

Meeting Minutes
April 14, 2020

BUDGET/ PUBLIC POLICY MEETING

Due to the State of North Carolina's Declaration of Emergency in response to the COVID-19 pandemic and per NCGS § 166A-19.24, the Mecklenburg County Board of Commissioners conducted a remote meeting using the WebEx application.

CALL TO ORDER – 2:30 PM - REMOTE MEETING

The Board of Commissioners of Mecklenburg County, North Carolina, met remotely on Tuesday, April 14, 2020 at 2:35 p.m. with Chair Dunlap presiding.

Present: Chair George Dunlap
 Commissioner Patricia "Pat" Cotham
 Commissioner Trevor M. Fuller
 Commissioner Susan Harden
 Commissioner Mark Jerrell
 Commissioner Vilma D. Leake
 Commissioner Elaine Powell
 Commissioner Susan Rodriguez-McDowell

Absent Until Noted: Commissioner Ella B. Scarborough

Chair Dunlap called the meeting to order, followed by introductions the Pledge of Allegiance to the Flag.

Dena Diorio, County Manager, offered condolences on the behalf of the family of Sharekia Johnson, who was a valuable member of the County Manager's Office and a joy to work with; her smile could light up any room. Ms. Diorio said she was sweet, kind, generous, and hard-working. She said their thoughts and prayers were with her family during the difficult time and that they were preparing a proclamation that would be sent to her family.

Commissioner Scarborough arrived at 3:05 p.m.

20-6081: COVID-19 Response Update

Dena Diorio, County Manager, said they were thankful to the hospital partners for expanding COVID-19 testing on the east and west sides of the County. She said the Atrium Health mobile unit would be testing. She reviewed the testing locations and times and stated it would be on the website.

She said that with regard to the field hospital, they were still analyzing how much capacity they could create within their walls and be able to staff and supply. She said that State Emergency Management continued to place orders for ventilators, PPE, and other supplies. She said if the field hospital was used, that it would be used for non-acute patience, no ICU beds, and it would be constructed at the Charlotte Convention Center. She said the field hospital would be a direct bill to FEMA and all other costs would be between the hospital systems which would seek federal and state reimbursement and that there would be no local dollars appropriated for this purpose. She encouraged healthcare workers who were interested, to

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register on the State's TERMS.ncem.org website and that more than 2,000 across the State had registered.

She reminded everyone that the County Stay at Home Proclamation would end on April 16, 2020. After consultation with the policy team, they recommended an extension of the proclamation to April 29, 2020 to align with the governor's order. She said the amended proclamation would include a provision to align with any future extension that the governor may make. She said if the governor did not extend, they would look at their data at the end of the month to determine if an additional extension is needed.

Ms. Diorio spoke about closing parks to vehicular traffic due to the need to enforce social distancing and that law enforcement would be stretched thin. She mentioned the Park Rangers were not trained in law enforcement. Ms. Diorio gave an update on the Business Stabilization Program and reminded the Board that in the last meeting, they proceeded with two Business Stabilization Funds in responses to COVID-19 in the community. She said there were 60 applications on the first day. She said the Micro Business Stabilization Loan Fund, which targets business located in the County's Community Block Grant area with one to five employees. She said the loan amounts were up to \$10,000 and that out of 60 applications that were received, only 13 were located in the CDBG area with requests totaling approximately 105,000 of the \$1 million allocated. She said the remaining 47 applicants were in the City of Charlotte and Mint Hill. She said they believed that some applicants misunderstood the geography of the CDBG Program, and the City of Charlotte and Mint Hill were not part of the program. She said they continued to spread the word and that the close of business there were 139 applications received in the Small Business Stabilization Loan Fund, which targeted businesses with up to 50 employees and loan amounts ranging from \$5,000 to \$35,000. She said 69 of those were applications under preliminary review with approximately \$1.8 million of the \$5 million appropriated and that 13 applications had been approved and accounted for approximately \$400,000.

