

Health & Human Services Committee Minutes  
January 27, 2021 – 4:00 p.m.

Present: Chairwoman Tara Gaston ; Committee Members Phil Barrett, Eric Connolly, Joe Grasso, John Lant, Darren O'Connor, Tom Wood; Supervisors Ed Kinowski, Dick Lucia, Bill Peck, Tom Richardson, Mike Smith, Sandra Winney, Benny Zlotnick and Chairman of the Board Todd Kusnierz; Steve Bulger, Matt Rose, Audra Hedden, County Administrator; Hugh Burke, Mike Hartnett, County Attorney; Jason Kemper, Planning; Tina Potter, Social Services; J. Wes Carr, Youth Bureau; Michael Prezioso, Mental Health & Addiction; Sandi Cross, Office for the Aging; Daniel Kuhles, Public Health.

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

**On a motion made by Mr. Grasso, seconded by Mr. Connolly, the minutes of the January 12, 2021 meeting were approved unanimously.**

Mr. Burke said that there was a reference in the minutes regarding the City Center agreement to a one-time cost of approximately \$49K, and he understands that this is a monthly cost. Mrs. Connolly clarified that the minutes cannot be changed as they reflect what was actually stated at the meeting, however it will be noted in the minutes of this meeting and a reference added to the January 12, 2021 minutes. Mr. Kinowski asked if he can get a copy of the contract with the City Center. Mr. Burke said that they are currently working on a draft. Mr. Kinowski had additional questions and Ms. Gaston said that it would be better handled under other business.

**A motion was made by Mr. Connolly, seconded by Mr. Grasso, to authorize the acceptance of \$34,000 from NYS Office of Children and Family Services to continue participation in the Safe Harbour NY program during the 2021 calendar year. Unanimous.**

**A motion was made by Mr. Connolly, seconded by Mr. Grasso, to authorize an agreement with Saratoga Center for the Family (CFF) in the amount of \$29,000 effective February 1, 2021 and will expire on December 31, 2021 for the development and implementation of the NY Safe Harbour program. Unanimous.**

Mrs. Potter said that the Safe Harbour NY program began in 2016 for the purpose of developing human trafficking awareness and a critical services team in the County for the needs of youth that are identified and victimized as human trafficking. At that point, they contracted with Saratoga Center for the Family for the five year period. Mrs. Potter said that she was just notified on January 5<sup>th</sup> of the \$34K allocation this year. This is 100% state funded and therefore will have no budget impact. Mr. Kemper verified that there are two items to be approved, accepting the funds and authorizing the contract.

**A motion was made by Mr. Lant, seconded by Mr. O'Connor, to authorize the acceptance of additional grant funding in the from the NYS Office of Children and Family Services (OCFS) for the 2020 calendar year and amending the corresponding Youth Program Contracts. Unanimous.**

Mr. Carr said that due to Covid and other issues, the 2020 Youth Funding was received in November 2020, Resolution 225 of 2020 authorized this funding. On January 11, 2021 the State notified Mr. Carr that additional funds for 2020 were being provided. Mr. Carr said that the contracts were already in place and this request is to accept the additional funding and to amend the Youth Program Contracts to reflect the additional funding. Mr. Burke said that he spoke with Mr. Carr yesterday regarding the contracts and does not see any problem with this. Mr. Carr said that the additional funding is from two different funding streams. \$16,047 from the Youth Development Program and \$13,294 from the Runaway Homeless Youth Act. Ms. Gaston said that a breakdown of the funds was attached to the agenda. Mr. Carr clarified that the funds are received from OCFS and as a pass through, the County contracts with all of the various agencies in the municipal rec. programs in Towns, Villages and Cities.

Ms. Gaston said that item 5 on the agenda is a discussion regarding ongoing COVID response. Ms. Gaston said that Dr. Kuhles is here to give a general update on how the County is doing right now and questions can be discussed afterward. Dr. Kuhles said that he is happy to report that the vaccine efforts continue to be very positive. We have, as of yesterday, 18,502 individual county residents that have received one dose of vaccine, that is 8% of the population. Another 3,584 county residents have received a second dose of vaccine, which is 1.6% of the population. 9.6% of the population has received some vaccine and there are approximately 3.5% of people over the year that have been infected with some immunity. Ms. Gaston said that some additional positions were presented at yesterday's HR meeting, and some were approved by the Board last month. Dr. Kuhles said that the HR Committee yesterday approved positions for Epidemiologists. These are needed positions that will help the department do a better job with not just case investigation and outbreak management, but also data analysis, trends, identifying links that may not be evident, and are reflective of the staffing of a full service health department. Dr. Kuhles said that many of the full service health departments that are around the ¼ M population, this is the threshold where you go from a partial service to a full service health department, have 4-6 epidemiologists on staff. Dr. Kuhles said that this will be a tremendous asset in our COVID response. Dr. Kuhles is currently the only epidemiologist on staff. Dr. Kuhles said that as we expand and move to a full service health department, there will be significant increased responsibilities on the County, and this is a greatly needed skill set. Ms. Gaston said that for those who may not be aware, we are required or recommended to go to a full service by the end of 2022. Dr. Kuhles said certainly recommended, and it is his understanding that this has been recommended for a while now. Dr. Kuhles said that the main distinction of moving to a full service health department is the addition of environmental health services. Right now this is provided by NYS in Saratoga County, or any partial service County. Of these environmental health services, the ones that people are the most familiar with are the restaurant inspections, and to go along with that, food borne outbreak investigations, items of that nature.

