



# County of Lackawanna

Lackawanna County  
Government Center  
123 Wyoming Ave  
Scranton, Pennsylvania  
18503

## Meeting Minutes

### Board of Commissioners

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Wednesday, April 9, 2025

10:00 AM

Commissioners' Conference Room

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#### Call to Order

Commissioner Bill Gaughan: We have a special guest here this morning. His name is Rich Craig, currently serving as the State Department of Pennsylvania American Legion Sergeant at Arms and Adjutant for Post 610 in Mayfield. He has served in the Navy for thirty years from 1983 to 2013 and retired as a chief petty officer E7. Currently lives in Clifford Township in Lackawanna County. Thank you for being here. Thank you.

**Present** 2 - Chris Chermak and Bill Gaughan

#### Reading and Approval of Minutes

A motion was made by Chris Chermak, seconded by Bill Gaughan, that this be Dispense with the Reading and Approve as Prepared. The motion carried by the following vote.

**Aye:** 2 - Chris Chermak and Bill Gaughan

#### Opportunity for the Public to Address the Board (Agenda Items Only)

Joan Hodowanitz, Scranton: The GED prep course, it's resolution twenty five zero zero eight five. This is a win win. It's a wonderful initiative for the prison, cost the taxpayers no money. My only comment on it is, I've watched this initiative, so to speak, pop up three times. Apparently, it was run by a gentleman several years ago. When he retired, it went away. Then we resurrected it only to have it go away again under COVID. So now this is the third resurrection. My only comment is let's not do this a fourth time. This is a great initiative for the county, and if only one inmate turns around, it's a success story. Let's see. Then there was, the Riverfront Park Grant. I think it's resolution twenty five zero zero eight two.

I like it, but I noticed that the deadline was April 4. Did we get an extension to squeeze under the wire?

Commissioner Bill Gaughan: No. They submitted it, and then we're ratifying it after the fact. So we're good.

Joan Hodowanitz: And finally, ordinance two ninety eight, which I guess is this comprehensive capital improvement project. I support it. You know, roads and bridges are are fundamental to the success of the county. They've been neglected for a long time. But I was reading through the legislative cover sheet, and several things, came to my attention. Are there any drawbacks to doing this? He writes, debt levels will be in the higher range of acceptable parameters. The county should forego additional future debt unless supported by a defined revenue source. This is something we're gonna have to not lose track of. When the budget process comes up later in the year, but not just for

2026. This will be for several years in the future. We need to watch whether or not we're gonna, introduce additional debt because here he's saying we should avoid doing that. Also, when you look at, the end of this, it says, why should the unanimously support this legislation? He writes, a broad asset improvement initiative has not been undertaken by the county for years. Classical case of kicking the can down the road. Let's not, you know we don't wanna spend those funds. Including the government center as an asset initiative is questionable. Now, I would like an explanation of what what's been implied in that sentence. I was never comfortable with buying the Globe store. I thought that we were low balling the cost of buying it and renovating it and sustaining it in and down the road. So, I would like some explanation of why it's questionable. Neglect has taken its toll on the many miles of roadway and bridges under county So when Dave comes up, I would ask him to talk about those items.

### **Proclamation Presentation**

[25-0083](#) Proclamation declaring April 6-12, 2025, to be "National Library Week" in Lackawanna County.

**Presented**

[25-0081](#) Proclamation declaring the month of April 2025 to be "Sexual Assault Awareness Month" in Lackawanna County.

**Presented**

### **Ordinances - First Reading**

[25-0079](#) Ordinance 298  
First Reading  
General Obligation Bonds

**Attachments:** [Legislative Cover Sheet Refunding 03 12 2025.docx](#)  
[Refunding Memorandum.doc](#)  
[Ordinance 298 \(2\).pdf](#)

#### **Introduction of First Reading**

Commissioner Bill Gaughan: Thanks, Dave. We really appreciate all the work that you put into this, Mr. Lukasik, Mr. Suma, county engineer, and all the other people that you cited. And I hope that people can appreciate the level of expertise that it takes to get something like this, up off the ground. And not only up and off the ground, but continuing to move to move the ball forward. I'm really proud this morning to support, this project because it's responsible and forward thinking, and it's a plan. And you need a plan for this type of investment in infrastructure in our communities that people rely on every single day. So the plan, as mister Bozzoni pointed out, finally addresses roads and bridges throughout Lackawanna County, which are in critical condition and long overdue for attention. These are not just numbers on a spreadsheet. These are the roads that our families drive on. They're the bridges that connect our neighborhoods, and they're the backbone of economic activity in our

region. And as the old saying goes, you wanna fix the roof while the sun is shining. So I think mister Bolzoni made this point. You know, I'm I'm sure there are some people who have the idea that we can wait or we can push this off, but the longer we wait, the opportunity or the, problem comes up that the costs go up, for bridges and for everything else involved in this project. I understand that people are weary of governments borrowing money, especially right now because of the financial situation that we're in. But as mister Bolzoni pointed out, through careful financial planning and the use of this long term capital financing, we can make these crucial investments without placing an additional burden on the taxpayers of Lackawanna County. So to me, this is about smart governance. It's about using the tools available to us today to prevent far more expensive problems tomorrow. We cannot afford to wait until a bridge collapses before we act. As Mr. Bulzoni pointed out and as Mr. Lukasik and Mr. Suma have reminded us almost every time we meet, we do maintain 154 bridges and about 35 miles of roadway. So deferred maintenance or waiting leads to higher costs, safety risks, and loss opportunities. So by investing now, we're not only preserving our assets, we're building a stronger, safer, and more competitive Lackawanna County for future generations. So to me, this is about leadership. It's about accountability, and it's about commitment. And as you saw with the slideshow today, our residents can see their tax dollars put to work in visible, meaningful ways, and we are literally laying the foundation for a better Lackawanna County. Thank you.

