

HEALTH & HUMAN SERVICES 2/24/2021

SPEAKERS

Steve Bulger, Darren O'Connor, Mo Wright, Phil Barrett, John Lant, Eileen Bennett, Mike Smith, Tara Gaston, Jason Kemper, Sandi Cross, Joe Grasso, Daniel Kuhles, Michael Prezioso, Several Supervisors, Eric Connolly, Tom Wood

Darren O'Connor

Okay, welcome, everybody. Thank you very much for coming. Tara is very, very briefly delayed and she asked that we just get started and she'll take over as soon as she gets here which hopefully will be in a couple of minutes. Okay, welcome. Do we have attendance? We're all set with attendance. Okay. Do we have a motion to approve the minutes from January 27.

Joe Grasso

So moved.

Darren O'Connor

Discussion. All in favor?

Several Supervisors

Aye.

Darren O'Connor

Opposed? Carried. Okay, the next item on the agenda is the one year contract for three contract tracers. Dr. Kuhles?

Daniel Kuhles

So these are three of the contact tracers who are doing an amazing job and have hit the limit on their, hour and dollar amount. So we would just like to extend them to roll them over for continued disease investigation and control activities. So it's a function of how they were initially hired and what the Board had decided on those contracts at the time that limits

Darren O'Connor

Any questions for Dr. Kuhles?

John Lant

I'll make that motion.

Tom Wood

Second, Supervisor Wood.

Darren O'Connor

Any other discussion? All in favor?

Several Supervisors

Aye.

Darren O'Connor

Opposed? Carried. Thank you very much, Dr. Kuhles.

Daniel Kuhles

I appreciate your support.

Darren O'Connor

Okay, the next item on the agenda is additional grants from the State of New York, amending the budget to conform to that. Dr. Prezioso?

Michael Prezioso

Thank you. This is to accept State funding, for cost of living increases in the amount of just over \$9,000. Accepting cost of living increases from the State for our downstream providers. None of the increases included are above the 10% contract threshold authorized in the prior resolution that allows the committee to accept the additional funds from the State. And then we will sign a letter countersigned by the agency to detail the increases. And again, it's a small amount of standard, it's cost of living increases.

Darren O'Connor

Okay, thank you, doctor. Do we have a motion to accept those?

Joe Grasso

So moved.

John Lant

Second,

Darren O'Connor

Any discussion or questions for Dr. Prezioso? All in favor?

Several Supervisors

Aye.

Darren O'Connor

Opposed? Carried. Thanks very much, Doctor.

Michael Prezioso

Thanks, Supervisors.

Darren O'Connor

Next item on the agenda is authorizing the renewal of contracts for the Expanded in Home Services. Sandi?

Sandi Cross

I'm just requesting an authorization for the Chairman to enter into contracts with five different homecare agencies to provide personal care level one and level two. The resolution and the rate is the same as last year. It's a housekeeping resolution.

Darren O'Connor

Okay, that's clear enough. We have a motion to authorize the renewal of those contracts.

Tom Wood

Supervisor Wood. Yes, I make the motion.

Darren O'Connor

Any discussion? All in favor?

Several Supervisors

Aye.

Darren O'Connor

Opposed? Carried. Thanks.

Sandi Cross

Thank you.

Darren O'Connor

Okay, the next item on the agenda is the additional allocation of COVID response funding. Let's see, do we have any, are we're going to have discussion on that, or are we just going to have a motion? Jason? Do you know, or Steve?

Steve Bulger

Yeah, that was something that Chairwoman Gaston wanted to bring up for discussion. And the bottom line is, she's looking at the COVID allocation that the Supervisors provided last year, which was rolled over again this year. And she wants to at least start a process of considering an increase for that from the Board of Supervisors for that allocation moving forward. Nothing has to be done today. There's no documentation. But that was really a discussion Tara wanted to lead. Right now, just for the record. There is, I believe, the last number, we got about \$224,000 left in the COVID allocation that the Board provided last year and was rolled over to this year, and that includes as best as we can tell everything that, any encumbrances that, we've already committed to so we think that number is pretty solid. We'll see moving forward, what else comes up with Public Health and vaccine distribution and everything we've got to do with that, but my understanding was the Chairwoman just really wanted to put that on

the radar for the Committee. Because at some point, it's likely later this year, there is going to have to be another allocation. So that's about all I know on that one, maybe if the Chairwoman gets here,. She may want to come back to that. But I'll leave that up to her of course, so.

Darren O'Connor

Okay, so let's postpone that for the time being and we'll turn to that issue when she gets in the room, which would be in a couple of minutes. And, Steve, I assume it's the same with the COVID Call Center? That's a discussion item, right? I don't think we have a motion on that. Right?

Steve Bulger

Correct.

Darren O'Connor

Mental Health Social Club. Is that the same thing? Okay, so why don't we take a two minute break? And I'm sure Tara will be in here at the end of that break. Is that okay with everybody?

Steve Bulger

Sounds good.

Darren O'Connor

Tara, we're up to item six on the agenda.

Tara Gaston

Thank you Supervisor O'Connor, we're on number six? Apologies. Okay. So Administrator, you covered some of the background of the of the funding?

Steve Bulger

Chairwoman, I gave the report, what we got in terms of the amount of money left in the account. And basically, in our discussions, you really just wanted to put it on a radar, that this might be something that this Committee is going to need to start thinking about to potentially add some additional funding as the vaccination efforts roll forward. And that was about as far as we got on that.

Tara Gaston

Okay. Were there any questions from anyone? Did you get that far? Did you open it for questions?

Steve Bulger

No.

Tara Gaston

I would say based on discussions with the Commissioner with the Administrator, the status of funds as they are right now. I think we're good where we are right now. We just want to keep an eye out on what's going on. I know we had talked last month about adding additional funds this month. Based on where we are, I don't think that that's necessary at this time, and I'd rather come forward with a more

specific number as opposed to just throwing out another round number. As pretty as they might be. Are there any concerns or suggestions or comments from those on the committee? This

Joe Grasso

This is Joe. So there were some recent appropriations, regarding like staffing health services, is that included in the COVID response?

