

Blue Ribbon Commission Meeting Minutes

Date: January 14, 2025

Time: 10:00 a.m.

Location: City of Sandusky Commission Chambers, 240 Columbus Avenue, Sandusky

Welcoming Remarks – Co-Chairmen Mike Parker & Jeff Krabill

The meeting was called to order by Co-Chairman Mike Parker at the City of Sandusky Commission Chambers. He welcomed the commission members and attendees and provided an overview of the commissions' mission. Mr. Krabill noted that the commission is voluntary, and consists of professionals and officials from different sectors.

Creation of the Blue Ribbon Commission

Speaker: Erie County Commissioner Matt Old

Mr. Old stated that the Blue Ribbon Commission was established by the Erie County Commissioners in direct response to the public outrage following recent property tax valuation notices, which sparked widespread discussions about local taxation and government spending. Mr. Old stated that the County Commission recognized an opportunity to rethink how public funds are allocated and used.

Mr. Old stated the Erie County Commissioners chose members with diverse backgrounds, including: City Commissioners, Township Trustees, School Board Members, Business Leaders, Department Heads, Superintendents, and other public officials. Mr. Old mentioned that he is positive that this diverse commission will ensure that multiple perspectives are considered during this review.

Mr. Old stated the Blue Ribbon Commission is tasked with conducting a comprehensive review of all government-funded services across Erie County and aims to identify redundancies, improve efficiencies, and propose collaborative solutions among local government entities. Mr. Old mentioned the core principal of this effort is to ensure governments are working together efficiently and not providing redundant services at increase cost to the taxpayers. Mr. Old stated the one thing to avoid is shifting of financial burdens from one entity to another; rather than transferring costs, the focus is on reducing overall expenditures.

Mr. Old noted two examples of successful cost-saving collaborations within the county including:

- **Regional Dispatch Consolidation** – Multiple jurisdictions merged dispatch operations, significantly reducing costs while maintaining public safety effectiveness.
- **Township Equipment Sharing** – A cooperative effort among Oxford, Margaretta, and Groton Townships to share road maintenance equipment and personnel, resulting in greater efficiency and cost savings.

Mr. Old commended and thanked the Blue Ribbon Commission Members for their commitment in this process.

Mission of the Commission – Co-Chairmen Mike Parker & Jeff Krabill

Mr. Krabill stated that there are overwhelming concerns from the citizens of Erie County regarding recent property tax valuation changes. He noted that the goal of the commission is to conduct an in-depth assessment of redundancies, inefficiencies, and areas where local governments could collaborate. He reiterated that the goal is not to eliminate services, but to find smarter, more sustainable ways to manage taxpayer dollars effectively. The Commission will examine where departments or agencies can consolidate resources for better efficiency (e.g., administrative functions, equipment purchases.)

He mentioned that many senior citizens expressed confusion and concern over their tax bills. He noted that Serving Our Seniors Executive Director Sue Daugherty has held public forums to educate residents on the increase of their property taxes and how the increases were calculated.

To conclude, Mr. Krabill stressed again, that the commission's focus is on what solutions can be made that will lead to real savings for taxpayers without shifting the financial burdens from one government entity to another.

Mr. Krabill then asked the Commission to introduce themselves and give a short biography of their work experience.

Karen Balconi Ghezzi – Executive Director of Job and Family Services and licensed attorney for many years. Mrs. Balconi Ghezzi still functions as an attorney as a consultant.

Tom Forster – Lifelong resident of Sandusky. He began his insurance career working for his family owned insurance business. Mr. Forster eventually moved on to his own insurance business and now does consulting for healthcare insurance.

Jeff Krabill – Member of the Sandusky City Board of Education for 18 years, is currently a Sandusky City Commissioner and his background is in marketing and advertising for which he worked for 35 years.

Mike Parker – Started his career working at the Erie County Engineer's Office. Has a degree in Engineering. Worked for Davis Besse for 36 years and has been a Township Trustee for 17 years and serves as President of the Township Association.

Kelly Moon – Retired as Plant Manager of ICI paints after 31 years. He was Mayor of Berlin Heights for 24 years and is currently in his 16th year as a Commissioner on the Veterans Service Commission.

Lisa Crescimano – Started her career in the private sector. She has since held many public service jobs including: Fiscal Officer for Perkins Township, CFO at the Lorain Public Library System, Interim Treasurer of Perrysburg and Ravenna Schools, Chief Fiscal Officer of the

Alcohol, Drug Addiction, Mental Health Services Board and a member of the Board of Elections.

