

**Herkimer County Legislature
Ways & Means Committee Meeting
Wednesday, December 23, 2020
Via Zoom**

Follows Public Safety & Emergency Management and Ways & Means

Persons Attending:

Patrick E. Russell (Committee Chairman)
Kurt J. Ackerman (committee member)
Raymond Smith (committee member)
Raymond Johnson (committee member)
Frederick J. Shaw, Jr. (committee member)
John P. Stephens (committee member)
Vincent J. Bono, Chairman of the Legislature
James W. Wallace, Jr., County Administrator
Lorraine Lewandrowski, County Attorney
Sheri Ferdula, Budget Officer/Purchasing Agent
Steve Billings, Personnel Officers
Tim Seymour, Commissioner of Social Services
Kimberlee Enea, County Treasurer
Christina Cain, Director of Public Health

(Non-Committee Members Signed In)

Legislator Gregory Malta, Sr.
Legislator Robert J. Schrader
Legislator Bob D. Hollum
Legislator William E. Keeler, Sr.
Legislator John L. Brezinski
Legislator Peter F. Manno
Legislator Ray Donley
Legislator Peter Campione
Legislator William Weakley

Absent:

N/A

Mr. Russell called the meeting to order at 10:04 a.m.

Items discussed:

WAYS AND MEANS:

1. Approve leave of absence extension for Mary Sullivan
2. Approve transfer in 2020 budget - **Tabled**
3. Approve Designation of Depositories of County funds
4. Cancel Taxes on Land Bank owned property
5. Discussion regarding COVID-19 vaccines
6. Discussion on Highway proposal
7. Discussion on Personnel in Emergency Services
8. Other – Discussion of legal issues with the jail

Committee Vote Record:

WAYS & MEANS:

Mr. Russell: "First thing on the agenda is approve leave of absence extension for Mary Sullivan

Item #1 - On motion of Mr. Smith, seconded by Mr. Shaw, Item #1 was voted on, approved and moved for Resolution. Unanimous.

Mr. Russell: "Number two approve transfers in 2020 budget."

Mr. Schrader: "Mr. Chairman, what are the transfers? I don't have the paper in front of me."

Mr. Russell: "This is the County promotion one."

Mr. Bono: "And what is the \$100,000 for?"

Mr. Schrader: "I thought that was pulled?"

Mr. Russell: "To be honest I do not have enough information on this right now. I've been trying to talk with folks, they are not around and I cannot give you an exact detail on what I think should be done. I'm hoping that if COVID gets better that we have some money to promote for the County. That's my intention but I do not have a plan. I am up to what the committee would like to see and do. We could probably do something next year. My intent was to try and get it out of this year's budget but frankly, like I said, I don't have a plan. I'm being told that things to do with social media can actually be cheaper than originally discussed. My concern is how much possibly it would cost to do any kind of TV or anything of that nature. How we want to handle it, if we want to handle it I'm fine with it either way. Normally I would be saying to you, if somebody else brought this up and didn't have answers like I don't have answers then I would wait and say when you have answers then we can talk about it. My only issue is, would it be better to take something out of this year's budget."

Jim Wallace: "Mr. Chairman, we still could do that on the 27th, the next full board meeting."

Mr. Russell: "Of January?"

Jim Wallace: "Yes. The books aren't closed so I don't know if that gives you enough time."

Mr. Russell: "Well, it gives me more time to try and come up with a plan."

Mr. Bono: "Mr. Chairman, would this be a County wide promotion?"

Mr. Russell: "Yes, that's what I would be looking at."

Mr. Bono: "Don't we have Pat and Jim maybe, don't we have \$82,000 of \$83,000 built into the budget for County promotion. I know some of that is spoken for but what's the break down on that? And how is that used?"

Jim Wallace: "The majority, Jim, is the \$40,000 for the "I Love NY program". There is money that goes up North and there is money that goes to the chamber for the rest of it."

Mr. Bono: "So this would be an additional \$100,000 on top of that?"

