

CASS COUNTY HUMAN SERVICE ZONE BOARD MEETING

June 1, 2020

MINUTES

With quorum present, Director Ferguson called the meeting to order at 2:05 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. Ellingsberg made a motion to approve the May 4, 2020 Board minutes. Mr. Peterson seconded it. Motion carried.

II. **Human Service Zone Board Composition**

Per a request from a prior meeting, Director Ferguson contacted other North Dakota Human Service Zones. She received responses from nine zone directors regarding the composition of their Zone Board. Other Zone Boards range from seven to thirteen members, depending on the number of counties the it serves. Zones with multiple counties have a commissioner from each county representing along with community representation from each county but many are still in the process of determining the composition of their Board.. Director Ferguson explains that along with zones, there are multiple regions within the State. Cass County is located in Region IV, along with Agassiz Valley and RSR (Richland, Sargent, Ransom) Human Service Zones.

Director Ferguson was able to meet with the Zone Directors from RSR and Agassiz Valley Human Service Zones to discuss their Zone Board. They continue to integrate commissioners and community members. Agassiz Valley utilizes community members to engage and educate the Zone Board in order to plan and meet community needs. Director Ferguson asked for a moment to attend to a phone call.

During this pause, Mr. Peterson shared that he loved the idea of having a community partner come in as it would strengthen the relationship and increase Zone Board members' general knowledge of the services provided within our community. Director Ferguson rejoined the meeting and agreed with Mr. Peterson's statement, adding it would also help in identifying gaps in services between community partners and our agency for future Redesign planning.

As agreed to in the May 4, 2020 meeting, Director Ferguson contacted the Zone Board applicants to inform them the agency would be holding on to their applications until a future date. She also had the opportunity to speak with Senators Judy Lee and Kathy Hogan regarding SB2124. They talked about recruitment and the purpose of the Zone Board in an advocacy role. She also participated in a Zone Directors meeting and inquired the status of the Zone Board Training. It was originally delayed due to COVID-19. Other Zone Directors indicated they are looking forward to this training as well.

Ms. Scherling questioned why the State is not going forward with the Board education that was planned. Director Ferguson explained there were so many program changes due to COVID-19 and mobilizing staff to work remotely that it disrupted the implementation of the Redesign process, including the Board training. Now that things are stabilizing, they are moving forward and starting the process again.

Mr. Steen asked Mr. Wilson his thoughts on the meeting he and Director Ferguson had with Senators Lee and Hogan. Mr. Wilson felt it was a good meeting. He felt they want to be advocates for this agency and would like to see the structure works well. They provided some examples of representation they felt should be on the Board and explained in single county zones that while it would be easier to use the same group of people, it would be more beneficial to have a variety. Some examples of representatives

were public health, schools, and individuals from Job Services or other State-administrated programs that overlap with our agency. The Senators also suggested reviewing local boards and emulating from them, such as the Fargo Cass Public Health Board. Both Senators identified that what exists regarding Board responsibilities does not necessarily help establish the intent, so it is up to our agency to interpret and proceed forward.

Ms. Scherling questioned if there was any talk of having consumers or someone that has direct contact with our agency as well as other geographic areas of Cass County represented. Director Ferguson stated the only comment made to having consumers on the Board would be to ensure the individuals would contribute to the Board and the delivery of services by this agency. Director Ferguson thought having representation from outside the metro area is a wonderful idea and would help provide a perspective for the large area being served. Ms. Scherling had a concern specifically regarding access to senior services in the more rural areas. Director Ferguson explained that we do some locally administered Home and Community Based Services that are just operated by Cass County, but we also partner with Agassiz Valley to provide services to residents living closer to those counties.

Mr. Breitling observed that Cass and Burleigh County's composition are nearly identical. Director Ferguson explained they were the only other single-county zone that responded to her request and did not research further into this at the time. She stated she would be interested to see what Grand Forks and Ward County would look like as well.

Mr. Breitling followed up with questioning about the Zone Plan that is due today, questioning if this has been provided to the Board members yet. Hearing no other questions regarding the Zone Board Composition, Director Ferguson moved to the Operations Report to address Mr. Breitling's question.

