

Cameron County Commissioners
Driftwood Senior Center
7806 Bridge St, Driftwood PA 15832
Meeting Minutes
Thursday, March 20, 2025 @ 11:00am

Commissioner Herzing called this meeting to order at 11:00am with a moment of silence and pledge to the flag.

Visitors: Kafferlin Group – Ben Kafferlin, Kathlynn Ireland presenting on County tax data and ratio study.

Penn State Extension – Rob Dickinson and Chi Catalone presenting on Extension programs.

NCPRPDC – Jim Chorney presented North Central programs and ongoing projects.

Dolly Livingston, Donald Livingston, JoAnn culver, Jim Copenhaver, Esther Hagg, Linda Burrows, Karen

Jones, Charles Lowe, Debra Johnson, Diana Ball, Misty Lupro, Brandie Sherry, Jackie Solic, Laura Narby,

Matt Stoehr, Nancy Fragale, Jeffrey Burfield

Public Comment and presentations:

Kafferlin Group: Ben Kafferlin provided an update on the Strategic Management Planning Program (STMP). The STMP, funded by Pennsylvania's Department of Community and Economic Development, aims to develop a five-year financial plan for the county, enabling it to draw up to \$200,000 annually for implementation. Ben outlined the program's phases:

- **Step 0:** Completed demographic analysis.
- **Step 1:** Reviewing the county's past five years of financial history (mostly done).
- **Step 2:** Budget forecasting for the next five years.
- **Step 3:** Addressing potential financial crises (not expected).
- **Step 4:** Reviewing departmental operations to identify efficiencies and revenue opportunities.
- **Steps 5 & 6:** Prioritizing and implementing recommendations over the five-year period.

The primary focus of this meeting was the ratio study, used to assess the fairness of the county's property tax system. Ben Kafferlin, drawing from his experience as a former county commissioner, explained that outdated property assessments (30+ years old) often lead to tax inequities. To determine the extent of the issue, the county enlisted Kathlyn Ireland, an expert in tax assessment and statistics, who analyzed assessment data to evaluate the need for reassessment. Ben then turned the meeting over to Kathlyn Ireland to present her findings.

Kathlyn Ireland's Summary of Cameron County Property Tax Assessment Study.

Objective: The study aimed to evaluate the fairness and equity of Cameron County's property tax assessments using ratio studies based on sales data from January 2022 to December 2024, with an appraisal date of January 1, 2025. The analysis followed standards set by the International Association of Assessing Officers (IAAO).

Key Findings

1. **Assessment Levels Below Target**
 - The county's predetermined assessment ratio is 50%, but the study found significantly lower median ratios across all property types.
 - The overall county-wide median ratio was 21.08%, indicating that properties are assessed well below their actual market value.
2. **High Coefficients of Dispersion (COD)**
 - COD measures how consistently properties are assessed within a category. The acceptable range is below 20, but Cameron County's COD values range from 53% to over 90%, showing high inconsistency in assessments.
3. **Bias Towards Higher-Priced Properties**
 - The Price-Related Differential (PRD), which indicates whether higher or lower-value properties are favored, exceeded the standard range (0.98 to 1.03), reaching values as high as 1.56.
 - This suggests regressivity, meaning higher-priced properties pay a smaller proportion of their value in taxes compared to lower-priced properties.
4. **Geographic Disparities**
 - Different boroughs and townships showed varying levels of underassessment, with median ratios ranging from 8.7% to 35%.
 - Areas such as Grove Township (8.7%) and Lumber Township (10%) had particularly low assessment levels.

Conclusion & Recommendation

- Current assessments in Cameron County are outdated (last reassessment: 1986) and inequitable.
- A county-wide reassessment is necessary to ensure fairness and prevent lower-value properties from bearing an unfair tax burden.
- This would realign assessments with market values, improve consistency, and comply with industry standards.

