

August 12, 2026

Vote:	Bigrigg	yea
	Shryock	yea
	Fischer	yea

COMMISSIONER'S JOURNAL

Wednesday

Regular

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Kellie Hayden, Community Development Educator Introduction

At 9:30 a.m., Emily Marrison, Brett Kinzel, Jenni Stickler, and Kelli Hayden from OSU Extension met with the Commissioners to introduce Kelli and discuss her new role with the county. Kelli is taking over for Evelyn Morrison and is currently working with the Extension Office. She has already met with Mary and brings a background in K-12 administration. One of her primary areas of focus is the land-use planning and grant process. She is also working with nonprofit organizations throughout the county and Lynn Jacobs at OhioMeansJobs. At this time, there are three main areas of focus, with the highest priority being the land-use grant. Kelli would like the Commissioners to participate on the steering committee for the land-use grant and encouraged members to review the materials she distributed.

The first steering committee meeting is scheduled for August 24 at 5:30 p.m. The purpose of this meeting will be to discuss the work of the committee and identify the needs and priorities of the community. A countywide kickoff meeting is planned for August 31, which will involve additional community members. The goal of the project is to update the county's land-use plan, which was last completed in 2006. Following the kickoff, committees will likely be formed to address different areas of the plan. Community input will be an important part of the process, particularly in determining how residents would like land throughout the county to be used.

Leonard Hayhurst, Tribune discussed the value of updating the land-use plan, noting the significant changes that have occurred in the county since 2006. Commissioner Bigrigg also emphasized the expansion of industries and the importance of providing the public with an opportunity to offer input. Another consideration is the transformation and potential reuse of the former AEP coal-fired power plant. Commissioner Bigrigg noted that updating the plan is a necessary step in the overall process. The project has received a \$50,000 grant from the Ohio Department of Agriculture (ODA).

Commissioner Bigrigg asked how the August 31 kickoff meeting would be advertised. Kelli explained that she has been working with Mary and Tiffany Swigert, Port Authority to develop a list of potential steering committee members and will also promote the August 31 meeting. She noted that she is working diligently to get the project moving, particularly since she is only in her third week on the job.

Commissioner Shryock asked whether Kelli believed the grant would cover the cost of the project. Kelli explained that she is currently working with a couple of GIS companies and will work within the available grant budget. Commissioner Shryock noted that there have been significant changes throughout the county, including changes within the Amish community, with English-owned farms being divided and purchased by Amish families. The group discussed the importance of reaching out to the Amish community and including their perspectives in the planning process. One possibility would be to contact Rusty Dreher to obtain names of individuals who could be invited to participate.

Commissioner Bigrigg also raised the issue of zoning and the community's thoughts on the subject, noting that the county is currently not zoned. Without zoning, there is no means of preventing a business from locating in an area if it meets other applicable requirements. This issue could be considered as part of the land-use planning discussions.

The Commissioners welcomed Kelli and expressed their support for the project. Kelli noted that the land-use planning process must be completed by May 31, 2027.

DJFS Update

At 10:10 a.m., Jed McCoy and Denise Nelson both from The Department of Job and Family Services provided the Commissioners with an update on the Department of Job and Family Services (DJFS) and children in placement. The number of children in placement has increased to approximately 90, with DJFS recently taking custody of four additional children. With the start of the school year approaching, the department typically sees an increase in calls and reports. There has also been an increase in reports regarding unsafe or unsanitary home conditions, including an increase in calls after the Vinton County incident. Kinship placements and family foster care numbers have both increased.

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DJFS Update, Continued

DJFS recently held a foster care recruitment event, which was attended by four families. A Connect a Family worker is also in place and currently working while the department continues to wait for the associated grant funding. The worker's primary responsibility is to explore family and kinship placement options for each child. This position allows for additional search and engagement efforts that caseworkers may not have the capacity to complete themselves.

Foster care maintenance costs are currently approximately \$384,000. The department is uncertain what additional costs may arise while Jon Piper is out on medical leave. There is no specific trend in the types of cases being received, as they vary considerably; however, mental health continues to be the largest concern. Reports are down compared with the same period last year. The department also experienced issues with 4E reimbursements last month that they continue to work through.

Jed reported that rate cards are still being developed at the state level. There is a possibility that the county could recoup 4E reimbursements for up to two years. The 4E reimbursement process has continued to be challenging, although there has not been significant pushback from the federal level. The current 4E income formula is based on information from 1996, and there is a desire to have the formula updated at the federal level. Jed explained that when entities submit their cost reimbursements, it can delay DJFS reimbursements by several months. Commissioner Bigrigg commented that the potential to recoup the reimbursements was good news.

