

July 29, 2020

The Lincoln County Board of Commissioners met for a regular session on July 29, 2020 in the Lincoln County Courthouse, Libby, Montana. Present were Commissioner Bennett, Commissioner Letcher, Commissioner Peck, County Administrator Patrick McFadden and Deputy Clerk and Recorder Chris Nelson.

Commissioner Peck opened the meeting with the **Pledge of Allegiance**.

10:30 AM **Administrative Issues:** Present were Derrick Perkins, Mike Cuffe, Nikki Meyer and Herb Cargill.

- Commissioners will wait for Clerk & Recorder Robin Benson to return from vacation to approve the minutes of July 22, 2020.

10:45 AM **Public Comment Time:** Present were Derrick Perkins, Mike Cuffe, Nikki Meyer, Barb Benson and Herb Cargill.

Herb Cargill said he noticed on his taxes there is a charge for county ambulance. After investigating he wondered why these board members are not up for public election. Their meetings seem to be secret and they are not filing minutes with the Clerk & Records office. Commissioner Peck said it is a legitimate question that hasn't been completely dealt with. Commissioner Bennett said he is working with the board and would sit down with Herb about his concerns. Herb says he does not believe anything underhanded is going on but just would like to see it be more transparent and brought up to date.

Commissioner Bennett will set up a time to meet with Herb.

11:30 AM **Health Care Providers Discussion:** Present were Derrick Perkins, Mike Cuffe, Nikki Meyer, Barb Benson, Michelle Boltz, Kelli Jarrett, Jan Ivers, Sarah Soete, Rachel Toland, Will Longhorne and Herb Cargill.

Kelley Jarrett said at the CHC there has been a significant increase in positive tests amongst their patients. She said this is not influenza by any means and her hope is to come away with something the board can do to help this crisis. There have already been two Lincoln County residents who have died and there will probably be more. CHC has already had to have a provider go on leave because of exposure. This has put extra pressure on the rest of the providers and made it harder on other patients. There are already not enough providers in the community at all the health care facilities and losing any providers can have serious repercussions.

Michelle Boltz from Cabinet Peaks Medical Center said she is the provider who would care for hospitalized patients with COVID. She said they have already had to bring in providers from out of town to help with hospitalized patients. If providers continue to have to quarantine or get infected, care will be severely crippled.

Kelley said they have also had to have nursing staff that have had to be quarantined further stretching staff on site.

Rachel Tolland from the Libby Care Center said if they had an outbreak in their facility it would be devastating. Their major concern is keeping their staff safe to keep the residents safe. Rachelle said there is the potential for the entire facility to get sick especially since it is so close quarters. Sarah Soete from the care center said they cannot limit what their staff does outside the facility and they would like help limiting exposure from events like the rodeo and car show.

Dr. Rice said half of their patients are the type that are high risk for COVID. They also feel responsible for their employees and want to keep everyone safe. He added that it would not take much for them to have to close their doors which would overwhelm the emergency room as their patients would have to be sent there. Dr. Rice said they are dependent on what every single person in this community does as far as staying safe. Libby Clinic has had 4 patients with Covid in the last 4 weeks. Their last patient was the patient who died Sunday. He said they had such few cases in the beginning when everything shutdown but once the reopening happened it led to a nationwide outbreak. This is far greater than our initial outbreak. Our rate of hospitalizations we exceed the rate in Kalispell. What he is asking the board is how they can help the community and the medical providers that is positive. We need your help and would like to hear your suggestions.

Commissioner Peck said he sees this as a community wide thing, and he is glad to see providers taking a lead in this. In the beginning, even on the national side, there was lack of coordination. He feels there is a level of frustration out there from the public because there has been confusing messaging. He said he is not against the medical providers but just trying to set the stage for why people are frustrated and the divide it has caused in this community. The health department is getting beat up and slammed publicly; people think they are either doing too much or some view it as not enough. He made clear he was not belittling this disease. Where do we go from here? As I go around Libby, I see a lot of compliance in the community. I talked with Dr. Black for an hour this morning about the need for the medical community to step forward. We also have to weigh the other side of this. Eureka is getting hammered economically by this. With the border closed it's been very hard up there and another closure could destroy businesses. We need to find a balance and that means looking at all sides.

