

**CASS COUNTY HUMAN SERVICE ZONE BOARD MEETING
SPECIAL MEETING
January 19, 2021**

MINUTES

With quorum present, Mr. Rick Steen called the meeting to order at 1:04 p.m.

Present: Chad Peterson, Mary Scherling, Rick Steen, Duane Breitling, Brian Hagen, Jim Kapitan, & Pearl Mell
Guest: Robert Wilson, County Administrator
Absent:
Presenter: Rick Steen, Human Service Zone Board Member
(all present via Teams Meeting)

I. Annual Performance Evaluation

Mr. Steen was pleased everyone responded to the evaluation and returned comments in time and appreciates everyone's feedback. The Board will go through the evaluation by topic and not read verbatim. Comments will start with the Board members and then allow Ms. Mell to comment.

Section 1 – Definition of Ratings - No comments necessary.

Section 2 – Goal Setting

Mr. Steen asked if Ms. Mell worked with the state to develop her goals. Ms. Mell stated these were her personal goals with no department feedback. The process was to work with the Board and then send the results to the state. Ms. Mell stated she tried to set goals that are achievable and would have a positive impact on the agency at an individual and collective level. The main goal of a consistent performance management system is to ensure that there is fair and equitable treatment for all employees and to establish good processes with clear expectations for all staff. Ms. Mell mentioned she has spoken with Mr. Wilson about refining the mission and values of the Human Service Zone as it relates to the overall strategic plan and overall mission and values of the County. The goal is to align the two. The last was to have the opportunity to meet with employees one on one. This has been a challenge with COVID but is important to build relationships to allow the agency to move forward. Mr. Steen did not receive any comments on the goals from the Board but opened the floor for comments. Mr. Wilson stated he and Ms. Mell have discussed and he feels there is value in looking at the mission, vision, and values. The Human Service Zone is a different area within the County since it is a hybrid between County and State but he feels they will be able to maintain consistency between Human Service Zone and the County.

Section 3 – Learning Section

No comments from the Board members. No comments from Ms. Mell

Section 4 – Values

Mr. Steen stated the Board has all had a chance to review Ms. Mell's comments so they will not be read aloud. They review Ms. Mell's assessment rating compared to the Board members. The ratings by the Board members are based on the average of rankings given by each member.

1. Integrity – Both Ms. Mell and the Board members rated this value at 3.0. There were no additional comments made.
2. Collaboration - Ms. Mell rated herself at 4.0 and the Board rated her at 3.2. Mr. Steen stated the Board is impressed with the collaboration. The one concern is Ms. Mell's ability to get everything done. Mr. Steen reported there were comments made expressing appreciation with Ms. Mell for working with the Board to bring the Board and Ms. Mell up to speed. Mr. Hagen mentioned the development score is nothing to worry about, it is difficult to review her capabilities over the short amount of time and from outside the daily activities. Ms. Mell agrees and feels she is in development, learning something new every day. She stated she has been conscientious about her time and realizes she cannot have her hands in everything. Mr. Steen clarified there is no criticism of Ms. Mell's capabilities, they simply do not want to see her burn out. Mr. Breitling added as time goes on, most of the transition will be completed and she will be more comfortable with the process which will allow her to extend herself further.
3. Stewardship - Ms. Mell rated herself at 2.0 and the Board members her at 2.5. The Board members agreed with Ms. Mell's personal assessment. The Board accepts it will take a while to learn everything. Ms. Mell agreed it is understanding she is learning what you don't know and once you learn something it is refining what you know to do your best.
4. Transformational leadership - Mr. Steen stated Ms. Mell gave a good idea of what she does in her narrative. Ms. Mell rated herself at a 4.0 and the Board members rated her at a 3.2. The Board generally agrees with her self-assessment even if the ratings are not exactly the same. Everyone believes she is moving along in the right direction and getting up to speed at a quick pace. The one issue that came up during the transition period prior to Ms. Mell's hiring, the Board would like an additional follow-up survey to know where the staff are today vs where they were. It has been almost a year and Mr. Steen would like to propose a survey be completed. Ms. Mell feels an "upwards feedback survey" is appropriate. She requests a local consulting or leadership company to assure it is an evidenced based survey. This could be used for more than just the Human Service Zone. She does feel it is important to meet everyone who reports to her prior to conducting a survey. Her current challenges meeting staff will affect the outcome of the feedback. If someone does not know her it will be difficult to know if the person is answering from their personal experience or what they heard from a colleague. An evidenced based survey would help ensure useful information is collected. Ms. Mell stated there would also be advantage to utilize an employee engagement survey to evaluate the agency overall. This would help collect information which could help all managers and the agency as a whole. Ms. Mell would like to be involved throughout the process, so she feels comfortable. Mr. Steen asked Mr. Wilson to explain the past process for collecting information. Mr. Wilson stated the county has some models and information they can work with. Mr. Wilson agrees it is key to know what you are asking and how you are tracking information. Mr. Steen believes it would be best to add this to a future Board meeting so they can discuss how they would like to move forward with a survey. Ms. Scherling clarified there were two different surveys. The most recent was prior to Ms. Mell's

