MINUTES – FEBRUARY 1, 2021

The Caswell County Board of Commissioners met in regular session at 9:00 a.m. on Monday, February 1, 2021. The meeting was held electronically using Zoom Webinar software. Members present: David J. Owen, Chairman, Jeremiah Jefferies, Vice Chairman, William E. Carter, John D. Dickerson, Nathaniel Hall, Rick McVey, Steve Oestreicher. Also, present: Brian Ferrell, County Attorney, and Debra Ferrell representing The Caswell Messenger. Absent: Bryan Miller, County Manager. Paula P. Seamster, Clerk to the Board, recorded the minutes.

WELCOME

MOMENT OF SILENT PRAYER

Chairman welcomed everyone to the February 1, 2021 Board of Commissioners meeting. He gave his sympathies to the Jefferies family, Commissioner Jefferies’ sister passed away. Chairman Owen asked that everyone remember Bryan Miller, his mother is in the hospital with COVID and is not doing very well, his sister is also in the hospital, his father also has COVID however he is at home.

Chairman Owen opened the meeting with a moment of Silent Prayer.

PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE

The Board of Commissioners and all the guests in the attendance recited the Pledge of Allegiance.

PUBLIC COMMENTS

The clerk read the public comments received:

“My name is Charles Harrison Blackwell and I reside in Yanceyville.   I have written you letters over the past eight months representing Concerned Citizens of Caswell County who have been petitioning for the relocation of the Confederate Statue. I am writing to add my name to the list of those acknowledging thanks for your efforts in conducting the special meeting in December that dealt with the subject of relocating monuments from the public square.  That meeting illustrated your commitment to developing a comprehensive strategy for the re-development of that space that will also address our objectives. I was particularly pleased that the idea of subjecting this issue to a county referendum was dismissed.  Such an action to do so would have only delayed decisions that will need to be made by you, our duly elected officials.  It has already been determined in other localities that a citizen's vote concerning this issue is not binding under State statue.  We all know that at the end of the day, no matter how many facilitative discussions are held and no matter how much input is obtained from the public, there will be some citizens who will be opposed to relocating monuments.  Ultimately, it will be your deliberations, based on the underlying moral and potentially economic impact issues, that will guide you to make the right decisions. As you move forward in the planning process, we urge that you remain conscious of the following:

1)  The approach used to obtain community input, given the on-going constraints resulting from the COVID-19 pandemic, should be designed to protect the health of our citizens and not require an unreasonable amount of time and energy to obtain, and 2)  We certainly understand the Board's desire to obtain information concerning the cost of re-locations prior to making final decisions.  However, we strongly feel that the determined cost should not become an impediment to relocation of the Confederate Statue.  We feel that the community will be willing to be supportive in developing alternative funding sources should that need become necessary. Again, we thank you for your on-going efforts in addressing this matter.  The community looks forward to our being able to provide input in the processes necessary to assure the successful implementation of this project.”

“Anita Foust, 2501 Hughes Mill Road. It has recently been brought to my attention that the attached water shed protection permit has been issued without an environmental assessment (EA) or Environment Impact Study (EIS). It has more than one date on it. One date is in 2021. The document is so messy and handwritten which makes it so that visually challenged people cannot read it. The approval box is not checked. Please acknowledge this email as my appeal in the appeal process and give public notice and a hearing regarding this watershed protection permit. Thank you.”



“Rev. Bryon Shoffner, Shoffners Loop, Burlington. Hello commissioners I am writing to you with some deep concerns.  The Planning Board has approved several water permits for a pollutant industry. The question is why would they issue these permits knowing that DEQ Air Quality has not issued a permit as well as a court date is set for them to go to court for Air Quality. Here's the thing wastewater management starts at the local level and so does the protection of the people.
When will everyone start protecting the people? God Bless.”

