



Portage County Board of Commissioners
Meeting Minutes

449 South Meridian Street
Ravenna, OH 44266
<http://www.co.portage.oh.us>

Amy Hutchinson, Clerk
330-297-3600

Tuesday, August 31, 2021

9:00 AM

Commissioners' Board Room

*The Commissioners' meeting minutes are summarized; Audio recordings and backup material are available.
Please contact the Commissioners' Office for specific details.*

The Portage County Board of Commissioners' meeting came to order with the following members present.

Attendee Name	Title	Status
Sabrina Christian-Bennett	President	Present
Anthony J. Badalamenti	Vice President	Present
Vicki A. Kline	Board Member	Present

Also present throughout the day: Department of Budget and Financial Management Director Joe Harris, County Administrator Michelle Crombie, Brian Ames, John Zizka and Ed Dean

Commissioner Christian-Bennett called for a moment of silence to remember the 13 soldiers that lost their lives in Afghanistan making the ultimate sacrifice for our Country and that is why we have the liberties we have today.

- Marine Corps Staff Sgt. Darin T. Hoover, 31, of Salt Lake City, Utah
- Marine Corps Sgt. Johanny Rosario Pichardo, 25, of Lawrence, Massachusetts
- Marine Corps Sgt. Nicole L. Gee, 23, of Sacramento, California
- Marine Corps Cpl. Hunter Lopez, 22, of Indio, California
- Marine Corps Cpl. Daegan W. Page, 23, of Omaha, Nebraska
- Marine Corps Cpl. Humberto A. Sanchez, 22, of Logansport, Indiana
- Marine Corps Lance Cpl. David L. Espinoza, 20, of Rio Bravo, Texas
- Marine Corps Lance Cpl. Jared M. Schmitz, 20, of St. Charles, Missouri
- Marine Corps Lance Cpl. Rylee J. McCollum, 20, of Jackson, Wyoming
- Marine Corps Lance Cpl. Dylan R. Merola, 20, of Rancho Cucamonga, California
- Marine Corps Lance Cpl. Kareem M. Nikoui, 20, of Norco, California
- Navy Hospitalman Maxton W. Soviak, 22, of Berlin Heights, Ohio
- Army Staff Sgt. Ryan C. Knauss, 23, of Corryton, Tennessee

9:04 AM In accordance with the Ohio Rev. Code Ann. 121.22(G)(1), it was moved by Anthony J. Badalamenti, seconded by Sabrina Christian-Bennett that the Board of Commissioners move into executive session to consider the employment of a public employee. Also present:

Water Resources Director candidate and County Administrator Michelle Crombie. Roll call vote: Anthony J. Badalamenti, Yea; Sabrina Christian-Bennett, Yea; Vicki A. Kline, Yea;

9:45 AM Upon conclusion of the above referenced discussion, it was moved by Sabrina Christian-Bennett, seconded by Vicki A. Kline that the Board of Commissioners moves out of executive session. Roll call vote: Sabrina Christian-Bennett, Yea; Vicki A. Kline, Yea; Anthony J. Badalamenti, Yea;

After exiting Executive Session, the Board took no action.

HUMAN RESOURCES

Present: Director Janet Kovick and Department of Budget and Financial Management
Director Joe Harris

Back in 2018, Clemans Nelson & Associates, Inc. created a wage scale that included the minimum, midpoint, and maximum pay grades with no steps in between and a question was raised concerning how employees move through the scale as it's based on market study not uniformity.

Director Kovick presented 2 Proposals for Commissioners' Departments:

Proposal #1 – is the existing wage scale from Clemans Nelson that was completed at the end of 2018. The minimum, midpoint and maximum did not change; however, step increases were added.

Proposal #2 – is the scale the former Interim Department of Budget and Financial Management Director Dave Lair created, which added 5% to the existing scale and step increases with decreasing percentages with the idea that the longer you are in a position, you know your job and the raise amount decreases.

