

Commissioners' Journal
November 18, 2025

The Geauga County Board of Commissioners met in session on November 18, 2025, at 9:30 a.m. in the Commissioners' Offices located at 12611 Ravenwood Drive, Room B303, Chardon, Ohio.

It is declared and determined that all formal actions of the Board of County Commissioners concerning and relating to the adoption of all resolutions that were adopted in this meeting, and that all deliberations of the Board of County Commissioners that resulted in such formal action, were open to the public and were in compliance with all legal requirements, including section 121.22 of the Ohio Revised Code.

President of the Board James W. Dvorak opened the meeting at 9:30 a.m.

Communications Intern Maximus Yost explained that he wanted to do some community outreach with the schools and invited local senior class officers to attend a commissioner meeting and be a part of local government. Berkshire High School senior class officers are here today, along with Senior Class Advisor Amy Green, and will lead the pledge and then introduce themselves and tell a little about themselves and their plans for the future.

Berkshire High School Senior Class Officers led the Board and audience in reciting the Pledge of Allegiance.

Ben Joles, a senior class officer at Berkshire, feels that he is very involved in community service projects through 4-H, adding that he has been in 4-H for eleven years. After high school, he plans to attend college and major in aerospace engineering. Mr. Joles was asked if he was the junior fair king, to which he replied he was.

Danielle Lane explained that she is a senior class officer and has been involved in community service through 4-H and Girl Scouts and plans to continue doing a lot more in the future.

Campbell Hoar is a senior class officer and helped their class find a class motto and a class song for graduation. Ms. Hoar has been a part of 4-H and Junior Fair, and plans to attend college and study political science. She would like to eventually work for the Department of Agriculture.

Leiha Spangenberg is a senior class officer who is involved with school activities and has been a cheerleader for four years, including captain for the last three seasons. Ms. Spangenberg expressed that she does a lot of community service.

Mr. Dvorak said that it's always nice to see some of the best and brightest from Berkshire, so let's give them a round of applause.

Mr. Dvorak read the following prayer:

In honor of the Veterans

Every waving flag, hand covered heart and deeply felt prayer asking God to Bless America!

It is a declaration of thanks to all those who have served.

You've shown by example what it truly means to belong to the land of the free and home of the brave.

Every time I think of you, I give thanks, to God.

Amen

PUBLIC COMMENT

Commissioner Brakey suggested that if any of the public comments were from taxing entities regarding House Bill 96 and the piggyback provisions, there will be a discussion with Auditor Walder and those wishing to comment could do so then.

Heather Copper explained that she may have misread something on the agenda, but that she has been volunteering with seniors and wants to find out if they could work with Geauga Transit to coordinate with the housing authority to set up some type of service to set up regular shopping days during the week. Ms. Copper mentioned that Geauga Transit was part of LakeTran, and she didn't know who she needed to talk to.

Mr. Dvorak stated that Joanna Santilli is the Director of Geauga Transit and there is a partnership with LakeTran. He suggested she reach out to her to talk about her idea.

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Mr. Hanlon said that he would wait until after the discussion with Mr. Walder to discuss House Bill 96.

Jonathon Tiber, with Geauga County Township Association and Claridon Township Trustee, thanked the Board for giving him the opportunity to speak. Mr. Tiber stated that House Bill 96 causes concern, and you as the County Commissioners can implement a 2.5% tax credit piggyback on state credits, however, he raised the question of what taxing authority will have to pay that, the response is the township. In Claridon, that represents about \$26,000.00 a year, that equates to more than half of one of their full-time workers' salaries. It is known that they collect less than anyone in operational taxes, but they don't have a poor man's mentality; they just do and get what needs to be done. However, they have no fat to trim. We should spend as little as possible but without compromising the quality of services. I am afraid that this may just do that, compromise. Mr. Tiber continued by saying, as you know, property tax reform, that's coming. This is a part of it and a way for legislators to say, "Hey, we're trying", well, not on their dime. Okay, it's on our dime. There's a grassroots campaign that may become a ballot issue to do away with all property tax. Mr. Tiber said that if the commissioners implement this, it may be a good idea a year from now in Geauga County or three years from now, but it's not a good idea today.

COMMISSIONERS' OFFICE - COUNTY ADMINISTRATOR'S REPORT

County Administrator Amy Bevan reported on the items approved, as authorized by Resolution #25-004 under the direction and supervision of the County Commissioners that was approved January 7, 2025, pursuant to O.R.C. 305.30.

Ms. Bevan explained that the County Administrator approved the following items on November 17, 2025:

Emergency Management Agency:

Approved hiring Blake Rogers to the position of Planner / Trainer (#1712) to be effective November 24, 2025, at the rate of \$29.75 per hour (Grade 13E, Step 3) with a one-year probationary period. This offer of employment is contingent upon the successful completion of the required pre-employment conditions.

Maintenance:

Approved hiring Aaron Boalt to the position of Maintenance Worker (#1904) to be effective November 24, 2025, at the rate of \$20.99 per hour (Grade 6, Step 7) with a one-year probationary period. This offer of employment is contingent upon the successful completion of the required pre-employment conditions.

Department of Water Resources:

Approved and executed the service Contract Agreement with Hydraulic Lifts LLC to perform vehicle lift service and maintenance, as needed at various locations within the department, for a period of one-year, effective November 17, 2025, in an amount not to exceed \$1,500.00.

Liquor License:

Concurred with the Bainbridge Township Trustees in not requesting a hearing on the Liquor License being requested by HAN VENTURES LLC located at 7175 Aurora Road, Aurora, Ohio (OCT NEW 03560177-2).

MEETING MINUTES

Motion: by Commissioner Brakey, seconded by Commissioner Spidalieri to approve and execute the minutes for the meeting of September 4, 2025.

