

Commissioners:

R. JACK MCKERNAN
Chairman

TONY R. MUSSARE
Vice Chairman

RICHARD MIRABITO
Secretary



MATTHEW A. McDERMOTT
*Director of Administration
and Chief Clerk*

J. DAVID SMITH
Solicitor

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COUNTY of LYCOMING
48 WEST THIRD STREET
WILLIAMSPORT, PA 17701

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**Minutes of the Meeting of
April 25, 2017
Board Room, Executive Plaza
Pine Street, Williamsport**

Commissioner McKernan - Present
Commissioner Mussare - Present
Commissioner Mirabito - Present

Solicitor Wiley - Present

1.0 OPERATIONS

1.1 CONVENE COMMISSIONERS MEETING. The meeting was convened at 10:03 a.m.

Bids were opened for the following:
Pre-Release Center and Lysock View Complex Entrance Paving Project
(2 bidders).

2.0 ACTION ITEMS

2.1 APPROVE CASH REQUIREMENTS REPORT. A motion by Mr. Mussare and seconded by Mr. Mirabito and passed (3-0), approved accounts payable cash requirement report through March 22, 2017, for payment on March 15, 2017, in the amount of \$763,866.49.

6.0 COMMISSIONER COMMENT. The floor was opened to commissioner comment and the following were received:
Mr. Mirabito talked about the importance for the public to think about the budgets at the state and federal levels.
Mr. Mussare echoed Mr. Mirabito's concerns.
Mr. Mirabito commented on the Visitor's Bureau expense report and the income/expense of the Grand Slam Parade.
Mr. Mussare said that the chambers who are designated as Tourist Promotion Agencies (TPAs) in the state have the lowest administrative costs.

Mr. Mirabito requested to hold off on the vote for increasing the hotel tax percentage. He would like to see a request for proposal (RFP) for TPA.

Commissioner Mirabito repeated the request that he made on April 18 and stated that passage of the new Hotel Tax ordinance was premature and should be postponed until several issues are resolved. Commissioner Mirabito repeated his request made on April 18 to issue a Request for Proposal (RFP) and allow organizations to compete to see who will utilize the Hotel Tax revenue most efficiently.

On both April 18 and April 25 Commissioner Mirabito raised issues involving the legality of the Chamber of Commerce as the Tourist Promotion Agency (TPA); conflict of interest issues regarding the Chamber; and issues concerning the Chamber's use of the Hotel Tax money.

The three legal issues involve (1) the change of the entity which is now being called the "Williamsport-Lycoming Chamber of Commerce d/b/a Lycoming County Visitors Bureau" and which is not a Recognized Tourist Promotion Agency designated to act within Lycoming County; (2) the fact that the County Code requires that the Commissioners to appoint the TPA - just as the Commissioners appoint all the members of the Airport Authority, the Lycoming County Water and Sewer Authority, the Lycoming County Housing Authority, and numerous other boards - but the Commissioners have not appointed the members of the Tourist Promotion Agency (instead the Chamber itself appoints the TPA); and (3) the Commissioners received a letter from the owner of an inn who collects the Hotel Tax and alleges that the Chamber has denied him due process to utilize the services of the TPA. Commissioner Mirabito compared this situation to the golf course and asked how the Board would react if a constituent was denied use of the golf course because he did not join an association set up by the management company the County hired (Billy Casper Golf).

Commissioner Mirabito also stated that there are numerous conflicts of interest with the Chamber being the TPA. These conflicts include (1) the fact that there is a disproportionate representation from the owners of large hotels in the county on the TPA to the exclusion of other groups who are trying to promote tourism in the County; (2) the fact that the Chamber gave a \$500,000 "loan" from Hotel Tax revenue that the recipient is not required to pay back and that the recipient is also a member of the Chamber and has a representative on the TPA; and (3) the concern that the same individuals who will benefit from the increase in the tax revenue are making the decisions about how to use the revenue without input from the full community of parties with a stake in tourism in Lycoming County. Commissioner Mirabito noted that he did not hold the developer who received the \$500,000 at fault because he was offered "free" money; the

poor judgment was by the Chamber leadership. Commissioner Mirabito also compared this situation to the golf course and asked how the Board would react if the management company (Billy Casper Golf) gave \$500,000 to one of its board members.