Director Kovick also presented a Cost Comparison sheet with two different proposals for Board consideration: Proposal #1 is to get all employees on the scale on a step and Proposal #2 would move everyone to the new scale, excluding new hires or individuals who received wage increases in 2021 (job refactoring or promotions, not COLA).

Funding has been reviewed by the Department of Budget and Financial Management and an error was detected in Proposal #2's formula, so the total amount will be slightly lower.

Director Kovick noted Commissioners' Directors are allowed to bring a new hire in up to the midpoint of the scale if they exceed qualification, providing they have Board permission.

It does appear from preliminary research that the County's wage scale is low for the Design Engineer positions at Water Resources.

Director Kovick will be adding Solid Waste to the wage survey because it's difficult to recruit CDL truck drivers.

When asked by Commissioner Christian-Bennett about the financial impact of changes, Director Harris noted the COLA estimated for next year will be over 6% (including the adjustment of the scale at 5% with Proposal #2 plus the COLA of approximately 1% with the actual amount being released in October.) Administrator Crombie commented the Board will need to decide whether it wants to give the COLA raise to the employee or to the wage scale and if it's given to the wage scale, all employees need to be brought up to the wage scale. Administrator Crombie noted she does not want to lose sight of new employees and they should be included, as well.

The Board agreed it would like to include every employee under the Board, including new hires and those who were recently promoted.

Director Harris recommends the Board keep the COLA included within the scale because some employees are over the maximum because COLA increases were given to employees rather than reflecting them on the scale. Administrator Crombie noted COLA increases would be provided every 3 years as opposed to every year.

Director Kovick noted the Cost Comparison was done with a January 1, 2022, start date in mind, but that date is flexible. Administrator Crombie noted employees could be brought to scale in 2021 and the budget allows for that, and employees would then receive their appropriate raise on their anniversary date in 2022. Administrator Crombie went on to say there should be more uniformity because some departments provide longevity raises and some that provide probationary increases and she would like to have all policies and procedures follow the wage scale for non-union administrative Commissioners' Departments.

Director Kovick noted the Compensation Plan has been updated over the last couple years and she included language that permanent full time employees will be added to the scale to the next closest step from what they are currently making effective whenever the Board decides, then the next step would be an increase on the employee's anniversary date in 2022 and the Plan will be updated to reflect the original hire date of the employee.

Commissioner Christian-Bennett noted the only modification to Proposal #2 is that no employee is excluded.

After reviewing the recommendations presented by the Human Resources Department, the following recommendations were approved by the Board:

Recommendations:

1. Move **ALL** Commissioners' employees to proposed scale effective the first pay period in November.
2. On the anniversary of their original start date with Portage County, all employees will then move to the next step in the pay range.

**Once an employee reaches the Maximum, they will be redlined and will only receive wage increases when the scale is adjusted. A waiver is added that the Board reserves the option not to provide a COLA adjustment on the third year.*

3. A Cost-of-Living Adjustment to the wage scale every three years instead of every year.
4. Once a person reaches Mid-point, step increases would occur every 2 years.
5. An employee will reach the Maximum in 19 years with step increases every 2 years after Midpoint.
6. For employees who start at Step 1 (Minimum), they will be provided a 2.5% probationary increase after 120 days and on their one-year anniversary, the employee would move to Step 2 and receive the balance of the 2.5% increase.

Job and Family Services has probationary increases and a longevity schedule for both bargaining and non-bargaining employees. The Board agreed Administrator Crombie will have a discussion with Director Jeffries to dissolve the policies because if the practice continues, it will move employees off the scale.

The Board agreed Administrator Crombie can sign the Personnel Action Forms to reflect the changes.

Commissioner Kline asked if this action would satisfy any requests the Board's already received and Director Harris noted they are their own Elected Officials.

Director Kovick noted the section on Page 5 is new to the manual and it states if a Director has a high performing employee that consistently exceeds expectations, they can offer an employee a step increase, but a conversation with Administrator Crombie and Director Kovick is necessary before moving forward.