Jim Wallace: "That's my understanding."

Mr. Russell: "Yes, for promotion."

Mr. Bono: "We haven't used that though correct? We haven't used that whole \$82,000 in quite a while if I'm not mistaken."

Jim Wallace: "Well, we just re-appropriated that. We have never appropriated the \$40,000 for the "I Love NY program". We just did that last year and we did it again this year."

Mr. Russell: "It's entirely different, that program."

Mr. Bono: "I'm not in opposition to having a county wide promotion but I think like you said Pat a plan is definitely needed. I don't know if you are going to be able to get that together on the 27th. That's short notice but certainly with COVID involved, we don't know if things are going to get shut down. Is it worth it to invest right now in this project with COVID being a potential shup down for economic development or ...?"

Mr. Russell: "I was hoping it would be something for if COVID let up. It doesn't make any sense to try and do any real promotion if COVID is still here."

Mr. Bono: "Do we want to table this?"

Mr. Russell: "It can be tabled however my only concern was again, we can talk about it as Jim said on the 27th whether we take it out of this year's budget versus trying to do something for next year."

Mr. Shaw: "Pat, wouldn't it make sense, since we already give \$40,000 to the I Love NY, to get all parties together so we are all going in the same direction for a change?"

Mr. Russell: "Yes, that would make a lot of sense. The issue is though is I don't see where, in looking at their numbers from previous years, I don't see where they are putting a lot of money into promotions at all. Either one in terms of what they are doing with our money."

Mr. Bono: "And Pat, this would go under Planning and Development committee if I am not mistaken?"

Mr. Russell: "It would be both committees. So we have a motion to table so I need a second on that and I can second that myself. I wish I had more information for you. Unfortunately it didn't work out."

Item #2 – Discussion was held. On motion of Mr. Bono, seconded by Mr. Russell, Item #2 was tabled.

Mr. Russell: "Approve Designation of Depositories of County funds."

Mr. Smith: "Pat, I would like to know what TD Bank is."

Mr. Russell: "I don't know if Kim is on. Kim, are you on?"

Kim Enea: "I'm here. You guys approved TD Bank last year as one of our banks the County uses. They are actually providing the highest rate on liquid money that any bank around here is providing currently. So, I'm putting a little bit more of our cash flow there so we can access it when we need it but they are a nationally recognized bank that you guys already approved."

Mr. Smith: "What does the TD stand for?"

Kim Enea: "Toronto-Dominion Bank."

Mr. Smith: "Is it an American bank or a foreign bank?"

Kim Enea: "They have branches all throughout America but they are located in Canada mostly."

Mr. Smith: "Okay. Thank you."

Kim Enea: "You are welcome."

Mr. Russell: "Any other questions on that?"

Item #3 - On motion of Mr. Shaw, seconded by Mr. Stephens, Item #3 was voted on, approved and moved for Resolution. Unanimous.

Mr. Russell: "Number four cancel taxes on Land Bank owned property. Who is speaking on this?"

Jim Wallace: "I don't know if Lorraine is on but I know Kim is. I sat down with Kim the other day and we went through along with our Property Agent and basically guys our belief is there was a water bill on the books but was never paid so we received the \$40,000. We were actually clearing everything that we were owed so I think it's something we should do. Lorraine's got it where she will get the check before any of this happens so I think it's the right thing to do."

Lorraine Lewandrowski: "This is Lorraine. I asked them to give us the check in our hands before we cancel the tax lien."

Kim Enea: "And this is Kim. I will hold the check in escrow until the Resolution is signed."

Mr. Ackerman: "This is referring to the trailer park, correct?"

Mr. Russell: "Yes."

Mr. Ackerman: "If it's going to be used as a business and it's going to be tax exempt, how is that fair to every other business in the County?"

Mr. Russell: "That's going to be up to what the assessors do. I don't know if it's necessarily going to be tax exempt but we will have to see."

Mr. Ackerman: "Isn't that kind of what we are talking about here or no?"

