

Saratoga County Reopening Advisory Group Minutes
May 15, 2020 – 3:00 p.m.

Chairman Lawler called the meeting to order and welcomed all in attendance in person and on the phone. Mr. Lawler thanked all committee members for volunteering to serve on this committee. Mr. Lawler said that Matt Rose and Nick Mauro will be serving the group in an administrative fashion to handle email correspondence and technology needs. Mr. Lawler said that the County will provide the resources needed to do the job in a way that will give the business community what they need.

Mr. Lawler announced the appointment of Mr. Todd Shimkus as Committee Vice Chair.

Congresswoman Elise Stefanik addressed the committee via telephone from Washington.

Thank you so much and I want to first thank all of the leaders from Saratoga County. Both the County staff, the Department of Public Health, all the officials from Saratoga Hospital, and the business community.

This has been a true partnership from the community level on up to the federal government. Right now I am in Washington. We have a number of votes today, and I wanted to highlight I think what are the key priorities that I've heard not just from Saratoga County, but from the 12 Counties and the 194 Towns across my district.

So we understand from a congressional perspective, the importance of direct federal relief, both to the state and the counties and municipalities. That is going to be critical to make sure that we can address the fiscal shortfall. The entire New York congressional delegation has been working together on a bipartisan basis to advocate for this in future bipartisan packages. Unfortunately, the package today, there was no bipartisan negotiation. So, that's going nowhere, but my hope is that before the end of May, we are urging there to be bipartisan talks to deliver this result. The first three legislative packages have been bipartisan, and we absolutely have to ensure that the direct relief is provided to the counties. One of my top concerns is ensuring that our rural communities, and I know Saratoga county is actually a really good microcosm of this where you have city center, but you also have suburban and rural towns throughout the county. We need to make sure that no matter how rural or how urban that you get the direct federal support you need. So that's a top priority, because in previous legislative packets, during the Covid crisis, there was a population cut off of five hundred thousand residents in order to qualify for that direct federal aid. That doesn't work for any of the twelve counties in my district. So, we are working to make sure that again, it's not based upon size. In addition, direct support for hospitals has been critical. To date, I've announced over \$100M of direct federal funds to hospitals. We've been working very closely with Saratoga Hospital as well as all of the other hospitals in the twelve counties in my district. Higher education, I know that while Skidmore is not in my district, it is a significant economic driver for the county as a whole. I do serve on the education committee and we have been working to provide direct federal relief to higher ed. institutions to students directly as well. And we'll continue to work with the colleges and universities to identify their needs. I also want to give a shout out to the Saratoga County Chamber of Commerce. Todd Shimkus and I have been in touch basically, on a daily basis throughout this crisis. And we have been triaging the incoming from the small business community that are facing significantly challenging economic times,

whether it's the retailers, the restaurants, manufacturers or our financial institutions. We worked really hard to address concerns, for example, with the paycheck protection program of which there were many to work with Treasury to update that. So it was a functional program for the businesses in Upstate New York that need that economic lifeline. I want to thank our lenders locally who did a tremendous job rising to the occasion, and really processing just an extraordinary amount of SBA loans that most of which will likely transition into grants. But that was a real team effort with a lot of conference calls between my office, SBA, and the financial institutions. Moving forward, I have three regional economic development regions in my district, the North country, and the Mohawk region, which cover some of my counties have met seven of the seven metrics. I know that Saratoga County, clearly, as part of the capital district region, when it comes to the Covid metrics. I know the Saratoga county officials are working hard to make sure that we can start the process of gradually reopening as soon as possible. We also have been trying to ensure that there's a reasonable approach for issues, like Saratoga Race Track, which is so critical for our local economy. And my office has put out a statement, ensuring that we don't make any rash decisions completely canceling, because we wanna make sure that we are thinking creatively about how to update operations to ensure that we protect some semblance of economic activity as we move through the rest of this high tourist season. With that, I want to open it up to any questions for me. I'm happy to answer anything.

Mr. Kinowski asked if Ms. Stefanik was aware of any movements as far as liability shielding for the business community. Ms. Stefanik said that it is part of the negotiations and she anticipates in the bi-partisan package there will be liability protections for businesses.

