



# 2020 Year in Review

**Seneca County Board of Commissioners**

Commissioners Mike Kerschner, Anthony Paradiso and Tyler Shuff

# Three themes entering 2020

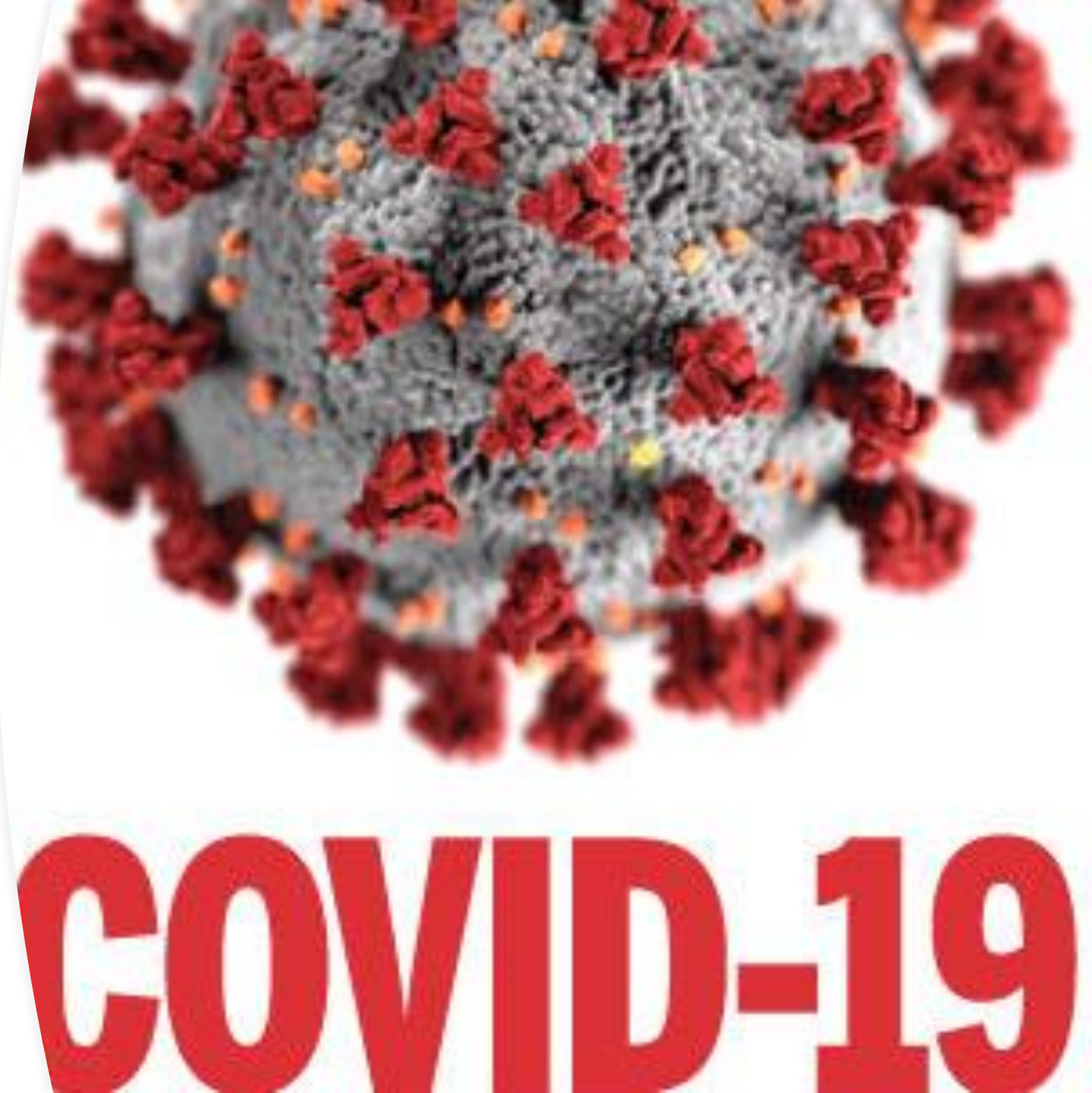
- **“The three C’s”**
  - **Continuity**
    - Don’t re-invent the wheel, the people and the systems are in place.
  - **Collaboration**
    - We may not have a direct policy lever, but we can work together to find a solution to the issues brought before us.
  - **Communication**
    - Acting as a bridge between institutions, agencies and individuals.
    - Focusing on teamwork and effective communication.
    - Remaining committed to being transparent and accessible to our constituents.