Commissioner Mirabito raised concerns about the use of the Hotel Tax revenue itself. He pointed out that the Chamber from has received \$7,171,557 dollars of Hotel Tax revenue in the recent history of the tax and the results are poor.

Commissioner Mirabito stated that he has been told by hotel owners that the occupancy rates of some hotels are at 35% or 40%. Commissioner Mirabito asked for numbers from the Chamber as to how many tourists have visited Lycoming County each year for the past 10 years. He also asked the Chamber to report how much has been spent on tourism each year.

Commissioner Mirabito noted that the Chamber has not been promoting the PA Wilds program despite the ordinance passed by the Commissioners several years ago to support the PA Wilds program. He noted that the Chamber had told the Commissioners that they did not think the PA Wilds is important to tourism in Lycoming County.

Finally, Commissioner Mirabito discussed how other counties - including Adams County, which is a 5th Class County - have used the Hotel Tax to reduce property taxes by passing legislation to give grants from the Hotel Tax to police departments in the County. Commissioner Mirabito stated that as elected officials we cannot wait for Harrisburg to reform property taxes; instead we must utilize all methods possible. Commissioner Mirabito stated that he is not suggesting that a majority of the tax be utilized for this purpose, but only as an effort to reduce the pressure (however slightly) on property taxes.

7.0 PUBLIC COMMENT. The floor was opened to public comment and the following were received:

Ralph Kisburg of Williamsport thanked the Commissioners for their hard work. He asked if the Board saw a copy of the letter the Mifflin Township supervisors sent to the state regarding a compressor station expansion in Salladasburg. He noted that public comment is being heard until May 1 regarding it.

Vicki Smedley of Jersey Shore is concerned with the noise pollution of the compressor station as it would affect those with special needs in the school. She is a retired special educator. Alison Hirsch of Rural Ave. in Williamsport spoke about the Visitor's Guide that is put out by the TPA as a failure and "bad tourist literature." She also referenced the outdated visitor's bureau website and critiqued both.

My name is Alison Hirsch, and I live at 423 Rural Avenue in Williamsport. I've worked in various aspects of publishing for 50 years. I've worked as an editor, a writer, and a historian. My

husband was a graphic designer all his life and taught graphic design at Penn College, and I learned a great deal from him about design. I've done historical research and writing for the City, for the Transportation Museum and the public kiosks around town. I've done a lot of traveling in Pennsylvania beyond, and am a fanatic collector of tourist publications. So think I know what I'm talking about when I say that the Lycoming County Visitors' Guide and visitor's website both convey a woefully inadequate and deadly dull image of this City and County. On top of the failure in content, the writing, editing, and design are poor examples of tourist literature.

I'm here today to ask questions and make comments about the Visitor's Guide, which this year has been combined with the Chamber of Commerce Membership Directory and promotional material—63 pages worth of self-promotion. The Tourist Guide contains just 27 pages, of which about 10 pages are ads, including a fullpage ad on page 5 for an insurance company - not something most tourists are looking for. Nor do most tourists come here looking for gas drilling structures or industrial factories, both pictured on the cover—suitable for a Chamber of Commerce publication but not a booklet designed to promote tourism. Who paid for this publication? Who supervised its production?

These publications are visible evidence of gross incompetence. Judging by their publications and websites, every other county in the state looks more interesting to the prospective visitor's eye than ours does. Frankly, the Chamber of Commerce seems more interested in punishing companies that have dropped their Chamber membership than in doing what they're supposed to do - make our county look inviting to tourists. They receive the hotel tax money to promote tourism in the entire County, not just to promote their own members. By putting their members over the other 9,000 businesses and over thousands of taxpayers, they make our County look like a tiny, rinky-dink place with hardly any services for tourists, with hardly anything interesting to see, and with a lot more chain restaurants and supermarkets than the independent shops visitors expect to see in small town tourist destinations. This does a disservice to their own members, as well as to the County as a whole.