Gibbie Harris, Health Director stated that the County had 992 positive cases of COVID-19 with 16 deaths. She said that about three in four reported cases were adults ages 20 to 59 years old, and two reported cases were among children less than a year old. She said that about one in five reported cases were hospitalized due to their COVID-19 infection and that while everyone was at risk for severe COVID-19 complications, cases showed that those who were older adults (≥ 60 years) were four times more likely to be hospitalized compared to younger individuals. Ms. Harris said that more than half of reported cases have met CDC criteria to be released from isolation and twelve deaths due to COVID-19 occurred among reported cases. She said that all deaths were among older adults (≥ 60 years) with underlying chronic illnesses. Almost all were hospitalized, two-thirds were male, and half were non-Hispanic Black. She went over the distribution of covid-19 cases reported by zip code of patient's residence.

Ms. Harris reviewed how the projections were created. She said that the modeling that they would see was based on an entire region. She explained that their core modeling relied on methods that were developed by a team of researchers at the University of Pennsylvania and that the CDC had also used this approach in some of its projections. She said that local data on current and projected COVID-19 cases and hospitalizations and use of ventilators due to COVID-19 were combined from Mecklenburg County Public Health, Atrium Health, and Novant Health to update the projections daily.

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Ms. Harris went over what the projections told us; she stated with community spread and increased testing, there were more cases of COVID-19 being reported in the community and that there had not yet been a dramatic acceleration in cases, indicating they were making some progress toward “flattening the curve.” She stated everyone must continue social and physical distancing, including increasing it. She said with current models forecasted that even with the current Mecklenburg County Stay at Home Order and increased social distancing, they would start to overwhelm our healthcare system in early to mid-May, meaning they would not have enough beds, staffing, supplies, and life-saving ventilators to care for everyone in our community and region. She believed the peak would be May 27, 2020s

She stated projections reflected expected hospital resource demand for the entire region, including neighboring counties in the primary service areas of both health systems. She went over projected daily demand for hospital beds, ventilators, and intensive care unit bets. Ms. Harris discussed the increased opportunities for testing, and reviewed locations and dates of operation at Atrium Health Mobile Unit Sites and Novant Health Mobile Unit Sites. She said they continue to test those most at risk and having symptoms. She said they were looking at their messaging for key populations, including: the African American community, especially those over 60 years of age and those with underlying health conditions. She stated that the largest number affected were 20 to 59-year-old. She said they were also looking to message to their largest number of effected, which was their 20 to 59-year-old, then the community at large, specifically around the Stay at Home Order.

Ms. Harris said that County staff finalized an outreach toolkit to be disseminated through community partners, including those connected to our Village Heartbeat and other community-based initiatives. She stated that the outreach toolkit consisted of a printable flyer; updated FAQs; social media infographics; social media posts; local hashtags; and draft email communication.

Ms. Harris said everyone, including pastors, community leaders, influencers, and the media, should share these key messages with those in their networks and that the toolkit would be posted on the county’s COVID-19 webpage <https://www.mecknc.gov/news/Pages/Update-on-Novel-Coronavirus.aspx>. She stated that an upcoming, virtual townhall would provide an opportunity for them to review the toolkit and answer any questions those in the community may have. She said the team would also be available for additional media engagements, including one-on-one interviews, to further share these important messages.

Commissioner Jerrell asked what other risks they should be promoted in addition to social distancing.

Ms. Harris responded that social distancing was really the main one and that they were encouraging people to wash their hands, cover their cough, and not touch their face. She said the guidance on masks was variable.

Commissioner Jerrell asked if they would put out specific guidance around what they were recommending as it related to the masks and said it was not clear at that point.

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Ms. Harris responded that they had developed that and were about to push it out by tomorrow.

Commissioner Jerrell asked if mental health resources would be included into the tool kit.

Ms. Harris responded that they would continue to add to the toolkit as time went on, including resources on mental health issues.