Mr. Kinowski asked if the vaccination numbers given today was all coming from the State. Dr. Kuhles said yes, in NYS there is a State immunization registry, and that registry is mandatory for individuals under 18. Providers need to report vaccinations back to the registry. By executive order this year, all COVID and flu vaccinations, regardless of whether it is a child or adult, are mandated to be reported to the State immunization registry. All vaccines get reported into the system and this is the database where the numbers come from. Ms. Gaston said that the vaccination numbers have to be reported within 24 hours.

Mr. Grasso asked Dr. Kuhles to talk to the active vaccination program that the County is currently participating in. Dr. Kuhles said that in essence we are at the mercy of the State Health Department, who is at the mercy of the Federal Government, who is at the mercy of the supply chain. There are only two vaccines that currently have emergency use authorization from the FDA, Moderna and Pfizer. The County has only been given Moderna. Dr. Kuhles expects that a third vaccine from Johnson & Johnson, they will be making an application to the FDA probably within the next week. The big advantage of this vaccine is that it is one dose and has no special storage or handling. A drawback of that vaccine could potentially be if the vaccine needs to be reformulated, as is done for the Flu each year due to different strains, it may take a little longer to reformulate this vaccine rather than the Moderna and the Pfizer because the technology is more of a traditional vaccine, where Moderna and Pfizer are messenger RNA based. Dr. Kuhles said that the County places requests for vaccines every week. By order of the State we are limited to who we can vaccinate. Hospitals are focused on primarily health care workers, local health departments are primarily focused on law enforcement, first responders, firemen, teachers, grocery store workers. Pharmacies are primarily focused on 65 and older. The State PODs are able to vaccinate anyone. Dr. Kuhles said that we get less vaccines than what we ask for each week. Initially early on when hospitals were not able to use all of their doses, we took them and were very aggressive from the start. Now that the demand and supply balance has shifted, we are not nearly getting what we want or what we have asked for, and this is the real challenge. Mr. Grasso asked, from those that have been vaccinated in the County, how many vaccines were administered from the Health Department. Dr. Kuhles said that he does not know the exact number, but can find out. Mr. Grasso said that this would be a good metric moving forward to know.

Mr. Lawler thanked Dr. Kuhles and his staff for the work they are doing. It has been a historical undertaking and is deeply appreciated. Mr. Lawler asked if as we move forward administering more and more first doses, in a short period of time, those people will be looking for their second dose, and asked if the State has indicated how they intend to fulfil the second dose, and if it will have an impact on future first doses. Dr. Kuhles thanked Mr. Lawler for his support of the team, they have been working 7 days a week since March, working 12-15 hour days, and being asked to perform tasks that they were not trained for. There are nurses attempting to be statisticians and items like this. Dr. Kuhles said that at the County level of allocation from the State, the second doses are completely separate, they will come automatically and do not need to be requested. There is a whole separate set of rules associated with the second dose. Dr. Kuhles said that no one at the County level will be denied or redirected for their second dose. Dr. Kuhles said that at the Federal level, it depends on the supply chain. Dr. Kuhles said that the amount of manufacturing will go up, there are some drug companies that have agreed to manufacture the licensed vaccine to ramp up supply, the addition of Johnson & Johnson will also boost the pool of vaccines available. Dr. Kuhles said that he hopes very much and expects that at some point in the next several months, summer, that there will be less demand than supply in this country and county. To reiterate, if you get a first dose, you are automatically guaranteed a second dose.

Ms. Winney said that she has a problem and is not sure where to begin. Ms. Winney said that this morning she was told she had to pick out ten people from her town who would receive the vaccine. Ms. Winney said that she refuses to pick out who will get the shot and who will not. Those that are homebound, or people that are ill and cannot travel. Ms. Winney expressed frustration over communication and misinformation being received. She understands that shots are limited, but constituents are calling all of the Supervisors and she wants to be correct with her answers. Ms. Gaston said that if there is any misinformation she definitely wants to make sure this gets cleared