<i>Roll Call Vote:</i>	<i>Commissioner Spidalieri</i>	<i>Aye</i>
	<i>Commissioner Brakey</i>	<i>Aye</i>
	<i>Commissioner Dvorak</i>	<i>Aye</i>

Motion: by Commissioner Brakey, seconded by Commissioner Spidalieri to approve and execute the minutes for the meeting of September 9, 2025.

<i>Roll Call Vote:</i>	<i>Commissioner Spidalieri</i>	<i>Aye</i>
	<i>Commissioner Brakey</i>	<i>Aye</i>

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Commissioner Dvorak Aye

Motion: by Commissioner Brakey, seconded by Commissioner Spidalieri to approve and execute the minutes for the meeting of September 16, 2025.

*Roll Call Vote: Commissioner Spidalieri Aye
 Commissioner Brakey Aye
 Commissioner Dvorak Aye*

APPROVE FINANCIALS

Budget and Finance Manager Adrian Gorton explained the financials for today as including an Appropriations transfer from the Sheriff's Office moving payroll funds into their Vehicles expense account for the purchase and outfitting of four new patrol vehicles; Cash transfers from the Commissioners' office to Water Resources for permit and construction costs for the new Youth Center project sewer line; Travel request for the Dog Warden; a payment for ADP to Zoho Corporation for Endpoint Central management and security annual renewal in the amount of \$8,276.00; and a payment for Squire Patton Boggs for services rendered in regards to the County's annual information filing with the Municipal Securities Rulemaking Board in connection with the General Obligation and Revenue Bonds that were used to build the Geauga County Office Building in the amount of \$4,000.00.

Motion: by Commissioner Brakey, seconded by Commissioner Spidalieri to approve and execute Resolution #25-200 itemizing the financials for the meeting of November 18, 2025.

*Roll Call Vote: Commissioner Spidalieri Aye
 Commissioner Brakey Aye
 Commissioner Dvorak Aye*

COUNTY ENGINEER'S OFFICE – CHANGE ORDER #1 – FINAL, DECREASE CONTRACT WITH OGLESBY CONSTRUCTION, INCORPORATED – APPLICATION OF PAVEMENT MARKINGS OF VARIOUS ROADS

Deputy Engineer Shane Hajjar asked the Board to approve Change Order #1 and final, which is a decrease to the contract with Oglesby Construction.

Motion: by Commissioner Brakey, seconded by Commissioner Spidalieri to approve and execute Change Order #1 and Final, decreasing the Contract with Oglesby Construction, Incorporated for the Application of Pavement Markings of Various Roads in the amount of \$6,270.10.

*Roll Call Vote: Commissioner Spidalieri Aye
 Commissioner Brakey Aye
 Commissioner Dvorak Aye*

COUNTY ENGINEER'S OFFICE – CHANGE ORDER #2 – FINAL, DECREASE CONTRACT WITH MILLER BUILDERS, LLC – CONSTRUCTION OF SALT STORAGE BUILDING

Mr. Hajjar asked the Board to approve Change Order #2 and final, which is a decrease to the contract with Miller Builders.

Motion: by Commissioner Brakey, seconded by Commissioner Spidalieri to approve and execute Change Order #2 and Final, decreasing the Contract with Miller Builders, LLC for the Construction of a Salt Storage Building in the amount of \$2,339.59.

*Roll Call Vote: Commissioner Spidalieri Aye
 Commissioner Brakey Aye
 Commissioner Dvorak Aye*

SHERIFF'S OFFICE – VICTIM OF CRIME ACT (VOCA) AND STATE VICTIM ADVOCACY ACT (SVAA) GRANT AWARD AND ACCEPTANCE FORMS

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Sheriff Scott Hildenbrand asked the Board to approve the VOCA and SVAA grant award and acceptance. Sheriff Hildenbrand explained that this is primarily the salary for an employee that handles the victims of crime, through the court process, and provides some personal touch to the victim.

Motion: by Commissioner Brakey, seconded by Commissioner Spidalieri to approve and authorize the President of the Board to execute the Victim of Crime Act (VOCA) and State Victim Advocacy Act (SVAA) Grant Award and Acceptance Forms in the amount of \$42,829.80 from Grant #2026-VOCA-136360814 (\$31,652.00 from Federal VOCA funds and \$7,913.00 local match from the County General Fund) and \$3,264.80 from Grant #2026-SVAA-136360818 with no local match. This grant is for the period October 1, 2025 through September 30, 2026.

<i>Roll Call Vote:</i>	<i>Commissioner Spidalieri</i>	<i>Aye</i>
	<i>Commissioner Brakey</i>	<i>Aye</i>
	<i>Commissioner Dvorak</i>	<i>Aye</i>

MAINTENANCE – WAIVE 200 HOUR MAXIMUM VACATION ACCRUAL – RIK WAREHAM, ACTING MAINTENANCE DIRECTOR – PERIOD OF SIX MONTHS

Ms. Bevan asked the Board to waive the vacation accrual for Mr. Wareham. Ms. Bevan explained that with the departure of the previous Director and Mr. Wareham's increased responsibilities, he is unable to take time.

Motion: by Commissioner Brakey, seconded by Commissioner Spidalieri to waive the 200-hour maximum vacation accrual for Rik Wareham, Acting Maintenance Director, for a period of six months, effective November 9, 2025 (Payroll #25-24) through May 9, 2026 (Payroll #26-10).