Tom Tucker – Tom was a teacher for 20 years, who was active in the union, serving as Chief. He then became a principal, and then Sandusky City Schools Assistant Superintendent and eventually became Superintendent. He then moved back to Lorain, his hometown, and was Superintendent there for 30 years. He noted that while he was Superintendent in Lorain, he brought their finances to the black without having to borrow funds from the taxpayers. He is currently a teacher with Cleveland State University and sits on various Boards.

Public Comment - Regarding overall mission and purpose of meeting

No public comment regarding the mission and purpose of the meeting.

Detailed Report on Property Tax Overview

Presenter: Caleb Stidham, Erie County Treasurer

Mr. Stidham provided a detailed breakdown of Ohio's property tax system, including when it began. He explained key concepts such as mills, inside and outside millage, tax credits, and tax rate calculations. Mr. Stidham also discussed the impact of the 20-mill floor on school districts and how it affects taxpayers. He noted that Erie County has 34 separate taxing jurisdictions with varying tax rates. Mr. Stidham also reviewed how state-mandated tax rate adjustments influence local government funding.

Public Comment/Question & Answer regarding Treasurer's Report.

No public comment regarding the Treasurer's Report.

Commission Discussion - schedule and topics for meetings

Mr. Krabill stated the Commission will conduct open and transparent public sessions to gather input from residents. A series of service-specific meetings will begin in February 2025, focusing on key areas such as insurance, emergency services, IT consolidation, infrastructure, and transportation costs. Findings and recommendations will be compiled into a formal report, expected by the end of June 2025, which will be presented to local government entities for consideration.

Mr. Parker stated that the public input meetings have been scheduled. Citizens are encouraged to provide their input on cost-saving measures and government services. The following are the upcoming meeting dates and locations:

- **Tuesday, January 21** – Ritter Public Library, Vermillion (5:00 PM)
- **Tuesday, January 28** – Groton Township Offices (5:00 PM)

- **Tuesday, February 4** – Huron Public Library (5:00 PM)
- **Tuesday, February 11** – Erie County Office Building (5:00 PM)

Mr. Parker noted that after the public input sessions, the Service-Specific meetings will begin. The first meeting has been scheduled for Tuesday, February 25, 2025 at 10:00 a.m. at the Office Building Chambers, 247 Columbus Avenue, 3rd Floor. This meeting will focus on Insurance (Health, Liability, Property). Other topics at meetings going forward will include:

- Insurance (Health, Liability, Property)
- Fire Services
- Police Services
- Purchasing
- Information Technology
- Infrastructure (Roads, Water, Sewer)
- Public Transportation
- Education
- Human Resources & Employee Benefits

This list is not all inclusive and subject to input from the public and public officials.

5. Public Comments & Questions

Co-Chairman Jeff Krabill opened the meeting for public comment, to share any thoughts or suggestions for the Commission on how to proceed with their examination.

Ms. Sue Daugherty, Serving Our Seniors emphasized the complexity of property tax calculations and the need for better public education. She urged taxpayers to take personal responsibility in understanding their tax bills and stated that Serving Our Seniors is offering several educational workshops where Treasurer Caleb Stidham will speak on tax calculations for residents over age 60. She praised the Erie County Commissioners for listening to public concerns and taking action by forming the Blue Ribbon Commission.

She stated that citizens, particularly seniors, have expressed that the increasing property taxes are making it difficult to afford staying in their homes. Ms. Daugherty urged the Blue Ribbon Commission to examine how tax exemptions and credits could be better structured to support low-income and elderly homeowners.

Mr. Jim Ommert, Perkins Township Trustee stated that government leaders need to remember that public funds belong to taxpayers, not the government. Mr. Ommert urged the commission to ensure that taxpayer dollars are used effectively, guarantee that unnecessary expenditures should be eliminated, and funds should be spent as if they were personal finances.

Mr. Marcus Harris, representing the City Manager's Office introduced the concept of the "Four E's" (Economy, Efficiency, Effectiveness, and Equity) as a framework for the commissions' decision-making process. Mr. Harris stated the importance of ensuring taxation policies remain fair and balanced, especially for vulnerable populations.

Mr. Harris encouraged the commission to use data-driven decision-making to support policy changes that benefit all residents.

Mr. Zach Rospert, Blue Ribbon Sub-Committee Member suggested collecting emails from those that attended the meeting today so a database can be created to utilize email as a way of keeping the everyone informed of upcoming meetings to ensure transparency. The Commission members agreed to expanding public communication efforts through email and local media.

There being no further discussion the meeting was adjourned at 11:30 a.m. following a motion by Mr. Tom Forster and a second by Mr. Tom Tucker.

Next Meeting: Tuesday, January 21, 2025, at Ritter Public Library, Vermilion.