Summary of Discussion on Property Reassessment and Taxation

The discussion focused on the need for property reassessment due to outdated valuations and tax structures. Key points included:

1. **Challenges of Reassessment:** It is often unpopular, as a third of property owners will see tax increases, a third will see no change, and a third will see reductions, potentially causing dissatisfaction.
2. **Equity in Taxation:** Current outdated assessments result in newer or high-value homes paying less than their fair share, while long-time homeowners in older properties may be overpaying.
3. **Impact on Different Property Types:** Seasonal homes and newly renovated properties are likely to experience the most significant tax changes due to reassessment.
4. **Potential for In-House Reassessment:** Some counties handle reassessments internally, saving money, but this is only feasible with a modern, well-maintained system and adequate staffing.
5. **Taxation and Budget Challenges:** The county's tax rate has remained unchanged since 2008, leading to an estimated \$1.8 million loss in purchasing power. Options to address this include:
 - Seeking a court order for a tax increase.
 - Conducting a full reassessment (which takes years).

- Changing the predetermined assessment ratio from 50% to 100%, allowing for tax adjustments without increasing rates.
- 6. **Concerns Over Short-Term Rentals:** Residents expressed concerns that Airbnb and vacation rentals do not contribute additional taxes, creating an unfair burden on long-term homeowners.

The recommendation was to proceed with reassessment to ensure tax fairness and explore updating the predetermined ratio to maintain county services.

Penn State Extension 4-H Presentation: Representatives Robert Dickinson and Chai Catalan from Penn State Extension presented an update on 4-H programs and their impact on the community.

1. Purpose & Recognition

- They thanked the Commissioners for issuing a proclamation recognizing 4-H and its contributions to local youth development.
- 4-H programs aim to keep young residents engaged in the county, contributing to the local economy and tax base.

2. 4-H Programs & Outreach

- Engages 342 youth through various programs in science, leadership, and animal science.
- Offers traditional clubs, including an air rifle club (40+ members) and an animal science club (established last year).
- Teen Leadership Council (covering Cameron and Elk Counties) was formed to teach leadership skills, civic engagement, and public speaking.

3. Teen Council Initiatives

- Public Engagement:
 - Commissioners Herzing and Mote attended a Sunday meeting to discuss local government functions.
 - Members practice Robert's Rules of Order and meeting management.
- Public Speaking & Professional Development:
 - Partnered with Toastmasters to improve members' confidence in public speaking.
 - Preparing members for formal banquets by offering etiquette training.
- Community Support Projects:
 - Developed a Teen Tech Program to help older adults with technology (pilot program successfully launched in Elk County).
 - Plans to expand tech assistance to Emporium in the summer.
 - Conducted a team-building problem-solving activity to enhance collaboration skills.

4. Future Plans & Gratitude

- The program will continue growing with new initiatives focused on leadership and skill development.
- The speakers expressed appreciation for the Commissioners' support and their recognition of 4-H's role in the community.

North Central PA Regional Planning and Development Commission. Jim Chorney, from the North Central Pennsylvania Regional Planning and Development Commission, provided an update. The commission covers Cameron, Clearfield, Elk, Jefferson, McKean, and Potter Counties, focusing on community and economic development.

1. Federal Advocacy & Washington D.C. Visit

- Representatives attended a national conference in Washington, D.C., meeting with federal legislators to discuss funding sources like:
 - Appalachian Regional Commission (ARC)
 - Economic Development Administration (EDA)
- Topics included healthcare, education, and economic impacts, particularly regarding the closure of birthing units at Cole Memorial and Penn Highlands Elk and challenges at Penn State's rural campuses.

2. Strategic Planning & Local Engagement

- The Commission is conducting a strategic planning process, with an upcoming meeting at Red Fern to align goals with member expectations.

3. Community Capacity Program

- A pilot program launched 2.5 years ago to help municipalities apply for grants due to limited administrative capacity.
- Impact: Assisted with 250 applications, securing \$11 million in funding.
- Issue: The program was recently restricted to federal grants only, limiting access to state funding (e.g., DCED, LSA, DCNR).
- Efforts are underway to reinstate broader eligibility at both the state and federal levels.

