

Human Resources & Insurance Committee Minutes  
September 29, 2020 – 3:00 p.m.

Present: Chairman Tom Wood; Committee Members Alan Grattidge, Jack Lawler, Bill Peck, Sandra Winney, Mo Wright; Supervisor Tara Gaston and Chairman of the Board Preston Allen; Spencer Hellwig, Chad Cooke, County Administrator; Steve Dorsey, County Attorney; Marcy McNamara, Adam Kinowski, Wendy Tennant, Human Resources; Eileen Bennett, Information Technology; Keith Manz, Public Works; Chris Schall, Auditor; Michael Prezioso, Mental Health & Addiction; Steve Bayle, Probation; Craig Hayner, County Clerk; Tina Potter, Social Services.

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

**On a motion made by Mr. Wright, seconded by Mrs. Winney, the minutes of the August 5, 2020 meeting were approved unanimously.**

Mr. Peck said that the reason for the special HR meeting is that Supervisor Gaston had brought up at a previous meeting a request to talk about a work from home or flexible work hour policy. Mr. Peck said that Marcy McNamara has reached out to numerous department heads. Mr. Peck said that he also sent a survey out to all Supervisors to get their thoughts, which were mixed. Mr. Peck said that there were positive options but also concerns were raised. Mr. Peck said that he requested several department heads to attend this meeting to get different perspectives. Ms. McNamara said that there are currently 20 employees currently on FFCRA due to schooling schedules. FFCRA is the Families First Coronavirus Response Act which enables employees to take paid leave at 2/3 of their pay, they can supplement the remaining 1/3 of time with their County leave time. Mr. Peck said that several of these employees are in a school district that went remote for the month. Mr. Peck requested input from the different department heads in attendance or on the phone. Mr. Peck said that he would like to come out of this meeting with a framework of what people think we should be doing, so that HR can put together a policy for next week's regular meeting.

Keith Manz, Public Works

Mr. Manz said that administrative staff working from home in his department was very positive vs. taking FFCRA. Mr. Manz said that 4 of the 13 admin staff are currently at home on FFCRA and while they get 2/3 paid, after a few weeks they can no longer augment the pay with leave time to make themselves whole. When they are home on FFCRA they cannot work, these employees are stressed because they are getting behind on their work, stressed because their co-workers are trying to make up for them. Mr. Manz said that they could easily work from home as they did so back in March and April when they were out of the office 80% of the time.

The employees were able to input accounts payable, purchasing, payroll, Buildings & Grounds maintenance requests from home.

Mr. Manz said that this would not work for Highway Crews, Buildings & Grounds, Cleaners.

Mr. Peck asked Mr. Manz his thoughts on flex schedules. Mr. Manz said that the admin staff need to be at home for the majority of the day while their children are at home. Mr. Lawler asked how the productivity of the staff is tracked while they are working from home. Mr. Manz said that they need to complete the tasks regarding accounts payable, purchasing, payroll, Buildings & Grounds maintenance requests, if these are not done in a timely manner, they will get a complaint calls from

other departments. Ms. Gaston asked if flex time would work for highway employees or employees that physically need to be present. Mr. Manz said that it would not work for highway crews. They work in crews on roadside projects that cannot be segmented. Mr. Manz said that it could possibly be done for cleaners and Buildings & Grounds staff to some degree. However, in his opinion, people need to be home all day while their children are at home that day. Ms. Gaston confirmed that for the most part, it would not work for DPW department, except for a few employees.

Craig Hayner, County Clerk

Mr. Hayner said that for the County Clerk's office and DMV, a high majority of the staff have direct interaction with the public. There is also a high volume of mail and people that come through the office on a daily basis. Regarding DMV, they don't do any online transactions, all staff need to be there to support each other. Regarding County Clerk side, a high majority of the transactions are done through paper or interaction with the public such as passports, favor program, filing, recording. Even though e-filing and e-recording numbers have increased, this only represents approximately 30% of the business and the remainder is done either in person or by mail. They also directly interact with the NYS Courts on a daily basis. The need for people to be available to interact with the public and with each other is important. Mr. Hayner said that there really is no job in his department that could support a work from home program the majority of the time. Regarding flex scheduling, Mr. Hayner said that it would really come down to an economies of scale. If additional hours were added where his offices would be open, additional staff would be needed based on the demand, they also provide services to surrounding counties. He would also like to add that there could be union implications.

