

October 21, 2008

ERIE COUNTY COUNCIL – Public Hearing

Mr. Giles called to order a Public Hearing at 6:00 p.m. on the Erie County Housing Plan and the Erie County 2030 Transportation Plan. Mr. Smith, County Clerk, called the roll:

Members Present: Mr. Giles, Chairman
Mr. Cleaver, Vice Chairman
Mr. Fatica
Mr. Foust
Mrs. Loll
Mr. Mitchell

Members Absent: Mr. Leone

Also Present: Douglas R. Smith, County Clerk
Joseph P. Maloney, Council CPA
James Sparber, Director of Finance
Sue Ellen Pasquale, Manager of Accounting

Jake Welsh, Director of Planning, advised Council that the purpose of this hearing was to gain public comment on both the housing and transportation plan elements of the comprehensive plans that are being updated at this time. He then introduced Mr. Tom Graney.

Housing Plan

Tom Graney, Pennsylvania Department of Community and Economic Development, handed Council Members an overview of the housing plan advising that the original plan used 1990 census data. Although the census is done every ten years, the data is not available right away. He noted there were some changes in housing characteristics, and a new demographic population projection for the county was completed. He pointed out that from 1970 to 2000, Millcreek Township had the greatest growth of housing units within the county, and even the City of Erie was growing at that time. In fact, the county grew by 30,000 units. Mr. Graney also pointed out that some of this growth is driven by population, and some is driven by the fact that the average household in Erie County, the state, and nation is dropping. More houses are needed for the same number of people. He explained that if the average household has dropped from 2.7 to 2.5 for every thousand people, more houses are required to meet those needs.

Also, in the last ten years, there were some communities that lost housing, the City of Erie being the most notable, as well as Corry and Union City, urban places where housing loss usually occurs. He pointed out that Edinboro has the lowest percentage of home ownership because of the university and the need for student rentals. Most townships in Erie County are in the 80 to 90 percent home ownership rate. The highest rentals levels are in the City of Erie, Millcreek Township, Edinboro, and the City of Corry based on the 2000 census.

With respect to the median values of homes, Mr. Graney advised that Fairview Township is at the top. Purchasing housing is somewhat more affordable in Erie County; this is driven primarily by Southeast Pennsylvania where values are very high. However, in the rent to income index, some communities within Erie County have a much higher rent index.

Mr. Graney explained that to project net needs for housing, it was determined how large household sizes would be based upon historic trends and using the projected population. It was also estimated how many houses would be lost by fire, change of use, etc. In the future, the need for new housing will shrink, which is mostly due to the fact that Erie County, like most places, is an aging population. Also in the future, the percentage of homeowners over 65 will increase dramatically; this is already evidenced by housing that is currently being built such as condos.

Mr. Graney stated there is a policy in the plan of housing rehabilitation, but that will take years to implement. An estimate of the total need for rehabilitation money was made based upon typical home

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grant applications, which would be \$350 million. This would come to about 778 individual grants, and Mr. Elliot of the City of Erie Redevelopment Authority, believes that to be a very conservative estimate. Mr. Graney further explained that a matrix of value of homes according to the census was used, and the recommendation was that housing maintenance and “rehab” resources be promoted.

Mr. Graney suggested that various communities nominate areas in the county to focus the rehabilitation funds because there is not enough money to do everything. Guidelines for this have been provided in the plan.

Promoting the diversity of housing is another recommendation. Mr. Graney explained that diversity does not necessarily mean publicly funded housing, but housing for all age groups, especially for 55 plus mixed in with regular residential neighborhoods rather than having it separated.

There are also requirements for special needs persons, MH/MR people, as well as physically handicapped individuals. Mr. Graney noted that mental retardation needs are more difficult because of the manner in which that is funded. Mental health needs are slightly easier to meet because of the way that funding is handled. There is also need for additional single room occupancy such as the Lodge on Sass in the county. He stated that very few of these are spread throughout the county where the need may be more universal.

Mr. Graney also suggested that affordable housing continues to remain a need within this area. He applauded St. Martin Center because they had provided 1,700 people with counseling and had less than 15 or 16 foreclosures in the years they have been working to house people. Housing for seniors will be less of the tower type and more of the low rise, and he predicted the market will be difficult for those who need middle income housing.