Commissioner Kline noted the refactoring has been done loosely in the past and moving forward Director Kovick has been researching other Counties as to their pay scale for a similar position.

Director Kovick presented a listing of all job classifications including Elected Officials which shows what positions are in the pay grades 1-3.

Director Harris asked if an Elected Official wants to get on the Board's scale, when would it take effect? The Board agreed it would become effective at the same time which is the first pay period of November 2021.

DEPARTMENT OF BUDGET AND FINANCIAL MANAGEMENT

Present: Director Joe Harris

Director Harris presented the following budget discussion items for Board consideration:

1. If an Elected Official doesn't want to be included in the Board's wage scale next year, how do we determine the amount for raises?

- Commissioner Christian-Bennett responded they will get the COLA amount and how they distribute the funding will be up to each Elected Official.
 - Commissioner Christian-Bennett noted if the Board is doing a 5% COLA and an Elected Official choose to give 8%, they need to bring supporting documentation for consideration and many of them have. The Board funds 8 Elected Officials and 7 Judges.
2. Does the Board want to increase employer's portion of health care costs to build up a reserve./Hold until the Board hears from Willis Towers Watson in a few weeks.
 3. Should the one-time \$700,000 for loss of the additional sales and use tax be put in the Sheriff's budget for this year?
 - Commissioner Badalamenti believes the additional \$700,000 amount was permanent, but Commissioner Christian-Bennett noted it was supposed to be a one-time funding expense this year and they were going to absorb it.
 - Commissioner Christian-Bennett would like to look at their budget to see if they can absorb it. Commissioner Kline pointed out they have certain needs including the Dispatchers, but Commissioner Christian-Bennett noted their revenue source should grow, as well.
 4. Are there any planned Capital Expenses occurring in 2022? Yes, the Courthouse parking lot, roof and windows on Riddle Block, and the Justice Center roof.
 - Commissioner Kline asked about Pretty Glen Dam and Commissioner Badalamenti noted letters were sent to the property owners.
 - Commissioner Christian-Bennett noted funding for Pretty Glen has already been set aside and asked for an update on the RFP for a consultant to assist with the ARP funds and noted some of the funding may be able to be used for the expense.
 - Commissioner Badalamenti would like to get an estimate for new elevators from OTIS.
 - A consultant is still needed for the Airport.
 - Security on the 7th floor/badge access was discussed but no decision was made.
 5. Is the Board going to allow vehicle replacements: As needed.
 - Commissioner Christian-Bennett asked to check the rotation of vehicles at the Sheriff's Office and for Director Harris to contact Enterprise for a list of vehicle replacements and leases.
 6. Technology upgrades: WiFi in the building.
 - Administrator Crombie will check with IT.
 - Streaming in the Boardroom: Director Alger was contacted for a quote for a second camera.
 - Commissioner Christian-Bennett mentioned the option to bring broadband into portions of the County and noted she received a phone call from someone who would like to do a presentation on broadband and Commissioner Kline mentioned Director Shackelford has someone too and Commissioner Badalamenti noted

Director Shackelford is coming before the Board to talk about this issue and the towers, as well.

7. Capital Improvement Plan and Maintenance Plan:

- The Board would like Director Harris to come up with both plans separately.
- Commissioner Badalamenti would like a report on the age of the air conditions and furnaces in the County and what cycle are they on (15, 20 or 25 year) and to see a maintenance schedule for replacements of same.

8. Sales tax funding: Funding has been set aside for the Airport into Fund 002, does the Board want to keep it in that fund or return it to the General Fund?

- Commissioner Christian Bennett would like to see the funding remain in Fund 002.

9. Motor Pool:

- Commissioner Badalamenti noted the appraisal is around \$200,000 and he would like to see the proceeds and ARP funding to build an addition for the command center at Station 30 for Director Shackelford.
- Commissioner Christian-Bennett noted the grant money used to build the Command Center was specific to the EMA function, although she is not opposed to the suggestion, it would take additional research to see if that's a feasible option.
- Commissioner Badalamenti noted it would be about \$1 million dollar addition. Director Harris pointed out they could merge with the Solid Waste building, but Commissioner Badalamenti wants EMA more centrally located.

