

CASS COUNTY HUMAN SERVICE ZONE BOARD MEETING

May 4, 2020

MINUTES

With quorum present, Director Ferguson called the meeting to order at 2:04 p.m.

Present: Chad Peterson, Mary Scherling, Brian Hagen, Rick Steen, Glenn Ellingsberg, Ken Pawluk, Duane Breitling (all present via Teams Meeting)

Absent:

Presenter: Pearl Ferguson, Human Services Zone Director; Robert Wilson, County Administrator

I. **Approval of Minutes**

Mr. Steen made a motion to approve the April 6, 2020 Board minutes. Mr. Breitling seconded it. Motion carried.

II. **Board Member Applicants**

The Board was provided with three applications for community members interested in participating on the Cass County Human Service Zone Board. The Board has capacity for 15 members with additional members being added based on the needs of the community. There are currently eight members, including Director Ferguson. She is seeking further discussion on the individuals that have applied with the possibility of making recommendations to the Board of County Commissioners for a final decision at their May 18, 2020.

Due to audio issues, there was a brief recess while Director Ferguson and Mr. Wilson relocated.

While waiting for Director Ferguson to rejoin the meeting, Mr. Pawluk questioned if any of the Board applicants have been personally interviewed. Mr. Wilson explained the applications came from the discussion and agreement the Board made to solicit applications for additional Zone Board Members. The three applications that were received were based on the advertisement agreed on by the Human Service Board. Director Ferguson is presenting these applications in order to keep the process moving forward. Mr. Breitling stated it was his understanding that a decision has not been made to go beyond the eight members. Mr. Wilson confirmed this statement. Mr. Breitling then questioned if a final decision on applicants today would be premature. Mr. Wilson stated the only intent for providing the applications to the Board members was to be reviewed and discussed. A decision does not have to be made today.

Director Ferguson rejoined the meeting.

Mr. Breitling questioned if it would just be a matter of receiving and filing the documents. Mr. Wilson stated that would be an option and there is no obligation to act on the applications at this time. Ms. Scherling's understanding was that the Board was going to wait to add any additional members but feels some sort of response should be sent to the applicants letting them know their application will be held on to until a decision can be made by the Board as to whether they will be adding more members or not. Mr. Pawluk felt the first decision should be whether to increase the size of the Board beyond eight members and agreed there should be follow-up with the applicants.

Director Ferguson apologized for not being aware of the decision to remain at eight members for a period of time, explaining she was trying to be proactive in managing the applications she received.

Ms. Scherling reminded the Board of past discussions as to what the Board should look like and who it should represent. At that time, there were suggestion of having other representatives

from the community, such as Lutheran Social Services or rural areas. She suggests actively recruiting community members to fill the positions as well. Ms. Scherling questioned the process for character and reference checks as well, since that has been done on other boards she has participated on.

Mr. Ellingsberg felt the current Board is still new and he personally is still learning the guidelines and processes. He feels it would be more beneficial to add members once the Board is more comfortable with their own responsibilities.

Mr. Pawluk made a motion for Director Ferguson or Mr. Wilson to contact the applicants, explaining the Board will remain at eight members but their applications will be retained for review should the Board want to increase members in the future. Mr. Ellingsberg seconded. On roll call, motion passed unanimously.

Director Ferguson offered to contact the applicants as she contacted them initially and would be happy to make the follow-up call as well.

III. **Operations Report**

Director Ferguson explained she is not familiar with how the Operations Report has been addressed in past meetings, so she opened discussion up to the Board for any questions.

Mr. Pawluk asked if she has any areas of concern. Director Ferguson explains there is not a clear picture on the affects of COVID-19 to the agency at this time. While numbers remain consistent with little variance, she feels there will be a more accurate report in April. She mentioned Child Protective Service (CPS) numbers are down. In speaking with other counties, she speculates this is due to children not engaging with teachers and other mandated reporters on a daily basis. The number of educational neglect reports have increased; however, due to the State's direction, these types of cases are referred back to the schools to address during this time. Director Ferguson has had conversations with some of the school districts and advised them to follow their standard practices when it comes to reporting their concerns.

Economic Assistance has been consistent in the first quarter of 2020. The agency has received guidance that clients will not lose their medical assistance unless they request to end their coverage, there is a death, or they have moved from away from the state. As with Family Services, there may be an increase in those numbers in April.