RECOGNITIONS

Commissioner McVey stated that he had the opportunity to be at Parks and Rec the other day when the Health Department was giving out COVID shots and he thanked the various groups for their participation in this event. He also gave a special thanks to North Village Pharmacy for giving the vaccines to the elderly population.

Commissioner Hall acknowledged the Health Department and various organizations that have volunteered to work with the Health Department during this difficult and challenging time with the COVID pandemic. He added that everyone is doing a wonderful job and he wanted to acknowledge them publicly.

Commissioner Oestreicher also recognized the Health Department and North Village Pharmacy for the great job they have been doing with vaccinations, testing, and screening. He stated that he had received many comments on how well organized this has been and what a great job all the organizations have been doing. Commissioner Oestreicher recognized them for the excellent work during the pandemic.

Commissioner Carter echoed Commissioner Oestreicher’s comments. He thanked North Village Pharmacy for doing vaccinations and for the Health Department for the job they are doing. Commissioner Carter stated that the healthcare workers work over and beyond so he wanted to recognize the Health Department and North Village Pharmacy.

Commissioner Dickerson recognized Mitch Strader in the Cherry Grove Community. He stated that during the pandemic and with the schools not being open for students many children are struggling to keep up and the lack of internet service makes it an extreme hardship. Commissioner Dickerson stated that Mr. Strader got involved and contacted Piedmont Electric Coop and the Cherry Grove Community now has an internet hotspot at the Cherry Grove Community Center that will enable to the children and the citizens in that area to have access to the internet for free. He publicly thanked Mr. Strader for getting involved and for finding a solution in that area of the county. Commissioner Dickerson stated that this hotspot has been operational for several months and has been a success and he thanked Mitch Strader again.

ACTION ITEMS

APPROVAL OF AGENDA

Chairman Owen added to the Agenda a discussion on the Planning Session scheduled for Thursday and added it as #11.

Commissioner McVey moved, seconded by Commissioner Jefferies to approve the agenda as amended. After a roll call vote the motion carried unanimously. (Commissioners Carter, Dickerson, Hall, Jefferies, McVey, Oestreicher and Owen voted in favor.)

BOARD MINUTES

Chairman Owen asked if there were any corrections to the Board Minutes of December 21, 2020 Regular Meeting and January 4, 2021 Regular Meeting. He stated with no corrections the Minutes stand approved.

SCHOOL BOARD – PANDEMIC DISCUSSION

Commissioner Hall asked if any of the School Board members were online and present in the meeting today. Chairman Owen responded that he did not see any School Board members attending the meeting today and added that he had set up a tentative joint meeting with the School Board on Monday, February 22nd. Commissioner Hall asked if the superintendent was in attendance today. Chairman Owen responded that he did not see her listed today. Commissioner Hall stated that he had four or five questions that he wanted to ask the School Board and the superintendent and he did not know if it would be worthwhile to raise these questions with no one from the School Board in attendance to respond. He asked for the Board’s feelings on this. Commissioner Hall stated that he was sure other Board members had questions as well. Chairman Owen responded that he thought it was a good time for the Board to decide what issues will be on the agenda for the February 22nd joint meeting. He added that these issues could be sent to the School Board ahead of time so it would be prepared to have answers to these issues. Chairman Owen reminded the Board that on the 12th or 13th of January the Board did receive the School Board’s COVID-19 CARES Act funding breakdown. He stated that this information was in an email from the county manager and this would be a good item to discuss in the joint meeting. Chairman Owen asked Commissioner Hall to state his questions.

Commissioner Hall stated that he would like to know the online absentee rate for the 1st semester and if the rate was not good how did the School Board address it. He stated the next question would be what the School Board is doing or planning to do to catch students up that are falling behind. He stated that this would be a two-part question because he was really concerned about the seniors that are about to graduate. Commissioner Hall stated that he did not want the seniors to leave high school with a false sense of accomplishment if they did get behind. He stated that his next question was what has been done for students with special physical, emotional, psychological, or mental needs, how is this being handled.

