

Saratoga County Reopening Advisory Group Minutes
June 4, 2020 – 3:00 p.m.

Chairman Lawler called the meeting to order and welcomed all in attendance in person and on the phone.

Mr. Hellwig gave a Control Room update. Mr. Hellwig said that outdoor dining for restaurants has been approved. There was also an Executive Order released on June 2, that authorized the re-opening of hair salons, barbershops and expanded low-risk outdoor recreational activities. Mr. Hellwig said that they are still waiting on additional guidance on what constitutes low-risk recreation beyond what has been specifically named. Summer Camps, daytime only, can be opened on June 29. They are still awaiting additional guidance on the safety and health measures that need to be taken relative to those businesses. Mr. Hellwig said that they are working on clarification of foot traffic in malls, with proper social distancing, and limiting the numbers of shoppers that will be able to enter a mall at one time. Civil Service exams will be postponed until the fall; however, municipalities will still be able to hire employees provisionally. During today's call they were told that the Civil Service Department is willing to work with the Counties in terms of setting up the exams so that they can be held possibly sooner than the Fall if necessary. Guidelines regarding graduation ceremonies was just released within the last hour. This document is available on the re-opening website. Mr. Hellwig and Mr. Richardson met with school district officials yesterday who were anxiously awaiting this information. Mr. Hellwig said that they are still waiting on CDC guidelines regarding travel. Some information is readily available and the Department of Health is still working on this. Mr. Dake said that he had made a request regarding travel. Since they are getting into vacation season, while it has not been part of the opening plan that he has seen, trying to make sure we have intelligent plans on what to expect from people that are on vacation and coming back from vacation. Mr. Lawler said that the control room calls happen every day. They are bringing comments and questions directly from the business community and others, trying to seek clarification and guidance to help business get back in business.

Mr. Lawler asked Mr. Shimkus what the main feedback is from the business community regarding Phase 2. Mr. Shimkus said they had a zoom call last week with B&Bs, and another one with hotels, who were asking the same questions. Occupancy rates for Memorial Day doubled from what they saw in April. People are beginning to return, and information was provided to them by Mr. Hellwig. There is currently no restriction on domestic travel. Mr. Lawler said that the State of Rhode Island just lifted their 14 day self-quarantine requirement this week. Mr. Shimkus said that the hotel occupancy rate in the City of Saratoga Springs was 26% for the month of April. He has not seen the County number yet. Mr. Lawler said that this is why it is so important to put a campaign out to try to jump start the economy in whatever way we can and to support those businesses, to eliminate to the extent possible, any confusion about what is open in Saratoga County, and that it is safe to go to Saratoga County. Mr. Lawler believes that our message needs to be consistent, clear and delivered as timely as possible.

Mr. Shimkus said that the Saratoga Rowing Association is generally a tremendous generator of tourism activity in the Spring and Fall. They cannot do their competitions; however, the US Rowing association has come up with a plan for single skull races that are very safe. This was

pushed through Mr. Hellwig to the control room to attempt to start this in June. They were told this is a Phase 4 activity, even though only one person would be in each boat.

Ms. Duncan gave a Public Health Update. Ms. Duncan said that things have slowed down however there are some bursts, one day they had 10 new cases, today only 1 new case, bringing the total to 499 at this point. There are 49 active cases. They are holding at 16 deaths however one gentleman is currently on comfort care. There are 5 people in the hospital. Over 12,647 tests have been conducted for County residents. This number includes the tests for antibodies. Ms. Duncan said that the Department of Health had initiated a new system, a software system that they were encouraging all of the Counties to use. Ms. Duncan said that at this time they are doing a great job using their own system and are politely trying to opt out. This system has many kinks, flaws and missing pieces. They tried for a few days and it was just not worth the effort. Ms. Duncan said that it assists areas like New York City and Downstate areas as they did not have the potential and capacity to do contact tracing like we can in Saratoga County. Mr. Lawler said that the Governor mentioned in his daily briefing today that the Capital Region positive testing percentage is down to 1% which is the lowest in the State. Ms. Duncan said that this is a positive thing however warned that we still have to be very careful and not have a false sense of security. People will still need to adhere to the plans in place, use masks, adhere to social distancing, keep cleaning, to keep those numbers low and avoid a surge by Fall. Regarding travel, Ms. Duncan said that her Department is advised of Saratoga region people that are flying so that they can be contacted to quarantine. Mr. Wait questioned if the low infection rate of 1% was due to testing rates. Ms. Duncan said that there are a lot of nursing homes in the area, and a good deal of the numbers we are seeing are employees that have to get tested twice weekly. Mr. Richardson asked Ms. Duncan if she had seen a spike since Memorial Day. Ms. Duncan said that June 10th is marked on her calendar, this is the date they are looking at.

