

# Blue Ribbon Commission Meeting Minutes

**Date:** January 28, 2025

**Time:** 5:00 p.m.

**Location:** Groton Township Hall, 9414 Portland Road, Castalia

## Welcoming Remarks – Co-Chairman Mike Parker

The meeting was called to order by Co-Chairman Mike Parker at the Groton Town Hall. He thanked the Trustees for allowing the use of space and welcomed the commission members and attendees. Mr. Parker noted that Mr. Krabill was not present at the meeting and hopes to return next week. The Board reintroduced themselves to the audience.

## Approval of Minutes

Mr. Parker asked for a motion to approve the Minutes from the January 21, 2025 meeting. A motion was made by Ms. Crescimano and seconded by Mr. Forster. The motion passed unanimously.

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

Mr. Parker explained that the purpose of these meetings is to collect data on how local government can be more efficient. Mr. Parker stated the cost-savings topics to be discussed are as follows: Insurance (health, liability, property), fire services, police services, purchasing, Information Technology, infrastructure (roads, water, sewer), public transportation, education and human resources and employee benefits. Mr. Parker asked if the audience had any input on these topics or good practice that they could share of ways they are cost-sharing, that could be shared with other entities.

## Public Comment

Mr. Parker noted topics that were discussed at the last meeting included: countywide bussing, promoting foster parents, county-wide Fire and EMS Districts, common bulk purchasing, countywide IT service, Inmate Work Program and procurement. Mr. Parker also noted that Mr. Krabill stated that county wide solid waste pick up and the use of brine on all roads to reduce salt costs was discussed at the City Commission Meeting.

Mr. Bob Day (Fiscal Officer at Margaretta Township), stated that Margaretta Township has a good working relationship with Oxford and Groton Townships and have found ways to consolidate services. Mr. Day stated these townships use combined staff and equipment to redo their roads. He mentioned that by doing this, it has saved Margaretta Township between \$50,000 and \$60,000 in road maintenance costs. Mr. Day noted that all townships are insured through OTARMA and a list of all equipment is required to be provided to them. Ms. Lisa Crescimano (Blue Ribbon Commission) stated she can attain those lists from OTARMA.

Ms. Nancy Funni (Groton Township Fiscal Officer) added that sharing employees and equipment has worked really well for Groton Township. She noted that there is a cost-share if equipment breaks down as well.

Mr. Kerry Jett (Groton Township Fire Chief) stated that four out of nine fire departments utilize joint training exercises and share purchases. Mr. Parker noted that it is important for the Commission to know that the Fire Chiefs are working together through the Township Association. Mr. Jett stated the it would be helpful if the County assisted with the costs of dispatching.

**Mr. Steve Shoffner** (Erie County Commissioner) stated that 40% of the total dispatch costs are paid for by the County for personnel. 60% of the costs are shared through the entities that use the services. **Mr. Matt Old** (Erie County Commissioner) stated the goal of regional dispatch is not to shift costs from one entity to another. He stated the Village of Kelleys Island should not pay as much for dispatch as Perkins Township. The more the entity uses the services the more the entity pays. Ms. Lisa Crescimano (Blue Ribbon) stated that when regional dispatch first started it was more about efficiency than cost savings.

Mr. Jason Dulaney (Perkins School Board Member) asked about the possibility of combining the zoning/building permit process. He wonders if there is an opportunity for the townships and county to collaborate to have one point person for permits like a one stop shop. He recently had a situation where he met with someone on a Tuesday evening to help him navigate the process of building his home. Mr. Dennis Schreiner stated that the Regional Planning Department coordinates all zoning manuals for Erie County and he would be a good suggestion to speak with about the differences in zoning and the permit process for all townships in Erie County. Mr. Parker noted that having joint zoning inspectors is a good idea and may be something that could be attained down the road.

Erie County Sheriff Paul Sigsworth was present at the meeting and stated that the regional dispatch center is available for anyone who would like to stop by and see it. He stated that regionalizing dispatch has shown to be a significant cost savings. There is no longer one 911 caller taking calls and then having to transfer them to a different entity. The Public deserves the service that they are currently receiving. The Sheriff noted that the dispatchers did receive a very well deserved pay raise. He also noted that dispatching has changed over the years. The Dispatchers now are required to give CPR instructions to callers and counsel suicidal people. The regional dispatch is working very well.