Chairman Owen asked if any of the other Commissioners had issues that they would like to see on the agenda for the February 22nd meeting.

Commissioner Dickerson stated that given the hardships that the children and parents have had to face by struggling online there needs to be a way to draw a silver lining out of this. He stated that the school system has been closed all year and it received $1.4 million in extra funding, the buses have not been running, the bus drivers have not been paid, fuel savings on the buses, there has to be savings so he was wondering if some of this money could be used to help offset the tax increase for the new high school. He stated there must be a way to shift some of that windfall back to the taxpayer.

Chairman Owen asked the Commissioners to email their issues for the School Board to him so the School Board will have time to prepare for this meeting.

Commissioner McVey stated that the County gave the School System $50,000 for a scholarship fund and he would like to know how that is going and where the money is going at this point. Chairman Owen responded that this is an item that will be discussed at the Planning Work Session as well because the Board had talked about changing that process.

Commissioner Hall stated that he would like to know how many people remain on the payroll full time. Chairman Owen asked if Commissioner Hall was referring to teachers and all staff. Commissioner Hall stated that he was referring to all that staff that works with the school system.

Chairman Owen asked if there were more questions for the School Board to email those to the county manager or clerk so they could be included in the discussion. He stated that he would let the Board know about the time and location of the joint meeting on February 22nd as soon as they are determined.

USE OF PUBLIC FACILITIES AT POLLING PLACES

Commissioner Dickerson stated that he has received telephone calls and he talked to a lot of people during the election process that individuals are not allowed to use the restroom at certain polling locations. He stated that he understood that this topic has been talked about before and action that needs to be done has to be done through the Election Board but he wanted to try to find a resolution for this because he saw several poll workers leave to go to a gas station to use the restrooms and other locations allowed individuals to use the restrooms. Commissioner Dickerson stated that he knew there were different reasons for this, but this is the year 2021 and things should be better than this. Chairman Owen responded that he did think this was a Board of Elections decision. He stated that he talked to the BOE to see if any complaints had been received and they had only received one complaint. Chairman Owen suggested composing a letter to the Board of Elections asking them to revisit the discussion considering having facilities available at the polling sites and allow them to have discussions with the polling sites and see what they come up with and then come back to the Board. He stated if the polling sites do not allow access to the bathroom and there is a need for port-a-johns then the Board of Elections can ask the Board to provide those during elections.

Commissioner Hall stated that he brought this issue up about 2 or 3 years ago and it was not only related to poll workers but also citizens that had to wait in line. He added that specifically the Casville location was one of those polling sites that did not allow citizens to use the bathroom. Commissioner Hall stated that he did not think it was good enough just for the Board of Elections to discuss this issue because there are bathrooms at these locations and citizens and poll workers should be allowed to use them and if not then the polling sites that do not allow this should be moved to another location. He stated that he heard what Commissioner Dickerson stated earlier, some people are allowed to use the bathrooms and some people are not allowed and he was not comfortable with that type of discrimination. Chairman Owen responded that he had not visited all the polling sites and added that if a bathroom is only accessible by walking through the actual voting area this would not be allowed. He stated that the BoE could inform the Board which polling sites allow public facilities and which do not and what would be needed to have facilities at the polling sites.

Commissioner Jefferies stated that Commissioner Hall brought this issue up in 2014 and nothing has been done about it. Chairman Owen responded that this discussion was right before he came on the Board, but he did read the minutes. He asked the Board how it would like to proceed.

Commissioner McVey stated that these concerns needed to be expressed to the Board of Elections and to have the Chairman or the Elections Director to meet with the Board to see what is needed.

Chairman Owen asked if the Board wanted to have a joint meeting with the Board of Elections to discuss this issue. Commissioner Dickerson suggested reaching out to the Board of Elections to see if they can come up with a solution before scheduling a meeting. He added that it is hard for him to schedule meeting during the day due to his work schedule. Chairman Owen agreed with Commissioner Dickerson and added that this was the reason he suggested sending a letter requesting the Board of Elections to revisit this discussion and then a decision can be made on how to move forward. Commissioner Dickerson stated that he thought this would be a good idea.