Recessed: 11:15 AM

Reconvened: 1:04 PM

NOPEC

Present: Chuck Keiper, Charlie Ramer, County Engineer Mickey Marozzi and Internal Services Director JoAnn Townend

- The Board has been a member of NOPEC since 2000 and their by-laws have been amended 3 times.
- NOPEC purchases electricity 18 months before its use, and they ask members to provide adequate notice to cancel membership to ensure they can use the electricity that was purchased for them.
- Commissioner Christian-Bennett pointed out that NOPEC decides the supplier for the aggregate and Mr. Keiper added the current supplier is NextEra Energy Resources of Ohio and the electricity for the aggregation literally is getting bid on a daily basis.
- NOPEC offers a range of prices with a default price and has been currently below industry's price to compare for approximately 8-10 months.
- There are 7 products for electrical and 4 for gas that change from time to time depending on market conditions.
- On any given day, NOPEC is in the lowest 3-5% of retail offers available, but if you always want the lowest price, NOPEC may not be the right answer.

- The biggest reason why NOPEC utilizes a variable rate for both natural gas and electric is due to the fact that pricing has continued to compress downwards. In 2022, predictions are not as stable because of the uncertainty that happened in the market with House Bill 6 and tariff increases. Generally, predictions are that pricing should continue to compress downwards for several more years.
- Commissioner Kline noted the Board's been told pricing is going to increase because the savings wasn't as much as it was told initially, hence the hurry to sign the contract with County Commissioners' Association of Ohio (CCAO).
- Mr. Ramer noted one reason for NOPEC's rate options is because of the many different opinions on rates in Portage County – some like fixed, some variable, that's why NOPEC designed options.
- Commissioner Kline doesn't believe it's the right decision when the Board is making the decision for the Townships when they aren't involved in the process.
- Commissioner Christian-Bennett was informed that NOPEC charged a higher rate in order to give back to the communities and Mr. Keiper explained NOPEC doesn't fix their price because they believe the current compression is downward, but they have fixed rates in the past.
- Mr. Keiper noted the Townships are under the Board's umbrella for electric and gas and the Board should make the decision in union with the Townships.
- Mr. Keiper explained part of his employment agreement with NOPEC was to find, sign and keep customers and in return, he asked for a part of NOPEC's savings to return to communities in the form of ongoing grants. The grants are based on the number of residents and small businesses that are using the product by getting a portion of the costs the utilities don't have to spend.
- Commissioner Christian-Bennett would like Mr. Keiper to come in periodically for an update and she would also like to know when the meetings are held to have the County Administrator or Fiscal Officer as backup attend.
- Commissioner Kline asked about the administrative charge and Mr. Ramer will try to provide the requested information. Mr. Keiper noted they manage 975,000 accounts with a budget of \$1.7 million dollars and the budget is published and advertised, and they are audited by the State Auditor's office.
- County Engineer Marozzi noted the annual budget is recommended by the Board and approved by the stakeholders at the General Assembly meeting each year.
- Commissioner Christian-Bennett asked if NOPEC still has a seminar for new Commissioners and Mr. Keiper responded they do, and it consists of 15 lessons on NOPEC information that take between 15-30 minutes to review each lesson.
- Mr. Dean mentioned there's a Township Association meeting on November 20th and invited Mr. Keiper and Mr. Ramer to present during the meeting.
- Mr. Keiper stated Jeff Heimrick is the County's representative.
- Commissioner Kline noted for the record that she was not complacent, but wanted to hear from NOPEC, not just CCAO.
- Commissioner Christian-Bennett asked where the September 1st date came from and Mr. Keiper explained NOPEC used to buy power a year at a time and had to have their contract in place by September 30th, so in the initial by-laws they asked that everyone who wanted

to be included be in no later than September 1st, so they had 30 days to buy power. NOPEC no longer buys power that way, so the September 1st date is irrelevant.