Denise, who serves as the intake supervisor, explained that her position is at the forefront of the department's incoming calls. The department is beginning to see more issues related to the cost of rent and the condition of rental properties. Staff are increasingly having to intervene to help families address poor housing conditions while also working with them to develop plans that will allow them to sustain their rent payments. Calls regarding housing conditions have increased, and mental health remains the biggest driver of cases. Denise also noted that domestic violence is at an all-time high compared with her years working at the department. Her office receives the initial calls, conducts home visits, and investigates the reported cases.

DJFS has limited funds available each month to assist families with rent, and individuals must be TANF-eligible to qualify for this assistance. Staff work with families to identify ways they can eventually sustain their rent payments independently. TANF is a federal program that provides funding for eligible families, allowing the department to use federal funds rather than local resources when possible.

With schools preparing to reopen, DJFS staff will visit local schools to provide education and guidance regarding what school personnel need to know when determining whether a case should be reported to the department. The goal is to ensure that school staff understand the reporting process and the circumstances that warrant a referral to DJFS.

Commissioner Shryock asked whether elderly residents are also experiencing difficulties with rent. Denise explained that Title XX funds are available to assist elderly individuals with certain needs. The group discussed the significant increase in rental prices throughout the county and the challenges this creates for families and individuals on limited incomes.

Denise also reported that the local error rate for public assistance is approximately 2%, compared with the statewide rate of 5.1%.

The department also discussed an upcoming local job fair scheduled for September. Approximately 30 employers are expected to participate.

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Jeff Ford, CEO Ohio's Responsible Fatherhood Initiative-via Zoom

Jeff Ford, CEO of ManUp and Stephanie Shermeta, COO of ManUp with the organization, met with the Commissioners to introduce themselves and provide an overview of their work. Their organization has been awarded contracts in Holmes and Coshocton counties through the Ohio Responsible Fatherhood Initiative. They applied to provide services in additional counties but were awarded contracts in only these two. Their goal is to increase father engagement and strengthen relationships between fathers and their families through the ManUp program. The organization has worked extensively with the Ohio State Buckeyes football program, churches, and other community organizations to address the effects of fatherlessness. The initiative is based on a successful plan developed in Florida and is being adapted for use in Ohio. Similar work is also being conducted in Missouri, Iowa, Texas, and Florida. The organization works closely with local governments and community partners.

Jeff explained that they want to learn as much as possible about Coshocton County and understand how they can best use the available funding to engage fathers in the community. He noted that they want to connect with local organizations and individuals who can help them understand the community and identify the best ways to serve local families. They are particularly interested in helping fathers reunify with their children when appropriate, preserve existing family relationships, and assist families experiencing a crisis. They also want to support efforts to keep children out of foster care and promote kindergarten readiness. Jeff asked the Commissioners who they should partner with and who would be most helpful in understanding the needs of fathers and families in Coshocton County.

Commissioner Bigrigg introduced Jeff and Stephanie to everyone in the room and discussed several potential community contacts. Commissioner Shryock recommended that they connect with William Johnson, who leads the local fatherhood initiative and rents office space in one of the county buildings. Commissioner Shryock noted that education and other community resources have been used in Mr. Johnson's efforts and encouraged Jeff and Stephanie to reach out to him. Commissioner Bigrigg agreed, stating that William is very committed to the local fatherhood group, regularly holds events, and takes children to community activities. He also has a strong understanding of what is happening in Coshocton County. Commissioner Shryock added that several local churches have also been holding fatherhood-related events and that Jed at DJFS has a strong understanding of the community and its needs.

The group discussed substance abuse among fathers and how it can negatively affect their ability to prioritize and care for their children. Jeff explained that substance abuse, housing, transportation, and workforce issues are some of the most common barriers facing fathers. The organization is focused on addressing these barriers and helping fathers connect with the resources they need. Commissioner Shryock noted that he does not believe transportation is a significant barrier in the community, while there are many employment opportunities available for individuals who are willing and able to work. He also noted that some local factories have more relaxed drug-testing policies. Housing, however, continues to be a significant concern, as the cost of housing has increased substantially throughout the county and finding quality, affordable housing can be difficult. Housing development projects are still in the early stages, including an affordable housing program being developed within the city through the Federal Home Loan Bank (FHLB).

Jeff explained that fathers often are not aware of all the resources available within their communities, which can add stress to an already difficult situation. The program serves as an advocate for fathers and works to help them reconnect with their children when possible. The program is voluntary and focuses on understanding each individual father, identifying his needs, and connecting him with appropriate resources in the community. Jeff noted that there are numerous employment opportunities in Coshocton County and that many local employers continue to seek workers.