Tara Gaston

Are you talking about the new positions like the Health Educator and Epidemiologist that would not be in the same? Right? This, these funds would be specifically set aside for COVID response only. Whereas those positions are more permanent positions for staffing the Health Department, we're going to need them well beyond COVID. Part of the reason for setting aside the separate bucket is especially now when the Federal Government has indicated 100% reimbursement for COVID costs. We're trying to keep those separate as much as possible and keep it clean so that that will make it a lot easier for our staff to help put forward that and hopefully, we can get all the monies that we spend in that area back.

Joe Grasso

Great, I'm good thanks.

Tara Gaston

Anyone else in the Committee? Any Supervisors not on the committee have a question or comment? Anyone on the phone? Okay. All right. So that was just an update for that. Alright, so item number seven is regarding a COVID call center. This is something that we've kind of talked about before and I believe the Administrator has some additional information for us.

Steve Bulger

Yes, thank you. All of the Committee members should have a copy of two proposals from the DiRAD company. They're a call center company based in Halfmoon. And I want to thank Matt Rose, for my team for a lot of work, not only with this company, but others trying to get the best proposals we can get from different call center companies. We had a conference call with this team today, Eileen Bennett was on there along with Matt. And we believe that this company can meet the requirements that we have been discussing internally. Certainly with Dr. Kuhles and his team, and the chairwoman, and others as to how we can set up as quickly as possible, as effectively as possible, a call center or a call in line, for the vaccine interest list. That interest list is done great. We have over 8,000 names on there. But we still need to set up a line so that, especially seniors who cannot access the computer, can call in and get registered on that list. That's what this particular these two potential contracts are designed for.

Tara Gaston

Thank you. And I know that previously, we had talked and we put forward positions to help in staffing the call center. Those are still positions that are needed and necessary both for making outbound calls and assisting in PODs. However, in discussions is Eileen here? Okay, well, in discussions with Director Bennett and the IT Department it takes, it's going to take a little bit longer than we had hoped to set up a separate line for vaccine registration. The reasons for that are basically making sure that we don't

take down other lines or that we don't overwhelm other parts of the County, which I think are excellent goals. So there was a discussion about perhaps outsourcing some of that to this call center, which is local. But also Commissioner Kuhles, I don't know if you want to speak any to it. But there was also discussion of how this would allow our Public Health personnel to engage in more field work or other activities as well. So the discussion was to do this to move forward, these right now would be only for accepting registrations to the interest list, to help support that, those are particularly for individuals who aren't going to have access to computers or who would have more difficulty being able to enter their information. That would allow our own Public Health personnel and the people that are staffing it here to do more of the detailed or nuanced calls, and then we can consider depending on how well they're doing, if it's appropriate or necessary at any point to move any other additional calls, like we discussed before FAQs, and the like. The Commissioner was particularly concerned about making sure of the quality so that whoever is answering on behalf of Saratoga County is doing the work of his Department and representing our Department well. Commissioner, did you want to make any more comments about it?

Daniel Kuhles

Thank you, Supervisor. I think your last point is one that I can't emphasize enough, we, in addition to our goals for getting working together with the community, and with you all, to get us out of the pandemic, while we do that, we want to provide excellent customer service, this is a very confusing time for everybody, especially for seniors. And we want to make sure that we have staff that are freed up to handle and provide, may not be a senior, but it may often be a senior, that extra care that they need to make sure that there is no confusion, and that they can get in and out efficiently and things of that nature. Additionally, as vaccine supplies increase, it's likely we will be either depends on how the increase comes in, of course, but multiple smaller pods or when it really comes in into, a big mass vaccination clinic. And so we're going to need, there's efficiencies gained by doing that mass vaccination clinic. And so I'll be needing to pull people that are answering some phones now to do the field work and run those pods. So this is a very flexible solution that will allow us to maintain excellent customer service to our own residents, and give us the flexibility to move where we need to be, COVID changes every day. As you may you may know. So I'm thankful to you all for considering this.

Tara Gaston

And part of the proposal that was put forward also allows the Commissioner or any designated individual to real time listen in on the calls that are being taken to make sure that they're being handled in the way that we want them to be. And (illegible) the department so that we don't continue any contract that is not engaged in the work that we want them to be engaged in. So first is any, and this is, pardon me, minor contract is what we are looking to look for, with the idea of, we'd have it for a few weeks, and then the Board can look forward to moving it for a longer term as appropriate. Administrator?

Steve Bulger

Yes, exactly. So it looks like that we will be able to do a combination, in talking to Dr. Kuhles, it's most likely that when we release the phone number the Supervisors get it, they release it, it's out on the media, there'll be a big surge in calls the first few days. And then typically it will start trending down a little bit. So this company is ready to handle any surge that comes in and then start trending down on

their staff, as required. Since it looks like, another good thing is that we will be able to use a County number Eileen Bennett from IT was able to talk to them today, and we worked out an arrangement where we can use a County number, which is good because then even if we get, if we decide not to move forward with this company, we still keep that number, that number is out there. It's our number. So that's another advantage. And we believe we can get to the 16th of March, which is the next Board meeting with a combination of these two, and keep it at the \$15,000 level, and then the Board can decide whether they want to move forward with a larger contract at that time.

Tara Gaston

I want to make two notes real quickly. Um, first, I was just informed there was in fact, a technical difficulty will be releasing a recording of this meeting in its entirety for anyone who was had an issue accessing it. So thank you for your patience with that. Also, I was just informed that Director Bennett is on the line now. So Director Bennett, do you have any comments regarding the technical aspects of this? All right, Director Bennett is here. I do think the that's an excellent point that we're going to be able to keep the number prevent confusion. I do want to know that IT and Director Bennett were involved in this every step of the way. And obviously making sure that we could support that and that integrated into our programs was very important. I think one thing for us to look at is there are two proposals, one weekdays and one including weekends. Does any member of the Committee or Commissioner, do you have any comments you want to make regarding the two different potentials? I'm sorry, we keep up and downing you. I will try.