arrival, to do a deep dive into issues within Social Services, but there was a second one which went out to a specific group which may be more what is requested. Ms. Scherling asked Mr. Wilson if the county wide survey was completed or if the consultant was returning to follow up. Mr. Wilson clarified there is not a follow-up planned on that survey that went out to a select group, but there are some internal staff members who have discussed doing some midpoint update to see if there are still relevant issues and to see there has been progress made on the issues initially made. Ms. Scherling felt that was a useful tool and would like to see this practice continue every three years or so and include this county wide. Mr. Steen stated this would be a good action for Social Services but will leave county wide issues for another meeting.

5. Advocacy – Ms. Mell rated herself at a 2.0. The Board members agreed but rated slightly higher at a 2.3. There was comment made to caution what we advocated for so we are not on a fringe. Mr. Steen mentioned Lutheran Social Services is closing and there was a news release stating Department of Human Services (DHS) will be taking on responsibilities to help cover the lost services. Mr. Steen asked for Ms. Mell to keep the Board informed on what DHS is handing down to the Zones. Ms. Mell asked for clarification on the comment to be careful of advocating for what is on the fringe. Mr. Steen clarified you can do what you can do and you cannot do everything. Come back to the Board if there are issues which are treading on fresh ground or issues which there will require a large resource spent on few who will benefit, then the Board should be made aware of these situations. Ms. Mell understands you can't be everything to everyone. Mr. Steen clarified, we know what we have to do, what we want to do, and what we can do.

Mr. Steen on the final page is a compilation of the comments and there were 6 comments made. The subtotal average of the categories Values by the Board members is 2.8 and Ms. Mell subtotal of Values is at 3.0. Very close and consistent. Collaboration and leadership are the only two areas where they did not rank the same score, but the Board members feel Ms. Mell is on the right track.

Section 5 – Responsibility

1. Supervision of staff – Ms. Mell rated herself at a 3.0 and the Board members rated her at a 3.2, very consistent. Mr. Steen mentioned there were questions that came up from the Board members. Will the Board be made aware of any complaints or grievances filed on the Director? Ms. Mell stated we need to work on the process, so staff understand the process but feels comfortable with the information coming to the Board. Mr. Steen stated as a Zone Board they have limited responsibilities, but they are responsible for the employees so if a grievance comes up, they would like to better understand the process. Mr. Mell would like to have a solid process which an employee can follow through easily vs an undefined process. Ms. Mell is committed to figure that process out. Mr. Steen stated the Board members just want to assure they know what is going on. Mr. Hagen stated such grievances typically go to HR. If there is one grievance it may not mean anything but once there are 10 grievances than there may be an issue. Mr. Hagan feels Human Resources would have to be involved and then find a way to have a report sent to the Board. Ms. Mell stated the issue starts with understanding if the grievances go to state HR or county HR and then figure out how to bring the issues back to the Board. This process needs to be outlined and published so the staff know what their options are.

2. Fiscal Accountability – Ms. Mell rated herself a 2.0 and the Board members rated her a 2.0. Mr. Steen stated it is too early, everyone is just trying to figure it out. No additional comments
3. Program Oversight – Ms. Mell rated herself a 2.0 and the Board members rated her a 2.3. Mr. Steen stated there were several questions and suggestions from the Board members in regard to oversight. Is this oversight of the individuals or the entire program? It was a wide-ranging topic. Mr. Steen asked who is monitoring the policies from DHS, are they for the betterment of the outcome for operation? How do we know what is coming down? Is the Board receiving enough information? One concern mentioned, is the Board receiving enough information? While '3. Responsibility' is referred to as program oversight, it is obvious the Ms. Mell is deep in the weeds overseeing the responsibility of item #4. Do we want to pay someone at Ms. Mell's level to monitor a child all night long? Is that the appropriate use of resources? The comment was to communicate with the state to determine the level of responsibility as custodial of the children. It is commendable but is she utilizing her time the best way possible? Ms. Mell stated there are many custodial duties which are carried out by social workers. She attends custodial team meeting with the various representatives to address issues. She does not get involved in many cases, but discussion needs to be had to determine what can be delegated. She needs to have additional conversations to delineate what should fall on Ms. Mell's shoulders and what should be delegated. She knows she may need to let go of some issues.

