

BERKS COUNTY PRISON BOARD MINUTES

OCTOBER 12, 2022

The Berks County Prison Board met in a regular session on Wednesday, October 12, 2022, at 9:00 A.M. in the Commissioners Boardroom and Microsoft Teams Meeting.

CALL TO ORDER:

Commissioner Kevin Barnhardt called the meeting to order at 9:00 A.M.

The following members were in attendance:

Commissioner Christian Leinbach
Commissioner Michael Rivera
Commissioner Kevin Barnhardt
District Attorney John Adams
Secretary Sandra Graffius
Judge Scott Lash

The following member were absent:

Sheriff Eric J. Weaknecht

The following County staff also attended:

Executive Assistant Jessica Blausner
Assistant Solicitor David Peris
Assistant Solicitor Cody Kauffman
Deputy Warden-Custody Jeffrey Schearer
Warden Jeffrey Smith
Chief Deputy Warden Stephanie Smith

APPROVAL OF MINUTES

A motion was made to approve the September 14, 2022, meeting minutes as presented. Motion carried.

PUBLIC COMMENT

None.

JAIL SENIOR STAFF REPORTS

INMATE POPULATION: Warden Jeffrey Smith stated the inmate population is 722. Fifty-six inmates that are scheduled to an SCI. Twenty-five of those will be scheduled to leave between now and October 25th. Twenty-five inmates are awaiting transfer date and 6 will remain in custody due to other circumstances.

PROJECT UPDATES: Warden Smith updated the board with the capital projects:

- Yard door replacements are being coordinated with vendors
- Roof Conduit repairs currently underway
- Kitchen HVAC unit replacement (waiting on vendor – Costars issue)
- Sewage pump at FCRC (still waiting for parts to arrive)
- NVR upgrade project – devices are at the security vendor being set up and programmed

CURRENT STATE OF AFFAIRS AT THE JAIL: Warden Smith updated the board with the current state of affairs of the jail:

- The Jail has been forced to impose several lockdowns usually on the weekends over the past weeks
- Due to several staff working several mandatory overtime shifts back to back
- Due to multiple inmates at the hospital, Constant observations at the jail, and call-offs
- Operate on a modified schedule to reduce staffing requirements
- Trying to avoid burnout and get these officers home to see their families

PROGRAMS: Chief Deputy Warden Stephanie Smith updated the Board on programing of the jail. Last month Chief Deputy Smith and four treatment counselors went to training sponsored by DOC on a program called *Seeking Safety*. This is a trauma focused treatment group for the inmate population. This is a new program for the counselors and the jail is looking at reinforcing that training and implementing a screening tool at intake to trigger a referral for the program. This would be voluntary program since it is trauma focused. It is a program that can implemented because it is skill based and present time focused. It is good opportunity for inmates to learn some new skills around managing their safety and looking at some of the drivers for why they engage in some of the behaviors that they do. The program will be started mid-November.

STAFFING: Deputy Warden-Custody Jeffrey Schearer updated the Board on the status of the staffing; there are 37 Correctional Officer vacancies. There were 5 cadets in the academy scheduled to graduate in November. Six candidates in the background check phase and 4 candidates scheduled for interviews this week. The academy will be started on November 23rd.

SOLICITOR'S REPORT

First Assistant County Solicitor Cody Kauffman had nothing to report and no need for executive session.

COMMENTS FROM THE JAIL BOARD

Commissioner Leinbach spoke about the challenges of staffing at the jail. Commissioner Leinbach realizes that it is a challenge everywhere but wondered if there is anything else that County can possibly do to increase interest in working in corrections. Warden Smith confirmed that HR is doing everything they can. All the other counties are in the same predicament. There is a referral bonus being offered and the county has one of the highest salaries compared to other counties. Lancaster County does have a sign on bonus, but their salaries are less that Berks County is offering.

STEERING COMMITTEE

Commissioner Barnhardt updated the board on the Steering Committee regarding financial modeling and public outreach which are continuing through CGL. The county is looking at potentially extending the CGL contract through the end of the year as opposed to a flat rate or an hourly rate if their services are needed. If there is a need for public outreach that could be done with the internal team. Financial modeling continues there is a meeting tomorrow there are some adjustments to the financial modeling piece.

There has been some other discussions based on comment from one of the support team of CGL to look at eliminating work release. There was a virtual call with Dauphin County who has a day reporting center and some information from them is very interesting. They currently have a jail population is at 900 with 50 to 75 inmates on day reporting. Having this type of center would be a huge cost savings and must be thought about when designing a new facility. The courts would sentence the inmate to day reporting as opposed to incarceration. They will have drug screening and must attend classes and the inmates would report two or three times a week. If they don't follow the program, then they would end up being incarcerated. The center in Dauphin County is open 7:00 AM to 8:00 PM in order to catch work inmates before work or after work. The President Judge is on board to visit the center in Dauphin County. The downtown facility is 3500 square feet of space.

Warden Smith spoke to the board about work release. Most inmates are either sentenced for immediate work release or to become eligible while they're in custody. They are then scheduled to go to work for 8 to 12 hours which is determined. They come back into custody and are provided with housing, healthcare services, and any other limited programming. The new facility has 7000 square feet allotted for work release. With eliminating this program would be a cost savings of over 7000 square feet in space that has been allotted and savings in staffing needs. The program would need about 12 full time employees to cover the shift relief factor and a full-

time employee salary is around 90,000 a year that's over \$1,000,000 a year cost savings if the program would be eliminated. Commissioner Leinbach spoke about not only the savings in cost standpoint but the benefit to that individual and potentially their family. When they are in jail the county is entirely responsible for them for their healthcare, food, and lodging. Instead of the taxpayers paying for their health insurance they can get their health insurance through their employer where they're working. This goes to the bigger issue of right size the jail before we commit to build a jail, it needs to be sized right. There will more details and information given as things are looked at with the Prison Board and the Commissioners and the courts which is a much bigger factor. More information will be decided on near the end of November early December.


There will be a tentative Prison Board meeting on November 9th virtually if there is more information on day reporting or fiscal reporting. Otherwise the meeting will be canceled until December.

PUBLIC COMMENT

None.

ADJOURNMENT

A motion was made by Commissioner Barnhardt to adjourn at 9:25 A.M. And seconded by Commissioner Leinbach. The next Prison Board meeting is tentatively scheduled for November 9, 2022.



Sandy Graffius, Prison Board Secretary