Commissioner Chris Chermak: And now so, Dave, I you know, that was a very detailed, presentation. So I think that will help everyone understand where we are with this, and I know we did start this back in 2022. My hope is that we can get Lukasik to stay on till we get all 54 bridges up in in good shape, but I don't know if we'll all be around by them. But, moving forward, this is definitely something that we have to continue and stay on top of. I did you did mention, you know, that we're gonna look at others revenue sources, you know, and I and I know I've been working along with the congressman and and senator Flynn and and Baker and and Rosemary Brown and even senate, secretary Carroll. So I know we'll continue to have conversations with them. We're gonna push the heat on them, and hopefully, they'll come up with some, funding that we can put towards these projects to to help with our borrowing situation. And even with this building, even like Commissioner Notariani say, it's the gift that keeps on giving. Hopefully, at the end of this project, we will have most everything taken care of finally. So I appreciate all that you've done, Larry and Frank. So thanks for your assistance. So thank you. Thank you.

## **Resolutions**

### **25-0086**

Approving Current Payables

**Attachments:**     [3H50L8A7.pdf](#)  
                              [3H50L8A6.pdf](#)  
                              [Res 25-0086.pdf](#)

A motion was made by Chris Chermak, seconded by Bill Gaughan, that this Resolution be Adopted. The motion carried by the following vote.

**Aye:**    2 -    Chris Chermak and Bill Gaughan

### **25-0085**

Awarding the GED Prep Course

**Attachments:**     [LACKAWANNA COUNTY PRISON - Outreach GED Contract 5.1.25 - 12.31.25 \(002\).docx](#)  
[Outreach GED proposal.pdf](#)  
[GED Leg Coversheet.pdf](#)  
[Res 25-0085.pdf](#)

A motion was made by Chris Chermak, seconded by Bill Gaughan, that this Resolution be Adopted. The motion carried by the following vote.

Commissioner Chris Chermak: And so just to make it clear for everyone that the the funding from the canteen account is inmate funding and it's used for the benefit of the inmates. So, you know, it does not come from our general fund. And so also with Gary DiBileo's office, he monitors that very closely. He has some very good investments with that, so we get some very good returns. So hopefully, we'll be able to keep funding this for many, many years with the use of the canteen account funds. Couldn't agree more, and I couldn't agree more with Joan's, sentiments earlier about the hope and the desire to keep the GED program continuously running.

Commissioner Bill Gaughan: On the question, thank you, Warden, for all of your help with this. This is more than just an educational program. It's a critical investment in second chances, rehabilitation, and the long term safety and well-being of our community. Providing incarcerated individuals with the opportunity to earn their GED gives them a pathway to a better future. I think everyone understands that it's hard really to go anywhere or to do anything without your GED. It's hard to get a job. It's hard to succeed, once you get out of prison. So education, as Sandy Longo pointed out before with our library system is one of the most powerful tools that we have, on many different fronts, in this case, to reduce recidivism. So that when someone leaves our correctional system with their GED in hand, they're far more likely to find stable employment, contribute to the community, and avoid reoffending and ending up back in our prison. So thank you.

Aye: 2 - Chris Chermak and Bill Gaughan

#### [25-0088](#)

Entering into an Inmate Services Commissary Agreement

**Attachments:**     [Commissary Services Leg Coversheet.pdf](#)  
[KeefeAgr3.31.2025.docx](#)  
[Res 25-0088.pdf](#)

A motion was made by Chris Chermak, seconded by Bill Gaughan, that this Resolution be Adopted. The motion carried by the following vote.

Aye: 2 - Chris Chermak and Bill Gaughan

#### [25-0084](#)

Entering into an Engagement letter for the County Pension Audit

**Attachments:**     [Lackawanna County Retirement Fund - Audit Proposal Letter.pdf](#)  
[Legislative Cover Sheet ZA 03 26 2025.docx](#)  
[Res 25-0084.pdf](#)

A motion was made by Chris Chermak, seconded by Bill Gaughan, that this

**Resolution be Adopted. The motion carried by the following vote.**

**Aye:** 2 - Chris Chermak and Bill Gaughan

[25-0082](#)

Authorizing a PA Department of Conservation and Natural Resources Grant Application

**Attachments:** [Legislative Cover Sheet Updated-Riverfront Park DCNR Resolution 2025.docx](#)  
[Resolution\\_Print-DCNR Lackawanna County Ratify Riverfront.pdf](#)  
[Res 25-0082.pdf](#)

**A motion was made by Chris Chermak, seconded by Bill Gaughan, that this Resolution be Adopted. The motion carried by the following vote.**

**Aye:** 2 - Chris Chermak and Bill Gaughan

[25-0087](#)

Appointments to the Agricultural Land Preservation Board

**Attachments:** [Appt 25-0087.pdf](#)

**A motion was made by Chris Chermak, seconded by Bill Gaughan, that this Appointment be Approved. The motion carried by the following vote.**

**Aye:** 2 - Chris Chermak and Bill Gaughan

### Opportunity for the Public to Address the Board

Bob Bolus, Scranton. First off, Mr. Gaughan, you couldn't attend the meeting here. You claimed you were sick, Yet you could be out in the rain, Lackawanna County Courthouse with Cagnetti, Pelosi. Do you have a medical excuse for missing work? Further on, as far as the reassessment goes, as of today, lawsuits are being filed regarding their reassessment. The tax increase, the 32% tax, and the money against you that you're using are taxpayer dollars for your own personal litigation against the Democrat party to try and get you a little hush puppy to sit next to you there because you don't like the democratic process. That as your employers in the county, you need to pay it back to us. This is your own personal litigation. And if you wanna fund it and challenge the democratic process that's been in place, then you need to support it on your own. Further, I think what you did to Mr. Conway was uncalled for. You made an embarrassment out of him for no purpose because you wanted a little lap dog sitting next to you. And he's a gentleman, and he's a smart kid, and he didn't deserve what you did to him. By bringing him in here, you should have submitted his application to the Democrat party, and they're the ones that are making the choice. Now the second part of this, you turned around and, there was a tax sale done to me. Because what I'm done, we filed another chapter 13 to prevent what you're trying to do in the county. The county's into me for over 18 and a half million dollars from the last time your legal department here in the assessor's office broke the law and ignored the Chief Justice of the Commonwealth Court who told him take a damn lien off me, and they didn't. They tried to put my property into a tax sale without adjudication from the court. That cost me millions of dollars in my companies because I fund them.