Michael Prezioso, Mental Health & Addiction

Dr. Prezioso said that for his department, work from home would be quite challenging for a variety of reasons other than something like a flex schedule opportunity. Dr. Prezioso said that they could fit flex scheduling in with the existing hours which already go beyond the standard work day. If they offered the flex option, it would be a useful tool for a number of employees who are parents and need to get their kids to and from the bus in the morning and afternoon. Dr. Prezioso said that if they have the opportunity to reschedule patients to work with this schedule, this would work well for clinicians. Support staff and clerical staff would be impacted differently. Dr. Prezioso said that he believes there could be some union issues to consider, there are employees that have children and have these responsibilities, vs those employees who do not have children. Dr. Prezioso expressed concern over drawing the line between employees in a particular title that have access to a flex schedule and how this would affect other employees in the same title who don't have the same needs. Dr. Prezioso said that in purely operational terms, the flex schedule would work ok for his department. Dr. Prezioso said that some work can be done virtually, however because of the individual needs of staff members, some would need to be in the office. Dr. Prezioso said that they never closed completely during Covid, clients still received injections. They had rotating schedules of nursing staff, employees on call, clerical staff who needed to be in the office to field and direct phone calls. The virtual part was made easier for his department because of the relaxation of telehealth regulations, which helped the clinicians. However overall,

unless they absolutely had to go back to working in this manner, it is best to see people in the office.

Steven Bayle, Probation

Mr. Bayle said that work from home for his department sounds like it may work because of the community and supervision aspect of the job, however it really would not work that well because there is a lot of interaction between the probation officers and probation supervisors, they also utilize confidential records that cannot leave the office. There are 1,000 people on probation and each one of them has a lawyer, a lot of liability protection is done by having these conferences with probation officers and supervisors to make sure that problems are kept to a minimum. Mr. Bayle said that they have to have access to the courts, communicating by letter and maintaining a record of what they do. Access to resources such as printers, etc. the infrastructure is not currently set up. Regarding keeping track of employees work, they have a software program for case management that the department was able to use via VPN during Covid shutdown. This does a good job of keeping track of what people are doing and staying on top of their work. Regarding flex scheduling, Mr. Bayle said that he would not want to implement this, this would require the need for Supervisors to be available during the flex time. They would also need to limit the off hours work to paperwork only as the building would not be open to the public.

Mr. Bayle said that they have had some relaxation of the supervision requirements over the past 6 months which made it a little easier, however when it all opened back up, they had to see people at home, in the office. When they are required to see people in person, working from home would create a challenge.

Chris Schall, Auditor

Mr. Schall said that there are 6 employees in the Auditors office. Mr. Schall said that when the office was out due to Covid, they did very well working from home with very few slowdowns at all. There was little, if any, disruption when his office worked from home. Using a VPN they were able to get into the financial system, and make sure that items could be reviewed and approved. Any documents they needed such as contracts, were able to be provided via email. Regarding accountability, invoices had to get paid in a timely manner. If not, they would back up and therefore would know that the work is not being done. Communication is always done to all of the departments via email and phone calls. Mr. Schall said that one of his employees is currently on FFCRA. She is out Monday and Tuesdays and this employee has expressed to him that she would love to be able to work, but has to be at home. If the remote option was available, she would be able to work from home on these days. Mr. Schall said that if there was a flex option, it would help a little whereby she could work more hours on the days she is in the office, but is not sure how it would be set up. Mr. Peck said that they are trying to get a general feel, his sense is that if they were trying to pack all of the hours into one week then there could be an overtime issue. Mr. Schall said that prior to working at the County he worked at the State where they had flex. For a two week work schedule, they could work additional hours on the first week, and less on the second week. For example they could take every other Friday off.