# A major curveball

- While the board entered the year with a focus on the “Three C’s” ... a fourth “C” emerged and became a defining factor ... COVID-19.
- Many times, we say, “this isn’t our first rodeo.” For a global pandemic, it *actually* was our first rodeo.
- On March 26<sup>th</sup>, the commissioners approved a state of emergency due to the health crisis.
- This led to online meetings and the eventual expenditure of millions in federal funding.

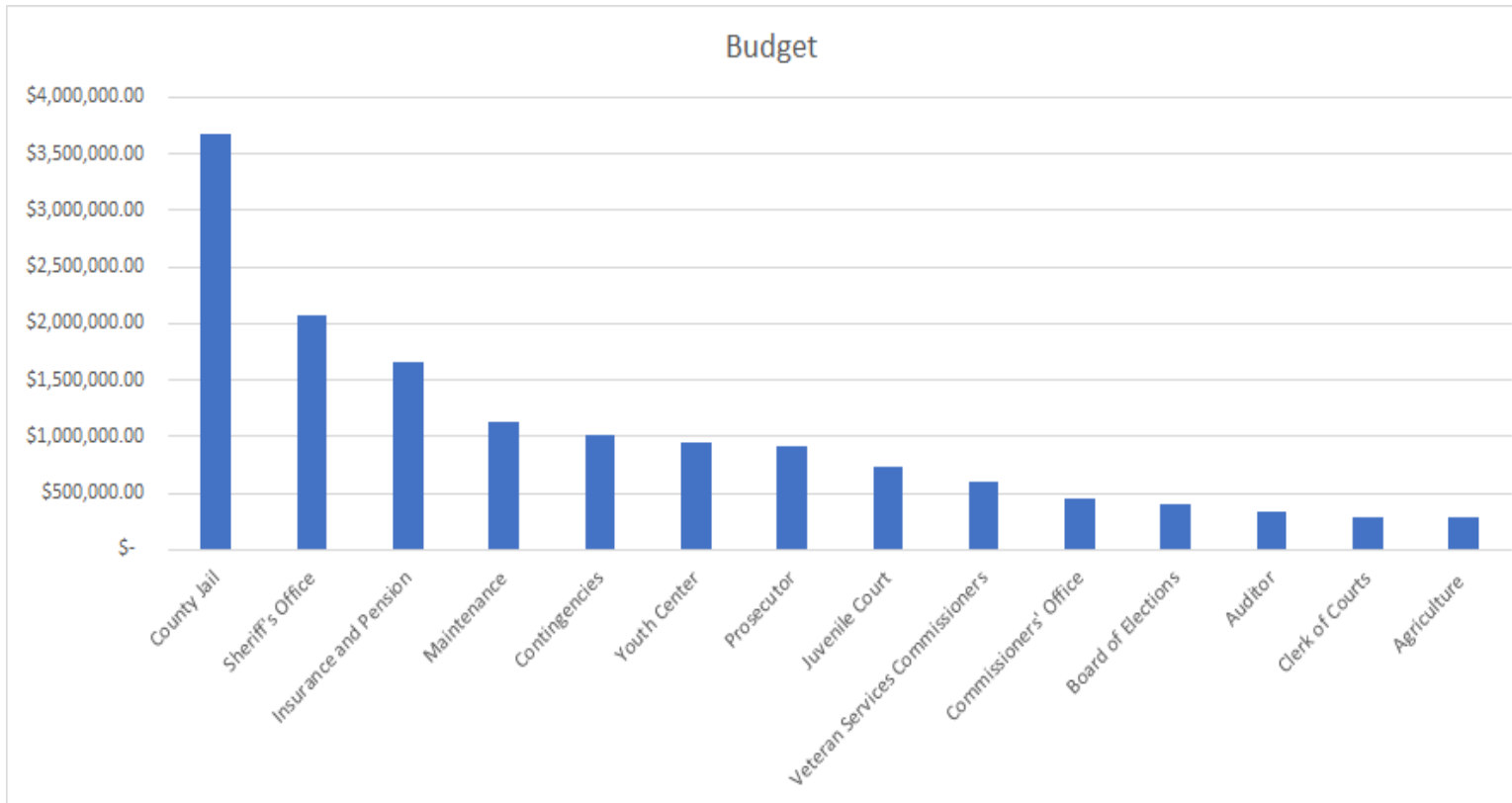




# Continuity

- Fiscal Responsibility and continued investment in vital county services.
- Support of the teams and systems already in place ... We don't need to re-invent the wheel; we already have talented and dedicated people in the right positions.
- A focus on planning.

