker noted that Mr. Krabill was not present at the meeting due to a prior appointment.

Approval of Minutes

Mr. Parker asked for a motion to approve the Minutes from the January 14, 2025 meeting. A motion was made by Mr. Moon and seconded by Ms. Crescimano. The motion passed unanimously.

Summary of the Purpose of the Commission – Co-Chairman Mike Parker

Mr. Parker explained that the purpose of the first four meetings is to gather information from public officials and the community regarding potential ways for local entities to collaborate, reduce redundancy, and ultimately save government resources and taxpayer money. The goal is to identify opportunities for improving efficiencies and find collaborative solutions to minimize redundancies across government services. He opened the floor for further discussion.

Public Comment

Mrs. Karen Balconi Ghezzi (Blue Ribbon Commission Member) shared her recent experience attending a meeting focused on ways to combine services in the County. The discussion centered around the idea of a central hub for school buses. She noted that while the concept of a shared bus system for the county had merit, the associated costs of such a hub might outweigh the potential benefits. However, she proposed it as an idea for further investigation by the Commission. **Mr. Tom Forster** (Blue Ribbon Commission Member) spoke to a resident who is the CEO of a school bus rental company. The company operates a fleet of 40,000 buses across the country, which may provide insights into the feasibility of a shared school bus system. **Mr. Tom Tucker** (Blue Ribbon Commission Member) shared his experience working with school districts that either own or lease school buses. He emphasized that leasing school buses is often a more advantageous option due to the complexities and challenges associated with bus operations in school systems. **Ms. Lisa Crescimano** (Blue Ribbon Commission Member) noted that state law requires school districts transport students to vocation and parochial schools. Mr. Parker confirmed that Service-Specific meetings would begin at the end of February.

Topics for future discussions would include insurance, fire services, police services, purchasing, information technology, infrastructure, public transportation, education, and human resources. He encouraged attendees to bring forward any suggestions or thoughts on these topics.

Mr. Matt Old (Erie County Commissioner) proposed the idea of collectively purchasing infrequently used equipment across townships, as a way to pool resources and reduce costs. He noted that this could be done by partnering with Erie County or neighboring townships.

Mr. Keith Sexton (Vermilion Township Administrator/Zoning Inspector) mentioned that Vermilion Township has a great working relationship with Erie County and neighboring townships. He expressed support for the idea of sharing equipment, noting that such arrangements had been explored in the past, but had stalled due to legal and protective agreement issues.

Mr. Steve Shoffner (Erie County Commissioner) suggested that compiling an inventory of equipment from all entities in the county could help identify duplications and under-utilized resources. Mr. Old mentioned that Erie County no longer charges for borrowing equipment, which may make sharing more feasible.

Mrs. Balconi Ghezzi raised the issue of foster care and child welfare. She emphasized the need for a larger pool of foster parents, noting that many children are currently moved to other counties due to a lack of local placements. She suggested this issue be addressed collaboratively among Erie County's cities and townships.

Mr. Forster inquired about the largest expenses faced by Townships. Mr. Sexton responded that roads and fire services are the largest costs. Mr. Forster asked if consolidating fire services would be realistic. The possibility of merging resources to build a shared fire station was also discussed. **Mr. Kurtz** (Vermilion Township Trustee) noted a major challenge for fire departments is the retention of volunteers, especially as many experienced firefighters are nearing retirement.

Mr. Kelly Moon (Blue Ribbon Commission Member) proposed that fire and EMS training be consolidated to ensure uniformity across departments, as each township follows different protocols. He noted that fire equipment often needs to be replaced due to regulations, even when it is still in good working condition.

Mr. Shoffner stated the Local Emergency Planning Commission (LEPC) would be an excellent resource for connecting safety services across Erie County. He encouraged the Blue Ribbon Commission to investigate this connection further for potential collaboration on emergency preparedness and training.

Mr. Kurtz suggested re-examining the Sheriff's Inmate Work Program as a potential cost-saving measure for township services, such as simple maintenance tasks, which could be performed by inmates at no cost.

Mr. Parker mentioned that a future topic for discussion would be Information Technology. He suggested the possibility of making bulk purchases among townships to reduce costs.

Mr. Shoffner noted that the hospital recently consolidated its printers into one department, saving \$1 million in the process. He pointed out that this concept has been on his radar for several years within the County. He observed that each department currently uses several small printers and copiers, and suggested that consolidating printing into one printer in each department's main office would reduce costs and eliminate the need for multiple contracts with different companies.

Adjournment

With no further discussion, Mr. Parker thanked everyone for their participation and the valuable discussions. He asked for a motion to adjourn, which was made by Ms. Crescimano and seconded by Mr. Tucker. The motion passed unanimously, and the meeting was adjourned.