III. Operations Report

Director Ferguson explained the Zone Plan final draft was due today. Due to the pandemic, it was thought the governor would issue an Executive Order to allow Zone Boards an extension. The Executive Order never occurred, but a decision was made at the State level that Zone Directors could provide a draft of the Zone Plans, with finalization made in the following six months. Director Ferguson explained the finalized Zone Plan would not be sent on without Zone Board approval. She explained that due to the lack of training programs for zone plan development, along with Director Ferguson starting her job in mid-March, she has had a late start in completing a Zone Plan. She has worked with other Zone Directors to fill in gaps for Cass County's plan, such as existing partnerships, current board composition, proof of liability coverage, assets, etc. She explains there are parts that do not apply to Cass County because it is a single county zone. Director Ferguson will be sending out the draft to Sara Stolt, Chief Operating Officer for North Dakota Department of Human Services, today along with sending it to the Board members. Mr. Steen felt it would be appropriate for her to share the document when it is in a form she is comfortable with. She does feel confident in the document she has created, there are just some gaps due to gathering some of the information and not knowing where to locate it.

Mr. Breitling questioned the current job description of Chip Ammerman, former Director of Social Services. Director Ferguson explained he is currently backfilling the Adult Protective Services Manager position vacated by Sharon Kleeman. She spoke with State Human Resources about what is appropriate to do in terms of finding him a permanent role, but a decision has not been made yet. Director Ferguson will have a follow-up conversation with State Human Resources to determine the best fit for Mr. Ammeman.

Mr. Hagen asked Director Ferguson was seeing any major concerns regarding services due to COVID-19. Director Ferguson explained she was not at this time. She reviewed the numbers again today with department managers, specifically Economic Assistance, as she anticipated high numbers in this area for the month of April. In discussion with Sidney Schock, Economic Assistance Division Manager, there was a slight increase in Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) and an increase of 449 recipients for Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP). Despite those two areas, numbers continue to be

consistent with previous months. Director Ferguson and Mr. Schock speculate the addition of the \$600.00 in addition to clients' weekly unemployment benefits may have been enough for families to sustain without additional assistance or it may have disqualified them from qualifying for assistance.

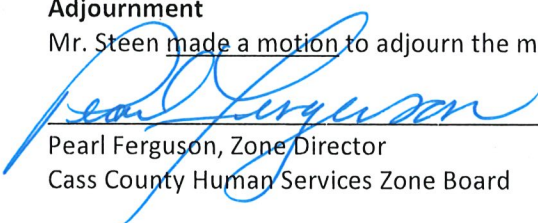
Director Ferguson addressed Mr. Pawluk's question from the May 4, 2020 Zone Board Meeting regarding the economic impact the agency has in the community. According to Mr. Schock, there are some reports regarding the impact that he is no longer able to access. He has been working with the State to correct this and hope they will be available again in the future. Mr. Pawluk thanked Director Ferguson for the response.

Mr. Wilson asked Board members what they thought the Zone Board should look like. Mr. Steen commented he envisioned it looking similar to what Senators Lee and Hogan described. He believes community partners would be beneficial on the Board. He also feels having a couple legislators on the Board would be helpful. He suggested a minimum of three Commissioners be on the Zone Board, but not setting a maximum in case there were others that still would like to participate. He would also like the two community members serving the Zone Board to be included as well. Ms. Scherling reminded members that having legislators on the Board was talked about in the past and Senator Lee indicated that may not be the best option because there are many already highly engaged, but suggested legislators that are not engaged be considered. Since the State funds the Human Services, it would be important to maintain good communication between the State and the agency. Ms. Scherling agrees with having legislators on the Zone Board. She suggested waiting a while before deciding the amount of Commissioners that should be on the Board, but agrees the number could decrease over time. She also suggested to include a representative from Lutheran Social Services or a member from the New American Community.

Mr. Ellingsberg suggested each Board member make recommendations to Director Ferguson on who they would like to see on the Zone Board. Director Ferguson could review and include it on the next Board meeting agenda in July. Director Ferguson was in agreement and suggested that instead of having an application process, the Zone Board be more strategic in recruiting individuals. The input current members would provide would be more beneficial than having individuals apply. Director Ferguson will send a follow-up email to the Zone Board requesting recommendations. She feels it would be important to have the existing Board but also involving community guests that could talk to the issues that are pertinent to them or what they are facing. She reminded that the maximum amount of members on the Board is 15.

IV. Adjournment

Mr. Steen made a motion to adjourn the meeting at 2:55 p.m. Mr. Breitling seconded. Motion carried.



Pearl Ferguson, Zone Director
Cass County Human Services Zone Board



Blair Hodge, Recorder