Mr. Lawler said that an example would be to work 4 10-hour days as opposed to 5 8-hour days in a work week. Mr. Lawler questioned if there was a flex schedule here in the county building, if there were any concerns regarding security issues with people pretty much coming and going as their schedule dictates. For example, if someone wanted to work a flex schedule in the building,

and wanted to come in from 4am to noon, if there would be any security issues to having the building open during these hours. Mr. Manz said that he believes this would also create a safety issue, having one person coming in alone at 4am or people leaving alone late at night. Mr. Lawler also questioned the ability for people to be able to access the building at any time using their key fobs. Mr. Manz said that he believes that employees fobs can be programmed to allow them to only be able to access the building during certain hours. Mr. Lawler said that any flex work scheduling that involves work in the building, would need to be very carefully planned out with HR, IT and security.

Eileen Bennett, Information Technology

Mrs. Bennett said that the work from home program during shutdown was very successful. They allowed some users to use their home PCs, which was a vulnerability that they did not want to have. They had software that allowed IT to access the home computers and Mrs. Bennett said that this is an area that IT should not be in. They should be working on a device that is issued by the County. They discussed purchasing additional laptops to cover additional users. A lot of IT resources were needed to support all of those working from home, approximately 150 during shutdown. At least two staff members had to be kept on site to support that. Mrs. Bennett said that the more you add a work from home program, the additional staffing would be needed in IT. Mrs. Bennett also said that IT needs to be considered when working hours are discussed. Backups and certain maintenance windows are needed where people are not using the system. A lot of departments such as Probation, also use other systems that need to be considered. Mrs. Bennett said that we currently do not have any monitoring tools other than a quantitative level from a department heads perspective for monitoring work. Mrs. Bennett said that in order to have a department work from home, there needs to be some type of collaboration tool so that the continuity of the departments can be kept together. Work from home was successful but there are other considerations to be thought about such as printing capability, scanners, use of private home computers, if work phones should be ringing on their laptops, etc. There are many questions that need to be asked and solutions found. Mrs. Bennett said that once the committee decides on what direction they are taking, there is a lot of work in the background that needs to be done by IT, whether it's for flex schedule or work from home. A discussion took place regarding IT security. Mr. Lawler expressed concerns over Saratoga County IT having access to employees personal computers, and in addition, employees potentially having the ability to save County documents to their own personal computers. Mr. Lawler suggested that IT calculate the cost of outfitting an employee with the necessary best practices tools to be able to work from home, costs could include laptop, docking station, software licenses, possibly software to route phone calls. Mr. Lawler said that he is an advocate for a work from home program however the cost of working from home in a secure IT environment could be very costly.

Tina Potter, Department of Social Services

Mrs. Potter said that from her perspective, for a work from home program, they did what they had to do during the Covid shutdown, but in her opinion, working from home moving forward on an ongoing manner is nowhere near optimal for her department. It presents many challenges. Mrs. Potter said that her department is a human services agency and they are required to be available to the public, the mandates they have for each and every program area says that they have to be available for people to see them face to face. They have to be available to go out for CPS hotline reports. Case workers need to perform home visits, and hospital visits when a child is injured.

Mrs. Potter said that it is very difficult to do this nature of work in a work from home environment. There are approximately 220 employees in 13 units in her department. Each of those units has different mandates regarding timeframes, interviews, how they are to be deployed to see people. Examples of these units include child protective services, adult protective services, temporary assistance, Medicaid program, daycare. All of the eligibility programs require interviews. There is some degree of interviewing they can do by phone, however there is a lot of paperwork processing, accepting documents, face to face interviews, emergencies when people are homeless, without food or medications. Mrs. Potter said that it is not feasible for her department to be able to do the type of work they need to do working from home. Mrs. Potter said that with winter coming up, the home energy assistance program brings in additional influx of people who need services. Code Blue also kicks in with the winter season. Mrs. Potter said that they have to have a supervisory support and team approach for serious or possibly dangerous situations.

