



Summer Caucuses with State Lawmakers

County Caucus

Wednesday, August 4, 2021

Call to Order/Welcome – The County Caucus met virtually on Wednesday, August 4, 2021, at 10:30 a.m. via GoToMeeting. Mark Stahl, Ottawa County commissioner and caucus facilitator, called the meeting to order and welcomed everyone present.

TMACOG members in attendance included:

- Laurie Adams, Managing Principal, DGL Consulting Engineers, LLC
- Carlos Baez, County Engineer, Sandusky County Engineer's Office
- Lori Brodie, Northwest Regional Liaison, Office of Ohio Auditor Keith Faber
- Mark Coppeler, Commissioner, Ottawa County
- Kelly Frey, Sanitary Engineer, Ottawa County Sanitary Engineering Department
- Adam Greenslade, Mayor, Village of Green Springs and Dir. of Govt. Affairs and MarCom, Ohio Turnpike and Infrastructure Commission
- Sarah Helbig, Executive Director of Marketing, Jones & Henry Engineers, Ltd.
- Kelly Hemminger, Zoning Administrator, Township of Perrysburg
- Ron Lajti, County Engineer, Ottawa County Engineer's Office
- Sean Smith, Development and Equity Officer, TARTA
- Mark Stahl, Commissioner, Ottawa County and Chair, TMACOG
- Tim Suter, Regional External Affairs, Toledo Edison/FirstEnergy

Non-TMACOG members in attendance included:

- Kristy Dutton, Sales and Marketing Coordinator, Corporate Intelligence Consultants
- Ohio Sen. Theresa Gavarone, 2nd District
- Christa Luttmann, Northwest Regional Liaison, Office of Ohio Governor Mike DeWine
- Erica Krause, Northwest Ohio Regional Representative, Office of U.S. Senator Sherrod Brown
- Tim Porter, Chair, Northwest Ohio Passenger Rail Association and Chair, TMACOG Passenger Rail Committee
- Ohio Rep. Mike Sheehy, 46th District

TMACOG support staff in attendance included:

- Jennifer Allen, Executive Assistant
- Alex Aspacher, Public Information Specialist
- Marissa Bechstein, Transportation Planner
- William Best, Vice President of Finance and Administration
- Tim Brown, President
- David Gedeon, Vice President of Transportation
- Kari Gerwin, Director of Water Quality Planning
- Sara Guiher, Water Quality Planner

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- Matthew Kennedy, Water Quality Planner
- Gilda Michell, Director of Membership and Outreach
- Nate Reiter, Accountant
- Michael Tippett, Director of Communications

Overview of Meeting – Discussion of Issues - The following topics were discussed by the caucus:

- **Ohio Water and Sewer Rotary Loan Program**

- The purpose of program is to provide no interest loans to governments for AG land assessment deferrals relating to water/sewer projects. Programs primary benefit is to provide gap funding for deferred agricultural lands that would then allow development to occur while protecting farmland.

Kelly Frey, Ottawa County Sanitary Engineer, discussed his role in Ottawa County and the role of managing water and wastewater as it relates to Lake Erie. The program was disbanded about 10 years ago under the Kasich administration but established before 1980. The goal is to loan to a county to offset agricultural assessment deferrals, then the fund is paid back to the state once the agricultural land is developed. Ottawa County is advocating for reinstitution. Funding often makes a project unaffordable without the loan offset and previously \$1.4 million was used for projects ranging from 20k to 999k. The county is looking for letters from TMACOG and county officials for support. Previously a commission ordered projects and met every six months to one year. The annual collection from areas that were developed was back into system for loans. There are also issues with land that was developed, but now there isn't anywhere to send deferred money since the fund no longer exists.

- **House Bill 168**

- This is a \$250 million water and sewer project program. The County Engineers Association of Ohio and Department of Development is working on structure details. Deadlines are quickly approaching.

Ron Lajti, Ottawa County Engineer, discussed the issues with the program. He is concerned that since there is no date of application or timeframe of funding for projects, are the funds first come first serve until the funding runs out? There is need for deadlines for project, priority list, and determination of funding. However, county engineers aren't as involved with water and sewer projects. The county would like the Ohio Department of Development to release guidance and details. Kelly Frey, Ottawa County Sanitary Engineer, said requests for projects have a deadline for Friday, August 6 and is concerned about the compressed schedule. Concerns were raised about construction deadlines. He also mentioned that he thinks the goal was to leave it to the local county engineers' offices to know what's best for their given communities. It's hard to determine priorities until all projects are submitted. Some communities may not have shovel-ready projects on a list, so it could be part of the reason for requiring proposed projects be routed through county engineers to help with prioritization.