I'm asking you here and now supply the insurance from the county to my attorneys in Philadelphia. That's a formal request for it because we are going forward with the litigation, and it's gonna cost the county a hell of a lot of money. I'm not gonna sit back from all I've contributed to this county in a lifetime I've been here to be insulted and humiliated, especially by you. The other part of the lawsuit that's being filed, you, sir, ordered a deputy sheriff to remove me here. We have video and we have photographs where my shoulder was torn. You are getting the lawsuit for it. I've been under medical treatment. I've had treatment here in Florida. I have treatment here scheduled even again today. I went through a lot of pain and suffering because of your arrogance. You gotta remember one thing and one thing only. You're here to represent the people. We're not here to represent you. And I really don't like all the publicity we're getting because you don't like the system because somebody's gonna send that seat that may not agree what you like. We're gonna fight the assessment because let me explain some. Realtors are making all this up, and they put it in their thing. It's what you could sell it for. Well, if it was so darn good in the real estate market, they wouldn't have a portfolio. They wouldn't have a piece of real estate to sell because everybody would be selling and making money on it. They're using this assumption, and you know what assumption means, all of us.

James Quinn, Carbondale: Full disclosure. I'm Republican. I usually have people tell me I have a big mouth. That's right. In a good way. So, I was, I helped run the Carbondale Trump, headquarters, but I was born in Scranton. I love Scranton. I know a lot of people. There's a lot of strife going on right now. So how about in the interest of comedy with tea and true bipartisanship, why don't you appoint an independent to that third seat? Sometimes they'll vote with you, sometimes they'll vote with Chris, and maybe some stuff can get done and people will be happy about it. Suggestion.

Joan Hodowanitz, Scranton: First of all, request that you put that slideshow on the county's website. It was excellent presentation. You probably saw in the paper a couple days ago, that Scranton lost its federal funding to buy the 18 homes that were flooded out in September of 23, which and they're obviously looking for other sources of funding, but it raises the issue. And you may not have an answer for this yet, but is the county at risk of losing any federal funding just as Scranton lost that funding?

Commissioner Bill Gaughan: Yes. Actually, so we've been talking to all of our directors, through all of the 30 plus departments here just to keep tabs on that. We don't know yet. So I don't have a definitive answer, but we are keeping track of it.

Joan Hodowanitz: Should information come down, please share it as quickly as you can with the with the county. I don't know how you can right the financial ship if you're gonna have this dammit Sword of Damocles hanging over your head all the time. If the shoe's gonna drop, I wish it would drop quickly so that you could react to it.

What bothers me is that you have all this work that Mr. Bulzoni invested in PFM and, you know, you're trying to chart a path, and some of it's painful, some of it's not. But not to know where you stand with the federal government, that bothers me. That bothers me. So should you get information, please, disclose it to the rest of us. Thank you.

David Maher, Clarks Summit: This is about, reassessment. My experience with reassessment so far is that I got the original, lot and house, data. I corrected that. I sent it back in. Then, couple weeks ago, I got the assessment estimate. So I called I said this is pretty high for my house. So I called the number and I

to make an appointment for the hearing and, talked to a nice lady and set that up. And I said, well, I want some information on the five houses, the five properties near me that were assessed. It was sold in the last, well, '22 to '24. Oh, she said I don't have that information. You have to call Tyler. Okay. I called Tyler. Tyler says, well, we don't have that information. I said, well, I wanna be informed when I go to this meeting something talk intelligently about these houses that were compared to my house. Well, we don't have that information. Well, when do I get that information? You get it at the at the hearing that you have. Okay. So isn't that asked backwards? Shouldn't I have that information now? Well, we don't have that information. Call the county. Well, I called your office, Pat. And they said, we don't have that information. That's Tyler has that information. So where do I get that information? My hearing's next week. If I go in blind, I mean, that's no good for me. I wanna have these five that they're bigger square footage in the house. They have three bathrooms. I have two. Whatever. I wanna talk intelligent about instead of just going and just hearing, well, this is what we found.

Samantha Edwards, Tyler Technologies: So there's a couple things that I wanna mention when it comes to these comparable sales that you're talking about. So comparable sales are gonna be used, for residential properties. When we look at, giving values to any properties, it's we have to take at least three approaches or at least consider them. So that would be cost, market, and then the income of the sales approach. So if we're looking at your property and we've determined that the best approach would be market, that in that case, there would be comparables that we would be able to give to you at your informal review. If we use the cost approach, there would not be comparable sales because we didn't use that market approach. So it could be that case with your property. I understand where you're coming from with wanting to see this information ahead of time. What we would be able to offer you ahead of time would be a data mailer. So that would show you the information that we have on record for you prior to your informal review.

I mean, we have the comparables available, for the informal review. The reason we basically don't give them out is only because we don't really have availability. Not everyone in the office is given that availability. Only certain people are able to give that information out. We ask for property owners to bring in their own comparable properties. So what do you feel is comparable to your property? What is it selling for on the open market? If you don't agree with the value that's there, we want you to come to us. We want you to say, you know, these are the reasons why. At the end of the day, what we're looking for is accurate data. And I believe that Sure. As long as we have that accurate data, you will have an accurate value. If you do not agree with that value, this is why we're asking for you to bring us this information. You can bring us photos. It doesn't have to be comparable sales. If you believe, you know, my house, for whatever reason, you think it's over assessed or overvalued. If there's a reason for it, show us the reason why. Maybe it's something inside of the home. Maybe it's something in the basement that we don't have access to. And the only way for us to find that out is from you, the property owner. At the end of the day, you know your property better than anyone.