Daniel Kuhles

So, my only comment would be, as Mr. Bulger mentioned, I do anticipate a rush of calls. So depending on what day of the week, the phone numbers and ask it might be nice to be able to have seven days a week to provide that level of service to our seniors or anybody calling, and then, be able to dial that back to five days a week as we get through that, that bolus. Likewise, when the Governor changes, the eligibility list, at some point is going to be opened up to anybody that want we'll have another bolus of calls everywhere and, being able to have that flexibility to handle seven days a week, when the bolus comes might be, I would ask that that be considered.

Tara Gaston

Okay, is that Director Bennett?

Eileen Bennett

Yes, it is.

Tara Gaston

Thank you. Okay. Before we have any further discussion, Director Bennett did you have any comments or anything you wanted to add regarding the call center proposal?

Eileen Bennett

I don't think so. I only heard part of it. But I was on the call with Steve and Matt. So I believe that we're all set, the biggest hits was whether or not we could give them a County number, which we can do

through our carrier. So if the number had to come back here to be used in our own call center, it would be the same number.

Tara Gaston

All right, excellent. Thank you. Okay, so Commissioner, your preference would be seven days a week, like maybe for the first couple of weeks. And then consider, see where we are and what the volume is, and whether dropping down to five, and the company is comfortable with adjusting as needed? Administrator? All right, so then Committee members, any comments or questions? Supervisor Lant your lights on does that mean you

John Lant

I want to make a motion to move this. I'd like to make a motion, we approve this COVID call center for seven days a week. I believe it's very needed. I'd be a big help. And one nice thing, it's a local company.

Tara Gaston

Okay. Thank you. And I appreciate your enthusiasm. I think since we're doing a minor contract, we don't need to move forward with a motion right now. We just want to make sure that the whole Committee is aware if any other Supervisors who are here to discuss it, the minor contract would cover a couple of weeks, and then we could move forward for the full if we believe that it is working appropriately. And if not, that also allows us the opportunity to step back from it. Supervisor Grasso?

Joe Grasso

Yeah, so just a couple of questions. So when we talk about a minor contract, I assume that that we're falling under a threshold where we don't need to, like competitively bid this or get other quotes. Is that, only because it seems like a weekly amount, but this is something that's going to be a recurring charge for, let's maybe say months or a year at which case it's going to escalate to a significant cost, or is that not the expectation? I just want to make sure we don't, that we're following whatever the procedure is, and we understand what the overall cost may be.

Jason Kemper

So Supervisor Grasso, or the overall cost for a minor contract, can be administered by the Administration is, you can't exceed \$15,000. So no matter what any ongoing cost, I mean, no invoices...

Tara Gaston

One moment please. Thank you,

Jason Kemper

Sorry. Supervisor Grasso, my apologies. With a minor contract which can be approved by the Administration, you can't exceed \$15,000. So no matter what, no invoices can be paid past \$15,000. That's a limit. So at that point, as Supervisor Gaston stated, you would have to come back to the Board to pay anything above \$15,000. So all those occurring costs have to be included in that, below that dollar amount. So I think what they're looking to do is, this is a temporary measure similar to what we've done and others to get a suit next couple of weeks to figure out, what would I do moving forward?

Joe Grasso

All right, yeah, fair answer. So my thoughts to the to the Committee is I agree with John in terms of the five days a week versus seven days a week, or we think that we should only be looking at a seven day a week option, the cost difference doesn't seem to be enough to justify the impact on service to our residents, at least to start, and maybe then the doctor said after time, we may be able to roll it back. But I do think that we just need to look at things from a cost cumulatively in terms of where this may be and make sure that we're following the right protocol and doing the right due diligence on it. But yeah, it's definitely a service that I think we should be prepared to move forward with quickly.

Tara Gaston

Thank you. Any other Committee members?

Darren O'Connor

Madam Chairwoman, just a question I in terms of the timing on this, what are what are we anticipating the start date for the phone?

Steve Bulger

Based on our conversations earlier, we think we should be up and running early next week. And I'll just put no later than Wednesday, next week, but hopefully, Tuesday, outside chance of Monday.

Tara Gaston

I do want to make it clear, that is assuming that this Committee in general agrees with it. While, this is a minor contract, and is not required to go through this. But the Commissioner, the Administrator, and the Director, wanted it brought here for discussion, and one of the Health Committee to have a general consensus on whether we wanted to consider this option and try this option first. So if the Committee feels comfortable with it, then we would move forward, and then it would be available at approximately that timeline.

Darren O'Connor

I'm definitely comfortable with it. And I agree that at least for the first couple of weeks, we should do the seven day option. In terms of the training for the individuals that are answering the phone, I'm assuming they'll be trained to distinguish and make it clear to the callers what the differences are between the vaccine interest list and the actual signup list? Because I mean, I think some of the callers especially some of our seniors are apt to be confused by that.

Daniel Kuhles

Yes, absolutely. We're going to do training, there's going to be a script and a pathway that needs to be followed by them. And that's another reason why we mentioned about listening in to those calls to make sure things go smoothly. Again, I want to have the best customer service for our for our residents in here. We'll also be looking to provide training on or general awareness on what a call from a senior might be like, and how to help them navigate that confusion of where they can get a vaccine, who can be vaccinated where, and all of that we want clarity, and precision in our message, especially for our seniors.

Darren O'Connor

Thank you.

