The Wadena County Board of Commissioners’ Meeting was held on April 7, 2020 in the Small Courtroom, Wadena County Courthouse, 415 South Jefferson Street, Wadena, Minnesota. The meeting was called to order at 9:00 am by Commissioner Horsager via zoom and all present recited the Pledge of Allegiance.


Amend/Approve the Day’s Agenda: Ryan Odden requested that we move item 7. SPED Committee Charter review and update to 5d in the consent agenda. Motion by Commissioner Hofer, seconded by Commissioner Monson to accept the agenda with this change moving #7 to 5b. Monson -yes, Kangas -yes, Hofer-yes, Stearns-yes, Horsager-yes, motion carried unanimously.

Recognize Interested Citizens: None present today.

CONSENT AGENDA:

Commissioner Kangas requested that Item C - Notification of New Hire be pulled for discussion.

Moved by Commissioner Stearns, seconded by Commissioner Monson to pull item C for discussion and approve the following consent agenda items:

- Approve the Minutes from Special Meeting held on 3-10-20 and the Minutes from the 3-24-20 Board Meeting.
- Approve the Public Health Advisory Committee members: District 1 – Brad Swenson, District 2 – Tiffany Doughterty, District 3 – Amy Yglesias for a three year term from 2020 to 2022.
- Approve the Strategic Planning Economic Development (SPED) Committee Charter Review and Update.

Kangas-yes, Hofer-yes, Monson-yes, Stearns-yes, Horsager-yes, motion carried unanimously.

REGULAR AGENDA:

County Coordinator Ryan Odden updated the board on the start date of Bobbe Anderson, Child Protection Supervisor being moved from 4-27-20 to 4-13-20.

Notification of New Hire: Commissioner Kangas had comments on the step given when hiring the new Human Service Director, Jennifer Westrum. She was hired at step 10. He believes that the steps are there for rewarding people who stay with the county for a longer period of time. There is a $32,000.00 difference between hiring her at step 1 or at step 10. He wants to know why most are hired at the lower end of the steps not at step 10 and in this case she was given the top step immediately. Commissioner
Stearns stated that to get a quality person into this position we need to pay a competitive wage for the position. Commissioner Hofer believes that this is a position that requires us to be competitive. Moved by Commissioner Monson, seconded by Commissioner Hofer moves to accept the new hires at the rates that are listed:

**Human Service Department** - Bobbe Anderson, Child Protection Supervisor at Grade 56, Step 5 $34.02 per hour for $70,761.60 per year (with Benefits $96,290.00) with a hire date of 4-13-20. Jennifer Westrum, Human Service Director: Grade 59, Step 10 $50.31 per hour for $104,644.80 (with benefits $135,306.00) with hire date of 4-28-20.

**Transit Department** – Linda Ness, Dispatch Grade 50, Step 4 $17.56 per hour for $18,262.40 per year (with benefits $22,828.00) with a hire date of 3-13-20.

**Highway Department** – Mason Evans, Engineering Aid: $12.50 per hour with an Estimated Seasonal Gross salary of $4,800.00 (with benefits $6,000.00) with a hire date of May 18, 20. Jonathan Lisson, Engineering Aid: $13.00 per hour with an Estimated Seasonal Gross salary of $5,100.00 (with benefits $6,375.00) with a hire date of May 11, 20. Lee Lorentz, Maintenance Worker I: $12.50 per hour with an Estimated Seasonal Gross Salary of $4,800.00 (with benefits $6,000.00) with a start date to be determined.

Stearns-yes, Monson-yes, Hofer-yes, Kangas-no, Horsager-yes, motion carried 4-1.

**Public Health Dementia Grant Application**: Moved by Commissioner Kangas, second by Commissioner Monson to approve the Wadena County Public Health Grant application to the Minnesota Board on Aging for dementia education and awareness strategies in an amount not to exceed $49,999.99 for the time period 7-1-20 to 6-30-21. Stearns-yes, Monson-yes, Hofer-yes, Kangas-yes, Horsager-yes, motion carried unanimously.

