

Health & Human Services Committee Minutes
January 12, 2021 – 4:00 p.m.

Present: Chairwoman Tara Gaston; Committee Members Phil Barrett, Joe Grasso, John Lant, Darren O'Connor, Tom Wood; Supervisors Dick Lucia, Bill Peck, Mike Smith and Chairman of the Board Todd Kusnierz; Steve Bulger, Matt Rose, County Administrator; Hugh Burke, County Attorney; Jason Kemper, Planning; Daniel Kuhles, Public Health; Michael Prezioso, Mental Health & Addiction; Sandi Cross, Office for the Aging; Andrew Jarosh, Treasurer; Ryan McMahon, City Center Authority.

Chairwoman Gaston called the meeting to order and welcomed all in attendance.

On a motion made by Mr. O'Connor, seconded by Mr. Lant, the minutes of the December 2, 2020 meeting were approved. Mr. Grasso abstained from voting.

Ms. Gaston announced the appointment of Mr. O'Connor as committee vice chair.

A motion was made by Mr. Lant, seconded by Mr. Barrett, to authorize the Chairman of the Board to enter into an agreement with Blue-Raster in the amount of \$25,000 for technical/training support with the ESRI Arc GIS enterprise system software and appropriating funds from the 2020 budget to amend the 2021 budget accordingly. Unanimous.

Mr. Kemper said that this is part of an enterprise GIS solution that we were looking at through the budget process last year. Public Health will be involved as well as numerous other County Departments. It came to the forefront because part of the proposal involved the Data Dashboard which we are relying on for our Covid response. Mr. Kemper said that therefore there is a need to get Blue Raster on board sooner rather than later in this process. This will move to Task 3 of the proposal immediately by getting them on board, and working with Public Health for improvements to the Data Dashboard. In the end, they will also help with the rest of the Countywide GIS system, incorporating all of the County Departments who currently do a lot of separate GIS work, all under one umbrella, one server for one entire County GIS. Mr. Kemper said that GIS stands for Geographic Information Systems and provides locational and attribute data. Ms. Gaston said that it has been requested to attempt to keep track of the amount of hours and time spent on the Covid part of this agreement in case it may be reimbursable in the future. Mr. Kemper said that the funds were already approved in 2020 and part of this resolution will be to reappropriate unspent funds into the 2021 budget. Mr. Barrett asked if this will improve the current digital dashboard that the County has been using. Mr. Kemper said yes and it will make it easier to update. Mr. Barrett said that it will certainly be a help as updating the information can be a time consuming task. Mr. Kemper said that Public Health Director has provided numerous items he would like to see changed on the Dashboard. Mr. Kemper said that the vendor has staff ready to assist once a contract is on board.

A motion was made by Mr. O'Connor, seconded by Mr. Lant, to authorize the acceptance of State Aid increases from the Office of Addiction Services and Supports in the amount of \$3,527 and amending the 2021 Budget. Unanimous.

Dr. Prezioso said that this is an annual housekeeping item and will provide cost of living increases to the agencies. A budget amendment is necessary to reflect the increase in revenue and expense.

A motion was made by Mr. Lant, seconded by Mr. Barrett, to authorize an amendment to the 2021 budget to reappropriate remaining COVID-19 response funds from 2020. Unanimous.

Ms. Gaston said that this will reallocate funding from 2020 to 2021 for Public Health.

Ms. Gaston said that she has two additional items under other business which potentially will be appropriated from the reallocated funds previously discussed.

A motion was made by Mr. Barrett, seconded by Mr. Lant, to authorize a contract with the Saratoga Springs City Center to be used as a COVID-19 vaccination site. Unanimous.