Mr. Lawler said that he would like to have Sheriff Zurlo as a standing item on the agenda from now on. As we begin to re-open more of the economy, there will be more potential for issues of non-compliance, complaints, etc. Mr. Zurlo said that the biggest complaint at this time is for people not wearing masks. 99% of the calls that come into the NY Pause are for people not wearing masks.

Mr. Rose and Mr. Mauro displayed the current website and gave an overview of the most recent updates and changes. The website can be found at www.saratogacountyny.gov/county-reopening. Mr. Rose is handling the emails generated from the website. Mr. Mauro is handling the website. They continue to revise and make solid changes to the website. The FAQ section has been expanded to its own section and they continue to add to it as inquiries come in. They have also added a "latest news" section.

Mr. Shimkus distributed a handout regarding the advertising campaign, which is attached to these minutes. Mr. Shimkus said that a formal presentation will be made to the Board of Supervisors beginning next week. Mr. Shimkus said that an video ad. was created and put out on social media last Friday. Over the course of the weekend, without any formal promotion, it jumped up to 1,400 views. The video (narrated by Mr. Shimkus) was played for the group. Mr. Shimkus said that a social media campaign was kicked off on Monday and it is now up to 14,000 views. This was achieved through an ad buy on LinkedIn, Instagram and Facebook and in the same 3-day timespan

went from 1,400 to 14,000. Mr. Shimkus said that the call to action on this is to direct people to the re-opening website. Mr. Shimkus said that they created a url www.reopeningsaratogacounty.com, which points directly to the County's page but has a url that is easier to say in a commercial. Mr. Shimkus said that the piece they have not done yet, which they would have added, is digital display and pre-roll video. This takes the same type of video and pushes it out onto websites based on keywords that people are searching, based on the geography and demography that are put in. The numbers could be jumped higher if digital display and pre-rolls were done. Additional details regarding the advertising campaign are listed in the handout. Mr. Shimkus said that as we move through phase 2 and particularly into phase 3, that's when restaurants will be opening, entertainment on the street and other things going on that can be promoted to bring visitors here. They would target visitors in the regional area that fit a certain demographic, interested in dining, recreation, outdoor activities, things you can do in the waterways, parks, downtowns and villages. With digital display and keyword, they can target specific people, that have specific interests, in specific geos. Mr. Shimkus recommends that a professional video be made, especially for digital display. A discussion took place regarding Television ads. Mr. Shimkus said that in late June, July and August, there will no longer be television ads for Live Nation and SPAC promoting concerts, NYRA will not be placing ads as they don't know at this time if fans will be allowed. Regional ads for Saratoga County will no longer be there, and the intent is to fill that dead air time with ads talking about how we are safely reopening, healthy activities that can be done here, and letting people know that small businesses are open for business. Mr. Shimkus said that results can easily be seen and tracked on social media and digital promotions. Television, you are taking a shot using local stations, local news and hoping to make an impact. Mr. Shimkus said that Television is more branding, information that the County is open. When television viewers are not hearing about the Track, SPAC, and Live Nation like they normally do, the worry is that Saratoga County will not be at the top of their minds. They are used to seeing these ads on TV. Tourism campaigns are normally 80% digital with very little television, however because this is a regional push and branding efforts, the experts he has been talking to advise that Television will help a lot. Mr. Wait said that it is a smart strategy, 75% of people who go to the track come from a 50 mile radius. Mr. Kinowski said that it also social media. Mr. Kinowski said that it's reasonable to assume that if we hit every form of communication out there, it's a good thing to do. Mr. Lawler said that each Supervisor can decide what they want to do. We are faced with a once in a 100 year occurrence in terms of the damage to the economy and the damage to these businesses. Mr. Lawler said that this is not only about helping business recover, this is about helping Saratoga County recover and the taxpayers of Saratoga County recover. Our critical time for sales tax receipts is in the summer. There is a sense of urgency here. Mr. Lawler said that not doing anything is a tremendous disservice and not sound financial reasoning. Mr. Lawler said that he hopes people look at this advertising and promotion effort as an investment. Putting money into advertising that will generate sales tax revenue far in excess of the \$50K they will spend. This will help the businesses, business employees, add some quality of life for the people that live here, those who understand, know and patronize the local businesses. But at the end of the day, the payoff for the Board of Supervisors is the tax revenue. Mr. Lawler said that quite frankly he has seen \$50K spent on much less important efforts. Mr. Lawler said that there was a conversation at the last Board meeting regarding not paving some roads and there was an immediate outcry about how the roads had to be paved. Mr. Lawler said that the money to pave roads comes from sales tax. Sales tax funds the Towns and it is in our interest to promote businesses that are going to generate sales tax. Mr. Lawler said that the County