up. Specifically regarding this particular special allocation that was provided for the purposes of vaccinating seniors, it was not known until recently, information was sent out as soon as it was available. Ms. Gaston said that a lot of it is happening very quickly and she would like to prevent any misinformation, however she would ask if there was a concern, Supervisors, as they were requested to do in the email communication she sent, that they reach out to her, so that the correct answers and information. Where she has heard information in the community, she has taken steps to correct that. Mr. Smith also expressed frustration with inconsistent information being received. Text messages, emails, requesting numbers and names, and it's not clear how these numbers and names should be arrived at. EMS people are being directed by the Office of Emergency Services and Supervisors being directed by Supervisor Gaston. Mr. Smith said that it is unacceptable. Mr. Kusnierz said that he would like all of his colleagues to receive the information they are seeking and believes that there is additional information that will lend itself to this conversation, something that should be discussed in Executive Session because it is in relation to the public health, welfare and safety of our residents. Mr. Kusnierz respectfully requested that the Committee enter into executive session so that a more detailed conversation can be had on the lead up to the questions that were raised. The Committee can then come back into open session and answer some of the additional questions that are being posed here. Ms. Gaston asked if this would be the recommendation of the County Attorney and or the Commissioner. Mr. Burke said that the criteria are met because it is a matter of public safety. Mr. Kinowski questioned if it met the criteria of going into executive session and said that the general public needs to know what is going on and how we arrive at certain things. Mr. Kinowski said that this is all open, he would discuss this with anybody, and can be discussed civilly without going into executive session. Mr. Kusnierz said that there is information that should be clarified for the benefit of his colleagues and this information does fall under the grounds for which he stated previously, and believes there should be an executive session to get into that level of details before we come back out and continue the conversation.

**A motion was made by Mr. Grasso, seconded by Mr. Barrett, to enter into Executive Session to discuss matters which will imperil the public safety if disclosed. Unanimous.**

**A motion was made by Mr. O'Connor, seconded by Mr. Lant, to return to open session. Unanimous. No action was taken in Executive Session.**

Mr. Kinowski asked for clarification regarding the contract with the City Center. If it was stated at the meeting that the cost would be one time, what was voted upon by the Board, one time or monthly fee? Ms. Gaston clarified that the Resolution 31 of 2021 did state in the 7<sup>th</sup> whereas that "the Health and Human Services Committee unanimously approved a resolution authorizing rental of the facility at a cost not to exceed \$49,328 per month".

Mr. Lawler said that he has two questions/observations.

Firstly, Mr. Lawler said that in the discussion regarding this, with a discussion of the term significant, that not being a very precise term, there was a conversation that took place that quantified significant, and Mr. Lawler is hoping that there will be some language in the contract that is more than just significant. Mr. Lawler said that he is hoping there will be some real numbers in the contract, so that there is not a situation where the City Center thinks we have significant supplies and we say we don't have significant supplies, Mr. Lawler believes that the language

would be better served for the residents of Saratoga County if it had a real number as a minimum number of doses that would be available. Ms. Gaston said that the language in the Resolution does not say significant, it states sufficient doses as determined by the Commissioner of Public Health. Mr. Lawler said that he would like to see the word sufficient defined. Both words sufficient and significant may have different meanings for people.

Secondly, Mr. Lawler said that this is a monthly lease, if we had a large number of doses that were used up in 2 weeks, can we have the contract prorated on a daily basis so that we are not paying for a monthly term, even if we only use the facility for a much shorter period than a full month. Mr. Lawler said that given the dollar amount of approximately \$50K per month, he believes this is important. Ms. Gaston said that the discussion of the contract, both at the committee level and at the Board, part of the discussion was that it should be as a month lump, because it requires logistics on a number of levels, both from City Center and Public Health perspectives. There are discussions, if she recalls correctly, on talking about what happens if it's used for a shorter period of time, or if it's needed beyond a certain period of time, of decreasing that, which the City Center Authority has said they are amenable to doing. Mr. Lawler said that he believes it's a disservice to the taxpayers to say that we are going to pay \$50K a month to rent a building that we may need for a week. Mr. Lawler said that he understands the logistics involved in reserving the space, etc. but it's \$50K. Mr. Lawler said that he is simply suggesting that we find a way to prorate this so we are not spending \$50K a month to rent a building that may only be used for one or two weeks. Mr. Lawler said that he is not against the City Center, but there are a lot of places in Saratoga County to give these vaccinations. Mr. Lawler questioned if there will be access to parking. Ms. Gaston said yes. Mr. Lawler said that the people who currently park there will not be parking there. Mr. Lawler said that items like this needs to be clearly spelled out in the contract so there is no confusion. There should be an expectation that there is some quantified number of parking spots that come with leasing the building. Mr. Burke said that he will speak with them about it.

Mr. Peck asked Dr. Kuhles what the timeline is on what the decision will be regarding sports. Mr. Peck said that from watching the news, Albany County said that they were conferring with all of the neighboring counties and Mr. Peck is assuming that he is having multi county discussions. Dr. Kuhles said that they are having discussions to try to unify the approach. They have heard from Superintendents and Sports leagues that they would like one set of rules, which would be easier for everyone. Dr. Kuhles said that he believes they are very close to reaching that. Dr. Kuhles that there are a lot of counties across the State trying to unify their approach.

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

Respectfully submitted,  
Therese Connolly  
Deputy Clerk of the Board