Commissioner Bennett said he would concur with Commissioner Peck. He said from the commissioners perspective they sit in a different world than the health care providers, saying they can't be myopic in how they look at things and trying to come to grips with what should be done and how to do it. He said he spent 8 years in the legislature not trying to pass good legislation but killing bad legislation. The commissioners go through a ton of information and they are trying to get to a place where they can, with confidence, talk to people about the issue and how to best address it.

Dr. Rice asked if they would support a public campaign to help arrest the growth of COVID. Commissioner Peck said depending on what that entails they would support it. Commissioner Bennett said they have a lot of people who are vulnerable to COVID but also those who are vulnerable to lack of work, childcare etc. He is not trying to say he is going to settle in any one place: it's fluid. When you see someone, who has invested 40 years in a business this could kill them.

Dr. Rice said the economic impact leads to increase drug use and suicide, so they are aware of that. If we can get a campaign going to decrease new infections to five every two weeks, we can help increase consumer confidence.

Commissioner Peck said maybe the board can help try and calm down the angst with the public like the trepidation caused at the Amish Store. I think the other piece to this is compelling our state folks is to fix this testing issue. To me, getting results back three weeks after testing is ridiculous. Dr. Rice said right now when they test things now for contact testing, they are getting results back in three days.

Commissioner Bennett said this is good, but this is a very big conversation. Its very easy for us to make a misstep because we are looking out for so many interests. The board has to make difficult decisions every day and that's the nature of what they do in this position. Conversations are great but eventually decisions must be made and that rests with them in a lot of cases. Commissioner Letcher said a lot of people are frustrated that they sacrificed for a few weeks during the first shut down and that stretched longer hoping that they would be good come summer. Its so hard to make a sound decision with so much information coming out. There is such a divide between people wearing masks and those not for various reasons. Dr. Rice said we don't have to have 100% compliance but 80% would help.

Kelly said we are not making things perfect with masks, but we are not making things worse. I don't think mandates help anything, but education can.

Commissioner Bennett said the way it initially rolled everything out it has made it a mess. The governor's office could have coordinated better. Commissioner Letcher said we need to all be getting the same information and getting it out.

Michelle said they have gotten the same confusion, using the CDC initial response and directives.

Dr. rice said he hopes we do not have another shutdown again; that it was awful economically and mentally.

Commissioner Peck said we must overcome the damage that has been done and do a better job with community outreach.

Patrick asked about discussions that were had discussions concerning machine testing that would produce results within 24 hours. Kelley said they do have a rapid test, but it costs \$900 per test so they are weighing how it is best used.

Commissioner Bennett said the county offered to underwrite those costs and they have heard nothing back. Jerry said he would jump on a plane to DC if it would help.

1:00 PM **MDT Update:** Present were Derrick Perkins, Jaqueline Smith, Justun Juelfs, John Schmidt, Ben Nunnallee, Darrell Williams and Mike Cuffe.

Ben went over the map showing current projects in Lincoln County (See attached). Commissioner Bennett asked if the project on Elk Hill is set up for chip seal or if it will remain the way it was laid down. Ben said it was chipped a few weeks ago then fogged. Commissioner Peck asked what was on their radar for Highway 37. Justin said they did a piece of that last season and they have another piece that will take them into Rexford and will start in August; south of there will just be reactive maintenance. Commissioner Letcher asked how they could push it past reactive maintenance. Bob said they recognize the road needs some work, but they are struggling with some funding constraints. He said from the dam up to Rexford needs some work and for that area they get 15-20 million in primary funds and they have a lot of needs.

Commissioner Bennett said last year the county signed an agreement for signage on Parmenter Hill and it ended up including guardrail. In the process on 2nd Street they put guardrail in front of a gate the county uses in case of flooding.

Ben said he just pulled up the last set of plans and there were not any guardrails in it. Bob will investigate the issue.

LINCOLN COUNTY BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS

Mark Peck, Chairman

ATTEST: _____
Chris Nelson, Deputy Clerk of the Board