budget is \$250M and let's not make a case of spending \$50K to try to generate sales tax money that will benefit every Supervisor. Mr. Richardson said there is an old adage, you have to spend money to make money. If you are not spending money on advertising, etc. then no one is walking in your door. Mr. Wait agreed and said that the financial ramifications are yet to be felt. Mr. Lawler asked what is currently in the contingency budget line item. Mr. Cooke said that they started the year with \$481K and there is \$447K currently in the line. Mr. Lawler said that the contingency line is used for things that come up during the year that cannot be budgeted or planned for. Mr. Lawler said that the \$50K is not an addition to the budget, it is just a decision to spend \$50K that has already been budgeted. Mr. Lawler said that he is looking forward to a healthy discussion on this and hopes that a strong majority of the supervisors believe that this is an important effort and worth the investment. Mr. Lawler said that he sent an email out to all Supervisors recently, the process is that this item will go to Economic Development, Law & Finance and then the full Board during the regular meeting cycle in June.

Mr. Veitch said that for the record, he is struggling a little with the amount. He would like to review it some more and is not sure he is there yet with \$50K. Mr. Lawler said that an in depth presentation will be made at Economic Development, and if asked at Law and Finance, that will have more detail. Mr. Shimkus said that if any Supervisor has questions or needs more detail to reach out to him. Mr. Lawler thanked the Chamber for the work that they are doing to try to get the County recover, it's not just Mr. Shimkus's job, but it's also his passion. Mr. Richardson said that over a 2 day period he and Mr. Shimkus visited over 25 small businesses with business recovery kits. Mr. Tollisen said that he has spoken with Mr. Shimkus and is looking forward to seeing more about the \$50K campaign. Mr. Tollisen said that he believes people want to be out and promote and help our businesses. Getting the right message out is a good thing to do. Mr. Peck thanked the group for the work they are doing, it is appreciated out in the community. He looks forward to supporting the investment for advertising. Mr. Peck said that it is a great lead to the business community having those that are not Supervisors committing their time and thanked them for that.

Mr. Lawler opened up the meeting for any further questions or discussion, and asked what this group could be doing as a group that they are currently not doing. Mr. Wait said that they are working on something on a small basis that may be worth thinking about as a committee on a larger basis. The bank is partnering with the Hospital within the confines of the Special Assessment District, they are paying for the Hospital's Occupational Health crew to, with the businesses voluntary support, come into businesses and do a survey, affirming that the guidelines are being followed, and providing the businesses with a sticker they can put in the window. Mr. Wait said that the bank are paying for the surveys, it's a way to use the local hospital, and gives a type of informal certification. They do not know at this point how it will be received and are planning a limited trial basis at this point. If it works it could be expanded. Mr. Lawler said that this is an innovative idea to give people peace of mind as they walk into a business.

Mr. Kinowski said that they have been handing out masks through their local Stillwater Local Public Health funds. Mr. Kinowski said that Stillwater created a Public Health District in 1956 and their budget is received via taxes. The funds for masks can be paid for via this fund. Mr. Veitch asked if Mr. Kinowski is suggesting that masks be purchased at a county level, if so he would support this 100%, and this is somewhat part of his concern on the advertising spend. Mr. Veitch said that it's important for businesses to have the material and equipment they need to be

able to serve their customers. Mr. Wait said that he would like to make the point that masks will not be needed if people are not going to businesses. Mr. Lawler said that he would like to have Mr. Kinowski and Mr. Veitch work as a sub-committee to work with Administration to flesh out the idea if this group should be involved in helping businesses with their PPE needs.

Mr. Kinowski said that July 4th is quickly approaching and that people keep on asking if events will happen for this holiday. Mr. Kinowski said that currently there are over 200 people on Browns beach, and they are tracking the areas they are coming from to help out the Public Health office should a spike occur.

Mr. Richardson thanked Mr. Shimkus for visiting the businesses with him and distributing small business recovery kits. Mr. Richardson also thanked Mr. Hellwig for meeting with him and the Superintendent of Schools from Mechanicville and Waterford on the football field in Mechanicville, to try to put together a plan for graduation. The City of Mechanicville school district has been working diligently to try to put something together for this. They could utilize 3 parking lots and the football field.

It was decided that the group would continue to meet weekly at this point. The next meeting was scheduled for Friday June 12, 2020 at 3pm. Mr. Lawler said that at that point they will have some idea of what is happening with the advertising proposal as Economic Development, Law & Finance, and the Agenda Meeting will be on Wednesday.

Mr. Allen thanked the group for the work they are doing. Mr. Allen said that this is a good thing for the County and really appreciates the time and effort they are putting into this.

The meeting was adjourned.

Respectfully submitted,
Therese Connolly
Deputy Clerk of the Board