# Fiscal responsibility and internal investment



*Chart includes the top 14 areas of the 2021 General Fund budget.*

- On January 9<sup>th</sup>, the commissioners added \$125,000 to the Budget Stabilization Fund, bringing the total in the fund to \$625,000.
- On December 22<sup>nd</sup>, the board approved a balanced General Fund budget, with expenses at just under \$17.9 million. The budget was approved after the Budget Commission certified revenue for \$18 million in '21.
- Several projects completed internally, including the installation of security cameras at the Seneca County Museum, a new bus for the Seneca County Opportunity Center, advanced funding for new vehicles for Seneca County Department of Job and Family Services and land acquisition and upgrades at the Seneca County Airport.

# Support of the teams and systems in place

- On Dec. 29, the commissioners congratulated Seneca County Engineer Mark Zimmerman for being chosen as Ohio's County Engineer of the year in 2020.
- In May, a representative from Secretary of State Frank LaRose's office praised the Seneca County Board of Elections for its "stunning work" in upgrading its cybersecurity measures.
- Seneca County Clerk of Court office received a \$202,000 technology grant to upgrade the court's case management system.
- Working closely with county offices in dealing with the pandemic.





## COUNTY PROPERTY ORIENTATION MAP



# “Plan your work and work your plan”

- **In July, the board finalized the Facilities Master Plan. The plan inventoried all county-owned buildings and outlined potential futures for them.**
  - Partnered with Gossman Group on the plan, with work beginning in January 2019.
- **In August, the board reviewed and accepted the countywide comprehensive plan**
  - The \$120,000 plan began development in March 2018. It includes strategies for housing, commercial and industrial development, education, transportation, parks and recreation and arts and culture.
  - With more than 150 strategies, the plan includes individual sections for all participants (the county, the city of Tiffin, Fostoria Economic Development Corp. and the Seneca County Park District.)
- **If you don't know where you're going, any road will get you there. These plans will help provide a road map for current and future leaders.**



# Collaboration

- Creating a business-friendly environment while incentivizing economic growth & collaborating to help those in need
- Working with partner agencies to more efficiently provide essential services
- Advocacy on local issues via legislators at the state and federal level to bring resources to Seneca County





## Partnering with the business community

- In February, the commissioners approved local tax incentives for a \$38 million Church and Dwight expansion project.
- Throughout the year, the board continued its work with Tiffin-Seneca Economic Partnership and Fostoria Economic Development Corp. to incentivize economic growth in the community.
- Seneca County Land Bank partnered with Sunny Farms Landfill to save thousands of dollars by accepting demolition debris from the former Ruffing Care Center on CR 6.
- Generous donations from National Machinery, Church and Dwight and many others to provide aid during the pandemic.

# Partnering with county agencies

- Running another successful dog picture coloring contest with the auditor's office and dog warden's office. *(In the picture is Dalton Coppus, the winner of the contest).*
- In February, the commissioners increased the indigent defense rate for attorneys to \$60 an hour, matching the rate of many neighboring counties.
- With the aid of Seneca Regional Planning Commission, Community Development Block Grant projects moved forward, leading to about \$105,000 in community enhancements. Upgrades to sidewalks in Bloomville, a homelessness prevention project and improvements to the park in Melmore were included.
- Work continued at the Attica Area Veterans Memorial Park. The park is located at the former site of the Attica Eagles.
- Playing a small part in facilitating the \$2.4-million community kitchen project with Old Trinity Episcopal Church.
- Working with the Barnes-Deinzer Seneca County Museum Foundation to re-open the museum in 2021.
- Work with Seneca County EMA to approve a multi-hazard mitigation plan, making the county eligible for federal funding.





# State and Federal legislative advocacy

- Worked with multiple local entities to advocate for state capital budget funding for several projects. These efforts yielded about \$200,000 for the Opportunity Park Project.
  - Worked closely with Eden Township, city of Tiffin, Seneca County Opportunity Center and the Seneca County General Health District to receive funding.
  - The project will greatly enhance the county's only park for those with special needs.
  - The upgrades could also satisfy an important portion of the county's active transportation plan. The park could help provide a safe pathway to cross US 224.
- Continued contact with state and federal government officials, including regular conference calls and several visits.







# Communication

- Megaphone function ... using our platform to amplify the voices of those in our community
- Celebrating the achievements of individuals and organizations
- Using all the tools at our disposal to be as transparent and as accessible as possible



# Amplifying the voices of our citizens

- The board approved a resolution affirming its steadfast support for the Second Amendment, in response to request from Ohio Stands United.
  - The non-binding, symbolic gesture sent a strong message to state and federal lawmakers that the county opposed any restriction on the rights guaranteed by the Constitution.
- In January, in response to pleas from citizens, the board penned a letter to the Ohio Department of Transportation, leading to a traffic study of the dangerous intersection at US 224 and SR 67.
- Several meetings were held to open the lines of communication on the future of Seneca County EMS. In 2014, SCEMS had 140 volunteers, in 2020, that roster had dwindled to 74 (with about 40 going on runs last year). The commissioners are aiming to work with local EMS leaders to find a way to supplement the remaining volunteers and to provide the best, most efficient EMS services possible.



