



**AITKIN COUNTY HEALTH & HUMAN SERVICES
COUNTY BOARD MEETING MINUTES
September 24, 2019**

Attendance

The Aitkin County Board of Commissioners met this 24th day of September, 2019, at 9:02 a.m. as the Aitkin County Health & Human Services Board, with the following members present: Commissioners J. Mark Wedel, Laurie Westerlund, Don Niemi, and Bill Pratt. Commissioner Anne Marcotte arrived at 9:41 a.m. Others present included: County Administrator Jessica Seibert, Cynthia Bennett ACH&HS Director, Accounting Supervisor Carli Goble, Erin Melz Public Health Supervisor, Sheriff Dan Guida, Assistant to the County Administrator Sue Bingham, H&HS Executive Assistant Shawn Speed, and Guests: Kari Paulsen/HHS Advisory Board Member, Terri Mathis/HHS Advisory Board Member, and Brielle Bredsten/Aitkin Independent Age.

Agenda

Motion by Commissioner Niemi, seconded by Commissioner Pratt and carried, all members voting yes to approve the September 24, 2019 Health & Human Services Board agenda as presented.

Minutes

Motion by Commissioner Westerlund, seconded by Commissioner Niemi and carried, all members voting yes to approve the August 27, 2019 Health and Human Services Board minutes.

Bills

Carli noted that there was nothing notable on the bills this month just a couple of pass through payments.

Motion by Commissioner Pratt, seconded by Commissioner Westerlund and carried, all members voting yes to approve the bills.

Health & Human Services Director Report, Cynthia Bennett, ACH&HS Director

Directors Update

Cynthia began by giving an update on her attendance of the Association of Minnesota Counties (AMC) conference this month and mentioned that the discussions were very timely, informative, and preventative.

A hot topic that was discussed there was immigration and the fact that in the U.S. we have more job openings than there are qualified workers. Per the AMC presenter, in the current situation immigration is very important to getting those jobs filled, as most of those jobs are entry level and are welcomed by immigrants.

Next there was talk about a presentation that was given by representatives from Washington and Colorado states about the impact on counties of legalization of recreational marijuana. Specifically information was shared regarding the proceeds, management of the proceeds, and taxes collected from the sale of marijuana. In Washington State counties were not included in discussions regarding excise tax and as a result counties are not receiving any monetary benefit. The message for MN is to make sure that the counties are included in discussions and at the

table to help determine these things from the start.

The Health and Human Services Policy Committee met to decide on their priorities for 2020.

They identified their top priorities, in conjunction with MACSSA and the LPHA. The top issues for all were Housing Workforce Issues, Child Care, Out-of-Home Placement, METS, Mental Health & Chemical Dependency Services, Procurement, and the Restructuring of DHS.

All agreed that Procurement and the DHS restructure needed to be removed from consideration, as these two topics are needing to get addressed now, rather than waiting for the legislative session to begin.

The Top 3 priorities, which were decided on for AMC, are METS, Out-of-Home Placement, and Mental Health & Chemical Dependency Services. These three aligned almost exactly with the draft top 3 priorities of MACSSA. The draft top three priorities that the LPHA chose were Food Safety issues, Medical Assistance and additional reimbursement for home visits for children with asthma, and a request to increase the Local Public Health Grant. This grant is flexible dollars to be used per identified needs in each community. The use of these grant dollars relieves the use of Levy dollars.

Commissioner Niemi reiterated that the legalization of cannabis was not being promoted, that this was just meant to be helpful if it come to that, for the counties.

Commissioner Pratt noted that if it does become legal that locations of growing cannabis will need to be planned as the smell of this will impact those surrounding the area. It needs to be grown in areas where significant populations will not be affected.

Commissioner Niemi inquired about how long cannabis remains in your system?

Cynthia replied that it stays much longer than alcohol, but that does not mean that it is causing you to be impaired. They have yet to figure out where the line is, like alcohol, where impairment begins and ends.

Commissioner Westerlund noted that she had just returned from a trip to Colorado and while there she had inquired with the local government about any useful information about what has happened there and she noted that, in Colorado, it is up to the employer to set the policies about drug testing and that the employers are responsible for all of the costs associated with testing.

Commissioner Wedel added, that while he was involved with Community Corrections and Sobriety Court, that he learned that cannabis, can remain in your system for up to 30 days, but again that does not mean you are impaired during that whole time period.

Cynthia then ended her AMC update with reminding the Commissioners that they will see these top priorities at their next AMC meeting and be able to vote on them.

Cynthia continued her update by talking about the restructuring of DHS. The interim commissioner of DHS that exited a few months ago recommended to the Governor that he should look at, possibly, splitting the two major divisions of DHS which are the Division of Direct Care & Treatment and the remaining divisions that comprises the rest of the DHS programs.