Tara Gaston

In anticipating a call center, Commissioner Kuhles already drafted the FAQs, which were passed out, and there are some additional items that will be added. And there'll be provided as well, so that the most common answer, or most common questions will be available. And they'll also be given training on when to identify if there's an emergency or a particular need, and what to do in that based on what Public Health feels comfortable with. With regard to that.

Darren O'Connor

Sounds good. Yeah. I mean, I think it's a very worthwhile expense. So thank you.

Daniel Kuhles

Thank you.

Tara Gaston

Any other committee members have any comments or questions?

Tom Wood

Yes, Supervisor Wood here, I fully support this. I think you've done a great job of organizing it and setting it up. And the sooner this can be up and running, the better. So it's strongly needed and seven days a week is an absolute necessity.

Tara Gaston

Thank you Supervisor Wood. Although as much as I would love to take credit, this wasn't none of mine. It was very much our County Staff doing all the work. And I appreciate them for doing that. Under a number of emails for me. Is there any other Supervisor on the phone who's on the committee who has a comment?

Phil Barrett

Chairwoman?

Tara Gaston

Yes Supervisor Barrett.

Phil Barrett

Yeah, I support this 100%. And I think as part of the messaging, we should be sure to say that getting on the list early or early earlier than others does not move you to the front of the line. hopefully, we can maybe offset a rush in calls by having that as part of the messaging. If you call today or call tomorrow, or later the same day, there's no advantage to calling right away. So I think, just want to make sure that's part of the messaging. And also the fact that, being on the list multiple times, is again, does not give you an advantage. I guess we've had that too. So it's call once and call when you can I guess.

Tara Gaston

Yes, thank you having your name in multiple times does not do anything except make our IT have to clean the database a little bit better? Or more often, I guess. Okay. I'm not sure which one of you had the light on first.

Mo Wright

I've got two questions. The first one's kind of logistical. If somebody calls my Town Hall, do I just give them that number and say, just call this and they'll sign you up? Or do I encourage them to get online and try to do it themselves first?

Tara Gaston

Either way.

Mo Wright

Logistically, just how are we supposed to, I know, right now, we've got people calling, asking about it, if they have a computer, then we're telling them to get on a computer and sign up. If not, we've been trying to help them get signed up, we're no longer going to do that correct? We're going to give them this counting number?

Tara Gaston

You will be able to give them this number, both the web access and the phone access will lead to the same spot. So there'll be no difference in whether you call the phone number or access it through the web. But yes, you can absolutely.

Mo Wright

Okay, when they call in this, they will be signing people up to the list right now just giving them information to go. Yeah. And then if you can't get on a computer, call your Supervisor, let them do it.

Tara Gaston

No, this will be specifically for assisting people to sign on to the list directly. Yes.

Mo Wright

Okay. My other question was, what are we doing for outreach to get this number out and let people know what's out there? Are we just depending on the Supervisors to, when somebody calls us by accident? Or? I mean, obviously you're having press conferences and stuff. But is there any other kind of blasts through the media? Or what are we doing for outreach?

Tara Gaston

Absolutely, if we're going to move forward on it, I absolutely think that the goal would be to get the message out as wide and as broadly as possible, including through media, we can include it in a County press conference. The Commissioner, I saw you were standing up, it looks like you may. Yes, absolutely it's your department. We're all here to support you.

Daniel Kuhles

I appreciate it. One option that I am considering is the, we have conveyed important messaging through the reverse 911, this is another layer to make sure nobody falls through the cracks. People without a computer, or may not have Cable television or something like that, will be able to access that information from the recorded message. We could also look at the performance of that message, who went to voicemail, who responded and things of that nature so it's been very effective for important communications.

Mo Wright

Are we still are we still encouraging people to try to get signed up on the State sites and pharmacies and whatever? I mean, obviously, we're not we don't have the vaccines to give out. We're just putting people on a list. And we're giving them false hope at this point. You know, they think they're on a list or going to get a vaccine, are we still encouraging them to and we got to explain to them that this is does not get to a vaccine.

Tara Gaston

I would hope and I know that the messaging that's been put out by the County is that the list is not a guarantee. However, that is how we are pulling information. I know that the Commissioner and other Departments are also working to see how we can assist in providing those names to other sources of vaccines, in addition to the vaccines available through the County. The guidance on the website and obviously what will come through the phone will also be, this is not a guarantee, it does not put you in a line if you have another way to access it. No one's feelings are going to be hurt. If we call and say we may be able to vaccinate you and you say I've already been vaccinated.

Mo Wright

I just don't I just don't want people giving them false hope,

Tara Gaston

absolutely

Mo Wright

You're on a list and they're going to wait until, because we may never get a mass vaccination here in your county. Correct? I mean, there's no guarantees we're going to correct?

Daniel Kuhles

I've learned not to try to (illegible) COVID. But I can promise you that I certainly don't want anyone to get a false sense. I want everybody to be vaccinated as quickly as possible wherever that is, particularly seniors, because the data is so compelling across this country and across other countries and cultures, that seniors are at the highest risk, and therefore we need to be vaccinated as quickly as possible. And so this list, this interest list, is also going to be used as part of the Capital Region vaccine hub, which includes all the hospitals in the region, federally qualified health centers, and medical practices, really the entire healthcare system. And so, when vaccine goes to one provider, or something like that, many of them will say, let's say it's a private doctor's office or a large group, they're likely to say, we're going to use, X amount of vaccines, maybe tap or something for our own highest risk

patients for recognizing this as a public health function. That if there are other providers that are public health, or this list, or whomever that have people at that risk group, that we can share that information and link them to vaccines in other sites, everybody, all the local health departments in the region, the hospitals, the providers, who sometimes those private entities are in competition, but they're all working together. And so the last thing I would want is for anybody to have false hope. And if we can vaccinate them, you know, I'll do that. But if I can get them vaccines elsewhere, faster than I can vaccinate, I'm going to do that, too.

Mo Wright

Are we going to have different groups on this list, say, over 75 over 65 with issues, I mean, or it is just going to be everybody's on the list, we're going to randomly draw or....

