BOARD OF HEALTH MINUTES
SPECIAL MEETING
Tuesday, June 30, 2020

THIS MEETING WAS CONDUCTED BY REMOTE PARTICIPATION DUE TO THE CORONA VIRUS PANDEMIC

MEMBERS PRESENT: Pete Daggett, Johnna Exner, Howard Hambleton, Steve Kiss, Steve Parker, John Ridlington, Karen Skoog

MEMBERS ABSENT: Don Dashiell, Elbert Koontz

STAFF PRESENT: Sam Artzis, M.D., Molly Corvino, Judy Hutton, Bethany Laird, Kelly LeCaire, Jon Ness, Jessie Roth, Matt Schanz

GUESTS: Sophia Aldous, Newport Miner; Karene Balcom, Northport Mayor; Don Baribault, Northport School District; Andrew Engell, Cathy McMorris Rodgers Office; Britney Inglis, Lake Spokane Chamber of Commerce; Dorothy Knauss, Chewelah Mayor; Pete Lewis, Colville School District; Mike Manus, Pend Oreille County Commissioner; Wes McCart, Stevens County Commissioner

CALL MEETING TO ORDER: Chair Johnna Exner called the meeting to order at 12:01 p.m. A quorum was present.

INTRODUCTIONS: Introductions were made by all.

PUBLIC APPEARANCES: No public appearances were pre-registered.

PUBLIC COMMENT: There was no public comment.

HEALTH OFFICER UPDATES REGARDING COVID-19 AND WASHINGTON’S SAFE START PHASED REOPENING PLAN: Molly Corvino reported that there are no new COVID-19 cases today in our three counties. The current number of positive cases in the three counties are: Ferry (1), Pend Oreille (4), Stevens (18). Bethany Laird reported that in the last 48 hours, the Idaho Panhandle has over 100 new cases and approximately 150 in Spokane County. Dr. Artzis reported that after a conversation with Dr. Bob Lutz, Spokane Regional Health District (SRHD) Health Officer regarding their significant increase in positive cases, Northeast Tri County Health District (NETCHD) will be assisting SRHD with contact tracing as they are currently overwhelmed. Yakima County is having a considerable amount of cases with significant number of hospitalizations. Chelan and Douglas Counties are also seeing an increase in cases. Areas of concern are the Idaho Panhandle including Priest River and Priest Lake because of their proximity to the Newpckt area. Dr. Artzis explained that our surge plan for our COVID-19 patients includes hospitalization in Spokane and they are currently seeing increased admissions for COVID-19 patients locally. As a result, the capacity for them to accept outside patients is potentially in jeopardy.
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Dr. Artzis said ambulance services in Ferry and Stevens Counties are limited in their ability to respond to multiple runs and our ability to find mutual aid is limited. Testing has improved with increased parameters and personal protective equipment (PPE) supplies have improved. However, if we have an unexpected surge in COVID-19 cases locally, PPE could quickly become a concern. He thanked county commissioners for assisting with obtaining PPE supplies. There has been an increase in mask wearing since the mask mandate. Dr. Artzis hopes that as we see an increase in cases, they will be easy to trace and manageable for us. We do not want to become a burden to Spokane by opening things up too soon and having to reclose some businesses, as other places have had to do. He indicated that Spokane remains in Phase 2. He noted that the role of public health is education, not enforcement. Dr. Artzis does not think we are ready for Phase 4. If we loosen restrictions for larger gatherings in our three counties, we are basically encouraging even more people to travel to our counties from areas of high COVID-19 risk, thus increasing the risk for further spread in our area. He would like us to find ways to encourage our communities and businesses in creative ways to do things socially and financially to give our people some hope.

