

**COMMISSIONERS JOURNAL NO. 77 - DELAWARE COUNTY
MINUTES FROM SPECIAL MEETING HELD JULY 13, 2022**

THE BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS OF DELAWARE COUNTY MET IN SPECIAL SESSION ON THIS DATE WITH THE FOLLOWING MEMBERS PRESENT:

Present:

Jeff Benton, President
Gary Merrell, Vice President
Barb Lewis, Commissioner

RESOLUTION NO. 22-578

IN THE MATTER OF APPROVING CORRESPONDENCE:

It was moved by Mr. Benton, seconded by Mr. Merrell to approve the following:

July 13, 2022

To the Editor of The Delaware Gazette:

We are writing to address inaccuracies published by *The Delaware Gazette* in the July 8, 2022, article entitled "Treasurer pushing for inflation relief."

- **The county sales tax:** The county's sales tax is not 1.5%. It is 1.25% except in those areas within COTA's service territory where another 0.5% is collected for a total of 1.75%. The state's sales tax rate is 5.75%, not 5.5%.

A change in the county's rate would not be immediate. It must be submitted to the Ohio Tax Commissioner and can only take effect on the first day of the calendar quarter at least 65 days after that notice. It is also not possible to make the reduction temporary. The County Commissioners would have to take action to increase the tax back to its current rate: That increase would be subject to a 45-day referendum period and then the same 65-day notice period before it could take effect on the first day of the calendar quarter after the notice period.

Additionally, we believe it is premature to consider reducing the county sales tax rate. While the current sales tax through June is tracking \$5.2 million ahead of our budget estimate, the percentage of the amount exceeding our budget estimate for each month has been declining. In January, we exceeded our monthly budget estimate by 16.8%. In June, it had dropped to 5.3%. We expect to see the continued impact of inflation and rising gas prices in our August sales tax figures.

- **The proposed \$1,500 bonus:** The bonus has been proposed for non-union employees. The Commissioners feel an organization-wide wage study and adjustments based on that study would be a more effective form of equity for all employees. They perform wage studies every three years or when requested for non-union and Job & Family Service employees, and they are undertaking one this year. They will invite other elected officials to participate if they so choose.
- **Health insurance costs:** Mr. Rankey's assertion that premiums rose 14% last year is incorrect. The premium categories are based on 1) whether the employee (and a spouse if there is one) complete the county's Wellness Program, reducing their premium by \$600 per year if just the employee completes it or \$1,200 if both the employee and spouse complete it; and 2) four rate levels ranging from single employee to employee with family members. The median category's premiums rose 8.7%. The full range of increases was 6.9% to 11.8%. Note: this year, we introduced a \$50/month surcharge for spouses who opt into the county's health insurance despite having access to health insurance at the spouse's employer. This surcharge is negated when the employee completes the Wellness Program.

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- **Accusations that funds are being hoarded:** Of the \$315 million that we believe Mr. Rankey is basing his proposals on, more than \$200 million is restricted. A total of \$89.3 million comes from tax levies and other sources earmarked for operations and services provided by levy agencies. These include 9-1-1, the Delaware County Board of Developmental Disabilities, Preservation Parks, the Delaware Public Health District and the Delaware-Morrow Mental Health & Recovery Services Board. This money may only be used for purposes authorized by state law and do not represent idle county funds.

Another \$116.9 million represents funds that are restricted for agency operations and are already encumbered or earmarked for operating expenses and capital expenditures for the various departments and offices funded by the county.

None of these funds could or should be used for investments in long-term securities as Mr. Rankey is seeking, nor could they be reallocated by the Commissioners for alternative uses. The balance is available to be invested in accordance with the county's investment policies, but invested in such a manner to ensure funds are available for future anticipated operating expenses and capital expenditures when needed.

- **The impacts of reducing any tax collection:** The decision to reduce taxes also must be weighed against a variety of factors, including how it might impact the county's AAA bond ratings and force us to borrow money to complete major capital projects such as the Byxbe Campus and roads and sewer construction. We believe the taxpayers are best served by the county's ability to finance the capital needs of a growing county without having to borrow money. Damage to our bond ratings would increase the interest rate we would have to pay to borrow money.

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- **Continued accusations of a lack of leadership and vision by other county elected officials:**
Finally, Mr. Rankey’s charge that there are no plans or vision for the spending of funds is inaccurate and disrespectful: There are detailed strategic plans in place for many county’s offices and departments, including the sewer system, roads and bridges, economic development, emergency medical services, 9-1-1 services, and facilities.

It has long been a hallmark of Delaware County government to treat our constituents and our fellow elected officials with respect and we call upon Mr. Rankey to join us in continuing this tradition. We further call upon The Delaware Gazette to independently fact check all submissions it receives before publishing them and to provide anyone mentioned in them the opportunity to respond before publication.

Signed,

Commissioner Barb Lewis

Commissioner Jeff Benton

Commissioner Gary Merrell

George Kaitsa, County Auditor

Vote on Motion Mr. Merrell Aye Mrs. Lewis Aye Mr. Benton Aye

There being no further business, the meeting adjourned.

Gary Merrell

Barb Lewis

Jeff Benton

Jennifer Walraven, Clerk to the Commissioners