

HEALTH AND HUMAN SERVICES BOARD

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Dr. Linda L. Petrou, PhD
Ms. Sharon Pettiford, RN
Ms. Sharon A. Rimm, LCSW
Dr. Peter Robie, MD
Dr. Ricky Sides, DC
Ms. Claudette Weston
Ms. Gloria Whisenhunt, Commissioner

HEALTH AND HUMAN SERVICES BOARD SPECIAL MEETING MINUTES

January 19, 2022

Board Members Present

Mr. John Blalock, Ms. Pamela Corbett, Dr. James Doub, Dr. Palmer Edwards, Commissioner Fleming El-Amin, Dr. Calvert Jeffers, Dr. Charles Massler, Ms. Heather Parker, Dr. Linda Petrou, Ms. Sharon Pettiford Ms. Sharon Rimm, Dr. Peter Robie, Mr. J. Phil Seats, Dr. Ricky Sides, Ms. Claudette Weston, Commissioner Gloria Whisenhunt

Board Members Absent

Mr. John Davenport

Staff Present

Ms. Shontell Robinson, Mr. Joshua Swift, Mr. Dudley Watts, Mr. Gordon Watkins, Ms. Tanya Donnell

Guests Present

Media Fox 8 News

Call to Order

On Wednesday, January 19, 2022, the Forsyth County Health and Human Services Board held a special meeting virtually. The meeting was called to order by Board Chair, Mr. J. Phil Seats at 5:30 p.m.

Moment of Silence

A moment of silence was observed by all.

Mr. Seats started the meeting off by opening the floor for discussion regarding a mandatory mask mandate for Forsyth County.

Dr. Robie followed by announcing that he requested the meeting and thanked everyone for attending. He stated that his purpose for requesting the meeting was to ask the Forsyth County Board of Commissioners to implement a mandatory mask mandate for Forsyth County. Dr. Robie shared that the number of positive cases have skyrocketed and that the medical professionals are overwhelmed and are at a breaking point.

Ms. Rimm asked what the repercussions would be if citizens do not comply with a mandate. Mr. Watkins responded if a mask mandate is issued, the repercussions would depend on what the Board of Commissioners pass. Mr. Seats shared that depending on how a mandate is designed will determine how it is enforced or if it is enforceable, which means it is really not a mandate. In his research, he has always seen an if/or clause. For example, get the vaccine or submit to testing.

Ms. Pettiford shared that the COVID infections seem to be reaching a peak and that people are tired of masks; however, she is encouraging people to hang on a little while longer.

Ms. Rimm asked if medical personnel staff are under a mask mandate. Ms. Pettiford answered yes. Dr. Sides shared that the doctor's offices and hospitals are under a mandate by the State of NC to wear masks and it is enforced by the Licensing board. This includes patients.

Commissioner El-Amin asked Mr. Watkins which parts of the county would be legally impacted if this mandate is passed. Mr. Watkins responded that the Board of Commissioners would only have authority over the unincorporated areas of the county which is approximately 1/6 of the population.

Commissioner Whisenhunt shared that the Commissioners did not mandate a mask requirement; however, they have encouraged it by recording messages and sharing with citizens of Forsyth County via multi media outlets.

Mr. Seats would like to not only encourage people to wear a mask but to also encourage them to fulfill their responsibility to the community to not spread the disease.

Mr. Blalock shared that there is scientific evidence to support that masks reduce the rate of infection and that he supports the recommendation to encourage people to wear masks.

Dr. Robie would like to show the health professionals that the county is standing with them and helping them out by suggesting a mask mandate.

Commissioner El-Amin recommends sending out recordings of individual messages of appeal from the HHS Board to the community to encourage the use of masks which would be a good alternate rather than a mandate.

There is a consensus among the board that a message of encouragement and education needs to go out to the citizens regarding wearing a mask and preventing the spread of COVID. Ms. Pettiford agreed with Mr. Seats.

Dr. Massler shared that he would like something stronger than an encouragement statement. He would like a recommendation.

Commissioner Whisenhunt shared that reaching out to the community is a great idea; however, she recommends that the HHS Board figure out how the media advertisements will be paid for and if the HHS Board will have time to do recordings. Mr. Watkins confirmed that the Commissioners and this staff would be responsible for funding any type of media releases.

Ms. Robinson confirmed that over a million dollars have already been spent on marketing media regarding wearing masks, testing and vaccinations. She also shared, that the staff has done a lot

of things over the last 2 years to help reduce the spread of COVID and that the Public Health staff work on behalf of the HHS Board.

Ms. Robinson also shared that the Forsyth County Commissioners have already passed a resolution encouraging that the whole community wear masks. Ms. Robinson has offered to help create a statement if the HHS Board would like something to come directly from them.

Commissioner Whisenhunt and Ms. Robinson shared that the encouragement from the Commissioners was shared via Facebook and the Forsyth County web page. Ms. Robinson shared that they are working on tweaking the message to say that the severity of the illness will be reduced.

Dr. Robie appreciated everything that Ms. Robinson and her staff has done. Dr. Robie asked if the statement could be included at a formal Forsyth County Commissioners meeting as a public service announcement which would not require funds to be spent. Commissioner Whisenhunt stated that it could be done if the board agrees; however, it would need to be added to the agenda in advance. Commissioner Whisenhunt requested time to speak with the other Commissioners regarding reinforcing the current resolution which encourages masks wearing then add the HHS board to it. Mr. Watkins has agreed to create/vet a statement.

Ms. Corbett made a motion to have Dr. Robie draft a press release statement, send it to Shontell Robinson, FC Communication Specialist Todd Luck and Attorney Gordon Watkins will review and edit. Chairman Seats will review the statement before it is released. Commissioner El-Amin seconded the motion. No further discussion. Motion carried with 16 votes in favor.

Mr. Seats thanked everyone for attending the meeting.

Commissioner El-Amin made a motion to adjourn the meeting. The meeting was adjourned at 6:26 p.m.

SR/tmd