<i>Roll Call Vote:</i>	<i>Commissioner Spidalieri</i>	<i>Aye</i>
	<i>Commissioner Brakey</i>	<i>Aye</i>
	<i>Commissioner Dvorak</i>	<i>Aye</i>

DEPARTMENT OF WATER RESOURCES – APPROVE SUBMISSION OF 2025 CERTIFICATION LIST OF DELINQUENT SEWER USER FEES, WATER FEES, TAP-IN INSTALLMENTS AND SUBSEQUENT CERTIFICATION TO THE COUNTY AUDITOR

Director Nicholas Gorris asked the Board to approve the submission of the 2025 certification list of delinquent sewer user fees, water fees, tap-in installments to the county auditor. Mr. Gorris noted that this was current as of 9:30 a.m. on November 17. Since then, several people have paid, but it is a living document. Mr. Gorris responded to a question from Ms. Brakey regarding the highlighted areas on the list, to which he noted that the yellow highlights indicate people whose charges have already been certified on their taxes but who haven't paid yet. So, we had to deduct current rate versus what was certified to get the actual amount. The blue highlights are people who are on our water accounts of which we have started with the shutoff notices. This happens every year; people just don't pay their bills. Mr. Gorris stated they were putting unpaid bills onto their taxes. The department is currently looking at developing some kind of education document. Mr. Gorris explained that people write these off on their taxes, whether they had a home business or something of that nature. They have been working on explaining to people that don't pay their bills for a year, there is a minimum of three hundred dollars in late fees that they're paying on top of the actual bill. They feel it's an education piece. And that's where we're at when you look at the numbers, and you see half a million dollars, but know that it's four hundred and some accounts. Mr. Gorris continued that by explaining it to people, they are starting to understand and we have gotten them on a payment plan. They issued notices about shutoffs, and they call in and ask what they can do, so they explain the payment plan and get it in process. Out of sixty shutoff notices, they have twelve left and once a final shut off notice is sent, they will usually pay it.

Motion: by Commissioner Brakey, seconded by Commissioner Spidalieri to approve the submission of the 2025 Certification List of delinquent sewer user fees, water fees, tap-in installments and subsequent certification to the Geauga County Auditor, in accordance with O.R.C. 6117.02 and the Geauga County Department of Water Resources Rules and Regulations (Section F.501) in the total amount of \$467,375.04 (\$438,172.24 Arrearage and \$29,202.80 Penalty), amounts current as of 9:30 a.m. November 17, 2025.

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Roll Call Vote:	Commissioner Spidalieri	Aye
	Commissioner Brakey	Aye
	Commissioner Dvorak	Aye

DESTINATION GEAUGA

Director Kathy Shimer stated that she wanted to talk about some things they accomplished in 2025. Ms. Shimer explained that they got a new website, and that the numbers and the growth are amazing. We are getting a lot of activity on the website. Ms. Shimer said their Facebook and Instagram numbers are also growing. Ms. Shimer stated that 4,305 people had gone to our Facebook and are looking at it and “liking” it. Ms. Shimer noted that the interesting part here is the age brackets of the people. We've kind of moved down from the baby boomers. Kim Braley from Middlefield was hired and has been doing the Facebook and Instagram pages, adding that she was hired to do one post a week and with over 420 members, it will take a while to get through all of them. She's doing a great job, and our numbers are just growing by leaps and bounds.

Ms. Shimer expressed that they are getting everybody into what tourism is all about and working at what we need to really be doing. Ms. Shimer stated they are planning a strategic planning meeting and a board retreat, which we haven't had either of those in about three years, so it's past time. We're working on redoing the bylaws. The annual dinner is set for January 15 at the Amish Country Kitchen and asked Mr. Dvorak to mark that down on your calendar and come and give us the blessing for that night. Hopefully, you can all come. Ms. Shimer stated that they just finished changing over from a brochure to a magazine, and the magazine has so much more.

Ms. Shimer noted that they still have to focus on the whole county, but be aware that the target market has changed, that we have one of the largest Amish populations in Middlefield and have to work with the changing market. Ms. Shimer explained that the market used to be seniors. That was the people that we had on Facebook, and now we're looking into the Gen X, the Gen Y, and the millennials. And, they all are different on how you have to approach them and what they want.

The real reason for today is to talk about bed tax. Ms. Shimer thanked Community Development for putting together a list, which included about 32 locations, but upon searching through artificial intelligence (AI), there were anywhere from 140 to 180 of just Airbnbs. On VRBO, it was over 300. It included residential houses that you live in, that you would rent out for a short-term rental. It was fascinating. Ms. Shimer stated that currently we get bed tax money from Punderson, the Lodge at Bass Lake, the KOA campground in Thompson, and Pine Lake Trout Club, and the Hillbrook Club. Ms. Shimer said that there is a lot more, and if we could get our fingers on a little bit of that money, it would help us. It would maybe allow Ms. Braley to do more than one post a week. It would help fund our marketing efforts. We have a marketing committee now that we haven't had in a long time, and they're really working hard. Ms. Shimer expressed that they are active with America 250 and have great relationships with the local chambers and Geauga Growth Partnership.

There are so many things in Geauga County that people are not aware of, and we need tourists to come to Geauga County. Ms. Shimer noted that during a presentation from Ohio Tourism, they talked about the difference in the amount of money spent when visiting for the day or staying overnight. We need tourism, and if we can do something to get more bed tax, anything would be beneficial. Mr. Dvorak added that Ohio is #3 in the country for tourism. Ms. Shimer continued by saying they are working with Ohio Tourism and have suggested area businesses to be included on the tour, including Cowboy Creamery on the Ice Cream Trail and Pattersons on the fall stops for corn mazes. Mr. Dvorak added that bed tax is paid by visitors to Geauga County, not its residents.

Ms. Brakey added that we are leveling the playing field; you are already taxing visitors to the larger hotels, so this just will include short-term rentals. She understands that HB 94 allows the Commissioners to amend the definition of a hotel to include establishments with fewer than five rooms. Ms. Brakey asked what the next step was. Ms. Shimer added that they could get additional information if needed, and that a few townships do not want Airbnbs.

Commissioner Spidalieri asked how much money Ms. Shimer feels they will bring in a year. Ms. Shimer said that it's something additional, even if it's \$500. Mr. Spidalieri stated that he was

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going to be in the minority, but that he didn't want to add taxes. There was discussion about the visitor paying the bed tax, that it gets collected by the Airbnb or VRBO and then they submit the tax to the County. Mr. Spidalieri said that the risk is there that they collect it and not pay, and the question was asked, who would police that. Ms. Brakey stated that this is an infancy stage and we need more information. Mr. Spidalieri stated that we need to invest in our county. Ms. Brakey replied that she wants the visitor coming to Geauga to pay for tourism, not the residents paying for visitors.

