

Whatcom County Council as the Health Board (Special)

**COUNTY COURTHOUSE
311 Grand Avenue, Ste #105
Bellingham, WA 98225-4038
(360) 778-5010**



Minutes - Draft Minutes

Tuesday, March 17, 2020

1 PM

Council Chambers

COUNCILMEMBERS

Rud Browne
Barry Buchanan
Tyler Byrd
Todd Donovan
Ben Elenbaas
Carol Frazey
Kathy Kershner

CLERK OF THE COUNCIL

Dana Brown-Davis, C.M.C.

Call To Order

Health Board Chair Barry Buchanan called the meeting to order at 1 p.m. in the Council Chambers, 311 Grand Avenue, Bellingham, Washington.

Roll Call

Present: 7 - Rud Browne, Barry Buchanan, Tyler Byrd, Todd Donovan, Carol Frazey, Ben Elenbaas and Kathy Kershner

Absent: None

Special Presentation

2. [AB2020-116](#) Update on novel coronavirus (COVID-19)

Donovan moved to meet for one hour. The motion was seconded.

The motion carried by the following vote:

Ayes: 4 - Browne, Buchanan, Donovan, and Frazey

Nays: 3 - Byrd, Elenbaas, and Kershner

Satpal Sidhu, County Executive, and Tyler Schroeder, Executive's Office, stated they would like to update the Board members on the following:

- The response from the Health Department and the Unified Command
- A grant opportunity that will be brought before the Council
- Update the Board members on issues that they asked at the last meeting related to an increase in the emergency budget
- An update from Human Resources on policies on teleworking
- An update from the Policy board meeting that took place this morning

John Wolpers, Health Department, stated the County is moving forward with transitioning to the Unified Command and will be operating completely in the Unified Command as of Wednesday, March 18, 2020. They have come up with incident objectives on the Incident Command System Form 202. He read those into the record.

- Prevent and mitigate the spread of COVID-19
- Provide essential medical screening and care
- Provide for the most vulnerable members of the community
- Ensure adequacy of first response personnel resources
- Maintain essential services including identifying critical function services such as power, water, sewer, and utilities
- Establish a communications plan
- Establish an incident security plan

They have decided on specific individuals who will serve in the different sections including the planning section, the operations section, the logistics section and the admin finance section. He named other people who are involved in the different aspects of the Unified Command and the capacity in which they serve. He stated they have set up a Joint Incident Command and named specific people serving in various roles. There is a call happening today between the hospital and some primary care providers and they will learn more about that call later. Their operational period started Monday at 9 a.m. and will go till 9 a.m. the following Monday. They also have briefings at the Unified Command happening daily at 9 a.m.

He spoke about logistics including requests for personal protective equipment (PPE) and delegation of tasks. They have been discussing whether they need to set up a call center, a border task force, and how law enforcement will work. In Unified Command they will be using Incident Command System forms, and I.T. is setting up emails for various groups. He described other issues the Health Department is dealing with on top of COVID-19.

He and Astrid Newell answered questions from Board member Byrd about how many tests we have, whether we have established a secondary hospital location, what our strategy is to get out of this as quickly as possible, and what is the timeline for that. It could take quite a few months.

Staff answered three questions that were sent to them earlier from Board member Donovan:

Question #2- Housing: Do we need to (and can we) take steps to restrict / limit evictions of renters over the next 60 or so days? Either with an emergency moratorium and / or increased access to rental assistance? Seems like as people lose paychecks, this might be an issue, and the last thing we want are more people without shelter.

Anne Deacon, Health Department, stated they could check into it and the Health Board could make recommendations to landlords. (21:46)

Question #3 - Testing: When results come back positive (3 so far?), how much is put into backtracking and gathering information about the person's contacts, and how public can that be? Is that work all done by our PH folks, and / or by the person's primary care providers?

Moreover, as the positives increase, do we have staff to keep up with that or do we need emergency hires to keep pace.

Astrid Newell, Health Department, described the procedures the Health Department is following and spoke about limited testing capacity. They can process 24 tests per day with staffing at the Health Department and are

reserving them for those who don't have another option. More test kits are being distributed to health care providers so they hope testing capacity will be expanded. (22:41)

Question #1 - Criminal Justice: Do we need to take measures, or at least get more information on contingency planning, regarding operation of our criminal justice system. Specifically, are we increasing risks by transporting people to other jails? Can we lower risks by further reducing who is incarcerated, and/or by releasing people who have a safe place in the community to go? Will courts be changing / reducing operations in ways that will affect how long people are held pre-trial?

