

Health & Social Services Committee Minutes
July 8, 2020 – 2:30 p.m.

Present: Chairman Dick Lucia; Committee Members Eric Connolly, Darren O'Connor, Sandra Winney, Tom Wood, Benny Zlotnick; Supervisors Tara Gaston, Bill Peck, Mo Wright and Chairman of the Board Preston Allen; Spencer Hellwig, County Administrator; Steve Dorsey, County Attorney; Cathi Duncan, Catherine Medick, Public Health; Michael Prezioso, Mental Health & Addiction; Dan Rourke, Sewer District; Pamela Wright, Clerk of the Board; Jason Kemper, Planning.

Chairman Lucia called the meeting to order and welcomed all in attendance.

On a motion made by Mr. Wood, seconded by Mr. Zlotnick, the minutes of the June 3, 2020 meeting were approved unanimously.

A motion was made by Mr. Connolly, seconded by Mr. O'Connor, to authorize an agreement with Health Research, Inc. to accept New York State Department of Health Emergency Funding Coronavirus Response Grants, and amending the 2020 County budget in relation thereto. Unanimous.

Ms. Medick said that the funds will be used towards the purchase of equipment, computers, publications, and consumable medical supplies. The funds would also provide for GIS capabilities along with contract tracing capabilities. Ms. Duncan said that they are also requesting that the purchase of the COVID-19 testing machine be allowed under this grant, but have not heard back yet if it has been approved.

Ms. Medick said that a meeting was held this morning regarding the past two weeks regarding COVID. Towards the end of June there was a lull and cases were down. The past two weeks they have seen an uptick in cases. Between the week of June 24 and June 30, there were 13 positive cases and of those 13 cases, 171 contacts were identified, which is way up. This makes sense as people have been coming in contact with more people as the phases open. For the week of July 1- July 7, there were 36 cases with 268 additional contacts. Ms. Medick said that at one point they were down to no hospitalizations and now there are 4. They were down to 15 active cases less than two weeks ago, now they are up to 43 active cases. They were down to 130 people in quarantine, today 342 people are quarantined. Ms. Medick said that they will not be surprised if they see more cases following the July 4 weekend. Ms. Medick said that it is not significant enough to overwhelm the hospital system at this point, but it is concerning that we are going a little bit in the opposite direction. The death rate remains the same at 17. Ms. Medick said that NY is one of the few states in the county that currently has the virus under control. However, there are a lot of people traveling and coming back to the state. Ms. Medick said that they are notified of those traveling via plane, but for those that drive here, we are relying on their honor. In some instances, neighbors have been notifying Public Health of people that have traveled and are out and about, not quarantining. Ms. Medick said that currently there are probably 7-8 strains of the virus, and just because you may have had one strain, does not necessarily make you immune to another strain. Ms. Medick said that it seems some people are getting this a second time.

Ms. Medick gave an example of a massage therapist that recently decided not to use a mask, became positive, and has 82 people that they came in contact with without wearing a mask. Ms. Medick said that several clusters are currently going on, out of one cluster there were over 104 contacts. Ms. Gaston said that she has been asked a lot if there is anything that can be done to enforce mask wearing. Either by the Sheriff or City of Saratoga Springs Police. Ms. Gaston said that the Commissioner of Public Safety for the City of Saratoga Springs believes that nothing has been written that allowed for enforcement. Ms. Gaston asked if there is anything in Public Health Law or that has been issued by the Governor that would allow for enforcement should a local government choose to move that way? Ms. Medick said that there is language in the Public Health Law that would require action by the legislative body for a Local Law. Ms. Medick said that she would share this information with Ms. Gaston. Ms. Medick said that currently the Sheriff receives all of the complaints, and visits the businesses to address the complaints. Person to person complaints are referred back to the Public Health Department and a phone call is made.

Mr. Rourke said that the Sewer District is currently undertaking an endeavor with some emerging science, being able to test for the RNA of the COVID-19 virus in wastewater. This tactic has been used with many viruses in the past including Ebola and Zika. Currently they are partnering under two minor contracts with Arcadis, and Quadrant Biosciences. Quadrant Biosciences is partnering with Syracuse University and SUNY ESF. The process is that the Sewer Department is sectioning off the county in different sewer areas to test for the RNA. This is emerging science, and what comes back can be compared to the previous results to show if there was an increase. Mr. Rourke said that eventually they will likely have a dashboard that can be signed into. Mr. Rourke said that they hope to move forward with a major contract if this endeavor bears fruit.

Mr. Rourke said that a few other counties are currently doing this. They are finding that it helps with contact tracing. If the County can be sectioned off into enough different quadrants, there are currently 9 in Saratoga County, you can find out results possibly 1-2 weeks prior to the actual diagnostic test happening, as the virus is shed prior to the onset of symptoms. You would be able to see a hotspot build prior to the diagnostic testing happening. This way contact tracing could be focused on certain vicinities, or if you wanted to get more aggressive, the samples could be taken further upstream to even section off neighborhoods to be able to assist with containing the spread. Mr. O'Connor questioned if sewer systems can be tested before people become symptomatic, can individual people be tested sooner in the same manner. Ms. Medick said that we may see this type of testing eventually but it's not available right now. Ms. Gaston asked if this would give us a much better idea and what needs to be done for Public Health to make sure we prevent it, ideally before it becomes a broader spread. Mr. Rourke said that this is the hope, and they have started under minor contracts in order to get a baseline that can be built off of, should there be an increase in cases. Ms. Gaston thanked Mr. Rourke and said that she believes one of big problems is that people are not getting tested, or, for whatever reason choose to not get tested.

On a motion made by Mr. Wood, seconded by Mrs. Winney, the meeting was adjourned unanimously.

Respectfully submitted,
Therese Connolly
Deputy Clerk of the Board