

FINANCE AND RULES COMMITTEE
May 19, 2020

Present via video conference: Legislators Tom Osborne, Ron Burns, Greg Kulzer, Ian Gilbert, and Phil Hathway.

Others present via video conference: Legislators Larry Dolhof, Jerry King, Richard Chartrand; Randy LaChausse, and Andrea Moroughan; County Manager Ryan Piche; County Attorney Joan McNichol; and Human Resource Director Caitlyn Smith.

Committee Chairman Tom Osborne called the meeting at 3:19 p.m.

Legislator Kulzer made a motion to approve the 4/21/2020 committee meeting minutes, seconded by Legislator Hathway and carried.

Working from home testimonial – Holly Plemons (DSS) & Candy Akin (Real Property)

Holly Plemons introduced herself as a caseworker for Social Services who works in the SNAPS benefits program. She has been working from home full time for about 4 weeks. One of the biggest challenges faced was connecting to the state system due to the vast quantity of people who were working from home. Sometimes it would require starting the log on process earlier in the morning just to be logged in when the work day started. The issue has since been resolved so logging on to the state system just takes a few minutes.

The phones were a challenge in the beginning because the home number of the employee would show up and many clients wouldn't recognize and therefore not answer the call. That has since been resolved by using additional software that can change the caller ID to a Social Services number. Holly also pointed out that if you had children at home who required using the home computer it could be a bit challenging to find the right balance. Overall working from home has been a positive experience and seems to be working well.

Legislator Hathway asked how many contacts would generally be made in an average day, Holly responded that it would be at least 10 calls. Legislator Osborne asked if the pandemic unemployment would affect if a person qualifies for SNAP benefits, Holly responded that it will be counted as income. The one time Stimulus check that people received will not be counted as income. Holly indicated that she does like working from home but it is different than working in the office where you have everything you need right at your finger tips. She enjoys being in the office and seeing her co-workers.

Candy Akin introduced herself as the Real Property Director. She has been working from home for about 3 weeks. It has been a good experience and she has been coming in once or twice a week to check the mail and bring in completed work. She enjoyed not having to commute everyday and is amazed by the technology that allows everyone to remote into their desktops so all of their files are available. The flexibility of working from home has allowed her to take a break in the afternoon if needed and then work in the evenings. Real Property staff has been communicating through texts and emails which is a bit more difficult than a face to face discussion but it seems to work good.

Candy felt one of the downfalls is not being around people, she feels more energized when she is with her staff or dealing with the public and at home you don't get that momentum. She stated that she has a whole new appreciation for her dual monitors at work because working from a laptop with only one screen is much more difficult. As a Department Head it doesn't seem like this would be the best option for long term but she can see the benefits of having her employees work from home long term.

Legislator Hathway questioned if Candy's entire staff is working from home, Candy responded that they have all been working from home for the most part although they do take turns coming into the office on occasion. Ryan asked Candy to explain how it has been to supervise staff who have been working from home. Candy explained that the COVID-19 time tracker, a spreadsheet to track time, has been helpful. She feels her staff is putting in their hours and utilizing a more flexible schedule. They have been taking more training sessions during this period which is a benefit. Overall she feels this is working well.

Legislator Osborne asked about the process for the Board of Assessment Review, Candy responded that she just put out a guidance document on how each Town is handling their Board of Assessment Review meetings that will be posted on the county website. Some Towns are having in person meetings and allowing only one person at a time, some are having video conference meetings, some are by appointment only and others are only allowing mail in grievances. It will be challenging.

COVID-19 Budget update – Eric Virkler (attached)

Eric shared the 2020 COVID-19 Adjusted Spending Plan with everyone. This information was taken from NYSAC and used to calculate our figures. The Revenue Reductions show a low figure of \$3,003,000 and a high figure of \$7,859,000. The Spending Reduction shows a figure of \$3,140,000. This equates to a low end difference of a \$137,000 surplus from what was budgeted and a high figure deficit of \$4,719,000. If there is Federal Aid for this COVID-19 pandemic our share on a low end would be \$1,500,000 and a high end of \$3,500,00, this would allow us a budget surplus of \$1,637,000 on the low end and a deficit of \$1,219,000 on the high end. Ryan believes that by the time Federal Aid does come it will be after Counties have had to make some tough cuts.

Caitlyn reported that the 20 individuals that opted to be furloughed came mostly from Highway and Social Services. Legislator LaChausse questioned why Social Services were furloughed because he was under the impression that they weren't going to be allowed. Caitlyn responded that the saving isn't as great with that Department however it is still some savings.

The following dockets were reviewed:

1. Resolution to approve and adopt the Temporary Telecommuting/Telework Guidelines and Protocols Due to Unprecedented Emergent Events Policy. *Legislator Hathway voiced his concern over the security of data by working from home. Joan McNichol responded that the access from home is through a remote connection which uses the same security as you would have at your desk in the office. There are also confidentiality and security guidelines that employees need to abide by when working from home. Legislator Hathway questioned whether the Union had to agree with this policy, Joan responded that it doesn't need Union approval but out of courtesy we let them look over the policy and they thought it was good.*

YEA 5 NAY 0

2. Resolution with reference to NYS SEQRA review, lead agency determination and negative declaration with respect to the proposed new operating room and clinic addition project at the Lewis County General Hospital. *Legislator Chartrand commented that he wasn't comfortable with the SEQRA that was done because he felt there are too many questions without answers. Legislator Hathway asked for further explanation. Legislator Chartrand stated that on page 6 there lists no issue with parking however he feels there is parking issues. On page 8 there is no hazardous waste vendor listed and he felt that DANC would have to sign off if it would be any other vendor. He felt it was incomplete in a few places. He feels that a meeting with the engineer would be appropriate to ask and get further clarifications on certain items. Joan suggested she could set up a meeting with the lead engineer Rick Tague to answer any questions that Legislators may have.*

YEA 5 NAY 0

3. Resolution re-appointing Jennifer Jones as Commissioner of the Lewis County Department of Social Services for an additional five (5) year term commencing on July 8, 2020 and terminating on July 7, 2025 at the current annual salary of \$79,591.00, subject to approval by the NYS Department of Social Services.

YEA 5 NAY 0

Ryan reported that Lewis County will be moving to Phase 2 of re-opening on June 1st. The Courthouse will be open to the public starting June 1st. There will be temperature checks and masks required. DMV will be opened at a later date which the state will determine. The June 2nd Board of Legislators meeting will be held in the Courthouse, second floor board room. There will be limited seating for the public due to social distancing guidelines.

Legislator LaChausse brought up a concern with a resident in New Bremen who is having a very tough time getting a good internet connection for her children to continue school work at home. Ryan reported that unfortunately there is no good answer at this point because Mohawk Network didn't finish, Frontier doesn't look like they are going to finish either. Legislator Kulzer said he was told it will be another 3 to 6 months. Legislator Hathway said in Harrisville they are doing a good job getting people hooked up, even on the lake.

Legislator Hathway discussed the SAM party and the primary election coming up. Ryan said he would talk to other counties about the SAM primary because if we have no registered voters it doesn't seem like a good use of money to have that primary election. Legislator Hathway asked about when Libraries would be able to open back up. Legislator Dolhof said that they can open as long as they take disinfecting precautions and maintain social distancing.

At 4:14 p.m. Legislator Burns made a motion to adjourn, seconded by Legislator Kulzer and carried.

Respectfully submitted,
Cassandra Moser, Clerk of the Board