John Gargett, Whatcom County Sheriff's Office Division of Emergency Management, and Bill Elfo, Whatcom County Sheriff, said they will continue to send inmates to Kittitas, they've increased booking restrictions, made changes in who is booked into jail, working with the Prosecuting Attorney on handling DUI cases and on resuming some hearings for accepting plea agreements. There are currently only four evictions and they have been returned to the courts with a request that they be delayed.

Cindy Hollinsworth, Health Department, answered a question about why the Health Department will no longer report locations of possible exposure to COVID-19 and whether it is helpful? She stated it doesn't help for people to know specifics because they could be exposed in many other places too. Their goal is to reinforce to people to stay home if you're sick and work from home if you are able.

Buchanan asked about the grant (memo attached to the Meeting Details)

Deacon spoke about what the County might use the grant for. The specific purpose of the money is to meet the unmet needs for quarantine and isolation housing or those living unsheltered or otherwise in need of quarantine or isolation housing. They will work through the Unified Command System and has a time period. She described possible uses and stated that they have been encouraged by the Department of Commerce to ask for what they need even if it is not specifically requested or outlined in the contract and to ask for more if necessary. She described where the money comes from and plans for using the money. Everything will go through the Unified Command and in order to spend the money, an emergency ordinance will come before the council next week.

Elenbaas followed up on his question about knowing specific locations people have been who have tested positive. Hollinsworth stated we don't

want to give people a false sense of security.

Schroeder spoke about an emergency budget allocation for \$250,000 and stated it will be on the agenda on the 24th. They also added language that would allow the Executive to transfer money to other offices as needed, and they added the \$900,000 grant revenue.

He spoke about the following:

- Human Resources policies on teleworking and sources that are available for staff.
- Purchasing PPE equipment with the funds that were already allocated. There was a conversation yesterday to see what was needed for first responders and elderly care facilities. As of today, 200 visors for first responders and 600 respirators have been purchased. They set up a protocol under Unified command to make those decisions.
- The Executive order issued yesterday to establish essential services and to limit in-person services as soon as tomorrow morning. Department heads have established what services can be provided remotely. Most will close in-person services but Whatcom County Government will continue to be open.

He answered a question about when we will receive the visors and respirators.

Kershner stated that the Medical Reserve Corp has up to 50 volunteers who are ready to help in our community if called upon.

Elenbaas moved to request that the Health Department report specific locations to the public, of possible exposure to COVID-19 from people that have tested positive if that information is known. The motion was seconded.

Newall and Wolpers stated there would need to be a policy discussion before deciding that.

Board members discussed the motion and asked about information that the Health Department is giving to the public.

Donovan moved to call the question. The motion was seconded.

The motion to call the question carried by the following vote:

Aye: 6 - Donovan, Elenbaas, Frazey, Kershner, Browne, and Buchanan

Nay: 1 - Byrd

The motion failed by the following vote:

Aye: 3 - Elenbaas, Kershner, and Byrd

Nay: 4 - Donovan, Frazey, Browne, and Buchanan

Sidhu spoke about the motion and his support of the Health Department's decision.

Set when we want to meet again.

Board members discussed setting the next meeting of the Special Health Board on Thursday, March 19, 2020 at 1 p.m.

Sidhu stated that getting answers to questions can happen outside of a meeting.

Byrd moved to request the Unified Command to immediately establish a secondary location as a hospital so that we can handle any increase in health services. The motion was seconded.

Wolpers stated it will be discussed at Unified Command and he will be taking questions to them too.

Board members discussed the motion.

The motion carried by the following vote:

Aye: 5 - Elenbaas, Frazey, Kershner, Buchanan, and Byrd

Nay: 2 - Browne and Donovan

Board members concurred that they will meet on Thursday at 1pm.

Byrd moved that we immediately establish a dedicated testing location and begin requesting that any individuals who have symptoms are encouraged to go to that location for tests.

Donovan moved to adjourn.

The motion to adjourn carried by the following vote:

Aye: 4- Frazey, Browne, Buchanan, Donovan

Nay: 3- Kershner, Byrd, Elenbaas

This agenda item was DISCUSSED. See Minutes or Action Details.

Other Business

There was no other business.

Adjournment

The meeting adjourned at 2:14 p.m.

ATTEST:

WHATCOM COUNTY COUNCIL
WHATCOM COUNTY, WA

Dana Brown-Davis, Council Clerk

Barry Buchanan, Health Board Chair

Kristi Felbinger, Minutes Transcription