In the study it was discovered that improved communications, having all of the housing providers together so they could argue with one another face to face, made it more difficult to be negative to each other. Mr. Graney is hopeful that quarterly meetings of the housing providers will continue.

Transportation Plan

Jake Welsh, Director of Erie County Planning Department, reported that the transportation side of the plan has less change than in the past. The Metropolitan Planning Organization is required under federal legislation to adopt an updated transportation plan every four years. Typically the county has taken the plan that has been developed and incorporated it as an element of the county’s comprehensive plan. The MPO recently updated the plan when the final list was completed and the housing plan was being worked on. Mr. Welsh felt it made the most sense to update both at the same time.

Mr. Welsh explained that the conditions for all modes of travel in Erie County must be evaluated by examining the transit impacts to the entire transportation network, as well as provide projects and forecasts. A great amount of time is spent on the highway network as far as projecting how much traffic there is going to be and what the associated impacts will be to the highway network. However, all modes of travel are scrutinized, needs determined, and a set of recommendations are then developed.

Mr. Welsh acknowledged that Erie County is definitely blessed with many modes of transportation, such as the highway and bridge network, along with public transportation. Erie County provides aviation, port, rail interests, as well as providing for pedestrian, bicycle, and goods movements.

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Mr. Welsh pointed out there are issues with growing truck traffic on the interstate and that must be addressed. Many hazardous materials are being transported through Erie County on the interstate system; there must be an awareness of that as part of the hazard mitigation plan.

There are also issues with east to west mobility through the county on the highway network. Many recommendations deal with operations and management. He advised that no new roads will be built; the Bayfront Connector was probably the last great public works improvement as far as the highway network is concerned that Erie County will see in the foreseeable future. PennDOT has turned their attention more to maintenance and operations of the existing system, and the plan addresses that as a priority as far as the highway network is concerned.

Mr. Welsh also reported there are issues as well, statewide and nationwide, with the bridge infrastructure. Many bridges are structurally deficient, and a large part of the recommendation deals with fixing those bridges either by rehabbing or replacing them entirely.

As far as public transportation is concerned, Mr. Welsh stated that EMTA provides a fantastic service. In addition to the fixed route service, EMTA provides paratransit services which are targeted for specific populations. He observed this service is doing very well. Park and Ride is under consideration for relocation from the bayfront area to the foot of 12th and Lincoln, closer to I-79, in an effort to make that more efficient.

Mr. Welsh also pointed out that one of the recommendations regarding aviation is the extension of the runway at the Erie International Airport. However, he pointed out, that is not the only airport in the area. There is also Corry-Lawrence, and several recommendations are provided for that facility. One of the findings from the port analysis is a lack of easy access from the rail to the port terminal. There are access issues, and this is a need that has been identified. A recommendation has been made to try to eliminate any obstacles to provide for more rail to ship transfers, and attempting to take trucks off the road.

Mr. Giles asked Mr. Welsh about the new administration building planned at the Erie Airport. He expressed concern about the funding and financing that is being done already for the airport, making sure that gets completed before something else starts happening. Mr. Giles believes that a new administration building is being built because the capacity and demand on the airport has grown, and hopes the issues ahead of this building are completed first. Council is invested in the runway and that is a significant infrastructure. Mr. Giles stated he is concerned that if this plan is passed, Council will be told this building must be completed because it was authorized.

Mr. Welsh explained the administration building is for the Corry-Lawrence airport, not the Erie Airport. Mr. Welsh understands there are other terminal improvements planned at the Erie Airport, and grants are being sought for that. In fact, some of those monies have already been secured; however, the new administration building is for the Corry-Lawrence Airport since the current building is half the size of Council Chambers.

There being no further business, the public hearing adjourned at 6:25 p.m.

Ann M. Bruno, Council Secretary

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Apprvg. LERTA Prgm in City of Erie adopted; Health Choices Revis. Exp. For Creation of Two New Grant Funded Positions adopted. First Rdgs: Rel. of Rest. Funds in Cond. Of Elec; PH SA for Tuberculosis Grant; PH SA for Nurse Family Partnership Grant; Gaming Fund SA for Revis. Exp. & Change in Position; C&Y Revis. Exp. & Reorg. Of Intake Unit. Erie Cnty Housing Plan adopted. Exon. Taxes on 1404 East Ave. adopted. Erie Cnty 2030 Transpor. Plan adopted. Response to 2009-2011 Oper. & Capital Plan aprvd. Colleen Loll-Illig appt'd to HRC Brd.