Ms. Mell also addressed the questions in relation to information which is coming from DHS. Ms. Mell is still learning what should be shared and what needs to be shared. She feels the Human Service Zone Board meeting should be used to properly share the information to help the Board understand procedural and operational changes. She believes she can find a way to better report information funneled down from DHS and can bring that to the current meetings. Mr. Steen would like to know more information on fundamental changes. Ms. Mell feels there is opportunity to continue to define how to use the time in the meetings and what is reported to the Board. Ms. Mell sees lots of opportunity for growth in this area.

4. Agency Responsibilities – Ms. Mell rated herself 2.0 the Board members rated her at 2.7. The Board is a bit higher but generally in agreement with Ms. Mell's rating. Mr. Steen stated there were some concerns brought up by Board members. Are these expectations too much for one person accomplish and should a Deputy Director position be considered in CCHS Zone? Does DHS provide adequate training in efficacy and quality of delivery? This hits on other items discussed. It has come to a point you cannot do all this if that is the state's expectation. Ms. Mell has been in conversation with Ms. Stolt and Ms. Hasbargen in discussing what is needed and what can be done. What is the best fit for Ms. Mell and the agency? Ms. Mell does believe she needs help. When it comes to training, there really has not been much. It is a unique role where you balance County and Department priorities, so having training on both sides from county and the department would be helpful. There should be a conscious effort for additional trainer. Having a mentor would be helpful from both the department and the county. Ms. Mell feels there are opportunities on both sides to learn more.

Section 6 – Professional/Career Development

Mr. Steen states Ms. Mell's comments were precise and there were no additional comments. Ms. Mell rated herself a 2.0 and the Board members were more complementary and rated her a 2.7.

Section 7 – Overall Summary

Mr. Steen reminded Ms. Mell the Board members ratings were an average. When you average all of Ms. Mell's ratings and the Board members ratings it was 2.7 across the Board. Individual comments are listed and are positive overall. Feedback and areas to think about. Overall ratings by the Board members is higher than Ms. Mell rated herself. Mr. Steen did take the liberties to share individual comments. They will not be reviewed in this meeting, but they are listed on the review. There are opportunities to improve and make her role more manageable. The overall rating is better than she rated herself but the final comment is the Board is very pleased with Ms. Mell's performance in her first year with CCHSZ and we look forward to continuing to work with her in 2021.

Mr. Steen then opened the floor for comments from the other Board members. Mr. Breitling asked if Ms. Mell would be providing the Board members with emails in regard to legislation and how it impacts the Human Service Zone. Mr. Steen stated they already receive updates. Mr. Peterson stated the Association does a good job of keeping Commissioners on top of issues. Kim Jacobson from Agassiz Valley is very in tune with what is transpiring and is good at forwarding information. Comments Mr. Peterson feels the Boards scores would have been higher if they had not seen Ms. Mell's scores first. The reality is she was hired and assumed her role under less than ideal situation and a there was also a pandemic. He appreciates her open mindedness to new things and processes. Mr. Peterson gave the example of investigating alternate hours and appreciated Ms. Mell was very open to considering the idea. Even if alternate hours do not come to fruition Mr. Peterson appreciate Ms. Mell for considering the option. Mr. Peterson then listed one criticism. He really wants to know quantitatively that the employees are protected and being taken care of. The more Ms. Mell can inform the Board as to what has been done to make it better would be good. He does not yet have that reassurance. He would love to see her provide that information. Mr. Peterson stated he is glad that Ms. Mell is with Cass because she takes a business type mindset approach and lets the managers take care of things. The managers are experts so using them to do their best is great. There is so much strength. The team is incredible. Ms. Mell responded stating it is important to find out what is the method to gather the information so it is meaningful and so we have truly assessed what is meaningful so it sheds light and allows the opportunity to solve problems. Mr. Hagen stated they previously tracked 75-100 policy procedure changes a year. They are swamping the system which can send a ripple through the Human Service staff. If the Boards job is to push back and control all the changes then they have to learn the systems and the programs. Overall, Mr. Hagen feels Ms. Mell is doing a great job.

Mr. Steen can follow up if needed. Ms. Mell has no additional information needed right now. Ms. Mell appreciates feedback when she can get it. Mr. Steen concluded with finalizing signatures are needed and then forwarded to the State.

Ms. Scherling made a motion to recommend for approval from the County Commissioners. Mr. Peterson seconded. Voice vote. All in agreement say aye. There was not no opposition. Motion passed.

II. Adjournment

Meeting concluded at 2:02pm.

Pearl Mell

Pearl Mell, Zone Director
Cass County Human Services Zone Board

Marla McIntyre

Marla McIntyre, Recorder