Tara Gaston

When an individual signs up on the list, and they enter whatever category they're eligible under, or as many as they're eligible under. So you can sign up, if you're over 65, that you have a comorbidity, you're a teacher, any category that's currently eligible is represented on the list. The commissioner is able to sort the names and the entries, so that if we get vaccines that are limited to a certain category, he can sort those and we can provide information and that way they can do it, however, it's necessary based on the priorities and the requirements of any particular vaccine. Does that answer?

Mo Wright

Yeah, I just, I mean, obviously we're struggling getting, I mean, I've got 90 year old people that have been vaccinated yet. And now I've got people that are, you know, 35 years old, that are just (illegible) eligible. So they're on the site, and I'm hoping we're not drawing from the same, you know, this guy just gets vaccinated, and my nine year old doesn't, that's what I'm trying to

Tara Gaston

The Commissioner's goal, which I fully support is our priority is those who are at highest risk of damage.

Several Supervisors

Supervisor Gaston and Wright speaking at the same time.

Tara Gaston

And we have received permission that's been made clear from the State that there is, in certain circumstances, but in general, yes, Commissioner, do you want to speak more of that?

Daniel Kuhles

Obviously, the local health departments are not making many decisions in this effort, and legally obligated to follow those Executive Orders. You don't need to be a physician or an epidemiologist to know that, a 20 year old with a little bit of, you know, hypertension is otherwise healthy, does not have the same risk of severe illness, hospitalization or death as a 65, 75 or 85 year old person, that's a diabetic, the kidneys don't work well, they're literate, etc. And so within that list, this is the hand we were provided, within that list of individuals with comorbidities, while relative to the general population there

an increase in the group itself. There's a tremendous fan of risk and although with this less than by seeking permission from the State to link people that are at highest risk, again, we're not allowed to vaccinate people that are 65, and older and healthy, that's the rules. But I need their names on that list. So that I can make them with a pharmacy working with Office of the aging or whomever it is, or a private doctor's office, where if they do have one of these conditions, that we can use data. Right, that's the goal here to find when the vaccine is scarce to be able to find out who's at highest risk. Likewise, that's one of the, kind of the theory behind involving the private doctors, right? I mean, we could use some demographic data to determine risk, but within somebody's own practice, they know those people best. And they know who really should be at the top of their list for vaccine, and that's what we're going to share and link people together. But you're absolutely right with your observation. And I wish it were different.

Tara Gaston

And that's another reason why the first come first serve isn't really wouldn't be the best option anyhow, because we want Public Health to be able to make those decisions based on their experience or expertise. And I do, I want to make it clear. These are decisions being made by Public Health, and Public Health and only IT as much as needed to support it and have access. So if anyone is concerned about that your information is secure. It's confidential. And

Mo Wright

I don't think that was ever a question I just

Tara Gaston

No, no, I had that question. People were concerned about if they put it in who was going to have access to it, I just want to make it while we have it on the record so that people are aware. This is only Public Health. We're not going to share that (illegible). But yes, I agree. You raised some very important points. Thank you. Supervisor Smith?

Mike Smith

Yes, I think that this is a phenomenal idea and I don't think you can sign that minor contract fast enough. I've talked with Dr. Kuhles quite a few times over the last week and a half or so. And I think this gives him a lot more tools in his toolbox to make decisions and to help people in this community. Last thing as far as how we get it out there, I don't want to double up on how we do this. I mean, it crossed my mind to use my Town newsletter and, and actually put it out on a postcard to people, I don't want to do that if the County is going to do something similar. I mean, a lot of the people, and I have a lot of people that don't know how to use, I don't say don't know how to use a computer, but don't have access to a computer. So I mean, they're going to get their mail, and they're going to see that and oh, I can pick this phone up. And I can make that call. So that was a thought I had, I think a couple other Supervisors have talked about, you know that as well. But I don't again, I don't want to double the efforts. So I mean, if there's something that

Tara Gaston

I would defer to the expert in public education, but I would say

Mike Smith

If the County's going to do on a County letter. Just let us know what that is so we don't double dip.

Tara Gaston

Absolutely. I mean, it sounds like we've got some pretty good support for that. So I think the next step would be the Administrator doing that, and then we can talk to the commission, and I don't mean to interrupt you, you're welcome to, and discuss exactly.

Several Supervisors

Supervisors Gaston and Smith talking at the same time

Mike Smith

I honestly think that this Committee should probably look, have this as a Resolution for March meeting for something longer term, I don't know where that stands. I mean, you can go ahead and issue a minor contract tomorrow for this and get this up and running. But in the timeframe that we're at, I think this committee should put something forward, that's a resolution for the March meeting.

Tara Gaston

That is the discussion

Mike Smith

We won't be meeting again, between now in the March meeting.

Tara Gaston

We've had a discussion about whether it's either appropriate for this committee to have a special meeting just before in order to move that forward, or whether it would be appropriate to bring it up at Law and Finance. Either way, I agree a longer term, it needs to be at the March meeting. And that's the intention.

Mike Smith

Very good. Thank you.

Tara Gaston

Do you, just when you mentioned postcards, do you believe that a reverse 911, or...?

Mike Smith

(illegible) definitely a good idea as well,

Tara Gaston

Postcard would be better for a number of your residents or

Several Supervisors

Supervisors Gaston and Smith speaking at the same time.

Mike Smith

I think a multi-faceted approach to this is probably a good thing. I mean, I put out a quarterly newsletter, I can easily put out a postcard with the same mailers, and I can get it out there, hopefully a lot quicker than my newsletter goes sometimes a little slow sometimes with it. But yeah, that was a thought that I know has been tossed around between some different Supervisors as well that once we knew what those phone numbers were, they could get that out.

Tara Gaston

Absolutely. Commissioner, it looked, I see you, Supervisor Wright.