Clerk Christine Blair noted that the current resolution from 1991 says five rooms and three percent and that will need to be updated to include the changes.

COMMISSIONERS' OFFICE – RESOLUTIONS HONORING JESSE GANDEE, NAZARIO MENDEZ, AND KENDRA RENKO ON THEIR HARD WORK IN RECOVERY AND BECOMING SUCCESS STORIES OF THE COMMON PLEAS COURT NEW LEAF PROGRAM

Mr. Dvorak wanted to note that Judge Paschke started the New Leaf program about six years ago. The Board of Commissioners contributed a percentage of the grant. The program recently received a national award. Mr. Dvorak said the program's success rate is eighty-five percent and he feels that this is a great program.

Motion: by Commissioner Brakey, seconded by Commissioner Spidalieri to approve and execute Resolution #25-201 Honoring Jesse Gandee for his hard work in recovery and becoming a success story of the Geauga County Common Pleas Court's New Leaf Program.

Board of County Commissioners, Geauga County, Ohio

Resolution: #25-201

Date: November 18, 2025

A RESOLUTION HONORING JESSE GANDEE FOR HIS HARD WORK IN RECOVERY AND BECOMING A SUCCESS STORY OF THE GEAUGA COUNTY COMMON PLEAS COURT'S NEW LEAF PROGRAM

WHEREAS, Honorable Judge Carolyn Paschke of the Geauga County Common Pleas Court started the New Leaf Program, a Drug Court, in June 2019, which was quickly certified by the Ohio Supreme Court in October 2019, and to date, twenty-nine graduates have completed the Program; and

WHEREAS, eligibility for the New Leaf Program requires a diagnosis of a severe substance use disorder, a determination of high risk for recidivism, and a pending felony case. While participation is optional, once entered, completion is a condition of probation; and

WHEREAS, the New Leaf Program is a sixteen (16) to twenty-four (24) month program consisting of six phases, including treatment, weekly or bi-weekly status hearings, random weekly drug screens and participation in prosocial activities; and

WHEREAS, participants' progress in the Program is overseen by a treatment team that includes Judge Paschke, an Assistant Prosecutor, an Assistant Public Defender, the Sheriff, a Probation Officer, the Program Coordinator, and representatives from local treatment providers, who determine whether participants may advance to the next phase of the Program; and

WHEREAS, Jesse Gandee was sentenced to complete the New Leaf Program and inpatient treatment with Lake Geauga Recovery after violating Community Control on a drug-trafficking case. After violating Community Control a second time, Mr. Gandee was ordered to complete NEOCAP and Aftercare, and after completion went on to Concord Pines. Mr. Gandee then stepped down into the Ravenwood sober living residence where he continues to reside; and

WHEREAS, Mr. Gandee has been working at a local restaurant where he has learned cooking skills, been steady in a relationship, continues to mend others, and plays volleyball in a league. Mr. Gandee, has had a total commitment of three years to the New Leaf Program, now graduating, has become a mentor to new Program participants.

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NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED, that the Geauga County Board of Commissioners do hereby honor Jesse Gandee for his hard work in recovery and for becoming a success story of the Geauga County Common Pleas Court's New Leaf Program.

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, that this Resolution become part of the permanent record of the Board of Commissioners of Geauga County, Ohio.

<i>Roll Call Vote:</i>	<i>Commissioner Spidalieri</i>	<i>Aye</i>
	<i>Commissioner Brakey</i>	<i>Aye</i>
	<i>Commissioner Dvorak</i>	<i>Aye</i>

Motion: by Commissioner Brakey, seconded by Commissioner Spidalieri to approve and execute Resolution #25-202 Honoring Nazario Mendez for his hard work in recovery and becoming a success story of the Geauga County Common Pleas Court's New Leaf Program.

Board of County Commissioners, Geauga County, Ohio

Resolution: #25-202
Date: November 18, 2025

*A RESOLUTION HONORING NAZARIO MENDEZ FOR HIS HARD WORK IN RECOVERY
AND BECOMING A SUCCESS STORY OF THE GEAUGA COUNTY COMMON PLEAS
COURT'S NEW LEAF PROGRAM*

WHEREAS, Honorable Judge Carolyn Paschke of the Geauga County Common Pleas Court started the New Leaf Program, a Drug Court, in June 2019, which was quickly certified by the Ohio Supreme Court in October 2019, and to date, twenty-nine graduates have completed the Program; and

WHEREAS, eligibility for the New Leaf Program requires a diagnosis of a severe substance use disorder, a determination of high risk for recidivism, and a pending felony case. While participation is optional, once entered, completion is a condition of probation; and

WHEREAS, the New Leaf Program is a sixteen (16) to twenty-four (24) month program consisting of six phases, including treatment, weekly or bi-weekly status hearings, random weekly drug screens and participation in prosocial activities; and

WHEREAS, participants' progress in the Program is overseen by a treatment team that includes Judge Paschke, an Assistant Prosecutor, an Assistant Public Defender, the Sheriff, a Probation Officer, the Program Coordinator, and representatives from local treatment providers, who determine whether participants may advance to the next phase of the Program; and

WHEREAS, Nazario Mendez was granted intervention-in-lieu of conviction for drug possession and ordered to complete inpatient treatment. Mr. Mendez left treatment against advice and, following a violation, was ordered to complete NEOCAP and the New Leaf Program. Mr. Mendez has completed the Jail Treatment program, CLIMB, residential treatment, and NEOCAP; and

WHEREAS, Mr. Mendez has overcome many hardships and now is without illegal substances. Mr. Mendez has been attending GED classes; this summer he started his own landscaping business. Mr. Mendez recently became engaged and is learning to be a father figure for his soon to be stepdaughter. Mr. Mendez has spent twenty-three months on the Program and has become a mentor to current participants.

NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED, that the Geauga County Board of Commissioners do hereby honor Nazario Mendez for his hard work in recovery and for becoming a success story of the Geauga County Common Pleas Court's New Leaf Program.

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, that this Resolution become part of the permanent record of the Board of Commissioners of Geauga County, Ohio.

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<i>Roll Call Vote:</i>	<i>Commissioner Spidalieri</i>	<i>Aye</i>
	<i>Commissioner Brakey</i>	<i>Aye</i>
	<i>Commissioner Dvorak</i>	<i>Aye</i>

Motion: by Commissioner Brakey, seconded by Commissioner Spidalieri to approve and execute Resolution #25-203 Honoring Kendra Renko for her hard work in recovery and becoming a success story of the Geauga County Common Pleas Court's New Leaf Program.

Board of County Commissioners, Geauga County, Ohio

Resolution: #25-203
Date: November 18, 2025

*A RESOLUTION HONORING KENDRA RENKO FOR HER HARD WORK
IN RECOVERY AND BECOMING A SUCCESS STORY OF THE GEAUGA COUNTY
COMMON PLEAS COURT'S NEW LEAF PROGRAM*

WHEREAS, Honorable Judge Carolyn Paschke of the Geauga County Common Pleas Court started the New Leaf Program, a Drug Court, in June 2019, which was quickly certified by the Ohio Supreme Court in October 2019, and to date, twenty-nine graduates have completed the Program; and

WHEREAS, eligibility for the New Leaf Program requires a diagnosis of a severe substance use disorder, a determination of high risk for recidivism, and a pending felony case. While participation is optional, once entered, completion is a condition of probation; and

WHEREAS, the New Leaf Program is a sixteen (16) to twenty-four (24) month program consisting of six phases, including treatment, weekly or bi-weekly status hearings, random weekly drug screens and participation in prosocial activities; and

WHEREAS, participants' progress in the Program is overseen by a treatment team that includes Judge Paschke, an Assistant Prosecutor, an Assistant Public Defender, the Sheriff, a Probation Officer, the Program Coordinator, and representatives from local treatment providers, who determine whether participants may advance to the next phase of the Program; and

WHEREAS, Kendra Renko was sentenced in February 2023 for obstructing official business and entered the New Leaf Program. Ms. Renko has had many struggles but has stayed committed. Ms. Renko completed NEOCAP, partial residential treatment, IOP and counseling; and

WHEREAS, Ms. Renko gave birth to her second child while in the Program. She has been working, was able to obtain independent living and remains very active in AA/NA meetings.

NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED, that the Geauga County Board of Commissioners do hereby honor Kendra Renko for her hard work in recovery and for becoming a success story of the Geauga County Common Pleas Court's New Leaf Program.

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, that this Resolution become part of the permanent record of the Board of Commissioners of Geauga County, Ohio.

<i>Roll Call Vote:</i>	<i>Commissioner Spidalieri</i>	<i>Aye</i>
	<i>Commissioner Brakey</i>	<i>Aye</i>
	<i>Commissioner Dvorak</i>	<i>Aye</i>

BOARD DISCUSSION

Auditor Charles Walder stated that he wanted to address a comment from a previous session regarding a signature line on a letter jointly sent by Commissioner Brakey and the Auditor's office to parties affected by House Bill 96 (HB 96) owner-occupied and homestead credit impacts. Mr. Walder clarified that the plural "Commissioners" on the signature line was entirely his error, adding that Commissioner Brakey had specifically emailed the day before the

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letter was sent, requesting the singular "Commissioner" to avoid misrepresenting the board as taking a collective action. Mr. Walder stated that she was seeking information as an individual. Mr. Walder noted that he failed to implement the change on the signature line, although he did correct it at the top of the letter where the commissioner's name appears. Mr. Walder attributes the mistake to being interrupted while editing. Mr. Walder said that there was no malicious intent and hoped that this error does not become the primary focus of the discussion on House Bill 96, which he believes has very important issues to consider.

Mr. Walder explained that in late September, Commissioner Brakey requested information on the ramifications if the county were to implement the "piggyback" provision in House Bill 96. Mr. Walder stated that he viewed this as standard due diligence, as other counties were implementing the provision, some "blindly." He provided factual, entity-by-entity cost analysis. On October 8, the Geauga County Township Association invited both himself and Ms. Brakey to present the ramifications of the provision to the townships. The presentation was fact-based and well-received.

Following the meeting, a joint letter was sent to other affected parties not present, as townships represent less than half of the entities that would be impacted. Mr. Walder stated that Commissioner Dvorak also independently reached out to him for information after hearing Lake County had implemented the provision, expressing concern for stakeholders who rely on the revenue. Mr. Walder expressed that he viewed this as commendable due diligence.

On October 16, Commissioner Brakey and himself sent out the letter with financial data, and since then, over a third of recipients have voiced their position on the potential loss of revenue. Many of these stakeholders are expected to be present at today's meeting. Mr. Walder explained that he testified on House Bill 96 in Columbus, noting the bill is a 4,000-page state budget document and disagrees with characterizations of it being an "embarrassment to Ohio."

He clarifies a key distinction made in the previous week's meeting: A "rollback" is a reimbursement from the state to the local taxing authority for a discount given to taxpayers, resulting in no financial loss to the local entity. The House Bill 96 provision is a "piggyback," which places the financial burden of the tax credit directly on the local taxing authorities, resulting in a loss of revenue. Mr. Walder stated that his purpose is not to vilify or praise House Bill 96, but to provide fact-based data for an informed decision, rather than one based on emotion or hearsay.

While he agrees that seniors and disabled veterans deserve tax relief, he warns that the "devil is in the details," and this provision could lead to a circular problem where lost revenue necessitates new taxes or earlier levy renewals. Mr. Walder reiterated that the intent of the joint letter was to inform affected parties of these potential ramifications so they could provide feedback.