Mrs. Potter said that for flex scheduling, she does not know the exact definition of that would be, but they are definitely team oriented. If it was numerous staff working all different hours it would be difficult to manage, as each of units have to have an adequate amount of staff depending on the number of clients coming in the door. They would also need an appropriate number of supervisory staff for each of the various units to answer questions and sign off on the work that needs to get processed immediately for benefits to go out.

Mr. Peck said that in getting this cross section of departments, he can see that for some departments it would work, for some department it would not work. As they work through this, there needs to be department flexibility incorporating the suggested policy.

Ms. Gaston questioned Ms. Bennett regarding specific IT security measures that the county currently has in place. Ms. Bennett said that she would rather not discuss such issues in a public setting. Ms. Gaston said that the IT department did an excellent job of setting up people during the shutdown and believes that if the county chooses a solution that involves people working from home, that the County should do what they need to ensure that technology is used only for county purposes and should not be using employees personal computers. Mrs. Gaston said that her biggest concern is to make sure that the IT department, and other departments, have what they need so that these decisions do not have to be made during a crisis again. Ms. Gaston said that she believes if the policies are developed, negotiated with the unions, and talked about with departments for what works best, she believes that the County would be better set up for situations such as a second wave of Covid, a natural or manmade disaster. Given the way that IT, HR and other departments had to respond to the Covid shutdown, it behooves the County to develop the policies going forward so that they can be enacted in a timely fashion if needed. Ms. Gaston said that they all did an incredible job and she appreciates the work that was done in order to maintain County functions, but she would not want to be in that position again.

Ms. Gaston asked Mrs. McNamara if she had a census of union personnel and if they had a preference for either of the choices. Ms. Gaston said that morale and efficiency of staff below department head is also a concern of hers.

Mr. Lawler said that it's great to have a policy that can be pulled out to address issues, however the policy has to be something that is implementable, and before it's implementable we need to know what it is going to cost. He would like to have some idea of what the potential costs are to implement the policies.

Mr. Peck said that he sense is that baby steps need to be taken. Costs associated with work from home per employee need to be researched. Mr. Wood said that working from home is a complex matter, there is a great deal of variability from departments, the cost factor is something that would need to be researched, and based on the diversity between departments, there is a great need for flexibility. Mr. Wood said that time needs to be taken, not to jump into something only to find out later that something was overlooked. Mr. Wood said that continuing to do the research is certainly worthwhile. Mr. Peck said that in his personal opinion, giving department heads some type of authority to work and manage their employees as needed would be beneficial. Different departments have different functions and it would work for some and not work for others.

Ms. Gaston asked Ms. McNamara if any discussions had taken place with unions, of if there was any idea of how many county staff would be interested in either a flex or work from home policy. Ms. McNamara said that each department head submitted to the HR office, the number of management employees, number of unions, and if they could survive a flexible schedule. By flexible schedule she means if an hour needs to be taken in the morning and work an hour later in the afternoon, depending on what the Supervisors have an appetite for, do we want to allow staff to work 4 10-hour days for example, do we want to give department heads flexibility so that their staff can be staggered? This all needs to be negotiated with CSEA and has to be done by department. It would be very hard to blanket.

Regarding work from home, Ms. McNamara said that there were only three department heads that were interested in a full work from home program. Ms. McNamara said that she would not recommend this until we have the technology portion and solid procedure. Ms. McNamara said that they also looked into the workers comp. aspect of someone working from home, and what types of waivers could be looked at for various employees to try to limit the county's exposure for employees while working from home. As an example, if an employee slips on an ice cube from their living room to their kitchen during work hours, workers comp. is responsible for that.

Mr. Wright questioned if this policy was only to be used during emergency times, or if it would be used by employees at any time. Mr. Peck said that one item to think about is if this policy would sunset by next year sometime and review whether to extend it, or if it's a full time policy.