Mo Wright

I just want to make one point. I mean, I agree with Mike. But I think if you're going to, if we're going to do a postcard or something like that somebody needs to come up with something that's said to everybody in the County, not one Town putting something out, and another Town put something else out, it needs to be all the same exact message going out. Whether, to tell Galway doesn't share with the rest of the county, whatever. But I think the same message has to go to everybody, and not a different message from me, as him and probably the message should come from Dr. Kuhles, we can obviously get it out through our newsletters, whatever. But I think we need to be telling the people the same thing throughout the County and not different Towns.

Tara Gaston

Absolutely. And to be clear, my question with that on, is that something that we should be considered? Do you believe that a significant enough proportion of the population that you represent, would that be a better way? Whatever that goes out needs to be....

Mike Smith

Yeah, I think for my town, I think that there's a lot more people that are going to see something in their mailbox, and they're going to respond to that. And they're not going to necessarily, they're going to see a phone number, you know? Well, I mean, if they're savvy enough to go online themselves, they're going to see it on a news media release type of thing. The people that are not going to pay attention to that, and

Tara Gaston

No and that's important, and I agree, whatever, it should be consistent and throughout, but that's why I wanted to make sure if that's going to benefit enough of our population, then I think that should be what we consider commission?

Daniel Kuhles

I was just going to add that often multiple modalities hit different kinds of people. And I think again, we're talking about COVID. And we're talking about sometimes life and death for many populations. And so, going back to the joke about my waistline, right, maybe on the menu, all of the above are many of the above, rather than, just one because it, from the purely the Public Health perspective, it doesn't hurt if somebody gets the message three times, but it does hurt if they get it zero times. So,

Tara Gaston

Absolutely, and your point is very well taken, that it needs to be consistent to the whole county.

Mike Smith

I mean, if something was to be put together as a statement, that probably would, singular, consistent statement across however we decided to get it out there, in our own Towns, but the statement should be consistent. I guess that is a good idea.

Tara Gaston

Administrator.

Steve Bulger

Yeah, I just want to say that we're definitely going to be working with Sandi Cross, and her Office for the Aging team, no one knows how to communicate with our seniors better than her office, they've already been very helpful with the vaccine. So thank you for that. So we will definitely be communicating through that network as well, which I think is a really good network to do.

Tara Gaston

Supervisor Grasso?

Joe Grasso

I just want to say I appreciate that we actually have the opportunity today to get into the discussion about the interests list, I wasn't sure if we're going to get into it and get a chance to ask questions. So I'm going to I should probably be more like Mike and talk to the doctor more often than just once a month at these meetings. But this is when my mind seems to focus on this issue more than ever. And hearing others talk, just starts to, I start to think of other questions. So in terms of the interest list, because we've obviously been dealing with this in our Town, just like other Supervisors have. So we've got 8,000 names, or so? Could you just, how do we measure success of the of the interest list? And then I'm going to do the questions one by one, because I know, I don't want to just rattle off five questions for you. So let's deal with that one first.

Daniel Kuhles

So I think there are, a number of ways to measure success from the interest list. One is tracking individuals from that list, and who have received the vaccine that may need to be done because of just the volume. I mean, we're talking eventually, about the full County population, you'd probably want to, at some point, do sampling. Early on, you can do everyone. So that's one way. But also looking at the number of people, again, because of the restrictions that have been placed on really any vaccinator, it's not just local health department, a pharmacy can only do 65 and older right, right now. So another measure of success, a secondary measure would be how many County residents have we linked, that have been vaccinated elsewhere, it doesn't matter where they get vaccinated. So that's a good, those would be the two off the top of my head. Eileen, Director Bennett's on the phone. People can use the number of views on the webpage and the number of people registered. But to me, the primary goal of that list is vaccination, and so that the primary measure of success should be vaccination.

Joe Grasso

So, we've got 8,000 people that have signed up on the list. Has the list resulted in people getting vaccinated?

Daniel Kuhles

It will be very soon within days, yes, because we're, there was you may be aware that there was a national delay in shipment of vaccines because of the storm in the southern part of the country. So that delayed both last week's vaccines across. And so yes, that list will be used in short order to both vaccinate individuals by our own clinic, but also to link them to other locations, as I mentioned earlier, whether it be a pharmacy, or private medical provider or a Federally qualified health center that has vaccine on their own, but is setting aside a portion of it not to be used on their own patients, but to be used for the public good and who really is at highest risk, to your point about the difference in risk among that one eligible group with comorbidities.

Joe Grasso

All right, so you touched on something that I think is significant. I didn't know until today that getting on the list actually exposes you to the availability of vaccines other than just at the County, and I know in our Town we've been then we've now been spreading wrong information because either it wasn't clear or we took a little bit and thought the wrong thing. So I think the messaging of that fact, I think needs to be front and center, because I'm going to have people saying, well, you told me that getting on the County list was only going to be for vaccines that the County was administering, and because I was over 65, and the county isn't doing over 65, I was only pursuing other avenues. I think we need to make sure in our messaging that getting on this list actually, may make them available to vaccines through other vaccinators.

Tara Gaston

I do, that was actually, the Commissioner presented some language to change in some of the messaging that we've been putting out, the ability to cooperate with others is actually relatively recent. Because they have to develop these relationships to work together. So the Commissioner, and I know Director Cross and other staff have been working to build these where they didn't exist before. So we're working on that and working on expanding that. So I don't know that the messaging was wrong, but it is definitely changing as through the continued work of our staff. But the Commissioner did provide some language for consideration, by I know, the Administrator and myself to change what's on the website, and then that will also be part of the consideration in the messaging that sent out with the phone number as well. I do want to make it clear that signing up on the list does not provide access to things like the State sites that you would register online for, we may be able to connect people to vaccines, other than administered by the County, but people should continue if there are other places to look there as well.