Mr. Kusnierz asked if Ms. Stefanik could spell out the issues touched upon regarding funding for local municipalities in assisting with Covid expenses. Ms. Stefanik said that she supports direct federal funding to the municipalities, it will be important to have guardrails, and as much as possible to have the funds go directly to the counties, towns, villages and cities without having to Albany. What she does not want to happen is allowing Albany, without input from local counties, to take that money to the State. Ms. Stefanik also said that they want to make sure the funding is designated towards education, emergency services, and law enforcement.

Mr. Wait asked Ms. Stefanik if there was something in the package for nursing homes. Ms. Stefanik said that they are working on additional funds for nursing homes. She supports direct federal funds and anticipates this will also be part of the bipartisan package. She is hoping that they will see a package before the end of May that will get to the House, Senate and be signed into law that will include direct federal funds for nursing homes.

Mr. Lawler thanked Ms. Stefanik for her participation in today's meeting. Ms. Stefanik thanked the group for the opportunity to provide an update and answer questions. Ms. Stefanik said that her office is teleworking and are available 24/7.

Mr. Lawler discussed the mission and the charter of this advisory group. Mr. Lawler said that all the information regarding the reopening originates with the State of New York. The Executive Chamber pushes that information out through multiple state agencies, economic development being one. They push it out to the eight regional control groups. Also referred to as the control rooms. They're reopening of each of the regions, the regions are organized on the same guidelines

as the Economic Development Council. There are eight counties in our region, and that information goes from the Governor's office to the control room. Updates and discussions on metrics are provided via a daily phone call. Mr. Lawler said that his thought is that this group would serve as a communications hub and a resource for the business community. To give the businesses a place that they can turn to for information and guidance. Mr. Lawler said that the Chamber has been sending out a lot of good information to their members, and they would like to replicate that for all of the businesses in the county. Another important item is to serve as a resource to the business community where they can bring their issues forward. Mr. Lawler said that he would like the committee to serve as a communication tool, so that businesses can get their questions and concerns addressed, to then have a direct liaison with Mr. Hellwig who can bring these issues to the control room, and then directly in front of the State Government to try to get answers as quickly as possible. Or hopefully even influence people to change policy regarding some of the reopening criteria. Mr. Shimkus expressed concern over contradictory information in the business community and agreed with having one portal or central location for businesses to be able to contact regarding re-opening. Mr. Wait expressed concern over the number of hospitalizations being reported. Ms. Duncan clarified that the number of hospitalizations being reported by Saratoga County are not by hospital, but by Saratoga residents, whether they are hospitalized in Albany Med, Glens Falls etc. Ms. Duncan did state however, that there is not enough information shared with all of locations as to the numbers each County is reporting. This raised concerns with whether patients could be double counted in different counties. Mr. Hellwig said that he would bring this issue to the Control Room.

Mr. Dake suggested that the advisory group relay their role as being a resource to the business community, not a regulatory body. A lot of small businesses need to be comfortable reaching out to the group. Mr. Richardson added that a public relations promotion of their efforts is important. Mr. Wait expressed concern over different regulations being enforced by different municipalities. Questions arose whether individual municipalities have the authority and power to regulate businesses reopening. Mr. Wait requested a legal option on this. Mr. Lawler said they will have an opinion for the next meeting.

Mr. Dake said that businesses being open under a set of guidelines, or reasonable set of regulations, is much safer than businesses that are currently operating on the grey market.

Mr. Kusnierz stated that the City of Saratoga Springs has the largest number of restaurants per capital of any City in NYS and suggested calling on the Governor to change statutes to allow opportunities for these businesses to have additional outside dining and advocating to lift the ban on Styrofoam to help with takeout orders. Mr. Shimkus also suggested an extension of the executive order allowing the sale of alcohol for takeout. Mr. Kusnierz said that it is important that Saratoga County be on record calling for these changes showing that we are looking to help our businesses and residents. Mr. Lawler agreed and added that these suggestions should also be brought to the control room so that these ideas can be shared with other counties.