The guide largely ignores the youthful art scene that now exists here - the art galleries, the music, the public art -- the wonderful hiking and biking paths, the birdwatching, hunting, and fishing opportunities... all aspects advertised widely by the tourist brochures for surrounding counties, which often have less of those things to offer than we do. The guidebook doesn't even mention that we're geographically the largest county in the state, which alone should give us an edge up with tourists. But in this guide book and website, we have much less to offer than counties that are much smaller.

According to the Visitors' Guide, we have only two bed and breakfasts, one of which is actually in Tioga County. There's no

mention of the Herdic Inn or Serene View Farm Bed and Breakfast, both in Williamsport.

According to the website, we have only three fine dining restaurants, no mention of the Herdic House or DeSalvo's. We have loads of pizza places, fast food restaurants, and chains like Burger King, but just one Chinese restaurant and no Thai restaurants. Our "ethnic" (elsewhere known as "International") restaurants are almost all Italian. We have only one coffee shop, no Starbucks, no Way Cool Beans. No Pajama Factory and no Panera Bread. No Fry's Turkey Ranch. According to the website, we have only three gift shops and no bookstores, new or used. No Otto's Books, no Liberty or Last Hurrah Books, used bookstores in Jersey Shore and Williamsport. But we do still have Borders Books and Music, on the website, although the company went bankrupt and liquidated its stores in 2011. Here's the entry on the website for the Mall: "Shopping You'll Love! Lycoming Mall is located approximately 12 miles east of Williamsport along the Interstate 180 and Route 220 corridor and is the only enclosed shopping center in the county. Lycoming Mall features more than 85 unique retailers including: Old Navy, Hollister Co., Dick's Sporting Goods, Borders Books & Music, Best Buy, Gertrude Hawk Chocolates, American Eagle Outfitters, Bath & Body Works, Victoria's Secret, Christopher & Banks, the GAP and more! Anchor stores include Macy's, the Bon-Ton, JCPenneys, and Sears with Burlington Coat Factory opening in Fall 2008. Lycoming Mall also has the area's only indoor carousel located at Center Court. Visit www.shoplycomingmall.com for a complete store directory and information regarding upcoming events and store sales information." (see attached screen shot)

The entry on the Mall in the print guide:

Lycoming Mall, followed by address and website. No listing of stores at all. The Mall, a member of the Chamber, should be up in arms over these lapses and errors.

Why should people want to visit Lycoming County? Here's what we could be marketing - and what the Chamber is absolutely NOT marketing. A historic, small city with big attractions, right on the river, just minutes away from hiking trails, forests, and scenic creeks and waterfalls. Small towns with big history—a single-room schoolhouse, historic churches, quaint main streets with interesting stores and small restaurants. Here's what's missing in the Guide: Millionaire's Row, Historic Architecture, Hughesville, Muncy, Jersey Shore, Trout Run, and so much more... Expansive forests, parks, waterways, mountains - these get barely a mention in the Guide. And more crucially, almost no photos of our beautiful scenery. Our local art lovers and historical organizations have felt compelled to create separate guides to Art and History—because they're almost completely absent from the Chamber's guides. Chamber members themselves should be outraged at this guide. Some members get special attention. Others get

none. There are no captions to identify any of the sites shown in photos. Instead of unique photos of County sites, there are photos of hotel beds and rows of shopping carts. (see attached screen shot) Listing only Chamber members makes the County look uninviting - as if we have very few hotels, restaurants, stores. Clinton County (which also has its Chamber run the TPA) includes non-Chamber members in its lists of attractions, shops, hotels, and restaurants. We don't. The production quality of the Visitor's Guide is poor. Did anyone look at this before rushing it into print? Did anyone bother to copy edit or proofread? Judging from these sentences, no. "The greater Williamsport and Lycoming County is teaming with skilled artists and artists."

"On the dining side, the community is host to a wide-array of restaurants offering food samplings to meet a host of different palates." "Like we said, Williamsport and Lycoming County have something to offer for everyone."