Director Ferguson highlighted that, in collaboration with Cass County's IT Department, approximately 61% of the agency's workforce are equipped to work remotely since the middle of March to the beginning of April. Staff were triaged based on medical needs and underlying health conditions, childcare needs, and other factors. Some staff continue to complete home visits per State guidelines. Due to personal protective equipment being provided, such as masks, sanitizer, and gloves, staff have been able to complete approximately 101 community visits between the end of March through May 1, 2020. A team of Family Service staff, along with community partners, were able to open an emergency 24-hour foster care shelter for youth that may be displaced due to the pandemic. This option would be used as a last resort.

With many working remote and the building being open by appointment only, Mr. Pawluk questioned how busy the lobbies have been. Director Ferguson explained there have been very few clients in the building. Many have adjusted to using the drop box in the main lobby of the Annex building for picking up and dropping off paperwork. There has been a request to have this as an ongoing option. Clients are also utilizing the online application process more. As of April 1, 2020, there have been approximately 832 electronic applications received, which is 200 more than previous months.

Mr. Pawluk questioned how the efficiency of staff is being tracked with so many working from home. Director Ferguson felt she could not provide an accurate answer at this time, but would be willing to work with her managers to get that information to provide the Board. She did explain the adjustment from working in the agency versus at home is a significant change due to the equipment available. For example, Economic Assistance staff are provided two large monitors to make it easier for them to utilize their multiple programs. Now, many are using a much smaller screen which takes more time to process applications. She did anticipate some decline in productivity due to this, but she has not received reports from any of her managers with staff concerns.

Mr. Ellingsberg sought an update on the disciplinary action taken at the April 6, 2020 meeting regarding Rick VanCamp and Linda Dorff. Director Ferguson reported she provided Mr. VanCamp and Ms. Dorff with their final action letters on April 15, 2020. It outlined what the Board recommended for them to remain in their current positions and to go through the performance management process. She has also met with both for planning meetings for the process as well. This allowed her to get to know them and talk about areas of potential improvement. Director Ferguson has worked with County and State Human Resources to obtain a performance improvement template and after review, she will use the State template as it is more detail oriented. It is Director Ferguson's goal to have the plans implemented by May 15, 2020.

Mr. Steen questioned the percentage of staff that will continue to work remotely once the agency opens up for normal business. Director Ferguson has retained a database of those that could continue to work remotely, which would be the bulk of the staff. She does not feel she is able to give a percentage right away due to factors such as productivity, equipment, etc. but feels COVID has made the agency really review their ability to allow staff to work remote and feels the opportunity is there, especially given the space issues at the Annex.

Mr. Breitling questioned whether the two positions that were held open have been filled. Director Ferguson reports they are still accepting applications for them. Applications go through the State Merit system. The agency is then sent a roster along with the resumes and cover letters. Director Ferguson reported there are a number of positions in varying stages within the agency right now, including the Administrative Services Manager, Economic Assistance Supervisor, Family Service Supervisor, Case Management Social Worker III, two CPS Social Worker III, and a fulltime Foster Care Licensor. There has been one resignation notice of an eligibility specialist as of May 15, 2020. Ms. Scherling questioned if these are new positions or being filled due to resignations. Director Ferguson explained the Administrative Services Manager is due to the resignation of Melissa Kain Varno. The supervisor positions are due to retirement, but she does not believe any of the other positions are new.

Regarding the applicants for the Zone Board positions, Mr. Wilson reports providing Director Ferguson with the applications and he takes responsibility for the miscommunication regarding additional members. He praises Director Ferguson for the work she is doing in her position. As portfolio commissioner, Mr. Steen would be interested how other Zone are filling their boards. He is requesting Director Ferguson seek out additional feedback during her meetings with other zones on how they have doing this.

Director Ferguson is asking the Board members for any feedback on what should be included in the Operations Report. While numerical statistics are important, she feels there is opportunity to discuss meaningful things happening within the Zone, along with challenges that would allow the Zone Board to serve in the advisory capacity.

Mr. Pawluk mentioned he liked to see what the economic impact is based on the services this agency provides on a monthly, or at least quarterly, basis. Director Ferguson stated she does

have some narrative that was left out of this board packet that she would be happy to forward on.

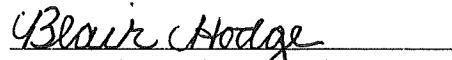
Mr. Ellingsberg also asked that as guidelines are established by the State, that they are provided to Board members.

IV. **Adjournment**

Mr. Steen made a motion to adjourn the meeting at 2:58 p.m. Mr. Breitling seconded. Motion carried.



Pearl Ferguson, Zone Director
Cass County Human Services Zone Board



Blair Hodge, Recorder