ERIE COUNTY COUNCIL – Regular Meeting

Mr. Giles called to order a Regular Meeting of the Erie County Council at 7:00 p.m. at Erie County Council Chambers, Erie County Courthouse, Erie, Pennsylvania. Following the Pledge of Allegiance, Mr. Smith, County Clerk, called the roll:

Members Present: Mr. Giles, Chairman
Mr. Cleaver, Vice Chairman
Mr. Fatica
Mr. Foust
Mrs. Loll
Mr. Mitchell

Members Absent: Mr. Leone

Also Present: Douglas R. Smith, County Clerk
Joseph P. Maloney, Council CPA
Thomas Talarico, Council Solicitor
Sean Wiley, Director of Administration
James Sparber, Director of Finance
Sue Ellen Pasquale, Manager of Accounting
Robert Spaulding, Director of Economic Development

Hearing of The Public

Gil Rocco, 2903 West 33rd Street, Millcreek Township, approached Council and stated that when talking about money, he urges Council not to spend it. He looks at planned projects with skepticism. He understands there is a plan to buy the GAF land and doesn't understand why that needs to be done. Many restaurants and bars have been built with private money. He suggested private money be used to buy that property and keep it on the tax rolls. He then addressed the issue of a community college and noted there is a declining population. A community college should be built when a population is growing, which is when they were built in Pennsylvania, during the 1960's. However, Erie County is not in that situation right now. Mr. Rocco further noted that the websites of many community colleges provide higher numbers than the numbers being discussed locally. He has been waiting for the public meeting on this particular issue. Mr. Rocco also understands that the plan for the civic center has been reduced from \$50 million to \$45 million, and still does not understand what kind of revenue is attached to that. Normally, when an investment is made in something, there is a return of some type.

Karen Dorich, President of AFSCME Local 2666, approached Council to address the Administration's proposed job eliminations. She stated that 46 members attended the last union membership meeting with questions about the job eliminations. They feel the administration is picking on the union that represents the clerical employees of the county, those who do the majority of the work for their supervisors while taking the lowest salaries in the county. The members wanted to know what kind of savings the county could realize from doing away with

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such low salaried jobs. Ms. Dorich asked what will happen during the 2010 budget process when the largest union in Erie County government is due to get a 3.2% raise plus \$1 per hour. She had asked the Retirement Board for a study by each department head on early retirement. The Board chose only to look at a report from Boetger. She asked why Council would choose to eliminate 44 jobs in this proposal when they have the power to give an early retirement incentive and open the door for over 150 of the highest paid employees to leave county employment voluntarily. Ms. Dorich stated the union will never believe the costs far outweigh the savings because Council has refused to order the study.

County
Executive
Report

Mr. Wiley, Director of Administration, submitted the following letter for inclusion in the minutes.

October 1, 2008

Erie County Council
Erie County Courthouse
140 W. Sixth St., Rm. 116
Erie, PA 16501

Subject: 2009 Budget Proposal

Dear Members of County Council:

With this letter we respectfully submit the Administration's 2009 County of Erie budget proposal. The Administration has received budget requests from all elected officials and department heads for the upcoming year and has met with each department to carefully discuss and analyze their requests. We appreciate these dedicated public servants and applaud their desire to provide efficient and effective quality services to the citizens of Erie County.

The Administration met with department heads throughout the year to examine the processes, programs and personnel used to deliver county services. The goal of this review is to make government more efficient and effective. As the country's economy is struggling, so too are the citizens of Erie County. No budget can be formulated without taking into account the needs of the community and the ability of the citizens to pay for those services. Unfortunately since Erie County provides critical human services, and those needs increase during difficult times, the cost associated with providing those services also increases. While it is a challenge to develop a budget that is both fiscally responsible and delivers the services that are needed by the community, we have successfully arrived at a 2009 budget that accomplishes these goals and does not include a property tax increase for the citizens of Erie County.