Commissioner Jerrell asked at what frequency data would go out to the community.

Ms. Harris responded that they were currently putting it out every Monday and Friday but were looking at the possibility of developing a dashboard to be updated daily.

Commissioner Cotham asked if the copy of the letter to the Department of Revenue would be made available for review.

Ms. Diorio said she would send it out.

Commissioner Cotham asked if they would have any free masks available.

Ms. Harris said that they still had a shortage and were not in a position to be able to provide significant masks to the public.

Commissioner Fuller asked if they had thought about extending the order to the date that schools return to session, which was May 15, 2020.

Ms. Diorio said they did but that consensus between the County, the City, and the six towns would be needed.

Commissioner Fuller asked about the data modeling.

Ms. Harris stated they had looked at three different models from working with the hospital systems, which showed the very best, worst, and middle of the line, possible projections. She said that Washington gave the best outlook but that after working with the County and hospital's data folks, the decision was made to go for a more middle-of-the-road projection.

Commissioner Jerrell said based on the projections that were just given, were they looking at June or before then for the peak.

Ms. Harris said that what they were looking at now was the possibility of their peak extended into early June or late May. She said that with a peak, there would still be the other side of the slope. She said it would not end quickly. She said it would have to be a gradual process.

Commissioner Leake asked why they had not been in touch with CW Williams as it related to testing.

Ms. Harris said they had been in conversation with them for several months and were doing testing but that it was limited, partly due to lack of access to protective equipment and access to testing results.

Commissioner Leake asked why it took so long for the County and Health Department to come up with testing in west Charlotte.

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Ms. Diorio responded that the County and Public Health Department was not doing testing and were relying on the hospital partners to do the testing. She said they were working with them to get the plan together and admitted it was not quick enough and could have done better with it.

Commissioner Leake asked how much equipment and supplies were needed.

Ms. Diorio responded that the situation was different than any other situation where they needed supplies, because the entire country was affected by it. She said they were looking for supplies and equipment as everyone else in the County was as well.

Commissioner Leake requested that future information be given out in layman's terms.

Ms. Harris agreed.

Commissioner Leake asked if they were still dealing with Cardinal Innovations.

Ms. Harris responded yes.

Commissioner Leake said she did not think they still were, because it was put on the table for discussion.

Ms. Harris said Cardinal Innovation was their only option currently.

Ms. Diorio said that in order to change managed care organizations, the process would take over a year and that it was put on the table to explore whether or not they should make a change but that they were still with Cardinal as the managed care organization providing behavioral health services to the community.

Commissioner Leake stated she had a concern with Cardinal Innovations and their credibility to her people.

Commissioner Rodriguez-McDowell asked if all testing locations provided free testing.

Ms. Diorio said she thought it depended on individual status; those insured would be ran through their insurance company but that she had heard from a lot of insurance companies that they were waiving it and not charging the fee, those there was no way to validate that system wide. She said she believed that people were probably not being charged any copay or charges for the service due to the vast majority of health insurers were waiving it. She said if someone was uninsured that it was her understanding that the fees were also waved.

Commissioner Rodriguez-McDowell asked if the no local dollars to the field hospital included the PPE, supplies, and staff for the part that included the County's funding.

Ms. Diorio said they had never intended to use local dollars for PPE, supplies, or staffing. She said it was her expectation that the hospital systems would take on the full cost of the field hospital.

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Commissioner Rodriguez-McDowell asked questions and Ms. Diorio provided answers.

Commissioner Harden asked if it was correct that we were short on 188 ICU beds.

Ms. Harris said that was correct.

Commissioner Harden asked what role the State had in getting them the special equipment.

Ms. Harris said in most disaster situations that they would make requests of the State to help meet their needs, and they would do what they needed to do either within the State or through the federal government to get what they needed. She said the difference they were running into was that it was a national situation, and everyone was looking for the same support.

Commissioner Harden asked if there were any other Counties with a larger outbreak than Mecklenburg County's.