The Direct Care & Treatment Division is very large unit and includes, approximately 4,600 employees, 200 residential and in-patient treatment centers across the state, and serves around 12,000 people per year. The thought is that by splitting these up there will be a better ability for leadership separate leadership which would provide better alignment of authority and responsibility. There would be better accountability in those areas. The Governor supports

forming a team to look into it more deeply, counties want assurances that they will be involved in those discussions. Whatever happens at this level will impact counties in some way so it is important that they are included in the discussions.

Last, Cynthia talked about a new committee, the Critical Incident Response & Resource Committee, which was formed between MACSSA and DHS. She has been accepted as a member and will partake in the work of this committee. The primary focus of this workgroup is to develop a toolkit that counties and DHS can use to assist and provide guidelines and resources for counties who are in the middle of or facing a critical incident. Our county has been in the middle of a critical incident for nearly a year and have noted that there has been a significant lack of guidance, support and resources available for our assistance. There are other counties who have discovered this lack of direction as well and DHS is in agreement that this area needs addressing.

The committee will be comprised of 5 MACSSA members, 5 DHS members, and a few Ad-Hoc members who are content experts or have experience in critical incident response. Cynthia noted that their first meeting will be held this afternoon in conjunction with the MACSSA meeting in St. Paul and that she will be bringing more information back to the Board in the future.

Commissioner Niemi commented that he is wondering why the state is trying to get rid of county based purchasing when it comes to the procurement process.

Cynthia does not believe that they are trying to get rid of it, rather, during the 5 year procurement renewal process that counties participated in this past year, there were counties who had County Based Purchasing (CBP) and were included in the procurement process. Counties with CBP should not be included in this process as it defeats the purpose of CBP. There were over 50% of the counties in the state of MN who were unhappy with the results of the procurement process and requested mediation. Clearly DHS did not take into consideration what counties were asking for or there would not have been such unrest.

Along with that, a lawsuit was filed by the counties with county based purchasing that states that DHS was not following the correct statutory procurement process procedures and that they should not have been replaced by other healthcare providers in their own counties. As a result of the large number of counties unhappy with this and the fact that the law suit impacted the ability of DHS to get this process completed within their deadline. DHS cancelled the implementation of the procurement results for this year. They have indicated that the procurement renewal process will happen sometime in the future and she expects the process to look quite different from what it has been in the past.

Approval of Contracts/Agreements/Policies

Motion by Commissioner Westerlund, seconded by Commissioner Pratt and carried, all members voting yes to approve the Service Agreement between Aitkin County and the Hill City Assembly of God Church for use of their facility during WIC Clinics that are offered in Hill City.

Tobacco Compliance/Educate Update, Erin Melz & Brea Hamdorf

Brea began by going through her presentation on the subject, which is included with these minutes.

Brea and Erin supplied examples of vaping devices to the Board members so that they could see what they look like and how, sometimes, they can look like anything from a USB drive to a sweatshirt that is designed to attach to a vaping pen so that you can use it through the hood strings and have no one know that you are, showing that the manufacturers are gearing their products toward young people.

Commissioner Wedel asked how many tobacco sellers there are in the county.

Brea responded that there are around 40 and of those 40 about half are resorts with licenses to sell tobacco.

Committee Reports

HHS Advisory Committee Update

Kari Paulsen and Terri Mathis, Advisory members, were in attendance and briefed the Board members on the September 4th meeting. Minutes from that meeting were included in the Board packet given to the members prior to the meeting.

AEOA Update

Commissioner Westerlund noted that AEOA did not meet, however the nutritional group did meet at Birchstreet Center on September 11th and talked a lot about Meals-on-Wheels, Arrowhead Transit, and where they could host some senior dining opportunities around town.

NEMOJT Update

Commissioner Niemi briefed that they had met, although he was not able to attend. He did receive an update via phone call and that the only major item was that the current Executive Director had taken a position at the College in Virginia, MN.

Lakes & Pines Update

Commissioner Niemi stated that they had also met and that their main topic of discussion was the gearing up of the Energy Assistance Program for the coming heating season. Applications were mailed out on August 26th and the workers are already starting to receive some back. In 2019, 6,387 applications were approved. They anticipate the funds, for this season, to be available by the end of October.

He also noted that the biggest challenge for them in administering a program like this is, to identify the most cost efficient and effective way to increase awareness and accessibility to the program.

Commissioner Wedel inquired of Kari Paulsen for an update on the U.S. Census Bureau recruitment process and how it was going.

Kari said that they were looking for more than 300 workers for them, just in Aitkin County alone and that they are having difficulties filling all of the positions due to difficulty in the federal application process. A representative will be at the Birchstreet Center again in October to help applicants with this process along with that he will be attending the BEACON event that is coming up.

The meeting was adjourned at 10:15 a.m.

Next Meeting – October 22, 2019