Joe Grasso

And that's basically the messaging we provide, right? Yeah, just like I say, I appreciate the list. I think it was a great step. And it sounds like it's a successful program. So I applaud your efforts in that regards, then your staff, so great.

Daniel Kuhles

Thank you. And my apologies, if I've, caused any confusion, the going back to the point about seniors and having staff that are able to spend more time with them freeing, or to avoid confusion, because there are so many, there's a Federal program, there's a State probe, there's a Veterans, the VA has their own program, it can be very confusing, even to the people in the field. And so, again, it doesn't register you for a State POD. Right. But it can be used, if there was an opportunity to link you to, another provider if that opportunity comes along, but we'll make sure that our that we redouble our messaging and that it's succinct, and clear and uniform, to all the members of the Board.

Tara Gaston

And we also appreciate the patience as, I'm sure if you pay attention to any of the State level announcements, things change quite rapidly. So I know the Commissioner on the staff have been working pretty hard to try and keep up with that. Are there any other questions or concerns from the committee, I guess, regarding the list or the call center, generally? It does sound like we have general support for at least moving this forward on the minor contract with the goal to have something at the March 16 meeting. Just as a heads up committee members, that may mean that we have to have a special meeting prior to that, in order to move this through, we do want to make sure it moves through the proper process and the channels. But we also didn't want to wait any longer than necessary to bring this forward and get it moving if that was where the direction was. Alright, the eighth item on the agenda, we're running a little late. And I know I asked for an update on the emergency rental quickly. So what I'll just say is the mental health social club, there's been, previously there was a program called Friendship House that provided a lot of support kind of social engagement for individuals either suffering from substance use disorders or mental health issues. And there's been some local agencies that have expressed interest in restarting similar programs. I kind of wanted to discuss with the committee about that. And talk, Doctor P. kind of have a an open discussion about the prospect of that, particularly as we recover from COVID. There are a lot of issues, we've seen overdose rates double. And we've seen a lot of individuals have trouble during this time. And if the County can help support through a program like that, it may be something we want to consider. However, as I said, we're running a little bit long, this is not an urgent thing. So I'll just kind of put that aside and we can have a further discussion on that next time. But I would if anyone has any thoughts or any programs that you think should be considered or as part of that discussion, let me know and we'll bring it up at the next committee meeting. The next is number nine for other business. I did ask Commissioner Potter if had any brief updates on the emergency rental program?

Tina Potter

Supervisor Gaston asked me if I can just give you a brief update on the Emergency Rental Assistance Program. Just as a backdrop, it is part of the Federal Cares Act. And the United States Treasury passed the bill for \$25B. We submitted an application in January and Saratoga County, we're going to get \$6,818,000 to help with this program for assisting households who were negatively financially impacted because of COVID. So any kind of loss of income, because of COVID loss of jobs, if they're on unemployment, then these individuals would be eligible as would the landlord to apply for this program. At the current time, the State is working on developing a portal, which will be a centralized application process to date these applications. We're hoping, we've been in regular discussions with the State Commissioner as to when we can get this up and running. But at the current time, there was a

Senate Bill, and the Senate Bill is working out some of the parameters for eligibility. And as soon as that bill gets passed, there's hope that will be sometime in March that the portal will be open. And then we can get information out about how to apply for that. But again, that'll be a great assistance to individuals in our county, because we'll have that \$6,800,000 to help with that rent to pay as much as if necessary, 12 months back in three months, prospectively. And what the local government, we're going to have to do is just do education to help applications, applicants, do their applications, do outreach, and also educate the landlords on the program. At the current time, we're really just waiting for that portal to get up, and I'm going to get open sometime by the end of March.

Tara Gaston

I think first it's important to note that Commissioner Potter found out about this program applied immediately, and I think everybody was a little bit shocked, including the Treasurer on how quickly it went through. But I do want to thank you for your effort in making sure that that happened, I think it will be a great benefit to our residents. There have also been discussions the State is opening a portal, there was a discussion about whether the County should handle our own application process instead, because of a lot of the criteria, including you can't double funding sources, and certain information and access that's required, I believe all of our County staff, Attorney's Office, Commissioner Potter, etc., decided that it was probably going to be better to go with the State's that has that capacity to check all of those things, which is going to be a more secure and accurate process for both the County and our residents and landlords, well renters and landlords, both of them are residents, who are applying it will allow things I think to be done a lot more quickly. So while we don't like having to wait on this, we do think that it's going to end up with a much better outcome for everyone. So I appreciate that. And the Commissioner has been on regular calls and been updating with regards to the status of the process. So look forward to that. Are there any questions from anyone on the committee regarding the program? Anyone on the phone on the committee? Any other Supervisors who are present have any questions? Okay. Thank you, Commissioner. I appreciate that. And I know she has been and will continue to update us as it moves forward. Is there any other business from any other member of the Committee? Yes, Supervisor Lant?

John Lant

I just got a text from my Town. We've got three senior housing in Wilton, is there any special plans for them? Going there to give the shots or

Tara Gaston

This is regarding the vaccines?

John Lant

Right the vaccine.

Tara Gaston

Commissioner Kuhles? Would you like to

John Lant

Because they did go up and do the Home of Good Shepherd a while back, the State did.

Tara Gaston

Commissioner, you're probably going to want to speak to some of that. It is important to note that there are different types of housing, and different classifications

John Lant

These are all senior housings

Tara Gaston

Right, but some of them are classified differently in different ways. And as a result, different programs have gone out and handled them. I know that

John Lant

Two of them are assisted living.

Tara Gaston

I know that Director Cross and Commissioner Kuhles have both been working in this area. So I would defer to

Sandi Cross

We're maintaining a list of all the senior housing in the County irregardless, we have Prestwick Chase on it, we have the HUD 202 housings. Only one of them in Wilton is HUD 202. So they all fall under different categories for

Tara Gaston

HUD 202. Could you define that quickly?