Chairman Owen stated that if this was acceptable to the Board sending a letter to the Board of Elections would be the first step.

USE OF CODE RED SYSTEM FOR COVID-19 VACCINE UPDATES

Commissioner Dickerson stated that he realized that we are in the middle of a pandemic and the health department is under the gun and they are doing a stellar job trying to protect the citizens during the pandemic but there is a problem with communication. He stated that he has received more telephone calls about this issue more than anything else since he has been elected. Commissioner Dickerson stated that he had one gentleman get all over him and he referred him to Commissioner Hall since he is the Board representative for the Board of Health. He stated that the complaints are about not being able to get information about the vaccine. Commissioner Dickerson stated the some of the complaints were about not being able to get a real person at the health department so he called the health department on Wednesday, January 20th at 9:25 and purposely left a telephone number with no name to see how long it would take for someone to get back to him and he has yet to get a return telephone call. He stated that he spoke with Bryan Miller about this and he had Shannon Moretz, the Board of Health Chair to call Commissioner Dickerson on Friday, January 22nd. Commissioner Dickerson stated that he told Ms. Moretz about the complaints that he had received, and it was discussed to start putting information on the website. He stated that he had looked at Alamance County and other counties websites there is more information listed than what is on Caswell’s website. Commissioner Dickerson stated that it stated if the vaccine was out of stock, there is a list to sign up for vaccines, and some directions on what is going on. He stated that on the Caswell website it directs to a state link and then back to Caswell and nothing is disclosed. Commissioner Dickerson stated that he was under the impression that this site was going to be updated but it has not been updated. He stated that the elderly individuals that have contacted him do not use the internet and they wanted a real person at the health department to answer their questions and if this is not an option then use an answering machine to inform people on vaccine updates and what number to call to be put on the waiting list. Commissioner Dickerson stated that he discussed this with Ms. Mortez. He stated it has been a week and nothing has been done so that is the reason he is suggesting using the Code Red System to get vaccine updates out to the citizens and added that Rockingham County is using Code Red for this purpose. Commissioner Dickerson stated that Caswell has been declared a red county for the spread this would be a good time to use the Code Red System to get the information out. He stated that the elderly does not use the internet and they are ones that should be getting the vaccine first. Commissioner Dickerson stated that the county needed to do its due diligence and it made sense to him that something needed to be done. He stated that he left a message on Wednesday, January 20th at 9:25 and has not received a call back yet and he spoke with the Health Board Chair over a week ago and no updates have been made to either of his suggestions so he thought the Code Red System could be used to help the health department out and the citizens would get the information they need. Commissioner Dickerson asked for suggestions from the other Board members.

Chairman Owen stated that this discussion needed to be discussed with the health director as well as the Health Board. He stated that he had been informed that the Code Red System had been used 9 times for COVID-19 purposes, but he did not know what the purposes were. Chairman Owen stated that he pushed Code Red all the time, but the problem is there are still a lot of citizens who are not signed up for Code Red. He thought it would be good to do another informational thing about Code Red to all of the citizens and added that he did not have a problem with Code Red being used for this purpose but he thought the problem would still be getting the information out to all the citizens. Chairman Owen stated that if the health department could put a message on the answering machine it would be a good thing as well, but it needed to be discussed with the health director and Health Board. He agreed that there are many ways that the county could approach to try to get the information out to as many citizens as possible. Chairman Owen stated that one of the items that he wanted to discuss at the Planning Session is a discussion on increasing the county’s advertising budget to get this information out to the citizens as well as other information. He stated that the website update was in the process. Chairman Owen stated that if there was an issue with not having personnel then that is a discussion that the Board needed to be made aware of. Chairman Owen asked if there were any comments from the other Commissioners.