Michelle Tierney, Glenburn Township: I want to commend the commissioners for their decision on a reassessment, and I say this because it's our system that we live with. When you are running a municipality, a county, a school district, you have to understand the system. The only way you can afford anything is by revenue. So in 1968 was the last time assessments on

properties were assessed and valued. So, for a county to be able to receive revenue to fix the 54 bridges and roadways with the 1968 assessment? Like, how does that work in 02/2025? So it's the system, folks, that we have to abide by. So I commend the commissioners for bringing Lackawanna County to 02/2025 with the values of our properties. And I also commend them by hiring a organization such as Tyler to be thorough and very transparent along with your staff that you have employed to implement and educate all of us. I have gone to quite a few informational meetings because my home is being reassessed, but I'm also sit in an opportunity, unfortunately, to raise taxes in millage. So I understand too well the value and what we need to have a fair formula for a revenue stream. So I commend you and I also commend all of those meetings that you've done to help educate And the two words that you have said over and over is revenue neutral. And all of us have to understand that. Revenue neutral. We're not here to put your value of your home so much higher that we're gonna receive so much more revenue for your county or your school district. No. It's a fair it's the system that we all have to operate under. So I commend you for that. I also was not going to speak on the lawsuits going on with the open seat, but I but I was challenged by the first speaker. I think when you both or all three of you take an oath of office and you've been elected by your community, you take an oath of office to stand up with the most integrity and honesty that you can abide by. When the opportunity to appoint a seat, not a special election, there should never be a political party that is the party that is representing the candidates that are looking to run for the open seat. That is corruption. So I commend the commissioners for fighting that and trying to make a change and understanding how you are going to get that seat and how you're someone for that seat. I commend you for that. My question is, why does a three sitting body commission have two solicitors? Why do we have two solicitors? Especially when this specific case, they're competing against each other. They're both brilliant attorneys, but we have one commissioner who is looking to see fairness, transparency, and to keep politics out. And we have another commissioner who, I believe, that you want the same thing, but you don't want the taxpayers to I'm not quite sure why you're fighting. So your oath of office is integrity. Don't you think that having candidates send a letter of interest to a political party for an appointment is not corruption? So I commend you for your fight, and you do work for us. We elected you, and I trust you both. But I would really like to find out why our taxpayers are paying for two solicitors with three county seat.

Linda Bonakiewicz, Benton Township: I just have a question for the roads and the bridges and all that and the registration money. Sir, this is for that gentleman? Mr. Bulzoni. Has the registration always that was collected for the Commonwealth gone to the roads and bridges? Do you know since, like, I started being a notary, it was \$45 for a car. Now it's \$67 for a car. The weight there's one to 25 classes of trucks. I don't even know how the truckers afford the registrations. So in 1980, a reg a class 25, which is, like, 80,000 pounds, was \$2,100. Now it's \$2,764. So that's, like, a lot of money being pulled in from the this registration. So where's all that money been from day one till now that the bridges and the roads were not fixed at the time when they needed it? It's like right now, there were all explosion, and it's all gotta be fixed now. Like, why wasn't the money used at that point? If I have a hole in my roof, I'm gonna fix it, like, that day. I'm not gonna wait ten years down the road and have a house fall down.

Chief of Staff Brian Jeffers: If I may, ma'am, the \$5 fee has only been implemented over the last three years for Lackawanna County.

Linda Bonakiewicz: Well, I'm talking about the increase in the fees of



registrations.

Chief of Staff Brian Jeffers: you're in the wrong body. You should address that with your state legislatures. Well, you said that you use that money for roads and bridges.

CFO Dave Bulzoni: The registration fee funding that we collect, you're referring to a measurable increase, those dollars go to the state.

Linda Bonakiewicz: So you don't use any of that funds?

Chief of Staff Brian Jeffers: No. We collect \$5. That's it.

Suzanne Green, Benton Township: I wanted to, say that I've already worked with, Tyler Technology just a little bit. I had two informal hearings already for two properties that I own. They actually went very smoothly. But as other people have said, there is no transparency. So I was not able to get any of the comps prior to those meetings. I came up and I did my own research and got comps of my own and provided those to Tyler Technology. Turns out there were significant inaccuracies in both of the properties that I own. I'll share with the group that one of them actually showed that there was additional dwelling and other buildings on my property that don't exist, and the other was a condition issue. So, neither property had been visited. Only aeriels existed of those. So they did not they did not go to every single property because two properties I own were not visited. Another thing I wanted to just talk about is the average ratio. We talked about what is the average ratio for the increase. I'm positive that it is an accounting aspect that people in this room can do and probably have done and do know what the average ratio is that has occurred here in Lackawanna County. Average ratio means that what your old valuation was and what your new valuation is. So I went ahead and did a sampling of my own. I sampled average homes in Throop. The 2024 assessed value averaged \$4,100. The new assessed value averaged \$158,000. That's an increase of 3850%. In ratio terms, that would be 38 and a half. An increase that size, if we compared it to, let's just say, an industrial property that is in Throop and Dunmore, which has a combined 18 parcels, which Mr. Tobin and I have already talked about, has a right now an assessed value of \$20.24 of \$1,200,000. If we put that same ratio towards that industrial property, that property would be assessed now at 4,000,620,000. I'm saying this so that you can put this in perspective. We're saying a residential average increase, now we've applied it to an industrial. Here's the issue, we don't have transparency, so we cannot confirm fairness or equitable. We do not have the tools provided by our county. And I'm looking at the two of you because I know you have the ability to provide that for our public. And I think that you should get together and talk about it. They have those. I'm sure you already know that they have all these details. If I have them, they have them. I don't even have a margin of tininess. I just did a small sampling. If I could do that in a couple days, I'm 100% positive they've already done it. And if they haven't provided those details to you, they should immediately. You should demand that. That's your job to look at that and confirm that we are fairly and equitably taxed and not giving some deals to someone else because the dollars those folks are saving is the extra dollars that these folks are paying. And when the public finds that out, because they are, they are not happy because it's not fair. So Schuylkill County and I only have a few more seconds, but Schuylkill County is at the same part of their process right now. They're sending out the old valuation, the old tax amount, the new valuation, and guess what? The estimated new tax amount. How are they doing that? Because they know the average ratio. It's not rocket science here. It's simplistic accounting. We know what the revenue is because, as we've said, it's revenue need neutral.

