

CITY OF LACONIA – CITY COUNCIL EMERGENCY MEETING

MARCH 15, 2020

1:00 PM

Minutes

LACONIA FIRE DEPARTMENT – 848 NORTH MAIN ST.

1. CALL TO ORDER – Mayor Hosmer called this emergency meeting to order at the above date and time.
2. RECORDING SECRETARY – Cheryl Hebert, City Clerk
3. ROLL CALL – City Clerk Hebert called the roll with the following Councilors in attendance: Bruce Cheney, David Bownes, Henry Lipman, Mark Haynes, and Tony Felch. Bob Hamel was in attendance via telephone.
4. STAFF IN ATTENDANCE – Glenn Smith (acting City Manager)
Councilor David Bownes lead the Salute to the Flag.
5. Discussion regarding the City of Laconia and COVID-19
 - 5.A. The purpose of this meeting is to discuss the closure of the schools mandated by the Governor of NH as of 1:00 pm this afternoon. There were many school officials present at the meeting. Superintendent Tucker gave a brief overview as to what has happened over the past few weeks and what the next few weeks may look like. Superintendent Tucker has been in constant conversation with many people in regards to the impact this may have on this community. He explained there are around 2,000 students and 400 employees. It is a priority to support these students and employees. Superintendent Tucker stated there will be a meeting at 4:00 pm today with the administrative team. Superintendent Tucker explained there are no COVID-19 cases in the Laconia School District. Superintendent Tucker explained that there will be many communications going out from his office over the next couple of weeks to keep everyone informed as much as possible. Superintendent Tucker explained the State Emergency Rule ED.306.18. This rule was enacted about 10 years ago to help with remote learning for five (5) days and the use of blizzard bags. The Governor has now extended this rule on March 12, 2020 to help with the current situation and enact remote learning for an unknown amount of time and have more flexibility. The Laconia School system does not have blizzard bags but the administrative team will be putting together a plan for remote learning, whether it be online or paper options. The District recognizes that not all students have access to internet use and will accommodate those families. Superintendent Tucker also spoke of the students that received free breakfast and lunches. Tim Goossens, Food Service Director, will be changing the food orders in order to allow for families to pick up food. Superintendent Tucker also explained that they understand that not all people will be able to pick food up and will be working with outside agencies as to how to deliver the food. It was mentioned that Woodland Heights Elementary School may be used as a central pick up location. There will be a variety of teams to collaborate over the next week on how all of these changes may look like. There have been conversations with community partners such Cereal Hero's, the Got Lunch Program, and the Santa Fund and they are all willing to help. It is the belief of the district that the food distribution can be set up as soon as Wednesday, March 18, 2020.

Mayor Hosmer thinks that communication and transparency is of utmost importance at this time. Mayor Hosmer noted that there are many community representatives present at this time such as the Police Department, Fire Department, school representatives, and Lakes Region Community Health. Mayor Hosmer also noted for the record that Kevin Donovan, President from LRGH, Chief Medical Officer Fred Jones and Chief Nursing Officer Karen Champagne are also on the phone. Mr. Donovan stated that both Laconia and Franklin hospitals have activated Incident Command as well as all hands on deck at both locations. There are tests available but they are only testing those that meet CDC guidelines or have a valid order from their own physician. Tests are being conducted in a restrictive location outside of the hospital. Mr. Donovan stated that as of today, March 15, 2020, at 12:00 pm, visitors will not be allowed at both facilities (LRGH and Franklin Hospital). The discussion that is beginning is what will happen with elective procedures. There will be a call with all the hospitals to discuss this at 4:30 pm today to try and come up with a uniform decision regarding elective visits.

Mayor Hosmer asked for an explanation on the process for testing. Doctor Jones explained that once someone is tested, the samples are being sent to the State lab. The turnaround time right now is about 72 hours. It is advised that during the 72 hour waiting period, the person should self-quarantine.

Chief Beattie explained if an alternative care site is needed, Laconia Middle School will be used. This plan has been put into place for many years but it hasn't had to be used. Dr. Jones stated that if they run out of regular patient rooms, they would put additional patients in the hallways and in the cafeteria before they would turn to placing patients off-site.

Councilor Bownes asked if there will be an improvement in the turnaround time for the testing results. Doctor Jones explained as more testing sites come online the timeframe should be reduced but it is unknown the amount of testing that may be needed.

Councilor Hamel asked what the number of available beds at the hospital are and what precautions would be put in place if the Middle School is needed. Doctor Jones explained putting ill people all in one room is counterproductive. There are about 100 available beds at the hospitals right now. In general about 100 people at a time can be taken care of (available beds) at a time. The overflow of less sick and non-contagious people would be the ones placed at LMS. Doctor Jones is asking for everyone to practice social distancing as serious as possible.

Fire Chief Beattie explained he has been in constant contact with Superintendent Tucker as well as the nursing home facilities. The Chief has also reached out to the department heads within the City to be sure everyone is enforcing best practices. The next step that needs to be talked about is the possibility of closing the Community Center and the Library. With the schools being closed, we don't want large groups of kids getting together at public places. Chief Beattie feels the City's Emergency Response Team is ready. The State 911 system is already fielding calls with the appropriate questions for finding out what someones symptoms are so emergency personnel can protect themselves appropriately.