Ms. Harris said not that she was aware of but that there were other counties with a greater rate of positives based on their population.

Commissioner Harden asked additional follow up questions, and Ms. Harris provided answers.

Commissioner Powell asked if it was care for all patients when it came to the amount of beds.

Ms. Harris responded yes.

Commissioner Powell said they needed to speak with Representatives at the federal level to see if they could get PPE for essential workers. She spoke about mental health and said they needed to think about it every step of the way and while it was life saving to flatten the curve, it was really taking a toll on people. She said she hoped that hope was offered in the messaging.

Ms. Harris said they would work to make sure they were getting access to resources and would put together a resource page.

Chair Dunlap asked that the Committee, which comes to them with recommendations, would come back next time they meet, with a recommendation as it related to masks. He said that he heard anyone in the community could be tested now.

Ms. Harris said no, they were not at a place in the community where they had the resources for anyone who wants a test to be able to get it due to availability and PPE.

Chair Dunlap said he just wanted to make sure everyone understood that they would still have to call in advance to be tested and that there was still protocol on whether or not they would be tested. He said they would be lifting their stay at home order before the virus peaked and asked what the dangers were from doing that.

Ms. Harris said they could have looked at a spike. She said considering where they were in the process, they would go back to the red line from the

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PowerPoint presentation and that their numbers would spike, and hospitals would have a hard time dealing with the number of cases they would see.

Chair Dunlap said he would like to see a plan, saying that they were not there yet but that given what they had learned from the month they had, there were some things that they could relax on. He said the mental component was wearing on a lot of people but that they could not risk that over the lives that may be saved. He said he was still getting a lot of calls about the hospital situation and asked what the likelihood was that the beds would still be needed if they were about to reduce the restrictions of the stay at home order.

Ms. Diorio said they completely agreed and that the modeling from the hospitals was very clear that the projections were predicated on the stay at home order not being lifted prematurely. She said she believed they were keenly aware that if they started to relax restrictions or take away the stay at home order, that the numbers would spike. She said the best case scenario would be that they would build 600 beds and do not need a single one but that it was really hard to predict if they would need the beds or not need the beds and that they did not want to be in a position where they do not build them and have a spike and them not be available.

Commissioner Jerrell said he was getting a lot of communication from people who wanted to help and that there was no follow up or response to it.

Ms. Harris said that everything she received from the Commissioners or community who had materials for sale or services for sale, that she was getting those to the right places and that they were being vetted. She said that from the volunteer perspective, Char-Meck Responds is the best way at this time to get information if you want to be a part of support and things you want to do. She said the other option for clinicians who would like to help and be part of the clinical part was the TERMS website that the Manager mentioned.

Commissioner Cotham asked follow-up questions and received an answer from Ms. Diorio.

Commissioner Fuller asked if they could get demographic information with respect to the Micro Business Stabilization Loans and Small Business COVID-19 Loan Program to see who is applying and who was getting them.

Ms. Diorio said sure.

Commissioner Fuller addressed the rate of African Americans with COVID-19, stating he was alarmed that the number was going up, stating that last time it was around 42% and now it was up to 50% of the County's reported cases. He wanted to know why they were seeing this.

Ms. Harris said she would give part of the answer and was not sure if it was the whole answer or not. She said at this point, it was not believed that the virus was predisposed to any particular age, sex, race, or ethnicity. She said what they did know, specifically in the community, that in the African American community, there were higher rates of chronic diseases, more negative impacts from social determinant issues, less likely to have insurance and therefore less likely to have good access to healthcare and tend to live in communities that were more dense. She said as they were focusing on those individuals who were most at risk and showing symptoms,

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they were likely to see more people in the African American community because the fact they were more susceptible due to their chronic diseases and have been showing symptoms and been getting tested. She said that may not be the full answer but that as they move forward, she believed they would be able to understand it more fully.