Jim Wallace: “No. We are talking about our old lien, Kurt.”

Mr. Ackerman: “Right.”

Jim Wallace: “We are trying to make ourselves whole.”

Mr. Ackerman: “So how much did you say it was, I’m sorry?”

Jim Wallace: “\$39,000 and some change and we are going to get a check for \$40,000.”

Mr. Ackerman: “Correct. And I thought that once they paid the \$40,000 they would come off the tax roll, no?”

Jim Wallace: “That’s my belief, yes. There are all different opinions on that but that’s my belief.”

Mr. Ackerman: “So for clarification are they tied together on this vote or no?”

Jim Wallace: “No, we have nothing to do with that. That is a State decision.”

Mr. Ackerman: “So the \$40,000 is just to pay the arrears then whether they become tax exempt after that is another discussion?”

Jim Wallace: “Absolutely. I don’t think you are a part of that discussion though.”

Mr. Russell: “By State law they are tax exempt but the issue is, my issue is whether they can collect rents and all of that other things and still not have to pay on it.”

Mr. Ackerman: “Well how did they get this property? We gave it to them?”

Lorraine Lewandrowski: “No, this is Lorraine. They purchased it from the private property owner.”

Mr. Ackerman: “Is there anything we can pass going forward that restricts them from taking properties like this then if they become tax exempt on this property? Is there anything we can do to block it in the future because I don’t think that’s fair to every other person that’s trying to make a living out there?”

Lorraine Lewandrowski: “I did say to Tolga that I did object. It’s problematic that the property would be forever tax exempt. I will read you his email: Lastly I will reiterate that it is in the interest of the Land Bank to get the park back on the tax roll. This is our mission and the park could become via like a Home Owners Association once on solid ground. The Home Owner’s Association would be formed and the residents would be charged a monthly fee which would go to water, sewer, and taxes and maintenance. This is the long term goal for the park and has been so that’s just an email from Tolga. I did have that conversation with him Kurt because you guys had mentioned that to me before.”

Mr. Ackerman: "And I appreciate that and I know there are quite a few properties that they are sitting idle on for a period of time now and I think that's where I have an issue. If they showed that they were taking properties and turning them over in a year or the majority of them, I would be okay with this but being that they are not I have an issue with it because now how many properties are off the tax roll in this County that now have to go back on the tax payers?"

Lorraine Lewandrowski: "I can provide you with that list. It was attached to the Inter-municipal Agreement that we did when we got out of the Land Bank so if you want I can email that to you. A lot of them are junk. I tried to add them up of the assessed value of all of these parcels. Some of them are empty lots or dilapidated houses at this point. I think the only one that has any value is the one where their office is. I will try and get you that list then you can look it over for yourself too."

Mr. Ackerman: "Yes, because there are a lot of questions that I have regarding this. They are receiving a lot of money on the backend to do a lot of this work and it doesn't seem like a lot of these properties are moving forward. I'm curious where that money is going."

Mr. Russell: "Well, that's true but I think on this one we need to determine whether we want to take the offer through the State and them or not and I think we already decided we were going to. It's just the matter of how much money."

Mr. Ackerman: "Right but I just don't to... like Jim said, as long as it's not tied to them taking the property and becoming tax exempt, I'm okay with that but if it's tied to it then I'm not."

Mr. Russell: "Well, we don't determine tax exemptions. That's the issue."

Mr. Ackerman: "We do when we grant them the properties though. If they are not moving forward, I think we should review all of the properties and if they are not doing anything with these properties we should cease to give them anymore from the County at least and then maybe advocate to all of the municipalities as well."

Mr. Russell: "I don't have a problem with that, I'm just trying to get through this motion. I totally agree with you."

Mr. Ackerman: "I appreciate it. Thank you."

Mr. Smith: "Pat, when this was brought up before in committee and we voted on it I voted no on that proposal and I will be voting no on this too."

Mr. Russell: "Okay. Any other discussion?"