Maureen Chase, Moscow: My question is about the millage. I've asked this at

one of the meetings and did not get a very satisfactory answer except that it's a new system. They're working on it. My question is, last year, the millage was .06300. This year, on our tax new tax bills, it is 85.6600. On your county website, it's 0.08566. It looks as though if this new system has moved the decimal point. And my question is, how were we taxed? Were we taxed on the 85.66? Or what your county website states? And if it were the higher one that's on the tax bill, why are we paying higher why would we pay higher taxes? I understand we have the 33% increase. That's not what I'm really talking about. So I would like to know why is the difference. And the other question would be to, mister Tobin and Tyler. It has been stated about, fair market value or cost. So how were we really reassessed? Is it fair market value? And if so, anybody, any one of us, can look in on Zillow, home.com, all of those other ones to see what the fair market value would be.

Samantha Edwards, Tyler Technologies: So with appraisals, we have to look at, we have to at least, look at three approaches to value for every property. So whether your if your property was in fact valued at market, we would have those comparable properties available in formal reviews. Whether no matter how your property was looked at, every property owner is you know, they can bring forward comparable properties if they have those available as well. We will look at every form of documentation that's submitted and then take further review. We're gonna pass it on to senior appraisers within our staff to look at the property and see, you know, maybe an adjustment does need to be made or maybe it was a condition that needs to be corrected. Like I said, before to the gentleman, as long as we have accurate data, I believe that your value is going to be correct. The way that our system is set up and those sales that we have looked at during the thirty month period between January first of twenty twenty two, June thirtieth of '20 '20 '4, we do we will have accurate values as long as the data is accurate. However the approach was taken, you're always give you you can always bring to us comparable properties. We may not have them if that was not the approach we took. If we looked at cost, it would go off of reports that have been taken throughout the state of Pennsylvania, like market reports that we have seen based on cost materials and stuff like that. That's also data that we take in. So what type of home is built, the structure, you know, we're looking at, you know, what signing type it is, how many story heights there are, square foot living area. That's the type of things that we look at when it comes especially the cost, with based on what's the market and how much those materials cost today.

Maureen Chase: What I have two vacant lots. They are each assessed right now at 500. 1 according to your information that that was sent back to me, one is over 26,000 some odd dollars. I don't have the figure right here. The other one is over 27,000 some odd dollars. How can a property be increased, a vacant lot be increased that much? That seems very, very high. I do have a meeting that we will be I will be addressing this, you know, at at the informal meeting.

Samantha Edwards, Tyler Technologies: Okay. So when we look at vacant lots specifically, we're looking at, are they buildable sites? What's the topography? So is it a level is it a level lot? What utilities are available to it? Are there public utilities there? Has even if it is a vacant lot, hasn't been improved at all? Like, is there paving? Those are things that we're looking for, and then the location. So where is the property? Are there you know, is it in a town? Is it outside of an area? Is it waterfront? Is it riverfront? Is it, wetlands? Those are things that we look at when we consider what a value should be for a vacant lot.

Commissioner Bill Gaughan: And, ma'am, if you can leave your information with Mr. Jeffers, your phone number. I don't know the answer to the question

on on the millage. I'd have to look at your documentation. But if you wanna leave your your number, we can get that, question answered for you.

Maureen Chase: You know, I understand that the millage for next year won't be set until later on in this year. So, you know, we can't, figure out the taxes, you know, until after that. But I know Mr. Tobin has stated that it should lower be lower.

Commissioner Bill Gaughan: Overall, not individually.

Maureen Chase: But I would like to would like to have an answer to, the millage because Sure. It seems like it's getting very confusing Right. When you see different numbers such as that. Alright. Thank you.

Pat Tobin: I think I have an answer for you, ma'am. You said, .0856. That's 85.6 mills. It's they're just two separate ways to express mills. See, the single tax office this year installed new software, and the new software put 85.6. But in a mathematical form to express that, it's .0856. They're the same number, just two ways of expressing it. The numbers are the same. There's just two ways to express it.

Maureen Chase: It's very confusing when you're looking at two different areas here. On on the county, it's one way, but on the bill, it's a totally different way. So I'm sure if you look at your taxes, you will see what I'm speaking about.

Joe Tutino: Good morning, county commissioners. This is about the third month I've been coming here asking the same question. I wanna know your progress on this. I keep on putting these taxes and everything on the taxpayers, which is an easy thing to do. You sit back and say, the taxpayers will take the burden. Whether they can afford it, they can't afford it, they could lose their houses, whatever. I've been asking for the nonprofits in this city, a list of who they are, what they contribute, and what they should contribute. My main concern is the University of Scranton who's a cash cow, who has tons of money. Did any of you two gentlemen approach University of Scranton or any of the nonprofits and ask them for more money that were in dire straits? Did any of you do it? Bill, did you do it?

Commissioner Bill Gaughan: No. And, Mr. Tobin, do you have a list of all the nonprofits or the city would have that information, I'm assuming?

Pat Tobin: I do. I have the information of all the nonprofits both in the city of Scranton and in Lackawanna County.

Joe Tutino: Yes. I'd like a copy of that if you would give it to me, Pat. Okay. I want a copy of that. Now my question is, are you guys afraid? Chris, are you afraid to go to these nonprofits and ask them for more money?

Commissioner Chris Chermak: No.

Joe Tutino: Why aren't you just doing it?

Commissioner Chris Chermak: Maybe we will.

Joe Tutino: Yeah. But You're you're When?