Commissioner Leake said they knew what the problems were and had yet to respond or correct those problems. She said that was a partial response and that healthcare was major.

A motion was made by Commissioner Leake and seconded by Commissioner Harden to ask the County Manager to communicate with the key executives of three major food suppliers, Publix, Harris Teeter, and Food Lion and report back as soon as possible.

Commissioner Leake said all across the country, African Americans were suffering due to ill living conditions and that they knew what the problems were but were not answering it. She said Mecklenburg County was number one in the process, as the poorest people stay the poorest people. She said 50% across the Country so they were the leaders. She said they needed to respond to that and were calling on the community to do the right thing, those who have jobs and money, to make sure they did not stay in the same position forever, because that was a part of the problem

Chair Dunlap said it was not necessary because they already did that at the Retreat and the Manager was already working on the same issue and just had not provided an update yet.

Commissioner Jerrell asked if there was anything different about the motion than what was already being done and was the Manager already doing what was being requested.

Chair Dunlap said she was.

Commissioner Leake said that the report she received was that nothing was in place and that it was behind now what the issue of the virus was upfront.

Ms. Diorio said at the retreat, she was given directions to meet with leadership at the local food retailers. She said she had reached out and had a meeting with Harris Teeter, and she reached out to Publix with no response. She said she still needed to reach out to Food Lion and Compare Foods but again that the virus did get in the way.

Commissioner Leake said her concern was that two consent items dealt with corner stores and you do not put corner stores in the white community, and that people of her color should be valued like everyone else.

A vote was taken on the motion and carried by the following vote:

YES: Commissioners Fuller, Jerrell, Harden, Leake, Powell, and Scarborough

NO: Commissioners Cotham, Dunlap, and Rodriguez-McDowell

Commissioners discussed extending the stay at home order in Mecklenburg County until April 29, 2020 to align with the Governor's order.

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Ms. Diorio said that per Commissioner Leake's request, she would research the County Commissioner's role with the towns if they came up with the recommendation of June rather than April.

20-6089: Commissioner Reports

Commissioner Fuller said they needed to do something about the high rate of African Americans with COVID-19 in the County, and he realized it was a problem faced by people across the County but to him it was not enough to just recognize there was a problem and that they needed to do something about. He said he had not heard any effective planning about what they would do about it. He said people were really good at pointing out problems, but they needed to get the solution. He said he needed them to come up with some solutions that were actually effective.

He said the second thing was to be mindful that there were differences among in the County about what they should be doing. He said he thought they needed to be careful that they did not lose people and were clear about why they were taking certain actions. He said he realized they had a policy team but that they had to answer to the people individually and that he had to answer for what the County did, and he wanted to be able to do that.

He said with respect to the field hospital, they had sent at least three different messages publicly about it and he was concerned about that, because it was like they changed their minds three times. He believed it was better to work out what was needed to be done before announcing because they were now a long way from being at UNC Charlotte to now being at potentially the Convention Center.

Commissioner Rodriguez-McDowell spoke on the homeless population asking for specific answers to the Mecklenburg request as far as the four asks in the request they sent to all elected officials. She said number one was to stop breaking up encampments; two was about the port-a-johns and the handwashing stations, number three was the expansion of the hotel rooms, and number four was the stay on evictions to stay in place and refer to Legal Aid. She asked for a definitive statement about what they were doing and which of those proposals or asks were they willing to definitively say yes to. She wanted to know if someone was talking about this and if someone at the EOC was considering putting out a statement about it. She requested a map of locations for where the hand washing stations and port-a-johns.

Ms. Diorio said they were in and around uptown, because they put them in places where people normally operate. She said there were six locations that were normally frequented by the homeless residents.

Commissioner Rodriguez-McDowell said they were saying that downtown was not enough; they need Northlake and other areas where there are encampments that are known about. She said it was spreading it out for more than just downtown and that was kind of part of the problem.