Mr. Ackerman: "Yes, one more. I just want to be clear, we are strictly voting on receiving the \$40,000 for the back water bill, correct?"

Jim Wallace: "I apologize, Kurt. The water bill was never a part of that. It was never paid back. Never charged, never paid so that is not part of the issue. It's the taxes and the interest. We would remain whole for that. That is what we are voting on. That that lien would go away."

Lorraine Lewandrowski: "It was \$36,646 in actual taxes and then there was interest on top of that so we are getting the money that we made them whole on plus a portion of the interest and penalties."

Jim Wallace: "Can I just clarify that? We are getting it all back because the \$8,300 on the water bill was never paid."

Mr. Ackerman: "Ok. I got it."

Lorraine Lewandrowski: "Okay, so we are making more money."

Jim Wallace: "So we are under \$40,000."

Mr. Ackerman: "Jim, I guess the question is, anyone that pays back taxes on properties with the penalties, we don't usually pass it here, so why if this isn't tied to anything else, why are we passing it here?"

Jim Wallace: "They are looking for that agreement, Kurt. The State is."

Mr. Ackerman: "The agreement for what Jim?"

Jim Wallace: "That the lien is clear. To be honest with you Kurt, up until probably, Kim jump in, about a week or so ago we thought we were taking a little bit of a hit until we really researched the water bill."

Mr. Smith: "You know when we do this for individuals, if we allow them to pay their back bills we always assess them three times what they owe us and here we are letting these people sack them out of money."

Mr. Stephens: "Didn't we get rid of that though? The three times?"

Mr. Shaw: "No."

Mr. Stephens: "No. I thought we did."

Kim Enea: "You guys stopped doing the three times amount a few years ago by Resolution."

Jim Wallace: "Right. Plus this is a little bit different. This is just redeeming what the taxes were."

Mr. Johnson: "That's all the State is looking to pay too, right Jim Wallace? They are only going to give the \$40,000. "

Jim Wallace: "Right, but they are making us whole which is a good thing."

Mr. Johnson: "Right. Kind of take the money and run I guess."

Jim Wallace: "And this was one of those properties that is hanging out there which makes it a little different. They didn't get it from us guys, they got it from the property owner."

Mr. Johnson: "They bought it from our auction from the gentleman that walked away from it."

Mr. Bono: "Let's get the money and hope that the assessor..."

Mr. Ackerman: "They bought that at our auction?"

Lorraine Lewandrowski: "They bought it from the property owner."

Mr. Ackerman: "Alright, because at the auction there wouldn't be any debt. We would have already wiped it."

Lorraine Lewandrowski: "Correct."

Jim Wallace: "Right, except for Federal."

Mr. Ackerman: "I just want to make sure I have the right information. As long as it's not tied to them coming off of the tax roll I am good."

Mr. Bono: "Mr. Chairman, I would think that the assessor would treat this like any other property. Sort of like the ARC, they are tax exempt in whole by their mission statement but any enterprise that they delve into, that is for profit such as land lording, for instance, the IDA is over at their building on German Street along with other businesses, hairdressers and gyms and other things. They must pay taxes on that portion of the property the way I understand it. I would hope that this property would be in the same boat. Especially when the State investing a loan I think is 1.6 million dollars in infrastructure over there, whether it be sewer upgrades or actually home too. Those are homes, those are real property. They would be subject to ..."

Mr. Ackerman: "How many homes are in there Jim?"

Mr. Bono: "I think there is six or seven. There is eight lots, I believe, eight or ten lots and there is only maybe six or seven right now. I would hope that they would pay property tax. Maybe we can find that out before better than later."

Mr. Ackerman: "We are looking at \$200,000 a trailer. Is that what we are talking about here?"