John Beland from the Emergency Preparedness and Response Manager from the Partnership for Public Health – Mr. Beland stated that they are ready to go if the City

needs to open alternative care sites at the chance the hospital gets overwhelmed with patients due to COVID-19. They are working with the school and City officials to prepare. The challenges will be getting volunteers if the volunteers should get sick themselves or do not want to come out.

Mayor Hosmer expressed concern in regards to the mental health aspect of this pandemic.

Maggie Pritchard, Executive Director of the Lakes Region Mental Health Center – explained that her office has been in contact with the Laconia schools in regards to the mental health of our students. Her office will be using telehealth as an option for kids and adults during this time as well. Ms. Pritchard stated they will be making plans this week along with the schools to see which kids are most at risk, not just mental health wise, but also food stability and medicinal purposes. Ms. Pritchard stated the group visits will be cancelled, and the home visits will be a case by case basis.

Superintendent Tucker spoke of the variety of levels of services the students may need throughout this process.

Chris Emond, Executive Director of the Boys & Girls Club – Mr. Emond explained the club will be open on a day by day basis. Mr. Emond's concern is that they may have to limit the number of kids they can take and being able to keep the kids separated from each other as much as possible. Mr. Emond would like to continue the meal program whether his club stays open or not and they are willing to work with the schools to help out with this service.

Councilor Cheney would like to know what has been made available to the Clerk's Office and other staff in regards to personal protective gear (PPE).

Chief Beattie explained nothing has been offered as of yet but his department does has some supplies. Chief Beattie stated the hard part is when someone should be wearing protective gear. Chief Beattie stated if City Departments would like to contact him to request protective gear, they can reach out to the State to get more supplies.

Councilor Cheney would like to make sure our staff is well equipped in order for them to continue to serve the residents. Chief Beattie stated he would reach out to department heads to see if they would like any protective gear.

Finance Director Glenn Smith explained that employees have already been spoken to in regards to maintaining the three-foot social distance. They are also using plenty of disinfectant and hand sanitizer.

Councilor Cheney is just worried that if this virus explodes, distance isn't what is going to keep our employees safe. He would rather us have the safety supplies already on hand.

John Beland explained that as we start to see more positive tests, more people may be contacted for investigative purposes as they could have been in contact with someone that has the virus therefore, it is important to get out to the public the importance of social distancing. The public should also have an emergency plan in place, in case they are quarantined. The website www.readynh.com is a great tool for people to utilize.

Chief Canfield explained they have been working closely with the fire department, public health, and the schools. The Chief also explained they will be responding to calls as usual and his staff will take necessary precautions if needed. The police department does receive the same information from 911 as the fire department does. The police department will not be going to all medical calls unless requested.

Councilor Hamel asked if there is anything being done throughout the City in regards to all the children being out of school and if they start congregating. Will the kids be required to stay home?

Chief Beattie explained this is a conversation that should be happening especially in regards to the Community Center and the Library.

Superintendent Tucker agrees with Chief Beattie that parents should not be allowing students to be out and about. The preparations is to have students online in grades five through 12. The SAU is also looking into purchasing online hotspots but the amount that is needed is unknown right now. These are all the things that will be discussed at the 4:30 meeting.

Chief Canfield stated that his department will keep everyone abreast if any problems arise with the kids being out of school for an extended period of time.

Councilor Hamel expressed his concern with using Woodland Heights Elementary School as a food distribution location due to the fact that the road is a dead end and narrow. Superintendent Tucker said there are a lot of factors that need to be accounted for before any final decisions are made.

Mayor Hosmer wants to make sure that everyone has complete and accurate information as quickly as possible. Mayor Hosmer is also particularly concerned about the older population as they are most at risk.

Patrick Cate, Vice President of Lakes Region Community College – Mr. Cate explained that the school is currently on Spring Break with the exception of some nursing and automotive students. With these students in the nursing and automotive programs, the number of students in the classroom will be very limited. Mr. Cate explained that the Apple Ridge dorms are still open at this time, which houses at approximately 70 students. LRCC is offering any help to the community they can.

Councilor Lipman mentioned using LRPA-TV as a form of communication to the public. Councilor Hamel explained LRPA-TV uses channels 24, 25, and 26. Channel 26 is controlled only by Laconia. LRPA-TV also has the ability to live stream.

Councilor Lipman also commented that the Council meetings are usually put on YouTube and maybe this could be utilized as well.

Councilor Hamel will contact Grace McNamara, Director of LRPA-TV.

Chief Beattie asked if the Council Chambers could be used to get information out via YouTube as well.

Mayor Hosmer asked for this to be done as soon as possible once all the information has been received.

Amy Lovisek, Director of Parks and Recreation – Director Lovisek asked if it is the

wish of the Council to continue with the programs as scheduled or to shut them down. She did mention that by law she would have to cancel all the programs and not just a few. Director Lovisek will get a list of her programs to the Council.

Councilor Felch suggested shutting down for the near future.

Councilor Lipman suggested using some of the kids or adults that are out of school or work that may be willing to help out in other ways. Director Lovisek will try and reach out to as many people as she can. Councilor Lipman suggests closing the Community Center immediately, for a few days and then reassess to see what the City Manager suggests.

Finance Director Glenn Smith suggested taking the Governor's lead on what his directives are.

Mayor Hosmer thanked everyone for their participation in this meeting and looks forward to the continuation of everyone working together.

6. NON-PUBLIC SESSION (According to RSA 91-A:3, II)
7. Adjournment – With no further business to come before the Council and hearing no objection, Mayor Hosmer adjourned the meeting at 3:25 pm.

DRAFT