The Sheriff stated the Inmate Work Program is still being utilized. Several inmates help in the kitchen at the jail and do other job duties. They have had corrections officers go with inmates to do jobs out in the community as well. This program does help keep costs down. If Township or Village or City is interested in utilizing the program, please feel free to contact the Sheriff.

Mr. Parker asked the Sheriff if there would be an advantage to consolidating road patrol services, like Castalia did a few years back. The Sheriff stated if any agency is interested in consolidating to contact him and he would definitely see if it was viable and he would support that decision. Mr. Day noted that Castalia spent the majority of their budget on the police force.

Mr. Day stated when the Sheriff took over road patrol for Castalia, the Sheriff's Office started receiving funds from the police levy and received Castalia's road patrol cars. \$30,000 per year is used to supplemental funds needed and a substation is provided for the Sheriff's Office staff. Mr. Old noted for one deputy to be in Huron Township for 40 hours per week, costs Erie County \$110,000. Mr. Tom Forster (Blue Ribbon Commission) asked how many substations are located in Erie County, with Sheriff responding seven. Sheriff stated the substations are not fully staffed and are used for the deputies to fill out paperwork and meet citizens.

Mr. Dulaney asked if the Sheriff provides deputies for all School Resource Officers in Erie County. The Sheriff stated SRO's are jurisdictional and he provides SRO's for EHOVE, BGSU, Townsend, NorthPoint, and Margareta Schools. Mr. Dulaney stated that he is very proud of the collaborations that Perkins Schools have. Mr. Tom Tucker (Blue Ribbon) stated he has worked with schools who have used private security and School Resource Officers and the schools are much better off with School Resource Officers. Mr. Tucker added it is important to have the same deputy trained to work with children and they become familiar with the deputy.

Mr. Day stated healthcare is a huge concern. In 2023, the Fire Department had 16 full-time staff. There was a 42.3% increase in healthcare costs, or \$400,000 each year. Mr. Day noted it is hard to provide the best care for the employees with costs being that high. Ms. Crescimano noted that the school districts have a county-wide consortium for healthcare and that seems to be a positive way to go. Mr. Forster understands the frustrations of a small entity and healthcare. He noted that even one claim in a small group is bad. He mentioned that some small businesses are creating their own insurance for their employees. If they own their own insurance, they have the control of what the stop loss is. He added that a consortium would be a good way to have significant savings, if you can get enough entities to join.

Ms. Sue Daughtery, Serving Our Seniors, stated that school bussing and having the staff is difficult and she encouraged the possibility of schools sharing busses. Mr. Parker noted that this was discussed at length at last week's meeting and is an item that will be further looked into. Ms. Daughtery then brought up the idea of regionalized public transportation and the need for public transportation to not just be confined to the city limits. She noted many of the Sandusky Transit busses are driving around half full. Many residents cannot get to jobs or doctor's appointments because the public transportation will not provide that service. Mr. Dulaney asked why it's important to expand public transportation to other entities. Ms. Daughtery explained that many working class residents are barely making ends meet and rely on the public transit to get them to and from work every day. She noted that public transit is a huge investment but it is needed to help those that need it and have to work.

Mr. Day informed all present that there has recently been a Senate Bill proposed called the "circuit breaker" tax credit. Mr. Day noted that 18 states have already approved the credit. The tax credit is based on senior citizens who have an income of \$60,000 or less and their property taxes are a certain percent over their income. Mr. Caleb Stidham (Erie County Treasurer) stated there are dozens of property tax reforms. Mr. Stidham did a presentation on what our community can do and he stated the county needs to look at the 34 taxing jurisdictions to find ways to reduce spending.

Ms. Daughtery noted that farmers are taxed differently and are very concerned they will lose their farm due to these tax increases. Mr. Stidham stated that it is easy to blame the state for these increases but it is also important to look locally. Property tax is a local choice. Mr. Stidham encouraged the farmer, Ms. Daughtery was referring to, to attend one of his property tax presentations in the near future.

Mr. Zach Rospert (Milan Township Fiscal Officer) stated that Milan Township just purchased new fire trucks. Mr. Rospert suggested having a shared fleet maintenance department among the townships. He doesn't see the need to have special mechanics at each township or city.

## **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. Moon. The motion passed unanimously, and the meeting was adjourned.