Mr. Wright expressed concern over a policy that is developed for people who decided to not send their kids to school, he anticipates that there would be several grievances. Mr. Wright believes that the union will have issues with the county picking and choosing who can work from home and who cannot. Mr. Wright also questioned the parameters to what age children need parental supervision. Ms. Gaston said that we cannot distinguish or discriminate over whether someone is a parent or a parent of a certain age child. Mr. Peck said that it's not really about school, it's about anything that may come up. Mr. Peck said that in this meeting he wanted to get a full view of what the thoughts and processes were. Mr. Lawler requested that IT, Purchasing or someone, to give the committee an estimate of the cost to have an employee work from home in an IT secure environment with audio capabilities, for phone calls. If an estimate of that can be provided so that the financial ramifications can be understood. Mr. Lawler said that he hears what Mr. Wright is saying but that work from home is where the world is going. Mr. Wright said that he believes there is a responsibility to the tax payer to ensure that employees are getting their full day of work completed. Mr. Lawler said that accountability needs to be part of the policy. Mr. Lawler said that some companies mandate that if employees with children are working from home, they need to get childcare while the employee is working from home. Mr. Lawler said that it is good for the county to look at a work from home policy as he believes more and more employers will be going

in that direction and at the end of the day, we are in competition for good people. It needs to be quantifiable, needs to be something that can be tracked to ensure a full day's work is being done.

Mr. Peck said that the next HR meeting is scheduled for next week. This special meeting was called so that a framework could be built for the next meeting. Mr. Peck asked if a draft flex schedule policy could be put together for the next meeting for review by the committee. Ms. McNamara said that the consensus is to create a policy that gives the department head the ability to flex their employees work day that makes sense to their operation, with union approval. Mr. Grattidge said that based on today's meeting it's clear that each department has a lot of different needs and angles, and the policy needs to be based on the department's needs and how they conduct their business, almost a case by case review. Mr. Lawler said that for him, flex would be a lot easier to do. For example someone coming to work 4 days at 10-hours a day rather than 5 days at 8-hours a day. Mr. Peck agreed that a flex schedule policy would be the easier one to come by. Ms. McNamara said that they can have a draft policy ready by the next HR meeting for review. Mr. Peck requested that the policy be provided the day before the meeting so that it can be reviewed in advance. Mr. Kinowski asked if this policy would be for emergency situations only or a general policy. Mr. Peck said that it would be a general policy, department by department, to see how they can best operate the business within their department. Mrs. Bennett said that if the county is increasing the hours they are doing business because of this flex schedule, for example some employees coming in to work at 6am and other employees working until 7pm, they need to consider the IT staff needs during these hours also. Extended hours for employees will also require IT to be available during these hours. Mr. Wright said that they will also need to consider the working hours of other departments, such as the cleaning crew. Mr. Peck said that from the earlier comments, any type of policy in either regard, will translate to an increase in staff needs in IT. Mr. Lawler questioned if IT staff were already available for the Sheriff's needs 24/7. Mrs. Bennett said that Sheriff after hours IT needs are initially directed to Deputy Coltrain, who is their designated IT person. If the problem cannot be rectified by Deputy Coltrain, the next person in line would be Chris DuBois, IT Deputy. If Chris is not available, IT staff member Nick Diamond will be called. Ms. Bennett said that additional users at off schedule times would put more burden on her department, an additional staff member may be needed in order to support a new initiative such as the ones being discussed. Mr. Lawler said that this comes back to what he was saying earlier, policies are great, but make sure you know how much you are spending for the policy. Mrs. Bennett said that it's important that employees have the ability to get the IT help that they need in order for them to be able to do their job. Mrs. Bennett said that she does not want to hear from a department head that their employees' job could not be completed as a result of IT not being available. Mr. Lawler commended Mrs. Bennett for the job that her department does.

Mr. Peck said that HR has their charge, IT has a charge of trying to come up with a cost going forward as to what an individual working from home would be, and additional costs of covering flex schedule depending on what the hours would be. Mr. Peck said that the desire to look at this issue was twofold, one to ensure we are positioned for another pandemic, and two are we positioned to be the best employer, and get the best staff we can moving forward into the next 20 years. Mr. Peck thanked all for their participation.

**On a motion made by Mr. Grattidge, seconded by Mr. Wright, the meeting was adjourned unanimously.**

Respectfully submitted,  
Therese Connolly  
Deputy Clerk of the Board