Mr. Walder again apologized for the typographical error but not for providing the data, stating the letter's content shows there are ramifications that were not considered when the legislation was created in Columbus.

Ms. Brakey explained that her initial gut reaction was that the HB 96 provision was not right for their county, noting their budget commission is stricter about cash carryovers than Lake County's, leaving less of a financial cushion. Ms. Brakey stated that she makes decisions based on facts and figures, not gut reactions, which is why she requested the information from the auditor.

Ms. Brakey explained that they solicited feedback from townships and other taxing entities regarding the HB 96 provision. The feedback received was clear: many entities would need to put additional levies on the ballot sooner, make cuts, giving an example of delaying road paving, and all but one township opposed the measure.

Mr. Walder noted the irony that a provision meant to help seniors would reduce revenue for entities like the Department on Aging, which directly supports them. Ms. Brakey expressed her personal discomfort with the idea of three commissioners unilaterally reducing a levy that voters had approved, sometimes overwhelmingly.

Commissioner Spidaleri criticized the lack of transparency in the process, adding frustration over himself and another commissioner being excluded from communications regarding the

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letter. Mr. Walder responded that House Bill 96's provision might be appropriate for Lake County, which has a less stringent budget commission and thus more "meat on the bone" with excess funds, unlike Geauga County where the budget commission is more rigorous. Mr. Spidalieri argued that the issue goes beyond the typographical error, citing a lack of transparency.

Mr. Spidalieri stated that he learned about the letter from people who reached out to him and felt disrespected, adding that he only received copies of the response letters the previous day. Mr. Spidalieri expressed that he feels it was "absolutely uncalled for" that he and another commissioner were not informed about the letter being sent, especially since it concerns a decision the three of them must make together.

Ms. Brakey clarified that the response letters were addressed to her because she was the one who requested the information. A disagreement over proper procedure for gathering information took place, with Ms. Brakey citing open meeting laws as a reason for not including others in the initial inquiries. Mr. Spidalieri reiterated that the original letter stated "to the commissioners' office," and he is a commissioner, implying he should have been included, stressing that the board is run by three people, not one, and demands more transparency.

Ms. Brakey defended her position, stating she routinely asks directors for information offline before meetings to prepare. She explains she does not include other commissioners on such email correspondence to avoid potential open meetings violations. She views this as her standard process for gathering information to make informed decisions.

Mr. Walder asked if Mr. Spidalieri aligns with Lake County's approach of acting without data, a "shot from the hip," to which Mr. Spidalieri replies he does not. Mr. Walder responds by saying it is his duty to answer individual inquiries, pointing out that there appears to be a communication gap based on the volume of incoming feedback.

Mr. Walder stated that he answers any and all questions he receives about House Bill 96, including those from the public and school officials, and does not copy all related parties with his individual responses. Mr. Walder added that if a commissioner chooses to do a "deep dive" into a subject, he encourages it but does not feel it is his place to "force feed" the information to the entire organization. Mr. Walder noted that there seemed to be communication problems between him and Mr. Spidalieri, that in the nearly eight years he has been auditor, that Mr. Spidalieri has never come to his office to ask about his concerns as the auditor, implying that "people kind of reap what they sow." Mr. Walder stated that this letter was not part of a hidden agenda; it was a straightforward request for feedback based on factual data.

Ms. Brakey added that she was receiving letters in response to her inquiry, and that there was a delay in sending out materials because they were waiting for all items to be received first. Mr. Dvorak noted that he had received numerous calls, emails and texts regarding the issue, including the spouse of a first responder, adding that the impact is widespread. Mr. Dvorak expressed that when he was Burton Township Trustee, they often struggled with passing levies, and that it was often a struggle to pass a road levy. Mr. Dvorak noted that he had reached out to Mr. Walder after Lake County had taken action which prompted him to re-look at House Bill 96, adding that he feels the issue is personal for everybody and that the proposed changes would be detrimental to all entities, given the existing difficulty in passing levies.

PUBLIC COMMENT ON HOUSE BILL 96 DISCUSSION

Dr. Michael Hanlon, Chardon Schools Superintendent, stated that the leadership of the Chardon School District acknowledges the challenges of significant property valuation increases and is engaging with you for a solution. Dr. Hanlon expressed concern that the piggyback provision will not result in meaningful reform but will instead frustrate and confuse taxpayers with program cuts and accelerated new funding requests. Dr. Hanlon stated that current issues are a direct result of the systematic failure of the Ohio legislature to fully fund public education which has shifted financial responsibility to residential taxpayers and not the strawman arguments that are being offered in Columbus. Dr. Hanlon explained the strawman, stating that:

- "Districts have a spending problem": Data from 2021-2024 shows only moderate cost increases (2% for teachers, 7% for healthcare), not "runaway spending."

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- *"Schools are flush with cash": 90% of Ohio school districts have cash carryover balances below 75% of their expenditures.*
- *"The General Assembly is appropriately funding schools": Ohio ranks 45th in state support for public education. Over the last 20 years, state funding has increased less than 1% per year when adjusted for inflation.*

Dr. Hanlon stated that systemic policy changes have shifted the burden of funding public schools on to residential taxpayers, increasing their share from 47% in 1991 to approximately 70% today. At the time of the DeRolf litigation, state support was about 45%; it is now 36% and projected to fall to 32% by 2027. The "Fair School Funding Plan" is the true path to tax reform. Dr. Hanlon stated that the district, described as highly achieved with little state support, warns that implementing the piggyback provision would run counter to the will of voters who approved funding for desired educational service levels and will result in consequences including accelerated requests for new money levies. These new levies will cost taxpayers more than previous levies that qualified for state reimbursement under the rollback provision. Dr. Hanlon added that it will cause cuts in programs and services across all school districts. The General Assembly has a number of tax reform bills in the pipeline, with some likely to be voted out of committee imminently. Dr. Hanlon expressed that the district requests the commissioners wait until the impact of pending state legislation can be better understood.