Here's what the website says at the top of the Contact Us page... "Ooops... Looks like we're not able to find what you're looking for. Sorry for the inconvenience, but you're welcome to look around elsewhere."

Right.

Google search engine has far more information about what to do and see in Lycoming County than this promotional material that costs the County hundreds of thousands of dollars in tax dollars.

I urge the Commissioners to open up the process and give the Chamber some competition, see if another entity, or multiple entities, can do a better job.

I'm also attaching some screen shots from the visitors' bureau website www.vacationpa.com that I made reference to yesterday. I'm glad to see today that someone has fixed the "Ooops" note on the Contact Us page. The Mall entry remains the same, unchanged since 2008.

Looking at the photo today for the Mall page, I see that it's not only a stock photo but a stock photo from a mall in Denmark. The prices on the clothing racks are clearly not in US dollars, and the Savona shoe store on the left is in Copenhagen. Surely, the Lycoming Mall would have submitted its own photos if someone had asked.

I might have mentioned yesterday, in giving my own experience, that for two years in 1981-1982 I edited the Columbia Guide to New York. So I know how tough a job it can be to produce a good guidebook. But the key is knowing your audience and what will appeal to them, what makes your location uniquely attractive to your readership. That basic viewpoint is, I believe, seems to be missing in the Chamber's tourism promotional materials.

Finally, I'd appreciate it if one of you would send me a list of who's who on the Visitor's Center board. I can't find it anywhere on the website or in the booklet. That should be public information.

Thank you for listening to me. I made these comments out of a love for this town and this area, and out of an abhorrence for seeing public money not being used to the greatest benefit for the public.

Again, I reiterate, I hope you will open up the process of granting this contract with an RFP and insist on greater transparency and accountability in the future. You are our elected officials with the power to do that.

Chuck Black of West Fourth Street in Williamsport commented as part of the younger generation. Websites should be great assets and social media should be used more.

Leann Karschner of Hughesville asked about the next step for the visitor's bureau.

Mr. McKernan responded that the vote on the hotel tax ordinance will be on May 2, 2017.

Mr. Mirabito commented on the many issues he has previously raised regarding the visitor's bureau. He said, "Nothing changes unless you push against the wall."

8.0 NEXT REGULARLY SCHEDULED MEETING. Mr. McKernan announced the next regularly scheduled meeting to be held Thursday, April 27, 2017.

9.0 ADJOURN COMMISSIONERS' MEETING. The meeting was adjourned at 11:38 a.m.

(From Alison Hirsch comments)

4/25/2017

Williamsport & Lycoming County Have shopping in department stores, shops, markets, malls and more



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So, you know exactly what you need and don't want to pay a lot to get it? You've come to the right place!

Williamsport and Lycoming County is home to all of your favorite department stores. This is where you want to be when you're looking for one-stop shopping for everyday values.

Once you're here, no matter where you go in Lycoming County, you'll find a lot to your liking ...not to mention plenty of down home comforts and urban excitement along the way.

Jewelry Specialty Shops Antiques & Country Stores Gift Shops Department Stores Sweets & Treats

Malls & Shopping Centers Outdoors Apparel View All

Lycoming Mall

Shopping You'll Love! Lycoming Mall is located approximately 12 miles east of Williamsport along the Interstate 180 and Route 220 corridor and is the only enclosed shopping center in the county. Lycoming Mall features more than 85 unique retailers.

[More Info](#)

[Website](#)

[Map](#)



UPCOMING EVENTS

- Tue - Apr 25 **BEAL April Exhibit**
- Tue - Apr 25 **"Hard Motion Painting"**
- Wed - Apr 26 **BEAL April Exhibit**
- Wed - Apr 26 **Senior Show**
- Wed - Apr 26 **"Hard Motion Painting"**
- Thu - Apr 27 **BEAL April Exhibit**
- Thu - Apr 27 **Senior Show**
- Thu - Apr 27 **Funny Business**
- Thu - Apr 27 **Concert at Noon**
- Thu - Apr 27 **"Hard Motion Painting"**

EVENTS CALENDAR

April 2017						
S	M	T	W	T	F	S
26	27	28	29	30	31	1
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4/25/2017

Williamsport & Lycoming County Have shopping in department stores, shops, markets, malls and more



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EAT SLEEP SHOP EXPLORE EVENTS



You'd like a Bed & Breakfast? We've got a few of the best in Lycoming County. Have a look at what we have to offer.