4. Rural Revitalization & Marketing Initiatives

- Exploring a program called "Make My Move", a marketing platform from Indiana aimed at attracting residents to rural areas.
- Currently being piloted in Mercer County, PA with potential ARC funding for regional expansion.

5. Advocacy for State-Level Funding

- Local officials raised concerns about rural counties lacking representation in state revitalization committees.
- Discussions with state officials emphasized the need for continued capacity-building support for rural municipalities.
- Legislators have responded positively, promoting the capacity program in newsletters and public meetings.

The North Central PA Regional Planning Commission is advocating for sustained funding and expanded grant opportunities to support rural communities, while also exploring marketing strategies to attract new residents.

Meeting minutes from March 6, 2025, were presented for approval. Commissioner Moate made the motion to approve the previous meeting minutes, Commissioner Zucal seconded the motion, all in favor and so carried.

Correspondence:

- Received Inspection Notification – National Bridge Inspection Standards from PennDOT

- Received the MATP Allocation for FY 23-24 for \$121,849.00.
- Commissioners' commitment letter to provide matching funds for the LSA (Local Share Account).
- PAGO (PA Great Outdoors) – Board Meeting Minutes from the February 19, 2024 meeting.
- Received Cameron County's final Child Welfare Needs-Based Plan and Budget (NBPB) allocations for FY 2025-2026.

Chief Clerk Report: The office has been busy handling various audits. Preparing for the upcoming election, including poll worker training. The draft ballot is expected to be released tomorrow.

Commissioner Reports:

Commissioner Zucal reported on the following:

C2P2 Grant for Dark Sky Park:

- Master site plan completed with public input.
- Goal: Improve road access to the Dark Sky viewing area.
- Deadline to apply: April 2nd.
- Working with Danielle Mason (Rec Director) on contracting and engineering estimates.

Brownfield Assessment:

- Collaborating with Cliff Clark (Economic Developer).
- Partnering with Montrose to assess contamination on private properties.
- Future goal: Apply for cleanup funding to address blighted properties.

Personal Update:

- Appointed Democratic Treasurer for Cameron County's Democratic Party.

Master Site Plan Grant:

- Partnering with Lumber Heritage Region.
- Working on grant closeout in the next month.

Commissioner Moate reported the following:

- Workforce Solutions CEO Board:
 - Recently appointed as Vice Chair.
- BEAD Application for Broadband Expansion:
 - Applying for a 10-county broadband funding initiative.
 - Funding is held up at the federal level, creating uncertainty.
 - Will continue advocating for the project with legislators.
- Cameron County Ambulance Service Annual Meeting:
 - Officers re-elected:
 - President: Rob Versa
 - Vice President: Bill Hopwood
 - Secretary: Jody Guisto
 - Treasurer: Phil Brown
 - Attended EMS Task Force meeting; ongoing efforts to address the EMS crisis.
- Legislation for EMS Services:
 - Pushing for:
 - Medicare reimbursement increase (400%).
 - Creation of an EMS Commissioner within the Department of Health.
- DuBois CareerLink Closure:
 - Workforce center closing, but no job losses—employees will relocate.

- Services will still be available within 30 miles in Clearfield County.
- CCAP Harrisburg Conference:
 - Technology Committee (Vice Chair): Focus on AI in local government.
 - Uniform Reassessments:
 - Counties saving money by conducting in-house property reassessments rather than outsourcing.
 - America 250 PA Committee:
 - Secured location for a Liberty Tree at the Little Museum.
 - Sarah Daily designing a Liberty Bell for the county.

Commissioner Herzing reported as follows:

FEMA Public Assistance Grant:

- Applied for grant funding to repair riprap loss on Mason Hill and Hunts Run bridges in Lumber Township.
- Working with Lumber Township officials to have them complete the work instead of a bidding process.

