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Delaware County has set April 6 as the date it will return the operations of the George W. Hill Correctional Facility to public control.

“We are in the process of hiring correctional officers at George W. Hill to become county staff members,” county Executive Director Howard Lazarus said at Wednesday’s county council meeting. “The date that the county takes on operational responsibility is April 6. So things are starting to move quickly and time is starting to compress.” In September, the county Jail Oversight Board voted 6-2 to terminate the contract with GEO Group Inc., which was awarded a five-year, \$295 million contract in 2018 to run the 1,883-inmate prison by the then-county Board of Prison Inspectors. At that time, county leadership was under Republican control, which turned to Democratic control in 2020. The contract with GEO included a 180-day termination clause. GEO Group Inc. first operated the George W. Hill Correctional Facility from 1998 until 2009 when Community Education Centers took over the contract. In 2017, GEO acquired CEC. GEO issued a statement related to the county’s April transition target date. “Throughout our long-standing partnership with Delaware County, we have always acknowledged the county’s right to terminate the management contract,” it said. “As government service providers, we continuously maintain the highest standards and have been working cooperatively with the county and its consultants to realize a smooth, seamless, and safe transition. As such, we hope the county can achieve its stated objectives directly managing the operations of the George W. Hill Correctional Facility.” At Wednesday’s meeting, county council also unanimously passed a 20-year pay scale for the correctional officers, sergeants, lieutenants, programs, records tech/booking and senior case manager/senior records tech staff. The scales include a 1.5 percent increase each year as well as a 10 percent difference between the correctional officers and sergeants and then the sergeants and lieutenants. “The pay scales that we have provided are competitive with our neighboring counties and will increase the competitiveness and attractiveness of working at George W. Hill, along with the county benefits program,” Lazarus said. The rate for newly hired correctional officers begins at \$21 an hour and ends at \$28.28 for correctional officers with 20 years of experience. For sergeants, the salary starts at \$23.10 an hour and goes up to \$31.11 for those with two decades’ experience. Lieutenants start at \$25.41 an hour up to \$33.72 an hour for those with 20 years’ experience. Programs staff and records/tech booking personnel start at \$18 an hour with the range ending at \$24.24 an hour. Senior case manager/senior records tech start at \$19.80 an hour and end at \$26.67 an hour. “There’s been a lot of thought put into this,” county Councilman and Jail Oversight Board Chairman Kevin Madden said, adding that the scales were shared with the Jail Oversight Board, which can give input at its Tuesday meeting. He said county council needed to vote on the pay scales prior to the JOB meeting due to the tight time frame and with representatives holding information sessions with current employees this coming week. Majid Alsayegh of Alta Management, who is providing owner representation services to the county during the deprivatization transition, said the new scale would cost the county approximately \$51 million, which he noted was less than the annual cost to GEO. In December, council approved a three-year, \$29.9 million contract with Nashville, Tenn.-based WellPath to provide medical services at the George W. Hill Correctional Facility. The contract contains an option for a two-year, \$21 million extension, depending on the availability of funding in future years. County officials have been moving to contract services such as medical, food and commissary to third-party providers as the transition moves forward. Regarding the pay scales, Alsayegh told council that a team of staff from human resources and the prison looked at salary schedules of neighboring counties and created a scale with the intention of keeping an filling existing vacancies. “At this time, approximately one out of four positions at the prison are vacant,” he said. “GEO has had an extremely difficult time finding candidates to fill positions. We are hopeful that if the county approves the wage scale here, we will be able to hire appropriate number of staff.” County officials said the prison population is not at full capacity and in the 1,400-range. “Under GEO’s management today, we have what I would call a vicious cycle,” Madden said, adding that their entry level pay for correctional officers is \$15 an hour, contrasted with neighboring counties, which, Madden said were in the \$20s. “You’re just not going to adequately staff when you’re paying 25 percent below market in an already challenging labor environment particularly for corrections,” Madden said, adding that the environment is inherently challenging and correctional officers are being

asked to work double shifts as less and less staff report to work.