

Blue Ribbon Commission Meeting Minutes

Date: May 20, 2025

Time: 10:00 a.m.

Location: Erie County Office Building Chambers, 247 Columbus Avenue, Sandusky

Welcoming Remarks

The meeting was called to order by Co-Chairman **Mike Parker**, Roll Call was taken. All present. An attendance sheet was signed by audience members present.

Approval of Minutes from May 6, 2025– Topic of Discussion: Economic Development

A motion to approve the minutes that were distributed electronically was made by Mr. Foster and seconded by Mr. Moon. The motion carried unanimously.

Purpose of the Meeting

Mr. Mike Parker (Blue Ribbon Commission) welcomed attendees and reiterated the Commission's purpose: to assess public service areas throughout Erie County and identify collaborative opportunities between municipalities, townships, and agencies that could reduce redundancy and provide a cost savings. These efforts aim to alleviate the growing tax burden placed on Erie County residents.

10:00 A.M. Mr. Parker turned the meeting to Facilitator **Karen Balconi Ghezzi** to start the discussion on ways to reduce costs and be more efficient with **Public Health and Job and Family Resources**.

Ms. Balconi Ghezzi expressed that Blue Ribbon Commission is tasked with reducing the local funding burden on taxpayers, but another area of concern is at the State and Federal level. Erie County Department of Job and Family Services (JFS) receives 1% of its budget funds from the Commissioners. JFS has a total budget of \$205 million. These funds are being distributed to the residents who should be paying their taxes and working. A large number of Erie County residents receive SSI, which should be a temporary fix. The Legislature needs to address this issue because once a resident is approved for SSI, there is never a review. Residents receiving SSI are supposed to be looking for jobs and trying to better themselves, but because the State does not review cases, residents do not look for jobs. This, along with residents receiving Medicaid and daycare funds, can lead to fraud.

Ms. Balconi Ghezzi believes this is indirectly related to Blue Ribbon's purpose because if residents were working, then they would pay their taxes and buy property and be a valid citizen. Therefore, bringing additional dollars into the county.

Mr. Jeff Krabill (Blue Ribbon Commission) recognizes these problems and believes that in the "white paper" recommendations it should be noted that bringing awareness to the legislature is crucial.

Mr. Parker then introduced the Public Health part of today's meeting.

Mr. Peter Schade (Erie County Health Commissioner):

1. What is the total annual budget for your organization? Health Department - \$24 million
FQHC - \$2 million
2. What local funding do your organizations rely on versus how much do you receive in state/federal grants?

Health Department - receives \$2.4 million through .3 mill, .2 mil and ½ mill levies, which makes up 10% of total budget. Over the last 20 years, the Health Department has migrated to applying for grants vs. relying on levy dollars. The balance of budget funding comes from collection of various fees, licenses and permits.

The Federally Qualified Health Center (FQHC) - separate entity to the Health Department, as this facility has their own governing board. The FQHC receives patients who receive Medicaid, regular insurance or self-pay and provides primary, mental health and dental services.

Mr. Schade added that his Department has a strategic plan in place to ensure that the Health Department and The FQHC can still operate if there are Federal and state cuts.

3. What partnerships currently exist with other public health agencies? Are there other partnership opportunities that would create efficiencies?

Both entities partner with 100's of agencies i.e., Ohio Department of Public Health, Department of Agriculture, USDA, Firelands Regional Medical Center, Erie County EMA, Ohio EMA.

Mr. Schade added that there are 18 preparedness plans in place for mass casualties. A carryover balance is saved due to the instance of a mass casualty or bio terrorism attack.

Health Department has 7 satellite outreach centers and partners with the following: Job and Family Services, EHOVE, Vermilion High School, Port Clinton High School, Kelleys Island, Sandusky Career Center, and Margaretta High School.

Mr. Schade stated that the Health Department is not in business to make money but to provide services.

There is a new senior health initiative the Health Department is working on that will keep the tax base free of health expenses. They are hoping to receive grants tied into keeping seniors in their homes vs. nursing homes.