# Celebrating our local institutions and people

- In 2020, we thanked many groups, including local educators, school counselors and school therapy dogs.
- We shouted out Corbin Hite, who was the first Tiffin Columbian student to qualify for the International Science Fair.
- We gave recognition to Andrew Steinmetz, of Troop 442 out of Republic, for becoming an Eagle Scout.
- We cheered as the Calvert Volleyball team won its second state championship in the past few years, and also recorded a video to honor them.





# A focus on transparency, accessibility

- In 2020, we aimed to lead the state in transparency and accessibility.
- We believe we accomplished this by hosting online election coverage, helping the Seneca County General Health District to host live video press conferences and COVID-19 briefings and by improving our website and social media offerings.
- Live video coverage during the primary and general elections in 2020 garnered nearly 20,000 views.
- A silver lining of a difficult year was the ability for people to watch our meetings on their cell phone, computer or tablet at home. This led to thousands of people witnessing county business at the source. We plan to continue offering this service even as we begin to meet in-person again.
- Seneca County Commissioner Anthony Paradiso hosted the second Coffee with a Commissioner event in Fostoria in February.





## COVID-19

- Although COVID-19 created many challenges in 2020, it also displayed how effective the “Three C’s” could be.
  - Continuity, Collaboration and Communication were even more important as we navigated a global pandemic.
- Making careful budgetary decisions in a time of uncertainty
- Facing great adversity, and adapting to overcome difficult circumstances ... managing CARES Act programs



# The Three C's during COVID-19

- Looking back at 2020, from March on, nearly everything that occurred was affected in some way by COVID-19.
- **Continuity**
  - We continued to lean on our team and our people.
- **Collaboration**
  - We worked internally and externally to navigate the pandemic together.
- **Communication**
  - Effective communication has been paramount during this health crisis, and we worked with other county agencies to spread the word as effectively as possible. Our office used press releases, audio, video and partnerships with media agencies to keep our citizens informed.







# **Making careful budgetary decisions during COVID-19**

- On April 7, the Seneca County Budget commission cut its General Fund revenue estimate by \$2 million. By April 23<sup>rd</sup>, the commissioners made 20-percent reductions to salary/wage lines and cut contracts, travel and half of supply lines.
- The county launched a Shared Work program to assist those who had hours cut or lost their job because of the difficult financial situation.
- Decisive decision-making, following the lead of the state government, helped protect the county's economic situation during a very uncertain time.



## CARES Act overview

- In all, the county received nearly \$3.5 million in Federal CARES Act funding to help deal with the health crisis.
- Some money was used internally to help manage the pandemic. Expenditures included deep cleaning, investment in personal protective equipment, digital thermometer scanners, automatic doors, remote work equipment, refrigerators and a generator for vaccine storage and emergency radio equipment.
- The board also committed \$1.25 million to assist small businesses, residents and nonprofits. The commissioners partnered with Great Lakes Community Action Partnership, Tiffin-Seneca Economic Partnership, Fostoria Economic Development Corp., Tiffin-Seneca United Way and Seneca County Department of Job and Family Services to disburse the funds. With additional money from townships, villages and Tiffin and Fostoria, about \$1.5 million was expended through the county's CARES program alone.
- **In Seneca County, 199 small businesses and non-profit organizations and 493 households received assistance through the Seneca CARES program.**

# Assistance for small businesses, people and nonprofits

- **Great Lakes Community Action Partnership**
  - Assisted 287 households with rent, mortgage, water/sewer payments.
- **Tiffin-Seneca Economic Partnership**
  - Assisted 186 small businesses with \$846,146 in funding.
- **Fostoria Economic Development Corp.**
  - Assisted 13 businesses and nonprofits within the Seneca County portion of Fostoria for a total of \$109,000. Also helped 13 others through the city of Fostoria's program, totaling \$116,569 in expenditures.
- **Tiffin-Seneca United Way**
  - Assisted 92 households with utility bills, mortgage and rent payments and property taxes.
- **Seneca County Department of Job and Family Services**
  - Assisted 114 households by distributing \$92,240.14 to assist with car, utility and mortgage/rent payments.



# 2021 Outlook

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- Welcoming new elected officials, Commissioner Tyler Shuff and Sheriff Fred Stevens.
- Supporting the voices of our residents, through advocacy for Ohio Senate Bill 52, the “Reineke Referendum.”
- A sustained focus on continuity, collaboration and communication.
- Online meetings and a hybrid focus, as COVID-19 cases continue to decline.
- Continued work on strategic plan