Ms. Gaston said that the County has worked to engage and hold the Saratoga Springs City Center for potential use as a mass vaccination center in Saratoga County. This is not in lieu of the other PODs and locations around the County, but it will put the County in a situation where the State is aware we are able to move in any capacity of vaccination that they will provide to us. Ms. Gaston said that the County Administrator was directed to sign a minor contract for the purpose of holding the facility, once all of the details are worked out, Ms. Gaston is requesting that we move forward with a major contract. This will allow for 24/7 access to the facility. The cost under the minor contract is \$2K per week which allows the County to be able to set up everything that is needed, including IT, everything except people and vaccination doses. Once we have notified that we wish to activate it as a vaccination center, we will be paying a one-time cost of approximately \$49K. It is important to note that this is only the cost to operate the City Center over what they are currently paying to maintain the facility. Mr. McMahon said that he looked at expenses for previous years for infrastructure and compared them with what the expenses have been since Covid began. Filters have all been upgraded. They currently do not have their regular staff employed and some of the cost is to bring some of the people back for regular maintenance, cleaning, sanitizing etc. as well as a minor cost for some security. The parking is currently staffed 4pm to 8am, this will be changed to 24 hour. Ms. Gaston said that Public Health and Emergency Services have toured the facility, the only criteria that was not available at the time of the tour was the facility having a back-up generator, however Commissioner Zeilman said that if this becomes a need, the county can provide this. There is vaccination storage capability on site if needed, a number of layouts have already been provided for potential PODs, allowing a waiting area for individuals to be observed after their vaccines. In addition to this, there are locations for staff and volunteers to have lunch, or breaks. There is also an isolation room if deemed necessary. Ms. Gaston re-iterated that the minor contract will allow for set up of the facility so that the moment the number of vaccines are received, it can be ramped up. The Saratoga Springs Police Department has indicated that they are willing to assist in locking down traffic, directing and providing security as needed. The Sheriff is also available as support and to work with the Police Department. Additionally, the Saratoga Springs Fire

Department has trained and obtained the proper authorizations for their firefighters to be able to help administer vaccines and have indicated they would be happy to support. Skidmore College has also indicated an interest in providing personnel to help support mass vaccinations. Ms. Gaston said that there are a lot of locations where they will be bringing vaccinations closer to communities, but having a place where we can all work together to get this done is important. Mr. Barrett commended everyone who has been involved in this and thanked Mr. McMahon for this help.

Dr. Kuhles said that there are currently approximately 18 different points of distribution throughout the County, geographically spaced. One of the challenges is with Covid nothing stays the same for more than a few days. Dr. Kuhles said that the fastest way to get Saratoga County back open, and back to their lives is if we have herd immunity. We want to achieve this through vaccination and not through infection. Having an option that can open quickly and 24/7 and can easily assist Public Health and provide some respite for Public Health Staff. Dr. Kuhles said that this is a location that is ideal for putting a large amount of people through.

Ms. Gaston said that it's important to note that they have been administering hundreds of vaccinations a day when it's available at the Public Health Services, but also have been doing smaller administrations throughout the County. Ms. Gaston said, again, this is dependent on when vaccinations are available, but it does allow us to set up and prepare.

For the second item under other business, Ms. Gaston said that there has been a lot of discussion about calls that have been received by all County staff, particularly in Public Health. There has been discussions about engaging an outside call center to assist in handling calls. Not for the purpose of providing medical advice, but for frequently asked questions such as about vaccinations, and direct them to resources as needed. Ms. Gaston said that we have obtained one quote for that purpose, however we are in the process of obtaining additional quotes. At this point, there is not enough information to bring this forward at this committee, however this item can be brought forward at Law & Finance or as an add on item at the Board Meeting consistent with the Board rules. Mr. Bulger said that the scope of the problem is that it is approaching over 2K calls per day and has inundated the County phone system.

Mr. Grasso asked where the calls are currently going and if we are sure the calls will be routed correctly. Dr. Kuhles said that currently there is a team in Public Health that handles the calls. They are open Mon-Sat 8am to sometimes 8pm. These are staff that Dr. Kuhles cannot use for other activities, whether it be case investigation or vaccinations. When information changes on a dime, which it did twice this week, first was the unexpected announcement by the Governor that seniors aged 75 and older were eligible to receive the vaccine, and again today with the announcement from the President and the Governor that the age threshold was moved from 75 to 65, we do not have the capacity to handle the calls, and this challenges the faith in Public Health. Having a solution will not only provide better customer service to the residents of the County but will also have the additional benefit of having Public Health Staff be deployed toward case investigations or vaccination efforts. Ms. Gaston said that one of the reasons a set quote is not available right now to move forward is because there were concerns brought up regarding language access, making sure the person taking the call was comfortable providing resources or dealing with an emergency, making sure that whatever organization we work with have the sufficient resources to handle the calls in the way Public Health and Mental Health feel is necessary and appropriate. Dr. Kuhles said that there would be an escalation protocol, call center could take 80% of the calls and those that require a nurse or epidemiologist can be escalated and triaged appropriately.