4. What duplications exist in the public health arena in Erie County? Are there opportunities to save costs?

Mr. Schade stated that Health Departments are a creature of statute. They work closely with Infectious Disease Control and he believes that there is more than enough need for other health centers to exist.

Mr. Tom Forster (Blue Ribbon Commission) spoke about having a combined health insurance consortium and believes the FQHC would be a great asset in reaching all entities who might be interested in the health program.

Ms. Diane Taylor (Director, Alcohol, Drug Addiction, Mental Health Services Board) :

1. What is the total annual budget for your organization?
\$6 million, with less than 10% going towards administration.

The ADAMHS Board have been good stewards of its funding. The Board right-sided its budget by taking an extensive evaluation of its levy dollars.

Mr. Matt Old (Erie County Commissioner) commended the ADAMHS Board for right sizing their budget and ensuring the budget dollars were used based on need and not “what ifs.”

2. What local funding do your organizations rely on versus how much do you receive in state/federal grants?

Levy funds – 52%
Ohio Department of Mental Health - 20%
Federal funding through grants - \$1.2 million

3. What partnerships currently exist with other public health agencies? Are there other partnership opportunities that would create efficiencies? ADAMHS contracts with 14 agencies including providing support to schools, Health Department, Community Foundation, Board of DD and United Way. Any reserve funds held are for special instances that arise.

ADAMHS cost shares services with JFS, Health Department and the Jail. They provide crisis services in the jail that assists inmates with substance abuse and provides peer services. ADAMHS has a crisis assessment team, that has a goal of assessing citizens while in crisis to prevent them going to the hospital or jail. ADAMHS Board is looking into expanding those services.

4. What duplications exist in the public health arena in Erie County? Are there opportunities to save costs?

The mental health system has a myriad of providers that ADAMHS works with in conjunction. The Board determined not to partner with for-profit entities to ensure the highest of standards are met with their dollars.

Ms. Rachel Malone (Finance, Board of Developmental Disabilities) :

1. What is the total annual budget for your organization?
\$9.9 million budget, but spent just under \$9 million last year.
2. What local funding do your organizations rely on versus how much do you receive in state/federal grants?

Federal grants – 15-17%

State grants – 1%

Local grants – 8%

Levy funds (3.0 mill) – 75%

Partial rollbacks, per the Budget Commission from 2021-2025, have saved taxpayers \$5.8 million

3. What partnerships currently exist with other public health agencies? Are there other partnership opportunities that would create efficiencies?

Board of DD partners with ADAMHS Board, FCFC and JFS.

Only eligible residents can receive funding through Board of DD. There are currently 750 residents out of 900 in Erie County receive assistance from Board of DD.

4. What duplications exist in the public health arena in Erie County? Are there opportunities to save costs?

No other agency in Erie County provides the services that Board of DD provides, so there are no duplication of services.

Mr. Caleb Stidham (Erie County Treasurer) noted that Board of DD is a test case of success. There was an enormous carryover balance, but, the partnership with the Budget Commission, has given tax relief to the residents of Erie County by Board of DD not collecting levy dollars the past four years. He added that this practice needs to be replicated to other entities that have large carryover balances.

Ms. Melissa Bayer Smith (Executive Director of Family and Children First Council) was present at the meeting but had to leave to attend another meeting. She provided the answers to these questions on paper for the Board to review.

Summary

Mr. Parker summarized with the following:

- Local entities need to tighten State controls of fraud and abuse in the system
- Health Services Centers may be interested in long-term health insurance consortium
- Public Health Resource entities need to match budget with demand

11:00 A.M. Discussing ways to reduce costs and be more efficient with **MetroParks and Libraries**. Facilitator: **Mr. Jeff Krabill**

Mr. Krabill invited anyone from the MetroParks or Libraries to provide the information that was requested.

Mr. James Tolbert (Director of Berlin-Milan Library) provided his information to the Board:

1. What is the total annual budget for your organization?
\$1,163,325.00 million, which breaks down to \$135.50 per person per year.
2. What local funding do your organizations rely on versus how much do you receive in state/federal grants?

