

**CASS COUNTY HUMAN SERVICE ZONE BOARD MEETING  
NOVEMBER 02, 2020**

**MINUTES**

With quorum present, Director Mell called the meeting to order at 2:02 p.m.

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

**Absent:**

**Presenter:** Pearl Mell, Human Services Zone Director

**I. Approval of Minutes**

Mr. Wilson mentioned edits to two names listed in the minutes and Ms. Mell agreed those would be changed before signing and asked for approval with those recommended changes.

Mr. Steen made a motion to approve the October 5, 2020 Board minutes. Mr. Peterson seconded it. Motion carried.

**II. Zone Plan**

Ms. Mell reported the Human Service Zone plan is required for completion by December. The plan has been provided to the board. The outstanding documents include updated financial and organizational charts. Ms. Mell addressed the existing pattern of the Counties trade area and any regional patterns established by the department. This addresses trends or needs in the area which are dictated by the citizens or geographically impact. Examples include the higher new American population, economic impact, and the growth of the area.

Ms. Mell asked for input from the commissioners. Suggestions from board members included the fact Fargo has the largest jail population in the state. It should be highlighted, Fargo welcomes about 85% of the new Americans to the region. Fargo is also a medical hub for the region with three major hospitals in the state which include Sanford, Essentia and the VA. Sanford is also the only Level One trauma center between Seattle and Minneapolis which brings challenges to the area. Transitional housing and job needs for those who recently left prison can be a challenge to secure. Also, affordable housing issues and the homeless population brings about issues.

Mr. Peterson asked if this plan is intended to advocate for future staff? If so, this document needs to be realistic to assure for future coverage, whether the intent is literal or implied. Ms. Mell clarified this area of the Zone Plan does not address or relate to staffing needs. The plan will initially highlight the differences between counties and the unique issues within the combined counties. The information included will be expounded on once the list is complete.

Ms. Scherling addressed the significant number of refugees settled or resettled in Cass County, which is an important consideration because once they settle, they are no longer tracked so this can make an impact. Ms. Mell asked if there is someone in the community who can provide statistics on the New Americans population? Mr. Peterson has the data available and will share but noted the switch of the parties than the count can change since each party tabulates the information differently. The shift may move from 500 to 700 refugees which will make a huge impact. Ms. Mell will note the changes in the political environment can impact the data going forward. Mr. Hagen stated the county can work with Lutheran Social Services to determine how many refugees we can accept. This will help the influx and the assimilation. Ms. Mell will note future collaboration opportunities.

Mr. Wilson mentioned the growing pressure of downtown to address criminal justice, homelessness, addiction, and mental illness which can affect the community in a number of ways so should be represented in the plan. Affordable housing again should be highlighted and mentioned. Lastly, if this plan does address future FTE's than this level of work may lend itself to supporting an assistant director. Ms. Mell stated caseloads will also be discussed. One of the additional attachments will include the employees their FTEs.

Mr. Pawluk asked to know who would see and use the document. Ms. Mell confirmed she would send it to Ms. Sara Stolt who is working with a legal team member.

**a. Appointment of Officers**

Ms. Mell was informed by Ms. Stolt, the zone plan will not be approved without officers. With the upcoming election, this can be re-addressed after elections if there are any changes, but officers should be put into place now so the Zone Plan can move forward.

Ms. Mell suggested the Vice Chair also be the Portfolio Manager. This would eliminate the need to appoint a new Portfolio Manager each year. Mr. Steen agreed. Mr. Breitling expressed concern with designating Ms. McIntyre as a recorder since she will not act as an officer. Ms. Mell clarified it is recommended by legal to have an actual zone board member act as the Secretary but those duties can be designated to an appropriate person, so they can delegate the tasks to the Administrative Services Manager, which is the position Ms. McIntyre currently fills. There is also a back-up within her department who can stand in for Ms. McIntyre if she is unable to attend a meeting. Mr. Peterson suggested having a Portfolio Chair and Vice Chair. This would save from the update being made every year. In summary, Ms. Mell will maintain her position as the Chair. The Vice Chair will be served by the Human Services Portfolio Manager and the Secretary will be served by the Vice Human Services Portfolio Manager.

Mr. Peterson made a motion: Within the Zone Board the Chair will be the Human Services Director. The Vice Chair will be the Portfolio Manager for the Cass County Commission. The Secretary will be Vice Portfolio Manager within the Cass County Commission. Roll Call Vote was taken, and all members agreed. Motion carried.

**b. Fiscal Information**

Ms. Mell requested to address the fiscal information in regard to outlining the process for ratifying or approving the budget or claims against the Human Services Zone fund. Previously this was done by the County Commissioner who is processing bills for the month. Ms. Mell's recommendation is for her to be the person responsible for the ratification starting January 1, 2021. This would allow her to have a better understanding of where the budget is being spent. The Zone plan will outline the current process and note going forward in 2021 the process will change to allow for Ms. Mell to oversee the process as the Human Services Zone Director.