Deb Armbruster, Treasurer and Chief Financial Officer, Chardon Schools, explained that the Chardon Local School District serves 2,500 students across 88 square miles and is heavily dependent on local tax revenue (74.56% from property tax, 16.41% from the state and 9.03% from other investments). The district emphasizes its responsible spending, using funds for one-time safety and learning projects without creating new ongoing expenses, and shifting one mill of inside millage to focus on safety and security to update our schools. Ms. Armbruster stated that the district has reduced student fees and eliminated activity fees to increase student participation. The proposed "piggyback" provision would cut \$772,000 annually from the budget. This revenue loss would force the district to request a new levy at least one year sooner, a levy that would not be affected by the homestead exemption and would increase the burden on local taxpayers. Ms. Armbruster added that "the piggyback is short-term tax relief with long-term consequences."

Nancy Benincasa, Superintendent, West Geauga Schools, expressed that the "Take-Back Tax Credit" in House Bill 96 would create an annual loss of approximately \$864,000 for West Geauga Schools, with no state reimbursement. This includes a \$400,000 loss in the current fiscal year. This would diminish the value of voter-approved levies and likely require additional levies to compensate for the lost revenue. The policy would introduce unexpected financial instability, making it difficult to sustain student programming and services. Ms. Benincasa argued that while tax relief is a shared goal, it should not come at the expense of children's learning opportunities, especially as other state proposals may further reduce school funding. A "quiet three-person vote" could have very real consequences for thousands of children in the county. Ms. Benincasa on behalf of the district asks the board to refrain from adopting the piggyback credit to preserve financial stability for the schools. Ms. Benincasa responded to a question about the letter and confirmed that the letter sent by the superintendent was read by their board.

Bruce Willingham, Superintendent, Kenston Schools, explained that the district has taken deliberate steps to manage its budget, including consolidating facilities, balancing class sizes, using retirement incentives, and expanding shared services. As a result, the district's treasurer was commended by the Geauga County Budget Commission for fiscal accuracy and encouraged to continue building the cash balance. The goal has been to delay needing a new operating levy, which has not happened for over 15 years. The estimated annual loss for Kenston Local Schools from the piggyback exemption is over \$900,000, equivalent to about 0.75 mills. This loss would immediately push the district into deficit spending and accelerate the timeline for a new operating levy from approximately five years down to two.

Mr. Willingham stated that implementing local tax exemptions without state reimbursement will increase the burden on remaining taxpayers and lead to larger staffing reductions, larger class sizes, and programming cuts. Mr. Willingham asked the Board of County Commissioners to refrain from advancing the piggyback option without a sustainable plan to replace the lost revenue.

Kris Carroll, Director, Geauga Public Library, expressed appreciation for being notified in advance, noting colleagues in other counties were surprised by the piggyback exemption's

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approval after their budgets were set. Ms. Carroll stated that the library supports families, schools, and students, but also provides significant services to seniors and veterans through outreach and tech help. The library is already “running as lean as we can” due to reduced state funding in the current biennium. The proposed additional cut of \$178,000 would deeply affect the core services the library can provide and accelerate the need for new funding. Ms. Carroll appreciates sharing this information with the Board before making a decision.

Adam Litke, Administrator, Geauga Public Health, along with Dan Lark, Environmental Health Director, Katie Taylor, their finance person, and a board member, came to express concern with the piggyback option, stating it pushes financial burdens back onto localities. Mr. Litke stated that the health department would face a \$17,000 decrease in funding, which is equivalent to about half of a clerical employee. The department operates on a nearly 20-year-old 0.2 mill levy and has consistently cut costs, including utilizing a first-in-the-nation cross-jurisdiction agreement and not replacing a sanitarian who left the department. Mr. Litke stated that at some point, the “do more with less” is no longer possible, and services will have to be cut, affecting things like food establishment safety inspections and water issue management.

Ms. Brakey added that as a former GPH board member, she acknowledges that the health department is run very leanly and that there is “no fat to trim” on their budget.

Christine Lakomiak, Executive Director, Mental Health and Recovery Services, explained that the Board of Mental Health and Recovery Services, that is comprised of unpaid Geauga County resident volunteers, held a special meeting on October 29 to deliberate the issue. Ms. Lakomiak stated that the board unanimously decided to write a letter that is in opposition of the implementation of the tax credits locally. Ms. Lakomiak stated that the annual decrease in levy collections for the board would be \$106,000, with no offsetting funds, as the levies continue to collect at the rate the year it was implemented. The revenue decline would be unexpected and would affect services already under contract with providers.

Skip Claypool, Chester Township, expressed that there is an old saying “avoid even the appearance of impropriety”, and this board is just that a board that operates as a board and all decisions should be made as a board. Mr. Claypool stated that Ms. Brakey was correct, that data collection was needed, however, disagrees with the approach. Mr. Claypool made an accusation of a commissioner operating like a county executive rather than a board member and expressed that the letter should have been sent from the board as a whole, not from an individual commissioner within the office. Mr. Claypool’s frustration expressed that the County Administrator had been aware of the letter, providing the argument that all official communication and decisions should come from the board as a collective to ensure transparency and proper procedure. Mr. Spidalieri stated that Mr. Claypool was incorrect and that Ms. Bevan had not been a part of the letter being sent. Mr. Claypool apologized to Ms. Bevan.

Benjamin Young, City Manager, City of Chardon, expressed that admittedly they are unique in that they are the county’s only city and are less dependent on property taxes unlike other entities. Mr. Young stated that while the direct loss to the city itself is minor and can be absorbed, the larger concern is for the fire department. The fire department is the city’s only service entirely dependent on property taxes and is operated as a partnership with two neighboring townships. The primary worry is the negative financial impact the provision would have on the partner townships, which could compromise the ability to contribute to shared fire service.