If you're looking to be pampered with candlelight breakfasts, afternoon wine and cheese services, bedtime cognac and chocolates and attentive service throughout your stay, then a Bed & Breakfast stay is perfect for you.

Once you're here, no matter where you go in Lycoming County, you'll find a lot to your liking ...not to mention plenty of down home comforts and urban excitement along the way.

[Inns & Bed & Breakfasts](#) [Hotels & Motels](#) [View All](#)

Mountain Laurel Bed & Breakfast

This majestic Bed and Breakfast is a 7,000 sq. ft. Dutch Colonial brick home which was built in 1924. Located in the quaint little borough of Blossburg, it has three guest bedrooms on the second floor. All rooms have a private bath, comfortable sitting area and a color television.

[More Info](#) [Website](#) [Map](#)



Hotel Manor

The Hotel Manor is located along Pine Creek not far from the Pine Creek Rail Trail. We have 10 rooms, 9 upstairs and 1 handicap accessible downstairs. All rooms feature private baths, air-conditioning and WIFI.

[More Info](#) [Website](#) [Map](#)



UPCOMING EVENTS

- Wed - Apr 26
BEAL April Exhibit
- Wed - Apr 26
Senior Show
- Wed - Apr 26
"Hard Motion Painting"
- Thu - Apr 27
BEAL April Exhibit
- Thu - Apr 27
Senior Show
- Thu - Apr 27
Funny Business
- Thu - Apr 27
Concert at Noon
- Thu - Apr 27
"Hard Motion Painting"
- Fri - Apr 28
BEAL April Exhibit
- Fri - Apr 28
Funny Business
- Fri - Apr 28
Life in the Fast Lane: The Story of The Eagles
- Fri - Apr 28
Design: 2017, Student Portfolio Exhibition
- Fri - Apr 28
Senior Show
- Fri - Apr 28
"Hard Motion Painting"
- Fri - Apr 28
Lycoming College Jazz Ensemble

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Whether you're looking for something to add to your wardrobe or for a unique gift for someone special, you're certain to find the perfect items in our area stores.

Here you'll find all the information needed to plan a day of shopping. Get some bargains at the Lycoming Mall and other shopping centers, go treasure hunting in our antique and country stores and visit our gift and specialty stores. There are plenty of options for a quick trip or an all day excursion.



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Deprecated: mysql_connect(): The mysql extension is deprecated and will be removed in the future: use mysqli or PDO instead in /hermes/bosnaweb04a/b2245/ywh.lcvb123/includes/conn.php on line 21



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Jewelry Specialty Shops Antiques & Country Stores Gift Shops Department Stores Sweets & Treats

Malls & Shopping Centers Outdoors Apparel View All



Lycoming Mall

300 Lycoming Mall Circle, Muncy



Malls & Shopping Centers

Call Us Today 570-546-6879

Visit Us Online At www.shoplycomingmall.com

Click To View [Map and Directions](#)

Shopping You'll Love! Lycoming Mall is located approximately 12 miles east of Williamsport along the Interstate 180 and Route 220 corridor and is the only enclosed shopping center in the county. Lycoming Mall features more than 85 unique retailers including: Old Navy, Hollister Co., Dick's Sporting Goods, Borders Books & Music, Best Buy, Gertrude Hawk Chocolates, American Eagle Outfitters, Bath & Body Works, Victoria's Secret, Christopher & Banks, the GAP and more! Anchor stores include Macy's, the Bon-Ton, JCPenneys, and Sears with Burlington Coat Factory opening in Fall 2008. Lycoming Mall also has the area's only indoor carousel located at Center Court. Visit www.shoplycomingmall.com for a complete store directory and information regarding upcoming events and store sales information.

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- Volunteer Registration**



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