Mr. Bono: "No, they are probably about \$50,000 a home and that's \$450,000 total but they are talking about sewer upgrades, put a fancy septic system in with a greenhouse and to evaporate the water. To me it's wasted money. It's really crazy money on a footprint that is the size of a postage stamp. I'm in the business guys, you know that and I could buy two or three parks for 1.6 million dollars let alone eight lots that's the size of a couple acres on a side hill no less but that's what the State wants to do. If they are willing to pay the taxes on those homes and in infrastructure upgrades then so be it."

Mr. Russell: "Right now we need to make the decision on whether we are going to take the money or not and then the other things we can chat about within the various committees. Do I have any motion's Jim?"

Jim Wallace: "Yes."

Mr. Russell: "Any other discussion on this?"

Item #4 - On motion of Mr. Johnson, seconded by Mr. Stephens, Item #4 was voted on, approved and moved for Resolution. Yes: Russell, Ackerman, Johnson, Shaw, Stephens, Bono (6). No: Smith (1).

Mr. Russell: "Number five discussion regarding COVID-19 vaccines. Is that going to you Jim?"

Jim Wallace: "Can Steve handle that?"

Mr. Russell: "Can you Steve?"

Steve Billings: "I can. Excellus has reached out to us regarding the COVID-19 vaccine that's going to be coming out and whether or not it's something we want our health insurance to cover. Let me just go through a few details with you. The vaccine itself, the actual vial is covered by the Federal Government. This would be the cost to administer that vaccine. Meaning, if you go to Public Health or you go to a Walgreens, there may be a charge for them to administer the vaccine. The way it stands right now the Federal Government is requiring all non-grandfathered plans to cover this in full. We are a grandfathered plan so it is our option. Two out of three of our health insurance plans right now do not cover adult immunizations which this would fall under. So the question is, do we want to amend our plan to cover the COVID vaccine, administration of it, and our PPO plan and our Classic Blue plan? Potential cost is about \$12,000. That is probably your maximum, close to your maximum liability on this. I know there was some discussion regarding flu shots and why don't we cover those or do we so I felt the need to bring this forward to see if we wanted to amend our two plans to cover this."

Mr. Bono: "Mr. Chairman, I think it would be worthwhile to do this in light of the pandemic and everything that is happening. I think it's the prudent thing to do for \$12,000. I don't think anybody should question it. I'd like to make a motion to implement it. It's \$12,000. Well worth it."

Mr. Russell: "It's going to be the one time, right Steve that we are talking about?"

Steve Billings: "As far as I know that would be for this year."

Mr. Russell: "I don't know if they are going to be charging for everybody. Any other questions?"

Jim Wallace: "Steve, does this hurt anything with our grandfathering?"

Steve Billings: "That's a great question. I checked with Excellus yesterday to make sure because we want to keep our grandfather status and I was told it does not affect our status."

Jim Wallace: "Thank you. Thank you Mr. Chairman."

Mr. Russell: "Any other questions?"

Mr. Schrader: "Mr. Chairman, so Steve, this covers all Herkimer County employees?"

Steve Billings: "Employees that have our health insurance."

Mr. Schrader: "Okay. The only reason I ask that Pat and Steve, is I had a situation yesterday with one of my constituents that works at Remington, which is laid off and they have no health insurance. His wife just got COVID so I'm just wondering what's out there to help out the unemployed people with this also."

Mr. Russell: "I'm not sure. Maybe Public Health would know of something."

Mr. Schrader: "Okay. Yes I talked with Christina yesterday and she did not seem to think there was anything out there for anyone right now."

Mr. Bono: "I'm assuming that this is going to be free to those people that can't afford it being a National pandemic, International pandemic. I would hope that it would be available to everybody. We can work the back door on that and get some answers."

Mr. Schrader: "Because you know what I am saying Mr. Chairman, I mean we all represent the people that work at Remington and a lot of them couldn't afford the insurance plan that they were offering. I'm sure I am probably not going to be the only one that this is brought up to."

Mr. Russell: "The fact that we are doing it, you mean?"

Mr. Schrader: "No. That fact that they don't have insurance Pat, and they can't afford to get this vaccination to prevent them from getting sick or whatever. If it even does that."