- Mr. Keiper will provide the Board with current by-laws and Council of Government Agreements.
- Commissioner Christian-Bennett would like the Clerk and County Administrator to be notified of the meetings.
- Commissioner Badalamenti asked if large companies located in Portage County could become members and Mr. Keiper responded the law puts a limit on the size of a service area and generally speaking it's about the equivalent of 4-7 households (small commercial).
- John Zizka supports NOPEC and noted Freedom Township has been a beneficiary of some of their grant programs which totaled close to \$100,000. First Energy donated \$61 million dollars to Larry Householder and his cronies, and the money didn't come from the officers or the Board of Directors, it came from their excessive charges and their utility costs. Think of what \$61 million could have done to reduce electric bills. He doubts NOPEC donates that kind of money to any kind of lobbyists. Ever since the Township has participated, Mickey's been the representative for the Townships, and they are comfortable with that.
- Mr. Keiper will provide a packet of information for the Board next week and the General Assembly meetings take place on November 10th.
- Commissioner Christian-Bennett noted if there are changes to membership, it would happen at the General Assembly meeting and Mr. Keiper responded yes. County Engineer Marozzi pointed out if the Commissioners plan to attend one meeting a year about NOPEC, attend the General Assembly meeting. Mr. Keiper stated they are streamed live and archived online.

Recessed: 1:56 PM

Reconvened: 1:58 PM

1:58 PM In accordance with the Ohio Revised Code 121.22(G)(1), it was moved by Sabrina Christian-Bennett, seconded by Anthony J. Badalamenti that the Board of Commissioners move into executive session to consider the appointment of a public employee. Also present: Michelle Crombie and Dawn Collins. Roll call vote: Sabrina Christian-Bennett, Yea; Anthony J. Badalamenti, Yea; Vicki A. Kline, Yea;

2:00 PM Upon conclusion of the above referenced discussion, it was moved by Sabrina Christian-Bennett, seconded by Vicki A. Kline that the Board of Commissioners move out of executive session. Roll call vote: Sabrina Christian-Bennett, Yea; Vicki A. Kline, Yea; Anthony J. Badalamenti, Yea;

After exiting executive session, the Board took action by Journal Entry as follows:

JOURNAL ENTRY: The Board of Commissioners appoints Dawn Collins as Acting Director for the Solid Waste District effective August 31, 2021.

Motion: Commissioner Christian-Bennett

Seconded: Commissioner Kline

All in Favor: Commissioner Christian-Bennett, Yea; Commissioner Kline, Yea;
Commissioner Badalamenti, Yea;

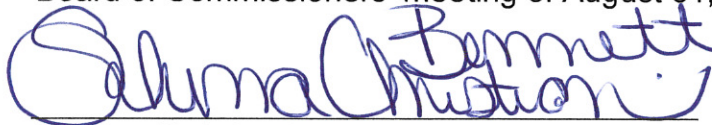
Motion Carries

Motion: by Commissioner Christian-Bennett, seconded by Commissioner Kline that the Board adjourn the Meeting of **August 31, 2021 at 2:01 PM.**

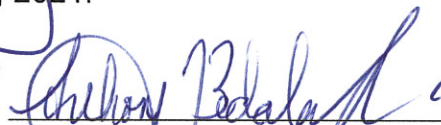
All in Favor: Commissioner Christian-Bennett, Yea; Commissioner Kline, Yea;
Commissioner Badalamenti, Yea;

Motion Carries

We do hereby certify that the foregoing is a true and correct record of the Portage County Board of Commissioners' meeting of August 31, 2021.



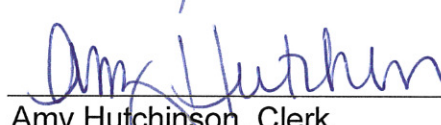
Sabrina Christian-Bennett, President



Anthony J. Badalamenti, Vice President



Vicki A. Kline, Board Member



Amy Hutchinson, Clerk