

Board of Health Meeting

August 29, 2011

Minutes

Present: Jane DeBruycker, Tim Sinton, Gayle Harris, Jim Hodgskiss, Corrine Rose, Elaine Sedlack, Lora Wier.

The meeting scheduled for 5:30 pm was delayed waiting for the arrival of Jane and Tim. The meeting was begun at 5:50 when Jane arrived.

Dawn Baker had to leave for another appointment but, speaking as a public person, reported that she was offered a position as a nurse at another facility at \$24/hr but accepted the position at Teton County Health Dept. at @ \$20/hr. Health department nurse salaries are below the area nurse salaries and yet they often have more responsibility. She feels there are few nurses with public health experience who would be available to fill Lora's position at the salary she is paid after working for the department for 30 years. Dawn knows from experience how hard it is to do a job for a long time and then have a new employee or a temporary employee come and earn more money in the same job.

Lora Wier presented background information on the Tobacco and Public Health Emergency Preparedness Grants which were Florence Anderson's responsibilities in the health department. When Florence retired the end of June, Lora advertised to fill her position. Only one nurse inquired about the position and she did not complete the application after learning the position paid \$8/hr less than her current salary. One person was interested in the tobacco prevention grant part of the position and April Spaulding was hired for that position.

Lora then moved job responsibilities around within the department with Lora and Elaine Sedlack then sharing the PHEP grant. Elaine would work 8 hours/week on PHEP and Lora would work 12. This meant Lora would be taking on an additional 276 hours per year above her full time 2088 hours per year, which she is willing to do because of her passion for public health and belief in the importance of emergency preparedness to the community.

Lora states she read in the Choteau Acantha on July 6th that both the sheriff and the clerk and recorder received extra compensation for additional duties. On July 8th she met with Arnie Gettel, Commissioner, about extra compensation, requesting a raise of \$3.00/hr for the public health director, \$1.00 for Dawn Baker, and \$.85 for Elaine Sedlack. He indicated that might be doable. On July 25th she met with Jim Hodgskiss, Commissioner who indicated it might be doable. On August 8th she met with all 3 commissioners who said it might be doable. On August 15th she was told that there would only be the same \$.65/hour raise that all county employees received. The commissioners said they were looking out for the taxpayer.

Lora pointed out that her budget did not raise the cost to the taxpayer. She said she has worked for 30 years at a substandard rate of pay because of her passion for public

health and all her programs save the taxpayer dollars. Without the pay raise and the PHEP grant some costs now covered by that grant would end up on the public health budget thus increasing the cost to the taxpayer. She has increased revenue from immunizations as the health dept is the only one doing child immunizations in the county but she has not increased the property tax for public health in the past 5 years.

Lora pointed out that some of the grants are for multiple counties and all have different fiscal years. She presented written budgets with and without the PHEP grant and staff raises. Without the PHEP grant more money comes from public funding. She presented a list of current compensation of other area nurses showing the lower salaries in the health department.

Elaine reviewed the responsibilities of the PHEP grant including communicable disease surveillance and epidemiology and key surveillance partners; Health Alert Network requirements including that someone be on call 24/7 and respond within 15 minutes; coordination with the county sanitarian on truck wreck protocol, food recalls, and foodborne illness; reviewing immunization records for completeness and having a plan of action to bring all children up to date; mutual aid with other health departments in the event the lead public health nurse or lead sanitarian is out of the office for an extended period of time; pandemic influenza plans; the SNS plan and POD and Chempak and exercises to assure adequate thruput; an all hazards plan to assure rapid coordinated response to chemical or radiological events as well as fires and floods; a plan for at risk populations such as elderly, mentally or physically disabled, homebound, hearing and vision impaired, etc; and risk communication during an event including instructions to the public for evacuation or in place sheltering , reassurance, etc. Writing, re-evaluating, testing and re-writing all these plans is an on-going project.

Lora states she has asked previously through the years for just compensation. She wants the commissioners to look four years down the road to when she may retire and they won't be able to hire her replacement due to the responsibilities and low wage.

Jim Hodgskiss said the sheriff and the clerk and recorder have been compensated previously. Lora is the department head. Each department head has a list of wishes. The commissioners decide which wishes to grant. Lora, as department head should defend her department.

General discussion followed. Gayle Harris said she thought Lora had laid out an excellent rationale for an increased wage. Jane DeBruycker asked why Lora was not compensated equal to others. Jim said the health department got the same raises as the rest of the county. Jim said he was not advocating cutting services, but the grant could go under another department since the county has the contract and Lora is the liaison. Jane asked how the nursing home administrator could get \$30/hour and Jim replied it was a private enterprise. Gayle asked how nursing home rns get more money for less responsibility. Jane asked how the commissioners came up with their decision. Lora said she felt she was misled.

Lora also said public health departments are working toward accreditation nation wide. Tim Sinton said public health has the reputation with providers as being a good

resource for instance during the H1N1 outbreak. He asked Jim what happens if the health department submits a budget with the raises and the PHEP grant and it is not approved. Jim said he doesn't know. The commissioner's budget hearing is Thursday, Sept 1st at 10:00 am to review and vote on the entire county budget.

Gayle suggested the board write a letter to the commissioners asking them to approve the budget with the raises and the PHEP grant.

Tim made a motion that: "The board write a letter supporting the budget including the requested raises and the PHEP grant, considering the longevity, education, dedication, and additional responsibilities of the director, to be more in line with the pay of other county nurses and administrators, which would in fact save the county taxpayer's money and prevent the loss of the grant which would adversely affect the public health preparedness.

Gayle seconded the motion. Jim abstained from voting. Randy was absent. The motion passed 3 to 0.

Gayle will write the letter. Jane will try to attend the budget hearing.

Nancy Thornton from the Choteau Acantha asked why Lora didn't attend the salary board meeting. Lora said she did not know about it, and since it was held in June she wouldn't have known that no one would apply for the vacant position.

Tim made a motion to close the meeting, seconded by Gayle. The meeting was adjourned at 8:10 pm.

Elaine Sedlack