

Health & Human Services Committee Minutes
April 28, 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, Bill Peck and Chairman of the Board Todd Kusnierz; Steve Bulger, Brian O'Connor, Matt Rose, Audra Hedden, County Administrator; Michael Hartnett, Michelle Granger, Hugh Burke, County Attorney; Daniel Kuhles, Public Health; Tina Potter, Pat Maxwell, Social Services; J. Wes Carr, Rebecca Robarge, Youth Bureau; Jason Kemper, Planning; Sybil Newell, RISE Housing & Support Services.

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

On a motion made by Mr. Wood, seconded by Mr. Connolly, the minutes of the March 31, 2021 meeting were approved unanimously.

A motion was made by Mr. Lant, seconded by Mr. Barrett, to authorize major contracts for contact tracing services with: Suzanne Kwasniewski in an amount not to exceed \$39,000; Kyle Abdellatif in an amount not to exceed \$45,500; and Kayla Aschmutat in an amount not to exceed \$39,000. Unanimous.

Ms. Gaston said that this is similar to what has been done before. These are currently minor contracts and are being rolled to a major contract. The hourly rate is the same for each contract.

Ms. Gaston said that a transfer from fund balance to the Public Health Operating budget for COVID relief funding was initially being requested, however she does not have sufficient background information for the Committee at this point in time. Therefore the request will be moved directly at the Law & Finance meeting. Mr. Bulger said that out of the original \$1M allocation, there is approximately \$15K remaining in unencumbered funds. Over \$0.5M has been submitted for reimbursement from Federal and State entities and it is unknown at this point when the funds will be actually reimbursed. Mr. Bulger said it is anticipated that \$600K in additional funds will need to be transferred from Fund Balance to the COVID Relief Fund to bring the expenses through July. A full breakdown will be provided at the Law and Finance meeting. Mr. Grasso questioned the status of the contract with the City Center. Mr. Bulger said that the agreement expires at the end of this week and there are no plans to extend it.

A motion was made by Ms. Gaston, seconded by Mr. Barrett, to authorize a transfer in the amount of \$200,000 from fund balance into the Public Health Operating Budget for Public Health Department Expansion costs. Unanimous.

Ms. Gaston said that the expansion of the Public Health Department is something the NYS Department of Health has requested in the past and at this point is now a requirement. Dr. Kuhles said that the main difference between partial and full service health department is the provision of Environmental Health Services. These services are currently provided by NYS and include services such as restaurant inspections, public water supply, realty subdivisions, etc. Expansion has been on the NYS agenda for over a decade. The County is working with the State to identify

how many entities there are and the staffing required to take over these programs. Dr. Kuhles said it is his understanding that it is going to be an iterative process, where personnel and certain programs get up and running, and then move on to the next. Ms. Gaston said that at the last Board meeting a law firm was hired to aid the County in the transition. Ms. Gaston also said that the Chairman of the Board will be appointing an advisory committee to help oversee the transition. Ms. Gaston said that having these funds in a separate line of the Public Health budget will help track the costs. Mr. Barrett said that regarding the timeframe, the State is expecting the transition to occur quickly. Mr. Barrett said that he has the utmost confidence in Dr. Kuhles overseeing the expansion project. Mr. Kinowski said that it his understanding once the County expands, the local health districts will be disbanded, and asked if guidance could be provided. Mr. Hartnett said that it is a two pronged approach, transitioning to a 340 district and environmental health services. Notification to the townships and cities is part of the process.

A motion was made by Ms. Gaston, seconded by Mr. Connolly, to authorize a \$75,000 contribution to RISE Housing & Support Services. The Motion Passed. Supervisors Barrett and Lant were opposed.