Property tax collections – 44.78%

Public Library Fund (PLF) – 47.3% (state funding)

Donations, fines and fees – 0.59%

Endowment fund – 7.25%

3. Percentage of budget for personnel and benefits? **57 ¼% of total budget spent on personnel and benefits, which is about the average for other libraries.**
4. What is your total carryover, and for what are you encumbering your carryover?
\$1,684,906.00
With State budget uncertainty, the goal is to have enough carryover to fund the budget for a few years. Having this carryover ensures that the Library does not need to find funding through the taxpayers by asking for a levy.

In the past, the Library was spending more than they should have, but the Library Board made cuts which right-sized the budget to its current state.

5. What duplications exist in the library systems in Erie County? Are there opportunities to save costs?

Duplications:

Middle Management has been eliminated, which then shifts duties to others.

School Districts have stopped hiring Librarians

Opportunities to save costs:

Consolidate the purchase of fire prevention supplies

Health insurance consortium

Share costs for snow plowing services – currently outsourcing with high expense

Partners with Clevnet, which shares physical and digital resources and IT support

The Rate on Investment (ROI) is \$3.96 per dollar spent utilizing Clevnet.

Ms. Cheryl Grizzel (Director of Ritter Public Library) provided his information to the Board:

1. What is the total annual budget for your organization?
Ritter Public Library services Lorain and Erie Counties - \$1.6 million budget
Library has also right-sided its budget and do the most with what is available
2. What local funding do your organizations rely on versus how much do you receive in state/federal grants?

Local Levies – 55%
Public Library Fund (PLF) – 45% (state funding)
Receive several small local grants
3. Percentage of budget for personnel and benefits? 62% of total budget spent on personnel and benefits
4. What is your total carryover, and for what are you encumbering your carryover?

\$900,000
\$1 million in Building Fund
The goal is to have six to eight months in reserve for unforeseen circumstances
5. What duplications exist in the library systems in Erie County? Are there opportunities to save costs?
Duplications:
Partners with local agencies, which is the nature of the business
Partners with Clevnet, which shares physical and digital resources and IT support

Ms. Celeste (Fiscal Officer, Sandusky Public Library) provided his information to the Board:

1. What is the total annual budget for your organization?
Sandusky Library serves Sandusky, Perkins and Kelleys Island
\$4.8 million revenue appropriations
\$600,000 special restriction funds
Total of \$5.4 million
2. What local funding do your organizations rely on versus how much do you receive in state/federal grants?

Local Levies – 45% (\$1.6 million)
Public Library Fund (PLF) – 55% (state funding)
Received a city grant, using ARPA funds to building renovations

3. Percentage of budget for personnel and benefits? **50% of total budget is spent on personnel and benefits. Recently found a vendor that will save \$96,000 on healthcare for personnel**
4. What is your total carryover, and for what are you encumbering your carryover?
**\$9 million – half of this, \$4.7 million, is General Fund carryover for one year
It was noted that the library's buildings (including Follett House), being large and old, tend to need renovations frequently. Therefore, the reason for the higher carryover amount. (The library funded 50% of the last renovation project).**
5. What duplications exist in the library systems in Erie County? Are there opportunities to save costs?
Duplications:
**Partners with Clevnet
Share personnel duties such as HR and security (personnel has not been replaced to pre-covid levels)**

Ms. Molly Carver (Director, Sandusky Library), thanked the Board for their efforts to bring inefficiencies to light and thanked them for including the library. She noted that the Rate on Investment (ROI) utilizing Clevnet libraries is \$19.00 for every dollar. She added that the need for carryover is important due to the need to be efficient with technology and security. She added that the library receives private, public and local grant funds to leverage tax dollars.

Ms. Carver is interested in the idea of a large health insurance consortium. The Sandusky Library has 33 employees on payroll including Follett House.

Berlin-Milan – 17 employees
Ritter Public – 23 employees

Mr. Krabill thanked all for cooperation in supplying the requested information and for being in attendance at today's meeting.

Adjournment

The next Work Session: 9:00 a.m., Tuesday, May 27, 2025 at Services Center Chambers, 2900 Columbus Avenue, 3rd Floor Chambers

A motion to adjourn was made by Mr. Moon and seconded by Mr. Tucker. The motion carried unanimously.