Ms. Harris said they were working with the individuals who provide homeless services in the County. She said they were talking with them and getting their input about where else they need to be put and that it was coming.

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Commissioner Rodriguez-McDowell said they needed to make more progress on that, because people were really concerned about the spread of the virus among that vulnerable group of folks who have compromised health already and just how it could really spread like wildfire through them. She said it felt as though they were not seeing the action they were looking for.

Commissioner Harden said one thing that she was concerned about was how many people applied for unemployment and how many were denied, because now with the peak being extended and we know that a quarter of the renters did not make their rent payments in Mecklenburg County this past month on April. She said she believed that they had to anticipate that number increasing for May and June. She asked if they knew how many people had been denied on their unemployment applications in Mecklenburg County

Ms. Diorio said the Economic Development team was trying to obtain the information she was asking for.

Commissioner Jerrell asked for an update from the City around their Small Business Program as far as lending. He said it was his understanding that their CDBG lending was only in certain corridors, which may leave out some businesses because the County could not cover the City of Charlotte and Mint Hill. He also wanted to know if the County was having continued conversation with the City to ensure the gaps were filled.

Ms. Diorio said he was correct; they only had a million dollars of money to spend and were doing it in certain corridors in the City of Charlotte, so there was a gap when you look at the CDBG money.

Commissioner Jerrell asked about transportation for the homeless as it related to getting to medical facilities for testing.

Ms. Harris said they had been working around getting them to testing for those who were symptomatic when they went to shelters. She said they were working with the Sheriff with that. She said transportation for the homeless in the past, especially if they were in shelters or receiving services from one of the providers, had been that they had a system where they provided that service but that they had just not been comfortable doing that with individuals who may or may not be COVID-19 positive.

Commissioner Jerrell said there was a gap that needed to be addressed.

Ms. Harris said she was not aware of any situation where they did not get someone transported who was screened at one of the shelters, found to be symptomatic and not transported for a test then transported to the hotel where their test results came.

Commissioner Harris encouraged that when people were reaching out to them to try to sell or donate items, if it was not something that was needed, to close the follow up loop by telling them thank you but that we would pass.

Commissioner Powell wanted to be a voice for the people calling her complaining about their loss of freedom, as someone said "because the knuckle heads who were not being compliant." She said they had not heard a lot about the order being enforced and she thought it may be time for enforcement for people to understand how serious this way.

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Ms. Diorio said CMPD and the Towns were enforcing it every single day and that was something they talked about in their 10:00 a.m. calls; they get an update from Chief Estes from CMPD about all of the enforcement actions they were taking and he was coordinating with all the Town police departments as well as the Sheriff to ensure they were consistently enforcing across the entire county.

Commissioner Powell said she hoped the homeless receive more hygiene throughout the County beyond the uptown area.

Chair Dunlap said he wanted to receive a response that would tell them to what degree they had met those requests, because one thing they did not know was whether or not the funds they appropriated had been spent. He said if they had been spent and all of the needs had not been spent, he would expect her to come back to the Board with the request for additional funds so that we could carry out the things that they wanted to carry about. He said he thought it was also fair, since they had all those offers for things they may or may not need, to tell people what they do need. He said one of the things that he would like to request was for those people who had the ability to make masks, to make them available specifically for the homeless population. He said most of them were not wearing masks.

Ms. Diorio clarified an earlier statement that she had made. She said the Convention Center was one of some sites that the Army Corp of Engineers were evaluating and that the final say had not yet been determined but the preferred site was the convention center.

20-6084: Meck Counts 2020 Census Update

20-6086: FY2021 Proposed Fee Adjustment

A motion was made by Commissioner Fuller, seconded by Commissioner Rodriguez-McDowell, and carried unanimously to defer these agenda items to a future meeting.

ADJOURNMENT

With there being no further business to come before the Board, Chair Dunlap declared the meeting adjourned.

The meeting adjourned at 5:10 p.m.

Emily A. Kunze, Clerk

George Dunlap, Chair

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