Ms. Gaston said that this proposal was initially brought up last month. The \$75K will allow for the renovation of a commercial kitchen and hiring a development director. Ms. Newell said that the proposal presented would get them started on their Social Club, which is a service currently absent for those in the County with mental health problems. Mr. Grasso questioned how this type of request is typically submitted to the County. Ms. Gaston said that requests can come in a number of ways. Ms. Gaston and Supervisor Veitch have both been very interested in the work that RISE has done. This would provide an opportunity for individuals who can't quite do the structured PROS programming being offered by Mental Health. Ms. Gaston said that that she believes it is an important way to expand the services and support to the community. Mr. Connolly said that RISE also have a location in the Town of Ballston that has been very successful. Mr. Barrett said that typically these requests are done through the budget process. Mr. Barrett said that if \$75K is approved today, it is going to be very difficult to say no to an additional \$250K when it is requested in a few months. In his opinion, it sounds like a partnership is being formed through the discussion and believes other funding sources should be researched prior to making the commitment. From the numbers that were provided, it's a \$675K commitment through 2024. Mr. Barrett said that he would personally rather not vote against this, but he does not believe he is ready to make such a large commitment at this time. Mr. Bulger said that he was not at the last meeting and questioned how the program would be structured, if it was a grant program or perhaps a contract with RISE. From a finance perspective, they would need to know exactly where the funding is going and how it will be tracked. Ms. Gaston said that from her perspective, the Board can make a decision on how it is structured. Ms. Gaston expressed frustration that she is being presented with concerns today regarding an item that was initially presented a month ago. Ms. Gaston said that in looking at the Law Enforcement, Coroner and related budgets, the County is spending far more than \$200K responding to crises such as these. Programs such as this and others throughout the County could work to prevent such response being needed. Mr. Grasso said that he believes it is a worthwhile cause however, it looks like the County is subsidizing or funding a not for profit that the County will not have control over the operations of. Mr. Grasso questioned if the funding required from the County will be necessary in order for them to be viable in the future. Ms. Gaston said that what was discussed previously was funding primarily for the first year, up to three. Ms. Newell said

that providing the first few years of operational funding up front will allow them to put some mechanisms in place. They are looking into Medicaid billable funding as well as private donations, and they have already applied for several grants. Ms. Newell said that Dr. Prezioso had in the past looked into transporting people from our community to take advantage of the same service that currently exists in Warren County. Ms. Newell said that there is a large portion of the mental health community that cannot participate in the kinds of day programming that's available currently. Mr. Barrett questioned if a tour of the facility in Warren County could be organized. Ms. Newell said that she believes the Executive Director would be happy to do a walk through. Most of the funding for that location is provided by Warren County.

Mr. Bulger said that it has been brought to his attention that the County will be applying for CDBG CV Covid relief funds and this could potentially be included in one of the programs being applied for. Mr. O'Connor questioned if the information provided for the \$75K request was specific enough for the needs of the County finance team. It should be recognized that assuming the \$75K request is granted, it is unknown what the Board of Supervisors will decide for future years funding. Ms. Newell said that their plan is to put \$40K toward the kitchen renovation and the remainder toward a Development Coordinator who will work on supporting the project going forward.

Ms. Gaston provided a brief update on the Emergency Rental Assistance Program. NYS in their budget process, removed all ability for the County to distribute the funds. At the last meeting it was authorized that the County would accept the funds and send them back to the State. A contract with Shelters of Saratoga was also approved to help get information out to the individuals who need it most. Mr. Bulger said that he spoke with Commissioner Potter this afternoon. At this point the County is waiting for the State to open the program, which is anticipated sometime in May. It is hoped that the State can get the portal up and running by May 15. The agreement with Shelters of Saratoga has been signed and they are reaching out to other agencies within the County to identify groups and landlords that may benefit from this. Mr. Bulger said that it is important to note that in the first 30 days of the program, the State is restricting the program to those who fall below the guideline of less than 50% of average median income. Mr. Bulger said that additional information is available on the County DSS webpage. Once the portal is open, all Supervisors and Department heads will be notified.

On a motion made by Mr. Connolly, seconded by Mr. Barrett, the meeting was adjourned unanimously.

Respectfully submitted,
Therese Connolly
Deputy Clerk of the Board