Mr. Peterson agrees with this new process, so the Director knows where the money is going. Normally they will do vouchers every other week, Mr. Montplaisir sends them to the Commissioners for approval. There was discussion around Ms. Mell taking over the process versus the Commissioners managing the process. Ms. Mell clarified the law requires the Human Service Zone Director or designee shall approve or ratify all claims against the Human Service Zone Funds. She has considered the current process as falling under the designee category but going forward she would approve and bring the financial information to the board for review. Conversation continued with members agreeing Ms. Mell's involvement is a good move but expressed concerns the funds would continue to be reviewed by an outside source to assure they are allocated appropriately. Mr. Wilson will clarify with the auditor's office, but he believes the bills will come from finance to the Zone Director so there are still levels of review. Ms. Scherling expressed her concern that the auditor and treasurer were once elected and since that

is no longer the case, the Commissioners are the only ones elected on behalf of the tax payers so they should work with Ms. Mell as part of a larger process. Ms. Mell agreed she is open to a collaborative process, so all parties are comfortable, but she needs to be part of that process. At this time, Ms. Mell will outline the current process for the Zone Plan and state the process will be updated with approval from the board in the upcoming year.

Mr. Steen requested Ms. Mell walk through the process for the Human Service budget. Ms. Mell reported she went through the budget for the first time in June. She worked with Ms. Laurel Sehn, from the State and they reviewed historical data and made projections going forward. Follow-up conversations also included Ms. Tang in finance and Ms. Sarah Heinle from the auditor's office to help make appropriate projections. There was discussion if the Commissioners had approved the budget and it was clarified they reviewed the budget, but they do not have the authority to approve although the commissioners do have the ability to work with the legislatures to discuss allocation of budget money between the State and the County.

### **c. Zone Board Members**

Ms. Scherling asked to address the makeup of the board listed in the Zone Plan. Going forward it should be noted the board members are elected which needs to be considered when representing the population. It was also noted there is no mention of the significant professional background experience held by the board members in the Zone Plan. Ms. Mell clarified she only put in the high-level demographics but there is another section which addresses the members, their time on the board, and their election vs non-election status. The members experience could be added to that other section to give a proper representation. Ms. Mell noted future expectations for each zone board across the state is to have a better representation of the population within each of the zone areas. It will be discouraged to have such a commission heavy board, but Ms. Mell will document what the current members bring to the board. Ms. Scherling objects with the idea of adding members to the board based on demographics without considering experience. The Commissioners are appointed by the people, so Ms. Scherling feels they are a good representatives to speak on behalf of the general population in the Cass County Human Service Zone area. Ms. Mell agreed to elaborate on the fact the current board has individuals with diverse educational and professional background. Mr. Pawluk requested to strike the sentence which outlined the generations represented on the board. Ms. Mell agreed to strike the sentence but clarified once Department of Human Services will ultimately finalize the required membership requirements.

Ms. Mell asked if the board members are comfortable approving the Zone Plan at this meeting knowing she will add the additional attachments, or would they prefer a special meeting once she has compiled the last of the information. The plan must be submitted December 1, 2020. Mr. Steen expressed concerned the plan is missing the Zone Board responsibilities. He believes their responsibilities should be included. Ms. Mell confirmed the Zone Board responsibilities were part of the Human Service Zone Agreement which was previously submitted by Mr. Ammerman. Mr. Steen feels the responsibilities of the board are still not clear. Mr. Wilson noted Ms. Hasbargen was hired October 1, 2020 to take on the task of outlining the roles and responsibilities of the board members. Ms. Mell confirmed, although Ms. Hasbargen has not had enough time to complete the task there are six element of the board members roles and responsibilities outlined in the stature. The Cass County Human Service Board is not the only board requesting this information. Mr. Hagen stated the state needs to better define the roles as the Senate Bill 2124 did not give enough information. Mr. Hagen and Ms. Scherling are not comfortable approving this plan if they do not have their roles and responsibilities better defined.

Ms. Scherling made a motion: move to approve the Cass County Human Service Zone Plan subject to additional information on the roles and responsibilities of the Zone Board subject to receiving that information and approving it.

Roll call was taken:

Yes – Mr. Breitling, Mr. Peterson, Ms. Scherling, Mr. Hagen, Mr. Steen, Mr. Pawluk.

No – Mr. Ellingsberg, Ms. Mell.

Motion carried subject receiving the requested information and approve the additional information.

To make the December 1, 2020 deadline for submission of the Zone Plan, it is suggested to have an additional special meeting on November 30, 2020. This would also allow time for additional conversations needed to discuss the addendums. Ms. Mell requested another meeting is scheduled by November 30<sup>th</sup> to address the outstanding issues.

III. **Adjournment**

Mr. Pawluk made a motion to adjourn the meeting at 3:20 p.m. Ms. Scherling seconded. Motion carried.



Pearl Mell, Zone Director  
Cass County Human Services Zone Board



Marla McIntyre, Recorder