

# County officials huddle on COVID relief spending

Posted By: [Fred Swift](#) April 24, 2021

*“Essential workers” to benefit . . .*

**By FRED SWIFT**

Having more money than you know what to do with is usually not a problem for most folks. But, local government is, in a sense, facing that problem.

With American Rescue Plan funds on the way to Hamilton County, officials must decide where they can spend their \$65.5 million windfall. County commissioners and county council members met Friday on the matter.

Hamilton County government did not suffer financially to a great extent because of the pandemic. The money is supposed to be spent to compensate local government for losses suffered in the past year.

The first decision by county officials was extra pay for employees who faced health risks and may have lost out on benefits due to a cautious approach to budget-making last year in the face of the rising health crisis.

Since any bonus pay to “essential” employees must be made by May 27, the matter was put to a vote at Friday’s meeting. Each employee will receive \$3,000 at a rate not to exceed \$13 per hour for the period of March 16, 2020 to April 30, 2021.

Yet to be faced are three other areas where the COVID relief money can be spent. This includes somehow reimbursing various county departments for lost revenue in Local Income Taxes, food and beverage tax revenue, lost gas tax monies, lost receipts at county parks and fairgrounds, and tourism revenue not collected.

These losses are believed to amount to about \$6 million.

A third use of the grant funds will go to drainage projects and extension of broadband service for certain locations as outlined in the federal act.

And, lastly grants from the county’s money may be given to non-profit organizations within the county and small businesses to replace lost revenue.

All this would seem to total little more than half the \$65.5 million which starts becoming available to the county on May 11.

Unfortunately for Hamilton County, federal restrictions prohibit using the relief funds for capital projects such as buildings, highways and bridges.

So, for what else can be money be spent?