Mr. Shimkus expressed concern over the availability of PPE for small businesses so that they can be ready to open safely. Mr. Tollisen agreed and added that he believes small businesses, once they open up, will be required to have masks available for their customers and a plan in place in order to open. Mr. Tollisen said that a template plan from NYS is available. Mr. Cooke said that he will be working with the County's purchasing director to get a list of vendors they have had success with and provide this information the group to be able to share with the business community.

Mr. Lawler said that he will take a stab at drafting a formal mission statement with some objectives and bullet points and get that out to the group early next week.

Mr. Hellwig gave an update on the Control Room. Mr. Hellwig said that the control room was put in place this past Monday. It's a 12 member board made up of representatives from the counties in the region, some state agencies and the City of Albany. The room is responsible for monitoring the regional during the reopening process, which includes hospitalization rate, the death rate number of new hospitalizations, hospital bed capacity, ICU capacity, diagnostic testing capacity as well as contact tracing capacity. On a daily basis the group meets to discuss the compliance status, and they provide the state representative with feedback on what changes or modifications to the metric that should be considered without compromising the health and safety of the community. At this time, most of the discussions over the past few days have been around the new hospitalizations and the death rate metrics, which have not yet been met. These two areas are closely tied to nursing homes. The second area of discussion that is taking place in the control room is testing and tracing. The region has met the criteria for testing and is expected to meet the contact tracing metric soon. Saratoga County recently increased our tracing capacity from 11 to 24. The State of New York has committed to providing the balance of what would be needed to be in compliance with the metric. Once the metrics have been met, the region will be able to move forward to Phase one of the reopening, depending on when we start will determine the timing of the three remaining phases. There will be a 14 day gap between each of the phases. NYS has published industry guidelines, requirements for the reopening plans which are accessible on the Forward NY website. If the metrics go backwards during a phase, the control room will use seven and three day averages to smooth out spikes in the numbers and will reassess what needs to happen to address the increasing infections.

Mr. Lawler said that Albany County Executive McCoy has drafted plan that he is asking for each of the Counties to adopt as the regional plan. Copies of this plan will be provided by Monday. It's a 43 page document that is basically a compilation of the Governors requirements. Before Saratoga County makes a decision, they have asked this advisory group to look at the plan to see whether or not the plan would work for Saratoga County. There is no obligation to adopt it.

The state dashboard on the metrics was displayed for the group and Ms. Duncan gave an overview on the metrics. Regarding hospitalizations, Mr. Wait questioned if this region was being tagged with the hospitalization and fatality rates from those patients that were received voluntarily from New York City. Ms. Duncan said that she cannot answer that question as she has no way of knowing. Mr. Connolly stated that standardization of the metrics is a high priority.

Ms. Duncan said that there are currently ample test kits however expressed concern over the fact that labs cannot currently keep up with testing. Wadsworth is currently refusing to process any tests other than hospitalized patients or nursing homes.

A draft website for the Advisory group was projected for the group and Mr. Mauro gave a brief overview. The website is in the very beginning stage, it will include links to reopening information, mission statement, metrics, monitoring dashboard, frequently asked questions. An email address will be provided, Matt Rose will be monitoring this daily. Any questions can be sent to this email and this will provide a solid and reliable repository for information. Mr. Wait suggested to have a section on finance that will provide information from banks that may be

providing special programs for business. Mr. Shimkus offered all of the information currently available on the Chambers web site to be made available on this website.

Mr. Zurlo said that calls from the public regarding non-compliance is currently very limited. If a complaint is called in, they are directed to the NY Pause website, this is filtered back to the Office of Emergency Services. There are two deputies in the command center and a friendly visit is made to the businesses. If the complaints continue, it has been agreed to send it to the Attorney General's Office.

Mr. Lawler said that there is a daily meeting at 9am that involve the principals involved in this emergency effort. They have done an amazing job under difficult circumstances, and we owe them a debt of gratitude.

It was decided that the next meeting would be on Thursday May 21, 2020 at 3pm.

The meeting was adjourned.

Respectfully submitted,
Therese Connolly
Deputy Clerk of the Board