Mr. Russell: "Yes. I'm not sure. The vaccination is free. In our case it's whether they charge an injection fee."

Mr. Schrader: "Right, the delivery fee."

Jim Wallace: "Steve, can you speak to that? The first dose and the second dose so far what we know?"

Steve Billings: "Sure. My understanding is the vaccine as of right now is two doses. You have to get one shot and then I think a couple weeks later you get the second dose. Excellus is giving us some estimates on what they believe is going to be the charge and it's around \$45 for the two shots in total."

Mr. Russell: "So some of it is going to go to our Public Health Department, right?"

Jim Wallace: "I think the majority Pat, they are trying to go through the hospitals for the hospital workers and nursing homes, EMS people and they are going to try and use the pharmacies for the majority of other people. I'm sure Christina will be brought into it with her PODs at some point but it's very unclear at this point. But again that is a Federal decision through the State. We are just ready to help wherever we can."

Mr. Russell: "Any other questions?"

Item #5 - On motion of Mr. Bono, seconded by Mr. Johnson, Item #5 was voted on, approved and moved for Resolution. Unanimous.

Mr. Russell: "Discussion on Highway proposal and discussion on personnel in Emergency Services, are both of those executive session?"

Jim Wallace: "Yes they are."

Mr. Russell: "Is there any other thing?"

Mr. Bono: "Yes Pat. In regard to Broadband, when I gave my speech last year as Chairman the first meeting we had in January, I had mentioned Broadband. An opportunity arose through the IDA where we had a company come in and give a presentation to John Piseck and I last week or the week before, they gave us a presentation about Broadband and what they could do to survey the County. It's a company called ECC Technologies and pretty much what they would do is come in and give an inventory of the Broadband infrastructure in the County. I know we all serve populations and areas in the County that either lack Broadband, they are served by Broadband, underserved or not served at all. This company would come in and pretty much do an inventory. They would tell you where fiber is, where COAX is, where the copper lines are and they would give soup to nuts type thing. They would do a map, collected data, put in a GIS system. They would identify owners of the companies so it would be a comprehensive survey that the County could use as a tool to go forward and apply for grants to increase Broadband. And the cost, they did send us a proposal this morning. I looked at it briefly and I think John Piseck is on the line too if John could speak. It's around \$66,000. I know that's a number that I think would be well worth the investment and I would love to entertain them if we could either bring them in and you could listen to them on what they would do. Whether we do it at the IDA level or at the County level. I think it's a County problem so I would like to see the County invest in this if that's the pleasure of the board. Again, we all hear that complaint time and time again. Get me Broadband and it's not just for entertainment purposes, it's for education and our kids, especially with the advent of this pandemic. You know, learning from home, economic development is another issue. Our businesses need high speed internet to compete. What's your pleasure? Would you allow John to speak if he has anything more?"

Mr. Russell: "I know that they did something in the North Country, the northern part. I think they have already done some surveys and stuff so I don't want it to be redundant. I'm not sure who to talk to on that."

Mr. Bono: "But how comprehensive Pat, any idea?"

Mr. Russell: "I don't have any idea. Maybe we could call the Town of Webb."

Mr. Bono: "Okay."

Mr. Russell: "They are not open now. The Town of Webb is closed. We have cases of COVID here. That's part of the reason why I couldn't get some information."

John Piseck: "I believe I could answer that question Mr. Chairman."

