



NEWS

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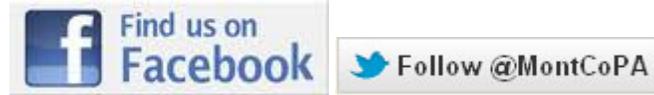
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Montco Commissioners Outline Plans for Next Two Years

Norristown, PA (January 24, 2014) – The Montgomery County Commissioners, after spending the first two years of their term putting the county back on firm financial footing, today turned to the future and outlined their plans for the final two years of their first term.

Chairman Josh Shapiro set the tone at the public meeting of the board on Friday by spending several minutes briefly recapping the first two years and then turning to the dynamic plans for 2014-15.

“To be sure, we will feel the effects of some of the problems we inherited for years to come, but the bottom line is this—after just two years in office together we have fixed the county’s budget problems, reformed our government and changed the culture,” Shapiro said. “However, I am mindful of the fact that home runs yesterday, don’t win games today or tomorrow. Thanks to our collective work, we are now in a position to make the critical investments today and tomorrow to meet the needs of our people, our infrastructure, our environment and our avenues of commerce for years to come.”

Shapiro said there would be new initiatives forthcoming in six areas of the county government including human services, infrastructure, safety and security, jobs and commerce, government reform and quality of life issues.

Commissioner Leslie Richards, who is the board’s liaison with the county Planning Commission, pointed to the county’s comprehensive plan, which is now being drafted, as critical to the county’s future. “With input from the public and hard work from our steering committee of diverse stakeholders, we will have a plan that outlines key themes and goals as well as provides realistic ways of realizing them,” she said. “This document will give the county and our municipalities guidance over the next 25 years.”

Richards, who is also one of the county's representatives to the SEPTA board, also pointed to increased funding for transportation as key to the county's future.

"Thanks to our new transportation funding, this region will receive \$1.6 billion in federal and state funding for capital programs over the next five years," she said. "This means we will see large Montgomery County projects like 202 and the 422/Valley Forge Bridge moving ahead. The transformative Lafayette Street Extension in Norristown will hit milestones and new phases will begin." She added that funding for SEPTA will double, allowing the agency to consider for the first time in a long time extensions of service such as the King of Prussia Rail Project, which would bring rail service to the busy area.

Commissioner Bruce Castor concentrated on a variety of safety and first responder issues, which is the area on which he concentrates as commissioner.

He pointed to the installation and completion of the emergency radio system, which will be completed this year as one of his primary goals. He said he was also working with the Sheriff's office and the Security department to enhance the security of all county buildings.

"I have also been asked to be the liaison between the Fraternal Order of Police and the county to seek ways to slow down the turnover of personnel at our 911 center," Castor said. "That is a very pressurized job, and experience on those phones is critical. We need to find a way to keep more of our quality, professional and experienced personnel."

Later in the meeting, the commissioners voted to appoint Castor to the board that oversees the county parks and historic sites.

Shapiro pointed to several initiatives in the social service area that will be introduced this year. "Community Connections has been a success, and soon we will expand the role and reach of our Navicate corps in new disciplines and new areas around the county," he said. "We will also announce exciting public-private and public-public partnerships to combat many of the social challenges our communities face and better partner with local hospitals and health care organizations. We are also interested in focusing on prisoner reentry programs that will reduce our recidivism rate by preparing incarcerated individuals for the workforce."

He said discussions in this area have already begun with a multidisciplinary approach including our warden, commerce officials, behavior health specialists and the district attorney's office.

The county will also announce plans to fight veteran homelessness and unemployment through the Veterans' Affairs, Housing and Community Development and Commerce departments.

Shapiro said Richards will lead the county's efforts to rebuild the county's infrastructure. "We assessed our infrastructure needs, budgeted for their repair and replacement, issued some RFPs and now will begin to see the fruits of that labor as parking garages, roads, bridges and historic sites benefit from our dedication of 96 cents of every capital dollar to meet the needs of our county-owned infrastructure."

Shapiro said that the sale of some county-owned assets will allow the county to reinvest in other county-owned facilities to make them more structurally sound, more energy efficient through a groundbreaking ESCO initiative, and more welcoming to visitors and our employees.

As he did for the first two years of the administration, Castor will lead the efforts in the safety and security realm. The major item on that list in the final two years will be the rolling out of the emergency radio communications system to our law enforcement and first responders and the investment in new and innovative methods and technologies to help protect our citizens.

One of Shapiro's major efforts has involved the reorganization and re-tasking of departments and boards involved in commerce and economic development, and that will continue in the next two years.

"When we took office there were multiple departments tasked with economic and workforce development," Shapiro said. "That model did not work, so we married them to eliminate the silo approach that actually stymied economic growth. We've spent the better part of the past year listening to business leaders tell us what they need from their county government to be successful, and we are now prepared to roll-out several exciting new initiatives aimed at assisting and attracting business."

"Another hurdle to economic progress was the uncoordinated nature of the boards, both inside and outside of county government who had a hand in economic and workforce development, often leaving the left hand wondering what the right hand was doing," Shapiro continued. "Shortly, we will announce an exciting new restructuring of those boards that will help propel Montgomery County to the front of the pack and in turn become a significant tool for local business."

"The county will also be announcing some significant multi-use trail extensions while continuing to improve existing parks and historic sites, preserve farmland and promote our agricultural strength as a county," Shapiro noted.

Finally, Shapiro said the commissioners will continue reforming county government to make sure it is operating effectively and efficiently. He said this will include “further internal refinements and more direct and helpful ways to communicate and collaborate with the public.”