Commissioner Jefferies stated that he had received a lot of telephone calls as well and the individuals are telling him that they are calling the health department every day and there is no answer and they want to sign up and they do not know what to do.

Commissioner Dickerson asked what could be done if the health department is too busy to record a message on the answering machine. He stated that there needed to be an option added to the telephone that stated ‘if you want to know more information about the vaccine press this button’ and then the latest information can be told to that individual calling. Commissioner Dickerson stated that he thought the citizens would appreciate getting this information. He stated that the citizens are concerned and a lot of the elderly population are scared and really want to get this vaccine and they can’t find out any information and added that a simple voice mail message would save a lot of the citizens’ aggravation. Commissioner Dickerson volunteered to record the message if the health department would give him the information. Chairman Owen responded that he did not think this was the issue. He thought the issue was actually answering telephone calls because he knew there were a lot of calls coming into the health department. Commissioner Dickerson stated that he understood that staff at the health department is swamped and cannot take every telephone call but it would be very simple to have a recording that would give the individuals the information that they are seeking. Commissioner Owen responded that he did not think this would be a problem to have the health department to do that. He added that if the county wanted to have someone to actually answer the calls then additional staff may be needed. Commissioner Dickerson agreed and added that it would be easy to put an updated voice mail out and he brought this up over a week about with the health board chair and it still has not been done and it concerned him that this has not been done for the citizens of Caswell County.

Commissioner Carter stated that he thought it would be appropriate for the Chairman or someone to meet with the health director to see if this can be done and added that it would not take a lot of time to do a voice mail recording. Ms. Eastwood responded that the health director was in the meeting. Chairman Owen stated that he was not going to have Ms. Eastwood included in the discussion at this moment but he was aware that she was in the meeting. He added that he was going to get with Ms. Eastwood to discuss this. Chairman Owen informed Commissioner Carter that this was his plan to get with Ms. Eastwood. Commissioner Carter stated that the health director was in the meeting and asked if she would like to respond to this. Chairman Owen responded that he was going to let Ms. Eastwood respond to this during the COVID-10 update if she wanted to respond and if she did not want to respond Chairman Owen stated that he would have the conversation with Ms. Eastwood.