Mr. Russell: "That's right. You were part of it. Go ahead"

John Piseck: "So one of the other major things that we would be looking at for this is telemedicine that we know has become a large part over COVID times. Right now, this company

ECC is working with DANK which is part of the Adirondack Park that is working with Jefferson, St. Lawrence and Lewis Counties on their fiber study. They have also completed one with Madison County. What this study would actually do is put some boots on the ground and measure the different areas and where we have Broadband and where they say it is. New York State Public Service Commission will say a town has Broadband if it's brought to a certain point within the town not connecting every end user so we felt as if that would be important here. I know Mr. Wallace is aware of it and I have included him on several of the emails that the MVEDD received some CARES Act funding to help support this study however we are not sure in what direction they are going to go in that. But the other day, two days ago, or whenever the new CARES Act is going to be released, there is additional funding in there. We would fight for our share to do some of this study. There is also a separate option on here for telecommunication profiles that the IDA would do in conjunction with this with our business parks and areas that we feel are good for development. This firm is very well known. They are really well known to DANK which does do their homework on what they are trying to do and trying to do things in the Adirondack Park, as Mr. Russell knows, is very difficult. With this study that would be done that would help, as Mr. Bono said, us to go after additional grant funding especially through the USDA that does have funding available to put in the Broadband for a study like this and I also talked to our consultant that's doing the County wide study that you are working in with the Community Foundation and all of the municipalities and he said this would be an excellent tie in with the data that he has collected and he is not going as deep in the weeds as this study is. That's all I pretty much have to say on the topic but if anybody has questions I am happy to answer."

Mr. Campione: "Mr. Russell, can I speak for a minute?"

Mr. Russell: "You can."

Mr. Campione: "I am a perfect example of this problem. I just missed three quarters of the meeting because I have no Broadband. I have what they call a Jetpack that works when it feels like it and sometimes it doesn't work so I really think we need to look into this. Thank you."

Mr. Russell: "Yes. I don't disagree. I know people up here would like it. I think they brought in some, I don't know what kind of lines they are called, cost a lot of money to connect it. Somebody has a question. Is it Fred?"

Mr. Shaw: "Yes. I have a question for John. What percent of that study do you think you can get grant money for?"

John Piseck: "Well, for the individual study it is hard to say because the money that came in to MVEDD is for the six County regions. Mr. Wallace might be better prepared to answer that question. They actually added an individual that is supporting this and there have been other requests for that grant money. I would have to say, and maybe like I said, Mr. Wallace might have a better handle on what he thinks we could get."

Mr. Russell: "Jim had to go get some information. He will be back."

John Piseck: "I will speak for him then. I'm only kidding. He is the Chairman or the President of the MVEDD and I have also reached out to EDGE to see if they were interested in partnering in something too just on the funding. Not that our scope of a project would be with them but if we

both applied for funding, similar funding, we could probably get that over the other communities.”

Mr. Russell: “So when do they want to do this study?”

John Piseck: “They can do this study anytime. They have the availability. They are a large organization. They could start relatively shortly on this and this would just add to all of the other things that we are doing that kind of separate us now to get more enticement or other distribution, houses and manufacturing.”

Mr. Russell: “So it sounds like we would rather do it sooner than later.”

John Piseck: “Well the other thing too Pat, since DANKs doing this and they are doing DANKs, maybe we could steal some stuff from them. That was my hope.”

Mr. Russell: “Well, me too. I mentioned it but...”

Mr. Johnson: “Mr. Chairman, I have a question. We fund the \$66,000, whose committee does that fall under or are we just paying the bill?”

Mr. Russell: “With money it would be Ways and Means. I’m not sure if there is another, Planning and Development or who else would be on it.”

John Piseck: “Patrick, can I ask a question?”

Mr. Russell: “Sure you can.”

John Piseck: “The Legislature I believe the study would help every constituent within all of your districts but there has to be a way to, not only manage the information we get but to go after different grants to help bring the Broadband to those homes. We are more than happy after we had a brief discussion, myself and Mr. Bono, to support this and run with it anyway that you all would like.”

Jim Wallace: “And Ray, to answer your question, it would be Planning and Development.”

Mr. Johnson: “Thanks Jim.”

Mr. Bono: “Pat, we can bring them in and grill the company but from what they showed us, I mean it was pretty in depth. It was really in the weeds.”

Jim Wallace: “I think you would have to do that, right? Bring them in.”