John Lant

Wilton Commons and that one on Northern Pines are not the same?

Sandi Cross

No, they're not. The one on Northern Pines is not the same. They're not under HUD housing. So they pay like \$800 a month, the HUD housing, which is the other one, it's only 30% of their income. So, and Dr. Kuhles knows, different people can get vaccinated by different places.

Daniel Kuhles

So we're working, we're actually meeting after this meeting, to talk through more of this. I mentioned there's Federal programs, State programs and Federal State programs together, assisted living facilities would fall into a Federal program in which New York State has opted in most visible part of this program, and where the overwhelming majority of the vaccinations have taken place is in nursing homes. But that also includes assisted living facilities, certain other types of adult care facilities, and also the section 202 housing that was discussed. And so these are entities that pharmacies are vaccinating either in cooperation with the State health department, or they may be working independently, depending on how that pharmacy has registered. There are, I think, 22 pharmacies in

the county right now that have registered with the State program, I put out a survey to them or communication to them last Monday was this Monday or Tuesday, the days blend together, but I think it was Monday. And I've heard back from about half of them. Some of the and you know, these are the big chains, mostly, but some independent pharmacies, many of the chains have chosen or indicated that they're going to no longer request vaccine from the State health department and instead get it from the Federal government. And so that will necessitate all local health departments to have close relationships which we're doing with Office of Aging, to have visibility of what's happening, where and when and are our most vulnerable. Getting that vaccine because everybody same thing, everybody in a building or in a location may have a different risk. But those are programs that are outside the operational capacity or control of local health departments in New York State. But we're working very hard with NYSACHO, which is the organization of local health directors and Commissioners to have, number one more visibility in that program and number two, more ability to influence where those doses go when vaccines are scarce.

Tara Gaston

It's also important to note that I know that we see a lot on the news about pop ups taking place in other counties and these housing facilities. Those are not run by the county health departments. Those are being run by the State or the Federal programs. I can assure you based on what the Commissioner and the Director and all of our staff have said that if we have that opportunity, and we have the doses, that will be something that we will look forward to and I know that they're planning and preparing for that. I also do know that the New York State Association of Counties is advocating for more control and more visibility as well as distribution in equity. Counties that are more urban are getting more of these doses. We need access to them as well, particularly for individuals, as I noted before are going to have difficulty going to Albany or Plattsburgh or even if they can go should not be because it is winter, and they are ill. So I know the Commissioner has been advocating and both NYSAC and the National Association of Counties are advocating so that counties have more insight into what Federal doses are coming in, as well. Because that allows the Public Health Department to plan better and to help work with those entities also.

John Lant

Thank you.

Tara Gaston

Supervisor Grasso

Joe Grasso

Yes. So another question for the doctor. So in terms of the county's vaccination efforts, we're still working on frontline workers, first responders, things like that. So is that correct? The county is getting vaccines weekly and doing that.

Daniel Kuhles

We get, again we get a small allotment of vaccines still each week and we are again limited. We have been limited to essential workers. So these are considered the three main groups are, police, law enforcement, fire, certainly EMS but teachers as well and just this would have been, last week would

have been the first week where we were allowed to vaccinate individuals with co-morbidities, health care workers. So again, there's different rules at different places. Hospitals can do health care workers and anybody over 65, if they have enough vaccine, regardless of comorbidities. Pharmacies are limited to 65 and older, Federally qualified health centers generally have pretty good flexibility to vaccinate. The problem is, in terms of what groups they can vaccinate, the problem is that they haven't been getting vaccine. So our efforts really have been to date. Each shipment of doses we get is prescribed to go to a certain group. We did get several 100 doses of vaccine that were for OPWDD communities, in the past, and so we have to, again, they tell us who the doses go to. And we have to administer those shots.

Joe Grasso

Okay, so in terms of the essential workers, do we know, like, what percentage of that cohort has been done in the county, is that 5%, 50%?

Daniel Kuhles

I'd have to go back and look at the data. Otherwise, I do believe because our vaccination data is ahead of the State average, that we would be ahead of other counties in terms of the central workers, etc. I don't know, I think the exact number, because getting that denominator is very hard. But I do know that we're nearly complete with Fire, EMS and Law Enforcement, there's people that change their mind, but we've had great progress there. And I think one of the places where we're proudest is the effort that we've made for schools, and teachers, you've heard the President speak about that, and others about the importance of schools being open not for just for kids health, and sometimes that's how they get food, but for families and childcare. And our partnership with Boces is the first in the State where we've trained them, we've had them at our PODs and train them, we've helped them conduct their own PODs with them, side by side, and now they vaccinate their own. And we just are their more of a consultative Supervisory role. And so that's a powerful model for getting to these essential workers when you can partner with that infrastructure. To get doses to the people that need it quickly.

Tara Gaston

I think the hardest population of essential workers that the County Public Health can vaccinate has been frontline grocery workers. That's been very difficult. So any assistance, I know that I've reached out to some facilities, we are working with some companies in the area. But if anyone is aware of essential grocery store workers, please make sure that they're also signing up on the list. They're one of the categories that can be pulled and sorted, and we want to make sure to access them as well. Obviously, we're all, we all have to eat. And we want to make sure that the people that handle our food are also safe as well. So I think that's been the hardest is that correct? Commissioner?

Daniel Kuhles

Yeah, that's been a problem. In most parts of the State, the one place where there's been some successes, then in the Western part of the State where many of the grocery store workers are unionized, and so there's a place in a way to capture them, but for the most part, it has been an area where Public Health has been challenged.

Tara Gaston

Any other Committee member have any other business to discuss? Do we have a motion to adjourn?

Joe Grasso

So moved

Tara Gaston

Supervisor Grasso

Eric Connolly

Second

Tara Gaston

Supervisor Connolly. All in favor,

Several Supervisors

Aye.

Tara Gaston

Any objection? All right. We stand adjourned. Thank you.