COVID-19 UPDATE

Ms. Jennifer Eastwood, Health Director, stated that since everyone wanted to talk about the vaccine, so started there. She stated that the health department started receiving the vaccines the week of Christmas and she informed the Board when they started vaccinating. Ms. Eastwood stated vaccinating 1a and long-term care facilities residents and staff. She stated that the health department was told the week of January 11th would be when the 75 and up would be vaccinated however at the end of the week Governor Cooper announced that 75 and up would be vaccinated immediately. Ms. Eastwood stated that the partnership with North Village Pharmacy was quickly established and North Village already had a relationship with the long-term care facilities and this group of individuals normally trust their local druggist more than their own doctor. She stated that by the end of the week President Trump announced that the 65 and up needed to be vaccinated and all healthcare workers and at this time the State health director stated that the vaccine was a federal asset and based on this fact a person could not be denied based on their residency. Ms. Eastwood apologized to the Board and Mr. Dickerson that they had been bothered and burden by this and she acknowledge that the health department was not prepared for the on sloth of calls that the health department received from county residents as well as residents from other counties which have not been nice or kind to her staff. She stated that for every call that Mr. Dickerson received that ripped him, the health department probably received 50 that ripped them and the health department handled it with grace and dignity to the best of their abilities. Ms. Eastwood stated that she wanted the Board to understand that when she says they have a call volume, she went into the Mitel system and she pulled the call volume reports so she would be prepared for this today. She stated that from October 2019 to January 2020 which was pre-pandemic the health department’s average call volume was 60 calls a day with the highest day being 106 calls, during the pandemic from October 2020 to December 2020 the average call volume was 80 calls a day with the highest day being 169 calls. Ms. Eastwood stated that during January 2021 the average call volume was 250 calls a day and this is just inbound calls with the highest day being 514 calls and during this time no additional staff was added. She added that every person available has been answering the calls including herself. Ms. Eastwood stated that when the call volume is this high, they have to be prioritized and she added based on what Mr. Dickerson’s message was he probably has not received a call back because the first priority of the health department are their patients because during this pandemic they are still a primary care provider and still the safety net provider in the county and they are still seeing patients in the clinic and the patients care have to be taken care of first and foremost. She stated that the 65 and ups who are trying to get on the list are being put on the list. Ms. Eastwood acknowledge that the website has not been changed however they do put out information on Facebook and she added that Mr. Dickerson shared this information on his Facebook page and she stated that she will argue a little with Mr. Dickerson’s statement that no updates have been given because she knew that Mr. Dickerson shared that post where the health department stated the shelves were empty. She stated that the shelves are empty every week because there is currently a wait list of 1617 people and they receive 200 doses per week which is gone the day after they are received. Ms. Eastwood stated that she understood that people are curious and don’t know what to do but the people who are on the waiting list are being given appointments so they know what time to show up and where to show up and to her to put out information about a vaccine that the health department does not have seems almost cruel. She added that the health department could do a better job updating their website and added that she would argue with Mr. Dickerson because she did not realize he knew a lot about the Mitel system which is helpful because the person that does all the Mitel stuff is out on maternity leave right now so she would look forward to Mr. Dickerson coming to the health department to set up the voice mail because it is not that easily done because it is a computerized system. Ms. Eastwood acknowledged Barry Lynch, EMS Director and Donnie Powell, Logistics Chief for the Health Department for putting together a POD or point of dispensing at Parks and Recreation which is very efficient and operates always ahead of schedule with no waiting. She stated that other county departments have been very helpful with stepping in and she thanked Rhonda and Jackie from the Library, Rickey and Laura at Parks and Rec., Matthew Hoagland has stepped in to help direct traffic, A.J. Fuqua helped to direct traffic. Ms. Eastwood thanked Parks and Rec and the Senior Center for allowing the health department to have events there and stated that the health department could not run as efficient as they are with the vaccinations and the health department and North Village has given out over 1800 doses of the vaccine. She stated that she wanted to address the comments made about other counties, while the other counties may be able to get more information out they have to wait and when they get to the front of the line they are being told there are no more vaccines so they come to Caswell and have been very complimentary that they do not have a wait. Ms. Eastwood stated that Mr. Dickerson mentioned large counties who are receiving large allocations and added that these counties may be putting this information out there but they are not putting the vaccines in the arms efficiently as the health department. Ms. Eastwood stated that the case count for Caswell is 1745 with 15 deaths. She stated that some of these deaths are due to an outbreak at a long-term care facility and added that the cases are coming in very quickly, so it is difficult to keep up with the totals. Ms. Eastwood stated that she and her staff are working at the health department until 7:00 and then they go home and work until midnight, so their days are full. She asked if anyone had any questions.

Chairman Owen stated that the Board had to acknowledge that these are unusual circumstances and things have happened very quickly. He stated that he was fortunate enough to get a vaccine being in the group of 65 and up and it was a very efficient system, and he did not want Ms. Eastwood to feel like she was under attack but the Board needed to know how it could help the health department in the areas that they are overwhelmed. Chairman Owen stated that understood that the county only receives so many vaccines and added if there is anything the Board could do to help the health department let the Board know. He stated that Ms. Eastwood has the same goal as the Board and that is to inform the citizens as well as possible and the county is facing many issues such as the internet, newspaper, radio, etc. to get the information out to the citizens. Chairman Owen stated that the goal of the county is to serve the citizens of the county as efficiently and effectively as possible and to keep them informed as well. He stated that he appreciated what the health department is doing, and he knew that the staff was working hard so the Board wants to help in any way that it can.