Donald Rice, Superintendent, Board of Developmental Disabilities, stated the proposed cuts would equate to a loss of approximately \$317,000 per year for his organization. Mr. Rice stated that for us, that would serve a lot of people, and they are already cutting back to hold off on a levy. Mr. Rice acknowledges the general public and board’s dislike for taxes but emphasizes their necessity for funding essential services.

Karen Hawkins, Fiscal Officer, Montville Township, notes that when new levies are introduced, they are often disqualified, or unqualified, which removes their “homestead and rollback” dollars from the state. Ms. Hawkins stated that Montville Township would face a budget cut of approximately \$16,800. While this amount is smaller than that of other entities, it would necessitate immediate and significant staffing cuts, such as eliminating the fire chief or the single part-time road department employee, to make up the shortfall. As any business owner knows, the easiest cut is in your staffing.

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Mr. Dvorak asked the Board if the Board wanted to take any action today. Ms. Brakey expressed that she was not in favor of implementing the piggyback provisions of HB 96. Mr. Dvorak expressed that he was not in favor of it either, and hopes no action is ever taken on it. Mr. Spidalieri expressed that he feels that way, and he will make a motion. Mr. Dvorak seconded the motion. Ms. Brakey asked for clarification of what the motion was. Mr. Dvorak stated that the motion was to not get involved or implement the piggyback provision.

The motion was clarified by Commissioner Brakey to state that “the commissioners will not implement the piggyback provisions for either the owner-occupied credit or the homestead exemption from House Bill 96.”

Motion: by Commissioner Spidalieri, seconded by Commissioner Dvorak to not implement the Piggyback Provisions on either the Owner-Occupied Credit or the Homestead Exemption from House Bill 96.

<i>Roll Call Vote:</i>	<i>Commissioner Spidalieri</i>	<i>Aye</i>
	<i>Commissioner Brakey</i>	<i>Aye</i>
	<i>Commissioner Dvorak</i>	<i>Aye</i>

BOARD DISCUSSION

Ribbon Cutting

Ms. Bevan expressed that she just wanted to provide some preliminary plans for an upcoming ribbon cutting ceremony on the courthouse project. Ms. Bevan asked for some feedback from the board on the look and feel of what they want that ribbon cutting to look like. Ms. Brakey suggested that the guest list should include county elected officials, the City of Chardon, along with federal and state legislators. There was discussion about a walkthrough for the community for the taxpayers to see what they have spent money on, excluding the secure areas. Ms. Bevan added that she had been speaking with the officials and those from NV5 on how and what that would look like and hoped to have additional information soon.

Board of Developmental Disabilities Board appointment

Clerk Christine Blair just wanted to bring back before the board that the appointment to the Board of Developmental Disabilities needs to be made by next Tuesday in order to meet the ORC. Ms. Blair was looking for direction from the board on who that appointment would be. Ms. Brakey stated that she reviewed the applications and stated that she would like to appoint Ms. Rebecca Bennett. Mr. Dvorak agreed, and a motion was made and a second was made to appoint Rebecca Bennett. However, there was no vote, and the action will be put before the board next week to ensure proper motion language including the length of the term.

Easement with Cleveland Electric Illuminating Company at the Geauga County Airport

Mr. Dvorak explained that he had spoken with the County Prosecutor and several others, and it was recommended to approve the easement for the Illuminating Company. It was noted that the easement had not been received and that it was preferred to have the actual document before the Board for approval and execution. The Airport agreed that it would be in the timeframe if it was on the agenda for next week.

PUBLIC COMMENT

Newell Howard, South Russell Village, expressed that this was the 62nd year that John F. Kennedy was murdered in Dallas, Texas. Let's hope it never happens again. What I saw here today was confusion and that causes major confusion, let's get the acts together.

COMMISSIONERS' OFFICE – EXECUTIVE SESSION

Motion: by Commissioner Brakey, seconded by Commissioner Spidalieri to move into Executive Session for the purpose of discussing the compensation of public employees, pursuant to O.R.C. 121.22(G)(1).

<i>Roll Call Vote:</i>	<i>Commissioner Spidalieri</i>	<i>Aye</i>
	<i>Commissioner Brakey</i>	<i>Aye</i>
	<i>Commissioner Dvorak</i>	<i>Aye</i>

The Board moved into Executive Session at 11:05 a.m. with Ms. Bevan and Deputy County Administrator Mark Jimison. The Board returned at 11:31 a.m. and as a result, no action was

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taken.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

a) Geauga County Airport Authority – 3rd Quarter Report

OTHER

The Board reviewed upcoming events.

MEETINGS

Tue., 11/18 Geauga Trumbull Solid Waste Management District meeting scheduled, has been CANCELLED

Wed., 11/19 NOC COG Board meeting, 10:30 a.m. Geauga County Offices, Room A334

Tue., 11/25 Investment Advisory Committee, 9:00 a.m. Room B303, Chambers, County Office Building

Tue. 11/25 The Commissioners will hold session at 9:30 a.m.

Thu., 11/27 **County Offices will be closed for general business in observance of Thanksgiving Day. Twenty-four-hour operations will continue to operate as normal.**

Fri., 11/28 **County offices under the hiring authority of the Board of Commissioners will be closed for general business. Twenty-four-hour operations will continue to operate as usual.**

Tue., 12/2 The Commissioners will hold session at 9:30 a.m.

Wed., 12/3 – Fri., 12/5 CCAO Winter Conference, Columbus, Ohio

BEING NO FURTHER BUSINESS TO COME BEFORE THE BOARD

Motion: by Commissioner Dvorak, seconded by Commissioner Spidalieri to adjourn the meeting at 11:32 a.m.

Geauga County Board of Commissioners

James W. Dvorak

Carolyn Brakey, Esq.

Ralph Spidalieri

Christine Blair, Commissioners' Clerk

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