**COVID 19 Emergency Executive Committee Update**: Item #3 concerning the Tax abatement of penalties on late property taxes was addressed first. There was discussion mainly on the delay of applying the penalties to those who do not make the tax payment by the May 15, 2020 deadline for property taxes. Auditor/Treasurer, Heather Olson, brought up the hardship that the pandemic is having on individuals and business that are affected by this virus. There are two reasons that would make a person eligible for this abatement, these are: the primary wage earner was laid off from work or the business was ordered to close. If a taxpayer applies by April 30, 2020, the Auditor’s Office would review the application and accept or reject the request. If the request is rejected, then the application would go to the Board Chairman or County Coordinator for review. Commissioner Kangas would like to include all taxpayers in this abatement. He would like to waive the penalty for everyone and forget any forms having to be filled out. Commissioner Hofer is concerned about the cash flow to the Cities and Townships and is leaning toward requiring conditions for the abatement. Commissioner Horsager would like to have the reasons left open on the forms and have tax payers write in their reason for an abatement. It was pointed out that the Minnesota Legislature is meeting in special session today and may delay the deadline for tax payments. It was suggested by Commissioner Stearns to table this until next week’s meeting and see if the State makes any changes to the law requiring the first half payment be made by May 15th each year. County Attorney, Kyra Ladd, said that there needs to be objective criteria for an abatement to be honored. Auditor/Treasurer, Heather Olson, explained that these requests will become an abatement if accepted and therefore there will need to be paperwork filled out by the tax payers and kept on record. Moved by Commissioner Hofer, seconded by Commissioner
Monson to table the tax penalties abatement policy changes until the April 14, 2020 meeting. Stearns-yes, Monson-yes, Hofer-yes, Kangas-yes, Horsager-yes, carried unanimously.

Item #1 - Delay any purchases not immediately needed was then discussed. Moved by Commissioner Monson, seconded by Commissioner Hofer to have all county departments delay, until further notice, any purchases not immediately needed to maintain county services. Commissioner Stearns stated he believes that this is too subjective to interpretation by the departments. Question was called, Stearns-yes, Monson-yes, Hofer-yes, Kangas-yes, Horsager-yes, carried unanimously.

Item #2 – Beginning immediately all job vacancies and new positions will be brought to the Personnel Committee before posting. The Personnel Committee will work with Departments on when vacancies will be approved to begin the hiring process. Moved by Commissioner Monson, seconded by Commissioner Stearns to approve this policy on job vacancies. Stearns-yes, Monson-yes, Hofer-yes, Kangas-yes, Horsager-yes, carried unanimously.

Solid Waste Services Provided: Chris McConn and Tammy Ehrmantraut from solid waste were on the phone to discuss the services that will be provided by county in this pandemic. They have been receiving more waste than normal at this time. The staff feel that perhaps too many people are coming at the same time during this “stay home order.” The consensus of the Commissioners was to keep the facility open and add additional signage at the site for the public’s direction. They will be allowed to use some help from the highway staff to accomplish the tasks needed.

Temporary Revision of Donation of Accrued Vacation or Compensatory Time: Discussion on the changes to the donation of time by employees to other employees. Moved by Commissioner Monson, seconded by Commissioner Stearns to make the following changes to Article 31. Of the Personnel Policy. The changes allow for the employee to donate from their earned Vacation Time and Compensatory Time up to 40 hours of their time to a specific employee. This must be done through the Human Resources Department. Stearns-yes, Monson-yes, Hofer-yes, Kangas-yes, Horsager-yes, carried unanimously.

Restroom Remodeling Upgrades – Award Bids: It was discussed that the county would like to delay the unnecessary spending due to COVID-19. Moved by Commissioner Monson, seconded by Commissioner Hofer, to reject all bids on this bathroom remodel project for now. Stearns-yes, Monson-yes, Hofer-yes, Kangas-yes, Horsager-yes, carried unanimously.

Award of SAP 080-617-008: Ryan Odden explained that these funds are designated for this and could be only used for this. The State of Minnesota is continuing the road projects around the state. Moved by Commissioner Stearns, seconded by Commissioner Monson to award the bid for SAP 080-617-008 for a total of $197,482.10 to Ferguson Brothers Excavating of Alexandria, MN. Stearns-yes, Monson-yes, Hofer-yes, Kangas-yes, Horsager-yes, carried unanimously.

Award of SAP 080-130-016: Moved by Commissioner Monson, seconded by Commissioner Hofer, to award this bid to Central Specialties Inc. of Alexandria, MN for a total bid price of $429,189.32 for SAP 080-130-016. Stearns-yes, Monson-yes, Hofer-yes, Kangas-yes, Horsager-yes, carried unanimously.

South Country Health Alliance Update: Stearns gave update on South Country Health Alliance. Wadena County will be getting back $1,906,673.00. This can be paid back over 5 years and will not get any of these funds in until October of this year.
Commissioner Reports:

Commissioner Hofer: 3/26 COVID Executive Committee, 4/1 Management Meeting, 4/6 COVID Executive Committee, 4/07 Board Meeting.

Commissioner Stearns: 3/25 PLSWA, 3/30 SPED Committee, 4/6 MRRC, 4/06 Board Meeting.

Commissioner Monson: 4/07 Board Meeting.


Moved by Commissioner Hofer, seconded by Commissioner Monson to adjourn the meeting at 10:29 am. Stearns-yes, Monson-yes, Hofer-yes, Kangas-yes, Horsager-yes, carried unanimously.

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Ryan Odden,                                             Charles Horsager, Chairperson
Wadena County Coordinator/Engineer                     Wadena County Commissioners