

# WEEKLY REVIEW

BENTON COUNTY BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS  
April 14, 2020



*This document is a weekly review of the Board of County Commissioners meeting, Tuesday, April 14, 2020. Information related to agenda changes, Consent Agenda, and Public Comment are on the [County website](#).*

## Main Topics Discussed

### *Benton County Newspaper Bid – Matt Rasmussen, Deputy County Administrator*

The Benton County Commissioners conducted the bid opening for the official county newspaper. Pursuant to [RCW 36.72.075](#), the County shall seek bids annually for services for the official county newspaper. The Clerk to the Board is required to publish notice and notify local publications. At the time of the meeting, two bids were received from the Tri-City Herald and the Prosser Record-Bulletin. **The Board gave direction to staff to review the received bids and provide a recommendation to the Board at a later date for decision.**

### *Families First Coronavirus Response Act (FFCRA) Policy – Lexi Wingfield, HR Manager & Stephen Hallstrom, Civil Deputy Prosecuting Attorney*

The HR Manager and Civil Deputy Prosecuting Attorney presented to the Board a resolution to approve the Families First Coronavirus Response Act Policy. This policy provides County employees protected leave and paid leave benefits for certain absences arising from the COVID-19 outbreak, in accordance with the federal Families First Coronavirus Response Act (FFCRA). This policy will be administered in accordance with the FFCRA and forthcoming federal regulations and guidance. **The Board moved and seconded to approve the resolution adopting the Benton County Families First Coronavirus Response Act Policy as presented. Motion carried.**

### *Benton County Emergency Declaration Continued Discussion – Jerrod MacPherson, County Administrator & Matt Rasmussen, Deputy County Administrator*

In response to the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic the Board of County Commissioners declared a County wide emergency on March 17, 2020 (Resolution 2020-258). In that Resolution the Board granted authority to individual elected officials and the County Administrator to use tele-commuting and/or paid administrative leave for employees who were deemed to not be essential for working at the County facilities. The initial authority was granted until April 6, 2020 and was extended until April 12, 2020 or until the end of the Governors "Stay at Home" order. The "Stay at Home" order was extended until May 5, 2020 by the Governor which automatically extended the authority.

Effective April 1, 2020 the federal government mandated that employers provide paid leave banks for employees impacted by COVID-19, through the Families First Coronavirus Response Act (FFCRA). One leave bank provides 80 hours of paid sick leave for all employees. The other bank is similar to FMLA but only provides 2/3 pay. The County is implementing these leave banks in accordance with the federal regulations and guidance.

However, with the option to put employees on paid administrative leave still available, no one is requesting to use these federal leave banks. Given that the County must pay salaries in either case, it appears to be advantageous to encourage employees to use the mandated federal leave banks rather than be on paid administrative leave.

Effective April 20, 2020 at 6:00 AM it is proposed that the authority to utilize paid administrative leave be rescinded and that employees be encouraged to use the mandated leave, or if they choose, use their own accrued leave banks, subject to supervisor approvals.

This is timed to allow up to full use of the 80-hour leave bank, which provides 100% pay during a statewide quarantine order, prior to the expected expiration of the “stay at home” order at the end of the day May 4, 2020. The impacts to employees should be minimal as only one workday would be outside of the available leave. Employees who used the entire 80 hours of emergency leave would have to utilize their own leave banks for that day. At this time, the fiscal impact is unknown and depends on how many employees utilize the leave banks available.

The Board moved and seconded to approve the second amendment to Resolution 2020-258, declaration of emergency in Benton County, and extend the dates granting authority to adjust office hours effective March 18, 2020 through May 4, 2020 and approve tele-commuting options and use of available leave for the period April 20, 2020 at 6:00 AM through May 5, 2020 at 6:00 AM. Motion carried.

*Other Business: Letter in Support of Home Builder’s Association*

Commissioner Delvin brought forth a letter addressed to Governor Inslee in support of the Home Builder’s Association’s request to suspend the moratorium on construction during the COVID-19 pandemic. Construction is an essential service which provides housing to our community, which needs affordable housing and single-family residences. The County has received assurances from the Home Builder’s Association and the development community of their ability to maintain safe social distancing practices while continuing to provide construction services for the community. **The Board moved and seconded to approve the letter as presented. Motion carried.**

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