Matt Schanz indicated that we have been in frequent contact with the Department of Health (DOH) regarding the phased approach while advocating for more information from the Governor’s office about intentions. He talked about the substantial difference between Phase 3 and Phase 4 going from 50 people in a gathering to an unlimited amount. If there was an unfortunate incident with a positive case with 50 people would be somewhat manageable, but an unlimited amount of people is not manageable. This past weekend, Secretary Wiesman sent out a press release talking about an incremental strategy within Phase 3 that will be worked on at the state level in the upcoming weeks. Dr. Artzis likes Johnna Exner’s suggestion of an incremental approach within Phase 3 and getting a letter/message out to the public as well. Matt noted that the message from DOH on Saturday morning was also included in the press release NETCHD sent out later in the day on Saturday. Johnna noted that technically we are eligible to move to Phase 4, but we realize that we need to move incrementally. Citizens should be informed of our intent on moving forward slowly within the same parameters we have already followed and that we must work together to keep our citizens healthy and reopen our businesses. She asked what the best way would be to get that message out to the people that we are in a pause with trying to reevaluate and we do not want to move backward.

Steve Parker talked about discussions regarding whether to have the second occurrence of the FarmJam Festival in Colville. The music festival is held on private property in September with professional talent. FarmJam organizers would like to continue to hold the event here, even though they have had an invitation to leave the area. The event is outdoors, which is less risk. Steve P. talked about opening outdoor events with the incremental approach with Phase 3 to 3.5, etc. He noted that FarmJam will do whatever they need to do with social distancing, limiting attendance, etc. He talked about finding a balance with advocating for people to be outdoors. John Ridlington said Kettle Falls cancelled two events they had scheduled for the summer. He noted that we need to be careful and consistent.
Johnna Exner reiterated that the letter to Governor Inslee and Secretary Wiesman needs to include a request for consideration to move our counties forward, slowly, while working with NETCHD and area hospitals. We need to stay healthy and stay on track, as we are leading the pack on this with other counties behind us. Wes McCart appreciates Dr. Artzis and Matt Schanz for their efforts in trying to move our counties along. He agrees with Johnna and stressed the importance of the Board of Health (BOH) and the boards of county commissioners working together. Sevens County Commissioners reached out to Lincoln County who are in the same position as we are. We need to find the best way for all four counties to move forward and stay together. Dr. Artzis is thankful that we have been able to stay together and appreciates the commissioners allowing us to do this. Johnna asked the BOH if they wanted to get a letter sent to the Governor and Secretary of Health with topics we have discussed as well as offering our assistance in helping set guidelines for our communities. Johnna talked about informing the public that we want to keep them healthy, and we want to move forward, but we need their help to do it. It needs to be worded so it is an explanation and request at the same time. Dorothy Knauss likes the wording “we need your help to move forward”. Matt asked for clarification on two different issues – are we advocating to move incrementally now, or are we wanting to set the stage when the conditions are right to move forward? Johnna said we want to move forward, and we are fully aware that everyone is safe in doing that. We need to tell our citizens that we are looking at a pause as we work toward this incrementally. Jon Ness read a message written by a Douglas County commissioner for the citizens of Chelan and Douglas Counties concerning face mask usage – “It isn’t about personal conviction. It is about doing what we need to do to support our friends and businesses, so they don’t lose their lifelong investments.” Jon suggested promoting the idea of what citizens can do.

Dr. Artzis said he had not considered the point that John Ridlington brought up about inequity in events that were canceled and if we were to move forward those events are allowed to take place. He reiterated that we cannot be a burden for Spokane. He feels that we need to pause for the time being as we do not know what will happen with our neighbors in Spokane and Idaho. Matt said the message we send out must dovetail with the Governor’s statement on Saturday. We will work towards advancement to the next phase including lining-out that process to follow when the conditions are right. We should tell citizens we are trying to do the right thing while taking a prevention standpoint and incremental stages when the time is right.

