

Commissioners' Journal
March 2, 2026

The Geauga County Board of Commissioners met in special session on March 2, 2026, at 9:00 a.m. concurrently and in conjunction with the ADP Emergency Meeting, in the Auditor's Office, Appraisal Conference Room located at 231 Main Street, 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.

Frank Antenucci, on behalf of ADP, opened the Emergency meeting at 9:00 a.m. explaining that the meeting was being held concurrently with the Board of County Commissioners. The President of the Board, James W. Dvorak, opened the Commissioners' meeting at 9:02 a.m.

Roll call was taken by ADP, and it was noted that all three Commissioners were present and in attendance at the meeting.

It was explained that the meeting was being held to discuss the Petition for Representation Election – Employee Organization that was submitted to the Auditor on Friday, February 27, 2026.

Mr. Antenucci stated that they had received a petition for a representation election from the ADP employees a little after noon on Friday. He explained that a petition for a representation election means that a group of employees got together and filed paperwork with the state employment relations board asking for a formal election so the employees can vote on whether they want union representation. Mr. Antenucci stated that it was not automatic unionization. It was simply a legal trigger to begin the representation process.

In terms of certification of a collective bargaining agreement or union in Geauga County, it was not known the last time a new union was certified. The Sheriff's Office has an existing one, which is currently expired, and the Commissioners have one with the Department of Water Resources, which was re-certified effective January 1, 2026. For a majority of those in attendance, this was a new process, which was why ADP called an emergency meeting.

Auditor Chuck Walder explained that he had received an email on Friday. Initially, it was thought to be spam, but it was later determined not to be spam. The email had two components. One was a Notice of Appearance by an Attorney, Michelle R. Evans, associate general counsel, representing the American Federation of Labor and Congress of Industrial Organizations (AFL-CIO). The second email was the petition, which was date- and time-stamped February 21, 2026, at 9:28 a.m., from the same address. Initially, it was rerouted due to an incorrect email, and he received the second notification with a corrected email address. This was a legitimate notification of the ADP employees' desire to engage in conversation about the formation of a collective bargaining unit.

Prosecutor Jim Flaiz stated that they needed to be careful what they said in public and cautioned them accordingly. Mr. Flaiz stated that there had been ongoing conversations about compensation for these employees and he was not sure if the differential between the unionized Sheriff's Office IT employees and the ADP IT employees was driving this, but if they wished to discuss compensation, they needed to do it in executive session. There were only two active unions in the county, and his office did not handle union negotiations. He stated that the issue was sufficiently specialized that he recommended an HR consultant to manage the union-related portion.

Mr. Flaiz asked the Commissioners who their labor attorney was. Clerk Christine Blair noted that Water Resources has its own or had its own. It was noted that the Sheriff's Office uses Clemans Nelson. Mr. Flaiz noted that they could at the very least authorize Mr. Walder as the administrator of ADP to retain a union consultant. Several different firms were brought up as potential options, but Mr. Flaiz wanted some time to make a recommendation. It was discussed whether the hiring of the consultant needed to go before the Board, and what that process would look like, depending on what was needed.

Mr. Antenucci responded to a question about timing by stating that it would depend on what the employees did with the state. It was noted that there were twenty-one employees on the petition.

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Mr. Flaiz asked again about a conversation about compensation. Mr. Walder stated that he received correspondence between him and the ADP members. He stated that it was lengthy, that he felt the issue was not money, and that he did not want to put words in anyone's mouth.

The ADP Board voted on a motion by Mr. Flaiz, seconded by Treasurer Hitchcock, authorizing the ADP Administrator to retain an HR consultant to handle the union petition.

There was a brief discussion about the process and whether they needed to move forward, and it was suggested that they should retain a consultant so that the ADP Board could respond as necessary based on what might transpire.

A roll-call vote of the ADP Board was taken, and the motion carried.

It was noted that an executive session had not been advertised, so they could not move forward with one. ADP had one scheduled for its regular meeting on Thursday.

Commissioner Brakey asked whether Mr. Walder could discuss the letter from the ADP employees and whether there was anything he wanted to note. The letter was received on Friday after the initial notices were received.

Mr. Antenucci stated that ADP employee morale had been low for months, noting a recent resignation.

Mr. Walder said that they needed to be cautious about how they treated their employees and that actions had consequences.

Ms. Brakey commented that this was a reasonable and foreseeable step for ADP employees based on the circumstances outlined in the letter.

Sheriff Hildenbrand expressed that it was not necessarily a bad thing and that there were advantages of unionization. He noted that everything expected of employees was spelled out in the union contract, including when raises would occur.

Ms. Brakey expressed that she felt it was ultimately a bad thing for taxpayers. Mr. Flaiz stated that Water Resources employees just got larger pay increases, and then the Sheriff's Office would receive increases, adding that he felt this was a sign of poor leadership. Mr. Walder said that he had been researching why unions were formed and their history. He agreed that there was a discrepancy and felt they were moving in the right direction, but that they had failed to treat people with respect. He did not want a contract to tell him how to treat people.

There was a discussion about voting on a contract every four years and how they handled uncertainty. Ms. Brakey noted that there appeared to be some instability and that this was expressed in the letter. Mr. Antenucci said that he needed to determine how to interact with the employees and would appreciate some guidance on that from someone with expertise. Mr. Walder briefly stated that over the last few years there have been day-to-day events that they have had to deal with it and it probably is part of it. Mr. Antenucci stated that he planned to maintain the status quo as the short-term plan.

Commissioner Dvorak supported retaining a consultant or legal counsel, noting that all twenty-one signed the letter, and that there should be no conversation with the employees regarding this matter until they received guidance from an attorney.

Ms. Brakey stated that it was good for the Commissioners' Office to have budget scrutiny for every office and department, but there was an issue when certain offices and departments were singled out, and she felt that this had contributed in part to the situation.

ADP Agenda item #2 – Public Comment

Carol Benton, Geauga League of Women Voters, inquired whether the letter was a public record. It was noted that at this point, it was.

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The floor was opened to anyone who wanted to address the Commissioners rather than the ADP Board.

Anastasia Nicholas, Geauga Times Courier, asked if Commissioner Spidalieri had any comment, to which Commissioner Spidalieri stated that he had none.

BEING NO FURTHER BUSINESS TO COME BEFORE THE BOARD

Motion: by Commissioner Brakey, seconded by Commissioner Spidalieri to adjourn the meeting at 9:34 a.m.

Geauga County Board of Commissioners

James W. Dvorak

Carolyn Brakey, Esq.

Ralph Spidalieri

Christine Blair, Commissioners' Clerk

Mr. Antenucci entertained a motion from the ADP Board to adjourn.

Motion by Mr. Hitchcock, second by Mr. Walder, and roll call vote was taken and with a majority, adjourned at 9:34 a.m.

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