Commissioner Bill Gaughan: You're talking about, a pilot, which is what the city does. Right? So you're talking about a payment in lieu of taxes. But and I think I said this to you the last time, and I know what you're getting at. If everybody, every nonprofit contributed x amount of dollars, but that still doesn't get you it still doesn't change what happened last year. It still doesn't change the tax increase. It still doesn't change the, \$37,000,000 structural deficit. It doesn't change \$19,000,000 in unpaid bills. It doesn't really move the needle as much as you probably think it would.

Joe Tutino: Any amount of money is better than nothing. What if they give you a couple of million dollars? What are they giving you now? There's a lot of nonprofits. Do you have an idea how many number of nonprofits there are in the county? And is there like a 200?

Pat Tobin: I don't wanna guess, but it it's a considerable number.

Joe Tutino: Well, how about these universities that are making all this money? Why aren't they contributing to our tax base and helping us out in some way, pay some kind of bills? I don't understand it. How some people can get away with it and put all the tax burden on the taxpayers who can't afford it. Some people can lose their homes because of this. I hear it every day on the street. People come to me and say, go to the meetings and tell them we cannot afford these tax increases. You guys understand that. They can't afford it. What can be done? You just can't keep saying pay the bill. You have to do something. You guys had a chance. Chris wanted to talk about it. When Matt McGloin was here, unfortunately, he left. He bailed. He did the right thing by getting out of this mess. But you could have sat down, talked about it, went over different issues on how we could get the budget down. What could have been done? We did that. They keep saying nothing could have been done. Mr. Bulzoni said we went through everything. I don't buy it. I just don't buy what he's saying. If Chris said there's ways to get it down, I'd like to hear them. You should talk to him and maybe we can reduce spending. Like in our federal government, they're spending money like drunken sailors. Musk went in and found all the fraud. How much fraud could there be in Lackawanna County? A lot. How do you know what it is? There's a lot of wasteful spending. I'm not blaming it on you guys right now. It's the past administrations. These roads, bridges, and whatever. They weren't in a deplorable condition when Notarianni Domenick was here. All of a sudden, we're gonna address them. Why weren't they addressed before? Get the money from the state. Did you ever go down to Shapiro? I asked you go to see Shapiro if he can give you any money. Did you guys go down and talk to him at all, tell him we're in dire straits for money? Did you ever go down and talk to him and say, hey. Listen. What can you do to help us? I mean, you gotta do something. At least try. We can't keep on putting it on the taxpayers all the time. I'm I'm sick and tired of it. I have two properties, and the thing on the reassessment is the house on the outside could be a barn, but on the inside, you can have gold toilets. How do they know you don't have a hundred thousand dollars equity in the inside, and the outside looks like a barn? You're assessing it from the outside. You never went inside and checked anything. That's not right either. How come that wasn't done?

Samantha Edwards, Tyler Technologies: We don't go inside anyone's homes. It's for the safety of us. It's for the safety of the property owner.

Joe Tutino: But how do you determine the value of a property when the outside could be deplorable condition? You're assessing it at this, and inside is beautiful.

Vanessa Langer, Benton Township: Tylor Technologies. I have contacted you. I've had my informal meeting with you. I got zero of my answers, like, questions answered. So I have a property. When we purchased the property out in Benton Township, our taxes were relatively low. My reassessment is now saying proposing at the current millage that I will be subject to over 20,000 in taxes at the current millage rate. Our property, I since since purchasing, about three years ago, we have formed a farm. So we have a small farm. We ag farm on our property. I asked specifically if there was different millage rates according to Ag Farms to Taylor Technologies. They did not answer me. They kept asking me if I was a Ag or a commercial property, which to my assumption is rated higher than a residential property. They were not able to give me any information whatsoever. They just told me that my rate was gonna go up substantially, and that they wanted to know more information about my property. They wanted to ask me more questions and then deflected every question I had for them. So is there a different rate for agricultural? I'm a USDA farm. I'm I'm registered as a farm. We crop our property. So you're still

gonna hold me at the same millage rate?

Pat Tobin: No, ma'am. The millage rates will be adjusted after the reassessment. They have to. We can't collect any more revenue after the reassessment than we did before the reassessment. The millage rates will come down. What they're gonna be exactly, we don't know yet because we haven't finalized the tax roll. That'll happen in November. Then then the new millage rates will be released.

Vanessa Langer: So is there because according to my current tax document, since there was no, no accounting whatsoever since we purchased the property. You never have updated whatsoever saying that we live on one acre and we crop 19 acres. So how is that going to be figured out? Because they couldn't even answer me that they, like they said, oh, send me the document. But they gave me a time frame that I could talk on the phone with them, and I provided them my paperwork. He said he would put it into his group chat at Tylor Technologies. No one answered. No one has answered my question.

Samantha Edwards: So I just wanna reiterate. So your question was if there's going to be a separate millage rate How are yeah. How are they taxed? So I wanna clarify this for you. So it says on the tentative value letter, first of all, do not take your new tentative value and multiply it by the current millage rate. It will be highly inaccurate. Like Pat had mentioned, the millage rates have to be adjusted. And to answer your other question, there is not going to be a separate millage rate just for certain classes of property. So when all of the values have been certified, that'll happen by November 15, all the values will be certified. Then you have your three taxing bodies, your county, your municipality, and then your school districts. They are then going to set what the millage rates are going to be. Now the county sets one millage rate for everyone within the county. Same for the taxing bodies. Each individual taxing body has one millage rate. You take that new millage rate and you multiply it by the new value of your property, whichever ones they are, and that's how you come up with what your new tax amount will be. So it's not going to be a different millage rate depending on the class. It's just, I mean, what these values are representing is once they're all said and done, what your portion of that that tax burden will be for each of your properties. Okay. So I wanna reiterate with everyone, a reassessment is not you know, like I said, it's revenue neutral. It's not to increase taxes. It's to redistribute who pays what portion.

Pat Tobin: We also have a clean and green program that's run through the state of Pennsylvania that you may want to apply for. Because you have to have at least 10, contiguous acres, and it sounds like you have 20. So you would most likely qualify for the program.