Ms. Gaston asked for Dr. Kuhles to give a brief update regarding the increase in deaths and hospitalizations, so that everyone is aware this is not something that is taking place and not announcing. Dr. Kuhles said that at the end of the calendar year he asked the staff to undergo a data reconciliation process to make sure numbers match with the State Health Department. Dr. Kuhles said that as part of the data reconciliation process, it was identified that there were a number of deaths that took place in nursing homes early in 2020, March, April, May, that were reported to the State Health Department but were not reported to Saratoga County. This process identified this discrepancy and now the numbers are matching, this is how the number of deaths increased recently. It does not represent a cluster of recent deaths between updates.

Mr. Barrett asked Dr. Prezioso if he is experiencing increased calls in his department. Dr. Prezioso said that their hotline in the spring was surprisingly underutilized, possibly because he was actually in the bunker and the phone calls were getting directly to him. They have seen a steady trickle, but not huge numbers. Dr. Prezioso said that the State has also put out hotline numbers so there are alternatives for people. Mr. Barrett asked if there was a population that is not calling at all? Dr. Prezioso said probably. Mr. Barrett asked how do we do more to reach out to people that might need help but are not taking the initial step. Dr. Prezioso said that there are a few items that he has also discussed with Supervisor Gaston. Items that could be helpful would be Facebook live type events, other social media, LOOK TV, would be helpful. Changing the format about to make it a little more Q & A rather than presentation, might be helpful. To get their attention to be able to provide support and resources for people. Ms. Gaston has drafted an email to Department Heads under this particular committee to ask them, particularly under the Chairman's initiative, that these departments be focused what they can do for this area. Ms. Gaston said that hopefully by the next meeting the ideas can be presented to the Committee. Mr. Barrett thanked Chairman Kusnierz for mentioning this in his remarks last Wednesday, the willingness to invest more funds into the area of mental health, behavioral issues and assistance. Mr. Barrett also thanked Chairwoman Gaston for her focus on this matter. With all of us working together, good strides can be made to help more and more people. Dr. Prezioso thanked the Chairman for his focus on Mental Health and Addiction issues. Fatal overdoses in 2020 doubled, non-fatal overdoses stayed the same, suicides have increased significantly, familiar discord, alcohol abuse, issues with kids struggling also. Any support is very welcome.

Mr. Grasso asked what the role of the Towns is, regarding pushing out information to residents. Is there any expectation from the County for the Towns to push out information. Ms. Gaston said that she believes the recommendation would be to do that as much as possible. One of the emails she has drafted is to all Supervisors to ask each Supervisor what their concerns are in their particular communities, high risk populations for Covid, high risk populations for mental health concerns, and what information can be provided so that we can bring this information back to County Departments to see if there are things that can be done, further information pushed down, so that the Towns know. What manner Towns prefer to receive this information. Public Health, Mental Health, Office for the Aging, Social Services have all been putting out information through their social media channels and email. If it would be helpful, possibly do a regular pushout on any new updates or resources, so that each Town and municipality can decide. Mr. Grasso said that in a Town with little resources, his concern would be the ability to keep up with updating the information. Making a commitment to push information out and if the Town would be able to keep up with it. Ms. Gaston said that we could maybe work to see how the County itself, the Board can compile something from the Department sites to make this information available, and not in a

way that places burdens on each of the municipalities. Mr. Lant agreed that all municipalities should be on the same page with the same message.

Mr. Barrett thanked Sandi Cross for her help recently with the purchase of a new senior bus. Mr. Barrett said that in a lot of municipalities services did not stop, seniors still need to get to appointments. Mr. Barrett said that they also partnered with CDPHP and their new van is emblazoned with a large logo on either side, and is a nice sponsorship opportunity they took advantage of. Ms. Gaston agreed and said that she knows services for seniors, meals and assistance have continued throughout the pandemic. Ms. Cross said that her office does NY Connects and the calls have tripled. Ms. Cross advised that the seniors are not going to call Mental Health, they are calling Office for the Aging. Her staff is trained, and they are also getting inundated with calls. Usually the NY Connects call fields 50 calls, yesterday the calls were 120. Increase in inquiries regarding where they can get vaccines, who is eligible and not. They are pushing out information from her Department and will share information with the Board that they may receive regarding seniors.

On a motion made by Mr. Grasso, seconded by Mr. O'Connor, the meeting was adjourned unanimously.

Respectfully submitted,
Therese Connolly
Deputy Clerk of the Board