Mr. Bono: “Yes. I have no objection to that and you can ask them any question but this is a question we get asked all of the time as Legislators. I need better Broadband and to John’s point, telemedicine is a new thing. It’s not just Public Health, it’s Mental Health too. The Sheriff and the Courts all can use this to make our County much more efficient. I think it’s time and potentially money well spent.”

Jim Wallace: “Jim, once you have this study, where do you go from there because right now the State has put up millions and millions of dollars to do it and it hasn’t been affordable to companies? So what is the next step after the study is done. I think it makes sense to do the study but what is that next step? That’s the real issue”

Mr. Bono: “Right. The company threw out some ideas, John, you were there too, about how they had success in other areas where they were able to achieve funding for the build out of certain projects, correct John?”

John Piseck: “Yes. There would be several avenues that we would search out funding. One being the USDA, they have funding set aside we were assured and from what we are seeing there is additional funding coming from the CARES Act. Mr. Wallace, I know you had to leave but I know for this study the money is coming through MVEDD and we reached out. They haven’t decided how they are going to divide it up but I think we could get a portion of that money. I would hope we could to support this study.”

Jim Wallace: “Yes, I talked to Steve about that.”

John Piseck: “Yes. You were involved in some of the emails that went back and he turned us over to Mary Kate to see where she was setting up with that. Also, part of the initial large renewable projects that are happening across the State, I was fortunate to sit on a committee for that and one of the things we are looking at adding is that when they do these sights they are going to add some fiber different opportunities to tie in and extend Broadband where a lot of these solar projects are going.”

Mr. Russell: “Some of the issues up here was when they decided where it needed to go, the cost was prohibited and a lot of the Frontier and Spectrum did not want to do it. I don’t think you would necessarily have that problem down there but what about the rural areas? If an internet company does not want to do the wiring or whatever it is called.”

John Piseck: “Mr. Chairman, What happened with a lot of those contracts is because they were smaller houses, the State wasn’t paying them as they progressed with the project. They were waiting until the end like we see in a lot of grants and project awards that we receive but I think that that is being changed as well. I did sit on an Economic Development call two weeks ago when we talked about ag and economic development and Broadband was brought up where that was mentioned specifically that if they need to do these projects they need to pay as they work it along. I don’t think we can rely on as much State money but with the USDA funds and EBA funds that are fed through MVEDD I think there is funding available to help support a lot of these areas that we never thought we could before.”

Mr. Russell: “Alright, so how do we want to do it? What do you guys want to do?”

Mr. Bono: “Can we bring them in Pat and then we can ask these types of questions and get a better handle on it and take it from there?”

Mr. Johnson: “Can we do a Zoom meeting with them Jim?”

Mr. Bono: “Yes. That’s what we did. John and I had a Zoom meeting with them.”

Mr. Russell: "Can you set it up prior to the 27th?"

Mr. Bono: "Sure. I'm sure we can. The 27th of January correct?"

Mr. Russell: "Yes, I guess that would be the best thing."

Mr. Ackerman: "Won't that be Planning and Development?"

Mr. Bono: "We can set it up, John or I can. We will get contact information and get that set up and I will talk to you and Kurt. We are going to have a committee meeting before the 27th so we could probably set it up next committee meeting."

Mr. Russell: "Does that sound okay with everybody? Asks questions too. Call John and Jim and ask questions prior."

Mr. Bono: "Motion to go into Executive Session to discuss Highway proposal, personnel in Emergency Services legal issues with the Jail."

The committee went into Executive Session for Item #s 6 through 8.

On motion of Mr. Bono, seconded by Mr. Johnson, the Ways & Means committee went into Executive Session at 10:54 a.m., under Public Officer's Law, Section 105 (h), Section 105 (f) and Section 105 (d). Discussion only. No vote taken. On motion of Mr. Stephens, seconded by Mr. Bono, the committee came out of Executive Session at 12:03 p.m.

On motion of Mr. Johnson, seconded by Mr. Bono the Ways & Means committee adjourned at 12:04 p.m.