Johnna asked the Board if they wanted to work on the letter today or bring ideas to the BOH meeting on July 15, 2020? Steve Parker suggests allowing the health officials to develop concepts of incremental steps between Phases 3 and 4 and what they would look like, and inform the Governor and Secretary that we are developing ideas and at the appropriate time, we would present those to them at the state level. If they understand that we are prepared to move, it gives them time and things to consider. Steve P. wants it to happen soon and hopes the spike we are seeing is under control with hospitals, etc.

John said FarmJam may have a deadline date of when they would need to know if they are able to proceed with the event. Johnna asked Dr. Artzis and NETCHD to develop a letter while we are in pause trying to figure out what we can do.
Mike Manus talked about problems with Panhandle Health District and the Newport Hospital regarding symptomatic COVID-19 cases being transferred by ambulance that needed to go to Idaho. Mike said they need to do a better job of working with the Newport Hospital as it effects the hospital even though they are Idaho cases. Matt Schanz said within the last 24 hours, Bonner and Kootenai Counties had 65 cases and they are having difficulty keeping up. Molly Corvino noted that Panhandle epidemiology staff had expressed to her that they are struggling. She will reach out to them.

Howard Hambleton appreciates the letter. He talked about the several methods of testing and pointed out that none of which are 100%. He feels that it would be smart for us at this juncture to observe and wait at the place we have currently settled on. We have done well in our communities. 0.03% is encouraging. Spokane having so many new cases is alarming. He feels that we need to step back as a group and do the logical thing.

Johnna Exner asked if the BOH wishes for NETCHD to continue reaching out to the Governor and revisit this again in two weeks? Karen Skoog likes that suggestion of thinking this through for the next few weeks. We can notify the Governor and Secretary that we are putting something together so they can expect it. Karen noted that we need to show leadership at this time.

Britney Inglis from the Lake Spokane Chamber of Commerce feels there are inconsistencies with events. She said Lake Spokane at Nine Mile had a graduation procession and the school asked Jon Ness and Matt Schanz for guidelines and were given approval. When Britney asked NETCHD about holding a Fourth of July celebration, she received a “scathing” letter from Jon stating that she could personally be charged as well as associated supporting businesses and agencies. Jon said he has worked with schools and never gave schools approval for parades. The email he sent Britney outlined risks associated with a large gathering. Britney read a portion of the email – “We discussed what the potential consequences of having such a large gathering could be, including: Legal liabilities incurred both for you personally, but also any associated supporting businesses and agencies.” Dr. Artzis indicated that when we are talking about the subject of gathering during this time, we consistently suggest and encourage the organization/group to speak with their legal counsel. He is hoping that we don’t have to have an authoritarian approach. Matt noted that Jon shared the letter to Britney with him prior to sending it out. We are giving people the best advice that we can with the information we have and trying to do our very best with our messaging. Britney stated that because of the letter, the fire chief would not allow the fire district to participate and provide assistance. She asked if that same letter was given to anyone else asking about events? Matt said the same kind of message has been shared to others. Dr. Artzis indicated that we have discovered that some groups have stated that they have approval from NETCHD and that is not the case. NETCHD is not here to approve or disapprove – we are here to offer our recommendation.

Britney said she went above and beyond to try to do everything the right way. Dr. Artzis thanked her for doing that. Matt said these are difficult conversations to have regarding community celebrations. We are in this together and trying to navigate this together. Johnna requested that commissioners and mayors be notified by email when such a message recommending not having an event is sent so they are aware. Matt said that is a very good idea to notify commissioners and mayors.
Johnna Exner asked the BOH to bring ideas and suggestions to the July 15th BOH meeting.

**ADJOURNMENT:** Chair Johnna Exner adjourned the meeting at 12:57 p.m. The next regular meeting of the Board of Health of Northeast Tri County Health District will be on Wednesday, July 15, 2020 by remote participation.

Respectfully submitted,

[Signature]

Samuel A. Artzis, M.D., Health Officer

By [Signature]

Kelly D. LeCaire, Executive Secretary

Johnna Exner, Chair