Vanessa Langer: And is there any agricultural habits to it that I'm not able to do anything on the land when it is clean and green?

Pat Tobin: No. I don't believe so. But if you get into the program, keep in mind, if you ever wanna back out of the program, you can but you have to pay what's called a rollback tax on what you saved over those years. I think you'd be a perfect candidate for

### **Commissioners' Other Business**

Commissioner Chris Chermak: Well, I wanna thank everybody for coming in today, and having our rep here from Tyler and having Patrick here. There's no doubt in my mind. There's no question in anybody's mind. This is a monumental task what they're trying to do, a reassessment after fifty plus years. You know, they they have to look at thousands and thousands and thousands of properties whether they're residential, if they're just bare

property bare land, raw land, or commercial or industrial property. So it is a huge project. You know, we are concerned about open and transparent and I know many of the people that are getting their paperwork don't feel that it is very transparent. Some values that they're seeing of their properties, whether it's just basic land or commercial property or whatever it is. They're looking at these numbers and they're absolutely absurd to them. You know, we're we're trying to get this all jammed in here by the end of, well, in the next couple weeks. You know, maybe we need to put the brakes on here a little bit and take a little more time. We have eight as of yesterday, 8,000 requests for hearings. It's probably a lot more today. Maybe we need to look at that. As far as values, you know, I think in other counties, I know they have they post these other values online so people can look and make their own comparisons. You know, I've had I've had I have a stack of emails here and I have a lot more upstairs. Property in North Abington Township, their their comparisons were, Montage Mountain. So Glenmarra and the other one was Waverly. Well, they are not the same areas. So to me, that is not an accurate comparison. It could be in the house. It could be in the square footage, but it's a different school district. It's a different municipalities. It's a different value. So to me, that is not correct. So, you know, I think we need to maybe look at that and and give more time for Tyler to have hearings and and fifteen minutes is I don't know if I couldn't do mine in fifteen minutes. So, you know, that's to me that's not enough time. You know, I have I have one here that sticks out that they got their the parents got their, new assessment or new appraisal and now they're again, they're confused, they're concerned, they don't know, there's too many unknowns, and the part that got me was their 14 year old son offered to go get a job to help them pay for their property taxes. So, you know, that's that's not what I wanna hear. So I think there's a better way we can, put people at ease. I think we need to take a little more time. And the other thing and my position has never changed on this. You know, we implemented this during a middle of a pandemic, which I thought was insane, but it happened. I think that we need to take a look at what we're doing, make sure these numbers are correct, make sure that everybody is on the same page, instead of just jamming this down people's throats and initiating it. The other issue that I have and that's very concerning to me is we have no safeguards in place. You know, we have folks that survive on \$11-12,000 dollars a year on their social security and they're living in their houses. That covers their taxes, that covers their food, that covers their light bill. If we raise their taxes a penny, they're in trouble. So we don't have safeguards. You know, there's there's ways to do it. Other counties do it. Other states do it. There's gradual phase ins. There's you can freeze assessments. I mean, there's lots of things that we can do. I think these all have to be put in place before this init is initiated. So other things we need to look at, absolutely. Somebody mentioned about different ways to pay for government and for schools, you know. I've been a huge advocate for raising sales tax and eliminating property tax. Let everybody pay. Whether you're traveling through this county or the state, you know, you're all everybody's pitching in. If you if you're the person living in your house, you're elderly, and you don't buy a lot of things, you're not paying much. But if you're out buying a new vehicle or you're doing this or doing that, you're you're gonna pay a little more in taxes, which is nominal. So there are other ways. I've been really hammering away at at our legislators to, you know, hopefully, the Pennsylvania could look at that. We're a class three county. There's 11 of us. Maybe the class three county can get a a waiver to increase a proper a sales tax so we can apply it to lowering property tax. So there's there's things that can be done. I have a lot of concerns. I wanna make sure this is done correctly. I

wanna make sure these figures are correct and that everybody once ready to pull this lever. Everybody's in agreement that they're okay with it. And and there's you know, as we move a little further, I think we should be able to definitely give people an idea of what their taxes are gonna be. That's everyone's main concern. It's very confusing to try to figure out. We know it's supposed to be revenue neutral within 10%, but nobody knows. I don't even know what my taxes are gonna be and believe me, I don't need my taxes to go up either. You know, my family business, I don't even wanna know what their appraisal was just given to them. I have no idea what it is. I'm afraid to even see it, but I think we need to take a long hard look at what we're doing, slow the process, make sure everything is correct, and move forward from there. You know, it's like locking the barn door after the horse got away. I think we need to do it before and make sure we have safeguards, make sure everybody's on the same page. So I hope that makes sense to people. I hope they appreciate that, you know, I am trying to do some of these things and, you know, let's let's hopefully we can move forward and this this goes smoothly and, again, it's a monumental task what Tyler is trying to do. This has been a long time coming. There's nobody I don't think there's anybody in this room doesn't agree that we have to do a reassessment, but it's gotta be done correctly. It's gotta be fair for everyone. So I appreciate you listening to me, and I appreciate you coming in. Thank you.

Commissioner Bill Gaughan: I'll just spend a second on the reassessment. So Mr. Tobin and, Miss Edwards, in your opinion, is this the reassessment being done correctly?

Pat Tobin: In my opinion, yes. It is.