The 2009 budget proposal reflects various changes in the levels and types of services delivered by the County. The County human services programs have transformed from "program funded" to "fee for service" to insure that programs are run as cost effectively as possible with full accountability of every dollar spent. All service contracts have been evaluated and consolidated to prevent duplicative programs and to prioritize necessary services. For example, a new collaborative initiative between the Department of MH/MR and the Prison will improve mental health services for nearly 25% of the inmate population who have been diagnosed with serious mental illness.

The County, in partnership with the Erie County Library Foundation, is upgrading the Library branch system. Next year will be the first full year of operation of the Edinboro library branch which opens with expanded hours and services. The Presque Isle branch will be closing but in October of 2009 the County will replace the branch with the much anticipated West County branch in Fairview.

This Administration's evaluation of effectiveness and efficiencies in County government is ongoing. Reducing the cost of services is only one approach. During the coming year, a revenue committee will be formed to pursue alternate sources of revenue. Each year the County experiences stagnant or reduced funding from federal and state programs. Grant funding is not

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keeping pace with the cost of mandated services. Therefore, this committee will explore other sources of revenue so that local taxes are not the only alternative.

The Administration will also be implementing or continuing other cost containment measures such as stricter oversight of overtime, and a reduction of travel expenses. County vehicles will remain on County property nights and weekends as a response to higher gas prices. Vacant positions will be evaluated to insure that they are essential before they are posted. Vacancies will remain open for sixty days. This budget also includes the elimination of 45 positions, many of which are currently vacant. Some will be effective January 1st and others will terminate during the year as the County consolidates the administration of services.

The two major goals of any County budget are to provide quality services to our taxpayers without a tax increase and to continue to build reserves for aging infrastructure, emergencies, and unforeseen issues. The 2009 budget is a work in progress, and this Administration will continue to explore new funding sources and examine ways to cut and control costs.

As you begin your review of this budget proposal, we pledge our assistance and support. Every effort will be made to communicate more current information as it becomes available to assure you receive an accurate view of County government. The Finance Department and every other department of county government will be available to answer any questions or concerns you may have during the budget process. Together we can create a realistic budget that does not necessitate a property tax increase and provides efficient and effective quality services to the residents of Erie County.

Sincerely,

/s/ Mark A. DiVecchio
County Executive

Finance Committee

Mr. Mitchell reported the Finance Committee met on Thursday, October 16, 2008, and agreed to place on the agenda Ordinance 160 dealing with the LERTA program in the City of Erie for a second reading. Also on the agenda for first readings are Ordinance 162, a General Fund Budget release of restricted funds in Conduct of Elections; Ordinance 163, which deals with the tuberculosis grant; Ordinance 164, which deals with the nurse family partnership; and Ordinance 165, which deals with the gaming fund budget. Also on the agenda is Resolution 80, dealing with Erie County Housing Plan which had a public hearing earlier; Resolution 81, dealing with the exoneration of taxes on 1404 East Avenue; and Resolution 82, dealing with the 2030 transportation plan, which also had a public hearing earlier. The possible approval of Council's Response to the 2009-2011 Operational and Capital Plan and the possible appointment of Colleen Loll-Illig to the Human Relations Commission have been placed on the agenda as well.

Personnel Committee

Mr. Cleaver reported the Personnel Committee met on October 16, 2008, and agreed to place on the agenda Ordinance 161 in reference to Health Choices Fund Budget revised expenditures for a second reading, and for a first reading Ordinance 166, Children and Youth Services for reorganization of intake unit.

Mr. Giles Report

Mr. Giles reported that the House, Senate, and Governor have signed what were known as House Bills 4, 5, 6, and 7. These were prison reform pieces of legislation. Mr. Giles explained that this required the caucuses of both houses, the efforts of the Governor, the Department of Corrections, County Commissioners, and the District Attorney's Association. For the past several years, all of these bodies have been involved in the process to achieve some type of prison reform in Pennsylvania. In particular, the County Commissioners Association of Pennsylvania has been very active and put Place of Confinement, a key piece of this legislation,

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as a top priority. The Deputy District Attorney for Philadelphia, Sarah Hart, has prepared a comprehensive analysis of what is now referred to as Acts 81, 82, 83, and 84. Mr. Giles explained these were signed into law on the 25th of September by the Governor, and because of the complexity, the analysis is just as important as the bills themselves. Not everything happens immediately, there are dates when issues become effective. Sarah Hart crafted a document for counties to understand when and how these things take place. Mr. Giles noted that, in the short run, there is an implied savings, either by promoting electronic systems, hearings for inmates, or the reduction in transportation of prisoners for every county in Pennsylvania. He offered documents for review, and gave a reminder that this could yield, in the short term, serious savings as to how Corrections is handled at the county level by partnering with the State. He believes this is a good thing, and it took many years and many people to accomplish, and is now being implemented.