The organization has already reached out to William Johnson, who recommended that they also contact Nathan Berry. A meeting with Nathan is scheduled for a future date. Jeff emphasized that strong community partnerships are essential for this type of initiative to succeed. The organization plans to hire a fatherhood engagement specialist and may hire one or two additional staff members. They are also looking for office space to rent and asked whether the county might have available space.

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Commissioner Bigrigg recommended that they contact Jon Strasser, director of Fellowship of Christian Athletes, noting that Amy Crown had also provided his name. Commissioner Fischer provided contact information for Mr. Strasser. Commissioner Bigrigg and the group agreed that Jon could be a valuable connection because of his involvement with youth and housing in the community. The organization also has connections with Ohio State University, including former team members who are involved with their program. Jeff mentioned the possibility of organizing a community rally or event to elevate awareness of fatherhood and encourage greater community involvement.

The group discussed the underlying causes of some of the challenges facing fathers, including substance abuse and the lack of strong positive influences within the home. The organization hopes to address these issues by strengthening fathers' connections with their children, families, and community resources.

Stephanie emphasized the organization's strong commitment to collaboration and teamwork. She explained that they want to become part of the community team and work alongside both nonprofit and for-profit organizations. They value the knowledge, experience, and expertise of local community partners and want to learn from those already serving families in Coshocton County. Their goal is to serve families with excellence while approaching the work with humility. Stephanie stated that they strive to listen and understand the community before determining how best to provide services.

Commissioner Bigrigg encouraged Jeff and Stephanie to follow up with the individuals who were recommended, explaining that these contacts would help them better understand the community and the people who are committed to serving it. He noted that the individuals mentioned have strong moral character and are dedicated to the work they do.

The Responsible Fatherhood Initiative is funded through a two-year grant that began last year and is scheduled to run through the end of June 2027. The organization hopes to demonstrate enough success and community impact to secure continued funding for another two years. The group was asked whether the current funding could be used to assist children who have lost their fathers. Jeff explained that this is not currently an eligible use of the grant funding.

Jeff and Stephanie thanked the Commissioners for the opportunity to introduce themselves and learn more about the community. The Commissioners welcomed the organization and expressed their willingness to serve as a resource and help make connections as the Responsible Fatherhood Initiative gets established in Coshocton County.

Updates, Mary Beck, Coshocton County Administrator/Project Manager

Mary Beck provided the Commissioners with updates on several projects and upcoming initiatives. She reported that the funds being returned from SKIP's Landing project will be used to address drainage issues in the area, particularly the standing water near the playground. Plans are also underway to improve the wildflower flats by using a combination of seeds and plugs to encourage growth. This project will be a collaborative effort between Coshocton in Bloom and the Coshocton Soil and Water Conservation District.

Commissioner Bigrigg noted that he had observed standing water in one of the farmers market areas. Mary said she had noticed the same issue and explained that, when rain blows into the area, the water tends to collect in one location. The second set of restrooms are nearing completion, with Wagner's completing the work. Commissioner Shryock suggested that drilling a small, pencil-sized hole through the concrete might provide a way for the water to drain from the farmers market area. Mary will look into the possibility.

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Updates, Mary Beck, Coshocton County Administrator/Project Manager, continued

Mary also reported that she received a call from Dorothy Skowrunski regarding the submission of Commissioner projects for consideration for a national America in Bloom award. SKIP's Landing and the Veterans Memorial will be submitted for consideration.

Mary noted that a Power House Cruise-In meeting is scheduled for later today. She also discussed the possibility of combining the Courthouse Lights and Ice Rink under one organization. The Commissioners expressed their support for combining the two entities.

Finally, Mary and Val Shaw, CPT Director are scheduled to meet with Crystal at ODOT next week to discuss the awarded grant funding for the CPT building.

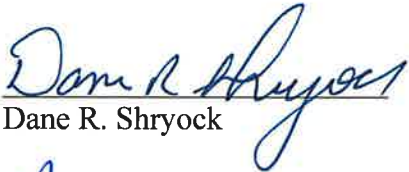
Meetings Attended

Commissioner Bigrigg reported that he attended the Friends of the Park meeting on Monday. He would like to see coordinated, reciprocal signage installed at both SKIP's Landing and Lake Park. The signage would direct visitors to both locations and include markers identifying and pointing toward each area. The goal is to create consistent signage that promotes both parks and makes it easier for visitors to locate each destination.

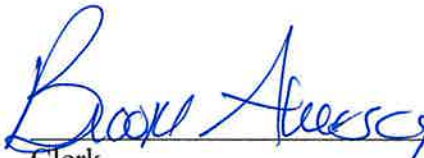
Adjourn

Mr. Bigrigg adjourned the meeting at 12:00 p.m.


Robert W. Bigrigg


Dane R. Shryock


Gary L. Fischer


Clerk