Samantha Edwards: So I would also like to reiterate that. We've done evaluation for Lackawanna County and all the work that we have looked at. We are within IAAO standards, which is the assessment law we have to abide by as, evaluators within the state of Pennsylvania. So everything that we have done value wise is within that, the IAAO standards. As far as, you know, valuation, lots of people have questions with the values that they have seen. I've been saying for the last year and a half now, and I don't get to, reach as many people, as I would hope. But I did state that when you go fifty eight years without a reassessment, your old value versus your new value, it's going to be sticker shock. The market has changed tremendously since 1968. And I think just about everyone in this room can agree, it's hard not to agree with that. The market changes. The real estate market changes, and typically it appreciates. Now we send out these values, and those values essentially mean, it's a starting point for, you know, where we're looking at, for properties to see who's gonna pay what portion of these taxes. Now as we mentioned before, you know, it's set to be revenue neutral. The millage rates will be adjusted. I know it's a big concern for everyone. You know, commissioner Chermak had mentioned that, you know, wanting to to put out there what these estimated taxes would be. But I don't know of any projects. I mean, they're mentioning Schuylkill. Tyler doesn't hasn't done Schuylkill project. It's a different reassessment that handles that. But, I mean, to answer your question, Commissioner Gaughan, I do believe that we're this is exactly how it should be going. We have these processes and procedures in place. We've been reiterating with everybody, you know, follow the process. You know, we go from data collection. We're talking to the property owners at the house. If we weren't able to make contact there, you have the data mailer. You weren't able to get a data mailer because it was a vacant lot or you weren't able to speak to us over the phone. We have the informal reviews. We ask for the property owner to engage with us and walk through the process with us because at the

end of the day, a property owner is, you're the the one who knows your property best. But, yeah, it's we're going through the process, and this is exactly how we expect it to be on this project and every project.

Commissioner Bill Gaughan: And is there any, correlation between the new valuations that people received and their what their millage rate would be? I know you've answered this before. I just wanna reiterate. So when you get your new valuation, can you can you glean anything on what your new tax rate will be?

Samantha Edwards, Tyler Technologies: There there is not. And there's no correlation between your old value versus your new value either.

Commissioner Bill Gaughan: The, the other and I respectfully disagree with commissioner Chermack on, the statement that he just made to put the brakes on or to pump the brakes. Attorney Price, can you speak to the order that was issued by the judges? I believe it was, a few years ago in terms of the reassessment. And can you just explain that? And I think that will answer the question on whether or not we can put the pump the brakes on this.

Solicitor Jack Price: Yes. There was a lawsuit that was filed by Lackawanna County residents in 2018. A stipulated order was filed and signed by a three judge panel, Lackawanna County in 02/2022, directing that the Lackawanna County full and complete reassessment shall be completed by 01/01/2026. To not comply with the court order, any parties that lawsuit can move to enforce the stipulated order as the court retained jurisdiction.

Commissioner Bill Gaughan: So, look, I understand that there's questions. I understand that there's concern about reassessment, but the facts are that it has to be done. We were ordered by a court to do it. And at this point, to try to pump the brakes, I don't can we pump the brakes on this? I mean, you're on a tight timeline to get this done, Mr. Tobin? Correct?

Pat Tobin: That's correct. It needs to be done by January 1, 2026. And just to reiterate a point that Samantha was making earlier, in New York State, our neighbors to the north, they reassess property every single year. In Maryland, our neighbors to the south, they reassess properties every three years. Reassessment is something that happens all over this country every year, and it does seem dramatic to the people of Lackawanna County because for fifty seven years, we didn't have a reassessment. That's why a lot of people are feeling the sticker shock from their previous assessment to their new market value. One thing has nothing to do with the other. One thing has nothing to do with the other.

Commissioner Bill Gaughan: Okay. Thank you. And just to end on, on this note, as everyone has said here ad nauseam, last time we had a reassessment was 1968. It's more than half a century of unfairness that's baked into our system where some pay way more than they should while others pay far less than they should. So reassessment isn't just necessary. Attorney Price pointed out we don't have a choice to do this. It doesn't matter if I wasn't here, Commissioner Chermak or whoever. It doesn't matter who the commissioners are. This reassessment was coming no matter what, no matter what questions were asked, or no matter who's here, Republican, Democrat, Independent, Green Party, doesn't matter. A reassessment is it's about restoring fairness, equity, and trust. And if there if you do have questions about it, the gentleman sitting in front of me here, Mr. Tobin, has literally gone to the greatest lengths I've seen, and I've been in government for over ten years now in public service, to answer every question, to return every phone call, and to give the facts along with Samantha Edwards and all the representatives from Tyler. So we are being transparent. We are telling the truth, and we're trying to do this the right way and to do it the fair way. Will there be questions? Obviously. Will



there be disagreements? Yes. And if you don't agree with your valuation, that's where the informal appeal comes in. If you don't agree with that, you have another avenue to appeal it later on, this summer, and we'll have more information on that. So there are, there are questions, but there are answers to those questions as well. In terms of safeguards, I nobody wants to see anybody lose their home. I mean, I didn't get involved in, public service to see anyone lose their home. Barb Lynady at the Tax Claim Bureau literally works with people almost daily to ensure that they either they get on a payment plan or there's other mechanisms to make sure that no one loses their home. So I don't wanna scare people. We will make sure that you do not lose your home. All you have to do is come in here and call us and and come to us, and we will absolutely work with you. And that's been done, for decades now. One other thing I I wanna speak about for, quickly. There's a young man named Eddie Kaufman who is a Mid Valley High School alumni and a Roanoke University sophomore, and he is currently in search of a blood stem cell donor to treat his t cell acute lymphoblastic leukemia, which is a form of cancer that affects blood, tissue, and bone marrow. To that end, team DIACC will be in the government center lobby this Friday, April 11, from 11AM to 2PM, and the team will take an oral swab of anyone who's interested in being a donor, for possible inclusion in the blood stem cell donor registry. Several county employees we've come to find out are related to this gentleman, Eddie, but they're outside the acceptable range of to be a potential donor. The acceptable range is 18 to 40. So we're sending this message out to all county employees. Anyone in the public who can stop by this Friday and would like to be swabbed to see if you would be a match, we are asking people to help us here. This young gentleman and his family are going through, hell right now. And if I know anything about this community and this county, everybody steps up, to help out. So there's been a ton of people who have come forward already to be swabbed to try to help him, but anyone in the audience today, anyone who might be watching any CTV, any county employees, Friday, 11AM to 2PM, come and get swabbed. And that's all.

Adjournment