Opioid Funding Report:

- Submitted required opioid funding use report for the county.

Rec Center Management & Grant Writing:

- Assisting Dannielle with QuickBooks training, financial record-keeping, and grant applications for operational costs.

Collaborative Board Meeting & Needs Assessment:

- Meeting of county service agencies to discuss social services and community issues.
- Attended Alcohol & Drug Abuse Services (ADAS) Needs Assessment—alarming statistics shared:
 - 23% of students live in single-parent households (5.7% increase since 2017).
 - Top 10 in PA for poverty rate and #2 in the state for residents under 65 on disability.
 - Youth abuse reports rose from 24.3% (2019) to 30.2% (2023).
 - DUIs: Average BAC of .25 (legal limit is .08).
 - Binge drinking: 19.9% of adults identified as regular binge drinkers (4th highest in the region).
 - Youth gambling concerns emerging (sports betting, fantasy sports)

Next Steps for ADAS & County:

- Focus on reducing youth substance abuse, DUIs, and parental engagement programs.
- More data collection to improve intervention strategies.
- Encouraging community awareness and support for local resources.

Final Notes:

- Praised the efforts of ADAS leaders Sherry Larson & Angie Eckstrom.
- Will continue participating in needs assessments and advocating for support.

Treasurer's Report: Expenses for the Month of March will be reported at the April 3, 2025, meeting.

Old Business: Update to the West Creek Recreational Trail Association ACT 13 request approved allocation of \$30,000.00 has been authorized for payment as part of the funds to resurface the trail.

New Business:

- Motion to approve the quote from Owl Labs for virtual meeting equipment in the amount of \$1,049.00, funds will be paid out of ARPA Grant. Commissioner Zucal made the

motion to approve this quote and purchase, Commissioner Moate seconded the motion, all in favor and so carried.

- Motion to approve Lease Agreement between Lumber Heritage and County of Cameron for office space. Commissioner Moate made the motion to approve this lease agreement with LHR, Commissioner Zucal seconded the motion, all in favor and so carried.
- Motion to approve Agreement between Lehman Consulting Engineers and County of Cameron for the Architectural Services to improve the Courthouse entrance for security purposes. Motion to approve Lehman agreement made by Commissioner Zucal, seconded by Commissioner Moate, all in favor and so carried.
- Motion to approve “Driftwood Water Meters Bid Opening 2024 CDBG.” Commissioner Moate made the motion to table this BID award pending the engineers’ review, Commissioner Zucal seconded the motion, all in favor and so carried.
- Motion to approve the appointment of Abigail Petrosky to the CYS Advisory Board. Commissioner Zucal made a motion to approve the appointment of Abigail Petrosky, Commissioner Moate seconded the motion, all in favor and so carried.
- Motion to approve Resolution No. 2025-3 for Grant Application to the DCNR C2P2 (Community Conservation Partnership Program). Commissioner Zucal made the motion to approve the C2P2 grant application, Commissioner Moate seconded the motion all in favor and so carried.
- Motion to approve 4H Proclamation made by Commissioner Moate seconded by Commissioner Herzing all in favor and so carried.

Good of the Order:

LSA Grant & Funding Commitment Summary

- LSA Grant Application:
 - The County applied for \$600,000 from the LSA grant to help fund a \$1.6 million roof replacement project.
 - The county committed in writing to secure the remaining funding.
- Other Discussions:
 - The C2P2 grant for the Dark Sky Project was explained earlier.
 - Open floor for additional questions or comments non-raised.
 - Encouraged attendees to reach out via calls or emails if needed.

Adjournment: Commissioner Moate made the motion to adjourn this meeting, Commissioner Zucal seconded the motion all in favor and so carried.

The next Commissioner Meeting will be Thursday, April 3, 2025, at 11:00am in the Commissioners Conference room at the Cameron County Courthouse.

Cameron County Commissioners Meeting

As recorded by: Annette Campbell
Secretary to the Commissioners/Chief Clerk