Carlos Baez, Sandusky County Engineer, noted that scoring for prioritization is needed by county engineers, but projects can be submitted before August 27. The county engineers didn't receive guidelines on how to prioritize, outside of a scoring

sheet, but engineers are making their own. Concerns were raised about how each county may be different and not having enough time for going through subcommittees.

Erica Krause, Northwest Ohio Regional Representative from the office of U.S. Senator Sherrod Brown, noted that infrastructure funding is being debated and worked on with a hope of passing before senate recess later this week. Senator Brown is focused on a requirement to purchase and utilize bridge and road materials that are made in the U.S. with priorities in the Bridge Investment Act for addressing highest need bridge repair and replacement. Another bill could address family care funding. They are also working on economic development grants and funds from the CARES Act and American Rescue Plan. Senator Brown is happy to provide letters of support for any local projects. Their office can also provide support on the use of ARPA money.

- **COVID-19 impacts, best practices, etc.**

- There were no updates from members.

- **Teleconference authority ended by Ohio legislature**

- Ohio Reps. Lisa Sobecki and Jim Hoops are the sponsors of legislation granting permanent permissive authority pending in the Ohio House of Representatives. Ohio Sen. Theresa Gavarone stated that a bill has been introduced to extend authority, but says concerns were raised and she isn't sure what is happening in the Ohio House of Representatives. Ohio Rep. Mike Sheehy said that they had more support early on in pandemic, but support has waned, and it's uncertain now what will happen. The bill has bipartisan support, so it may get through the House, but he doesn't know where the Governor or Senate stand on the issue.

TMACOG President Tim Brown pointed out that the legislature granted university boards of trustees the authority to meet and govern via teleconference. He would like to see multi-jurisdictional boards like TMACOG's Board of Trustees to also have permissive authority to meet from time-to-time utilizing teleconference authority. Remote authority is useful to TMACOG because it has resulted in higher attendance at meetings and can help with getting more people involved, as it removes long commutes to the office for many members. TMACOG has 44 elected board members from throughout the region. Sarah Helbig said that when working across states and multiple groups, being able to meet via teleconference can be helpful with reducing costs and travel time for businesses. Support for having continued teleconference authority was also echoed by the county engineers.

- **Michigan/Ohio Bills addressing long term financing of Lake Erie Water Quality Initiatives. (H2Ohio program in Ohio.) Maintaining funding to effectuate Lake Erie/Watershed Algae Reductions is imperative. How it all fits with TMACOG's Agenda for Lake Erie and Ohio's stated Goal of achieving a 40% phosphorus reduction. Increasing water levels in Lake Erie – updates?**

- Kelly Frey discussed the importance of the lake and gave an overview of some of the issues. Some of these include microcystin levels are always of concern and Ottawa County has not seen a reduction in levels. He also expressed concern that getting the lake cleaned up is taking longer than they thought. He mentioned the

need for getting a total maximum daily load (TMDL) requirement for nutrients, regulations for the Maumee River watershed implemented, and determining what methods will have the largest impact. Rep. Sheehy discussed working to focus with H2Ohio on collecting sediments using best practice methods and how programs so far are not enough and may need additional regulatory enforcement. He also raised concerns with concentrated animal feeding operations (CAFOs), where animal units in the Maumee River watershed region have increased dramatically. He is organizing meetings with groups later this month to evaluate goals and best practices. Sen. Gavarone stated that the lake didn't get this way overnight, so we need a focus on how this will take time. She introduced a bond issue for long-term funding over 10 years for water quality projects. These funds would not be divertible to address other issues. She also mentioned that H2Ohio funding doubled last biennium and referenced the introduction of a House bill that would increase fines for communities that dump raw sewage. Ron Lajti agreed and stated the need to determine TMDL goals through research. He also expressed concerns about ensuring that H2Ohio funds are being properly managed and implemented for best outcomes.

- **Opiate/heroin drug epidemic impacts**

- Sen. Gavarone mentioned legislation to increase drug trafficking penalties if it occurs within 500 feet of a rehab center. There are pushers targeting people in rehab and joining rehab to get close to individuals seeking to recover. She has also advocated to make it a criminal offence to use fake urine (or someone else's) during a drug screen. Erica Krause mentioned that fentanyl is contributing to overdose deaths.

- **Michigan/Ohio state general operating budgets, issues for discussion**

- Sen. Gavarone outlined education/school funding changes, fair school funding plan, funding for maritime assistance programs, income tax reduction, and tax incentives for qualifying business development investments.

What legislative action might be helpful? – Sen. Gavarone thanked everyone and shared information her staff assembled in response to the water and sewer rotary fund questions.

New Business / Next Steps – There was no other business or next steps discussed.

Adjourn – Commissioner Stahl thanked everyone for participating in the County Caucus. The meeting was adjourned at noon.