The Special Wadena County Board of Commissioners’ Meeting was held on Thursday, February 28, 2019 in the Auditorium, Wadena County Courthouse, 415 South Jefferson Street, Wadena, Minnesota. The meeting was called to order at 9:19 am by Chairperson Stearns and all present recited the Pledge of Allegiance.

Also present were Commissioners: Chuck Horsager, Sheldon Monson, Jim Hofer and Jon Kangas. County Coordinator/Engineer Ryan Odden, County Attorney Kyra Ladd, County Auditor/Treasurer Heather Olson, Public Health Director Cindy Pederson, County Recorder Soledad Henriksen, Human Services Amie Gendron, IT Director David Hotchkiss, Human Resources Director Curt Kreklau, Wadena Pioneer Journal reporter Brian Hansel and Sebeka/Menahga Review Messenger reporter Matthew B. Johnson.

The meeting began with the Commissioners wanting their top priorities given.

The Liaison assignments was listed as one area that needs to be addressed. Commissioner Kangas would like to keep the liaison format with assignment changing so the commissioners would get to know the county staff and how the county operates. Commissioner Horsager would like to move to more of a CEO model with bi-monthly and monthly meeting between the coordinator and department heads. Commissioner Hofer believes that until the Coordinator position is full-time the liaison format is necessary. Commissioner Monson believes that the there is value in the liaison assignments and they should parallel the committee assignments that he is on. Cindy Pederson believes that it is important for the department heads to have direct access to board members and that removing that access would not be good. Commissioner Stearns voiced concern that an administrator could become too strong of a gate keeper. He does not want to lose the department head access by the board. Commissioner Horsager stated that he is ok with keeping the liaison format for now. Commissioner Kangas would like clarification on the roles and responsibilities of the liaisons to the different departments. Commissioner Hofer suggests that the strategic planning commission address the roles and responsibilities of the liaison and department heads. The liaison assignments were as follows: Commissioner Kangas; Human Services, IT and Human Resources. Commissioner Stearns; County Attorney, Highway and Solid Waste. Commissioner Hofer; Assessor, Auditor/Treasurer, Court Administrator and Law Library. Commissioner Monson; Building Maintenance, Court Administrator, Public Health and Sheriff. Commissioner Horsager; Extension, Recorder, Veterans Service, Zoning /Parks.

The board moved on to the DDA Implementation Plan suggested by Gary Weiers:

1. Strategic Plan – This has been drawn up 2 times in the past. The strategic planning committee should review the current plan and then review it annually.

2. Convert to full-time Administrator from the part-time Coordinator position - This has been suggested two times before and the board has held off on this due to budgetary concerns. Commissioner Hofer feels that perhaps this should be considered and planned for in the future budget. Commissioner Kangas would like to have more information on an administrator role verses the coordinator role. Commissioner Monson would like to hold off until the legislative session determines appointed verses elected positions. Commissioner Hofer asked Ryan Odden
who was assisting him with some of the clerical duties that are required for his job. He said that currently Joy Weyer from the auditor’s office is typing the minutes and assisting with some of the paperwork involved. April Damlo from Highway has also been helping with duties. It is working currently, but may need to change during a general election time when Joy becomes very busy with running the elections.

3. Monthly work sessions – This is the first of the monthly work sessions.

4. Video recording of board meetings – there is value in the recordings being available to the public. There is a cost associated with making this a reality. The board already audio records the meetings. These recordings are available upon the request for a small fee. Commissioner Hofer feels that perhaps some newer microphones and screens for use at the board meetings would be helpful for those in attendance. Commissioner Kangas suggested that perhaps the audio recordings of the meeting should be available on the web site like the minutes are.

5. Land Service Department – The commissioners feel that some legislative action needs to be changed before this could be happen. Department heads could perhaps work together to share employees between offices and the commissioners would encourage working together.

6. Courthouse remodel of the lower level – The sentence serve crew is putting the courthouse on the schedule for work on the basement remodel. The commissioners would like to see this begin soon. Ryan Odden was asked to follow up on moving this along.

7. Human Resources – There were questions that were brought up on the Personnel Policy for the county that was reviewed in 2016. Curt Kreklau said that the review is still on his desk and needs to be consolidated as one policy from many policies that are out there by the policy committee. Commissioner Hofer said that the management team is the policy committee. Commissioner Stearns and Commissioner Monson want the revised personnel policy that was completed by an outside source in 2016 brought to the board at the next meeting for their review. Commissioner Kangas and Commissioner Horsager think that we need to work on the onboarding of new employees. Performance reviews are not being uniformly and consistently done by the department heads. This should be addressed by all departments.

8. Departments hold regular meetings - This will be left up to the department’s discretion as to how often to hold these meetings but the Commissioners would like to make this a priority.

9. Human Services: Consider a multi-county human services model – Commissioner Horsager feels that this not needed. Commissioner Stearns would like to discuss this and perhaps explore this option. There would probably be no financial savings, but it is usually done for more consistency between the different counties.

10. Human Services and the County Attorney’s Offices: Commit to working together – Commissioner Kangas would like to make this a high priority. He feels that going through the Bureau of Mediation Services is not necessary. Commissioner Hofer feels that the two departments need to work through the differences in order to come to a working agreement to benefit the community. He stressed that the Comprehensive Reentry program and the Children’s Justice Initiative are good things to help with this issue. Commissioner Stearns suggested that a Paralegal could be added at the Human Services Department to make sure that all of the legal aspects are covered before a case is presented to the County Attorney. Commissioner Monson believes that the different offices need to respect the decision and authority of each office and not be talking around town about things that happen. Kyra Ladd spoke up that communication between the departments is not the problem. She feels the problem is with roles and
responsibilities and the message given is not the message they want to hear. She stated that there has been a great deal of time spent on talking. She is not interested in spending any more county money on outside resources coming in. Studies have been done already. Chairperson Stearns assigned the Human Service Liaison, Commissioner Kangas, and Ryan Odden the task of working to improve the working relationship between the two departments.

11. Process Improvement – LEAN training. LEAN strives to make processes within the county that move through different departments more efficient. Soledad Henriksen spoke about the splits and combinations of parcels and how the meeting of all involved has helped to get the process to move along more quickly. It also helps to keep each department accountable to finish their tasks in a timely fashion.

12. Evaluate Janitorial Contracts - The Building committee is looking at the options.

13. Evaluate the Otter Tail Solid Waste Agreement – Commissioners feel that sharing a Solid Waste Director with Otter Tail County works quite well for Wadena County for a cost of $25,000.00 per year.

Moved by Commissioner Monson, seconded by Commissioner Horsager to adjourn the meeting at 11:19 am. Motion carried unanimously.

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Ryan Odden, Bill Stearns, Chairperson
Wadena County Coordinator/Engineer Wadena County Commissioners