Commissioner Dickerson stated that the voice mail was brought up and the lady that normally handles the voice mail being out on maternity leave and he appreciated Ms. Eastwood for bringing up the fact that the system that is being used is somewhat complicated for the average user and recommended getting one of the two IT employees to go by the health department to help Ms. Eastwood with the voice mail situation. He stated that he did not realize the health department was getting 500 calls and if there was a voice mail set up this would help with these telephone calls. Commissioner Dickerson stated to Ms. Eastwood that giving out information is never cruel but the elderly population not getting the information they need is cruel.

Chairman Owen asked Ms. Eastwood if it was possible for IT to help with the voice mail. Ms. Eastwood responded that she could not answer for county employees and added that she thought Mr. Norris was in the meeting as well. Chairman Owen asked Mr. Norris, IT Director, if IT would be able to help the health department with recording voice mails. Mr. Norris responded that he would get with Ms. Eastwood and address this issue. Chairman Owen thanked Mr. Norris.

Commissioner Oestreicher stated to Ms. Eastwood that he knew she was doing the very best that she could under very difficult circumstances and he fully supported what she was trying to do. He stated that he believed there was CARES money still unspent that could be used to bring in temporary people to help with the call volume. Ms. Eastwood responded that she has request some cert staff from the state and has been provided one person who is state personnel from Alamance County and is onsite during the PODs for vaccination clinics and she has been very helpful with data entry but she is onsite only on those days because she has her own state job. She added that they have received another cert staff member that will be answering the phones and is also returning calls and making appointments. Ms. Eastwood stated that there is a possibility of getting people hire but there is a lag time in getting this done but she may be able to explore an agreement with a temp agency. She stated that she thinks it is difficult to get individuals hired and trained to do things in a professional way, but it is something that she can explore. Commissioner Oestreicher stated that he was fully supportive of this and he understood that Ms. Satterfield may not be readily available to help with personnel issues, but he was sure the county manager would be happy to add Ms. Satterfield to the health department’s resource list if this would help with the hiring. He encouraged Ms. Eastwood to be aggressive in trying to find help and added that the Board wanted to support the health department.

Ms. Eastwood stated that she thought the message today is that all the commissioners could tell people when they call that the health department is scheduling by the call list, by appointments, and if they have not heard from the health department it is because they do not have vaccines and as soon as possible the health department will get in touch with them. She added that the health department has a great operation and can put shots in the arms all day if the vaccines are available, but 200 doses does not go very far. Ms. Eastwood stated that some of the family health care providers are getting approved to be able to get vaccines as well so she hopes that the Caswell Family Medical Center and the Prospect Hill Medical Center will get doses soon. She stated that the health department does not have the vaccines and that is the message that the Commissioners need to give to the individuals that call and that the health department is trying to return calls as quickly as possible. Ms. Eastwood also stated to encourage the individuals to call other counties to try to get in there because they are getting more doses than Caswell is. Commissioner Oestreicher stated that this was an excellent point.

Commissioner Carter stated that he was very appreciative of the job that Ms. Eastwood and her staff is doing and he knew that she did not have any control over the amount of doses the county gets from the state but he wanted to know if the health department would have enough doses to give the second doses of the vaccine. Ms. Eastwood responded that when the health department receives the allotment of first doses and at the appropriate interval the health department receives the second doses and the second doses were started last Friday and North Village started on Saturday. She stated that the county is getting the second doses the way the state had promised. Ms. Eastwood stated that when someone comes in for their first vaccine they go ahead and schedule them for their second shot so there is no question on when they need to come back. Commissioner Carter stated that the Board was willing to help the health department anyway it can.