Mr. Mitchell's
Comments

Mr. Mitchell commented that it should be noted there are expenses in belonging to CCAP, and Erie County got more than its money's worth back on this particular bill. CCAP put in a great deal of time and resources, and has been able to secure grant money to produce the studies that were the foundations for this issue. Mr. Mitchell wished to publicly give credit where credit is due, to the hard work of the County Commissioners Association of Pennsylvania, and all those people involved with this issue.

Revised LERTA
In the City of Erie

Mr. Smith gave a second reading of Ordinance Number 160, 2008, "Waiving Section 4 of Erie County LERTA Ordinance 59, 1980 and Approving the Revised LERTA Program in the City of Erie." Mr. Cleaver moved to adopt; Mrs. Loll seconded, and it carried in a unanimous roll call vote.

Health Choices
Creation of Two
Grant Funded
Positions

Mr. Smith gave a second reading of Ordinance Number 161, 2008, "2008 Health Choices Fund Budget Revised Expenditures for the Creation of Two New Grant Funded Positions." Mrs. Loll moved to adopt; Mr. Fatica seconded, and it carried in a unanimous roll call vote.

First Readings

Mr. Smith gave first readings of the following ordinances:

Ordinance Number 162, 2008, "2008 General Fund Budget Release of Restricted Funds in Conduct of Elections"

Ordinance Number 163, 2008, "Tenth 2008 Public Health Fund Budget Supplemental Appropriation for Tuberculosis Grant"

Ordinance Number 164, 2008, "Eleventh 2008 Public Health Fund Budget Supplemental Appropriation for Nurse Family Partnership Grant"

Ordinance Number 165, 2008, "Fourth 2008 Gaming Fund Budget Supplemental Appropriation for Revised Expenditures and Change in Position"

Ordinance Number 166, 2008, "2008 Children & Youth Services Fund Budget Revised Expenditures and Reorganization of Intake Unit"

Erie County
Housing Plan

Mr. Smith gave a reading of Resolution Number 80, 2008, "Erie County Housing Plan." Mr. Mitchell moved to adopt; Mrs. Loll seconded, and it carried in a unanimous roll call vote.

Exon. Taxes
1404 East Ave.

Mr. Smith gave a reading of Resolution Number 81, 2008, "Exonerating Taxes on 1404 East Avenue, Erie, Pennsylvania." Mrs. Loll moved to adopt; Mr. Fatica seconded, and it carried in a unanimous roll call vote.

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Erie Cnty 2030
Transport. Plan

Mr. Smith gave a reading of Resolution Number 82, 2008, "Erie County 2030 Transportation Plan." Mrs. Loll moved to adopt; Mr. Mitchell seconded.

Mr. Giles stated that a public hearing providing detail was held on this issue earlier. Both staff and agencies that deal with this subject were in attendance and provided a lengthy explanation as to the contents of this particular plan. He then called for the vote on the resolution, and it carried in a unanimous roll call vote.

2009-2011 Oper.
& Cap. Plan
Response Apprvd.

Mr. Mitchell moved to approve the Erie County Council Response to 2009-2011 Operational and Capital Plan. Mrs. Loll seconded. Mr. Giles thanked members of the Committee who crafted the response under the leadership of the chair of that committee, Mr. Fatica. He then called for a vote and it carried in a unanimous roll call vote.

Colleen Loll-Illig
Appt'd to HRC Brd.

Mrs. Loll moved to appoint Colleen Loll-Illig to the Human Relations Commission Board. Mr. Mitchell seconded, and it carried in a unanimous roll call vote.

Ann M. Bruno, Council Secretary