Commissioner Hall reminded the Board that for the most part the citizens of Caswell County and the region were very, very stubborn when it came to wearing masks and practicing social distancing and before the pandemic got so bad the Board had options and did not ask the Health Board how the Board could help and the Board knew how to help with encouraging wearing a mask and practice social distancing. He stated that the Board refused to go out on a limb to suggest that people do these things and the Board stated that people do not like to be told what to do and now people are getting sick and dying and they want to get to the front of the line. Commissioner Hall stated that the Board is part of the problem and stated that the Board can say they want to help now and asked what the Board did 6 months ago. Chairman Owen responded that as a Board it may be nothing but he added that he has worn a mask and he has practiced social distancing and he had encouraged citizens to do this as well but it is their choice. He stated that he could not say the Board took any other action but to encourage the people to wear masks and to practice social distancing. Chairman Owen stated that the county is where it is, and it cannot go backwards but encouraged working together moving forward. Commissioner Hall stated that he was not suggesting not working together but if the Board refused that it was not acknowledged that the Board could have done a better job with encouraging citizens of Caswell to wear masks and practice social distancing then just saying let’s move forward is just a hollow statement. Chairman Owen responded that without saying what the Board could have done and added that he knew what he had done. Commissioner Hall stated that the Board should have said that it encouraged the citizens to wear masks, encourage the citizens to practice social distancing, and it should have been done as a Board and this was not done and refused to do it. Chairman Owen thanked Commissioner Hall.

Chairman Owen asked if there were any more questions about COVID-19.

BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS PLANNING WORK SESSION

Chairman Owen stated that the Board needed to make a decision because some issues have come up regarding the Planning Work Session scheduled for Thursday. He stated that Commissioner Jefferies’ sister’s funeral is Thursday and he stated that he was not sure about the situation with the county manager’s mother and he thought it would be important that the county manager be in the planning work session. Chairman Owen stated that if the Board wanted to have the planning work session on Thursday to shorten it to just 2 hours and schedule another work session later or look at rescheduling the work session for another date and time.

Commissioner Carter stated that he was not sure he would be there on Thursday because his father is very sick, he asked for the Board to consider rescheduling for another date.

Commissioner Dickerson stated the he would not be able to attend the work session if it is held this Thursday because he had a prior engagement at work that had been scheduled for quite some time and he would not be able to attend the work session.

Chairman Owen asked if postponing the work session would be acceptable to the Board due to the different circumstances mentioned. He stated that he would not set a date today, but a Doodle Poll may be sent out. Chairman Owen stated that he wanted to talk to the county manager and hopefully schedule the Planning Work Session for next week. He asked the commissioners to look at some dates to give feedback on when to schedule this work session.

COUNTY MANAGER’S UPDATES

FYE 2020 Annual Audit Update

Chairman Owen stated that the county manager shared that the County has requested an extension on the audit from the Local Government Commission for various reasons such as COVID-19 with some of the courthouse staff as well as the new financial software. He stated that if the Board had any questions on this to please direct those to the county manager.

Redesign of Square Update

Chairman Owen stated that the county manager has had meetings with Healthy Places by Design but that is all the information he can share on this because the county manager got the call on Sunday morning about his mother and have to leave very quickly. He stated that the Board should received information on this soon.

 COMMISSIONER COMMENTS

Chairman Owen informed the Board that there will be a meeting on Friday with some state representative and legislative items will be discussed. He stated that Ms. Eastwood would be a part of this discussion. Chairman Owen stated that one of the items that will be discussed will be broadband in Caswell County. He stated that he was sure that there would be a long discussion on vaccines. Chairman Owen asked the Board if there were other legislative items that needed to be discussed to please email those to him. He stated that this meeting was set up by the legislative representatives.

ANNOUNCEMENTS AND UPCOMING EVENTS

Chairman Owen stated that Planning Work Session scheduled for Thursday, February 4, 2021 at 9:00 a.m. has been cancelled.

Chairman Owen asked if there were announcements that the Board needed to be made aware of.

ADJOURNMENT

At 10:15 a.m. Commissioner McVey moved, seconded by Commissioner Carter to adjourn. After a roll call vote, the motion carried unanimously. (Commissioners Carter, Dickerson, Hall, Jefferies, McVey, Oestreicher, and Owen voted in favor.)

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Paula P. Seamster David J. Owen

Clerk to the Board Chairman

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