



Northeast District Department of Health

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Finance Committee Meeting Minutes 3/09/23

Start Time: 3:00 p.m.

Attendance: Elaine Lippke (Finance Chair), Nate Swift, Robert Kerr, Robert Kelleher, Susan Starkey (DoH), Linda Buisson (Administrative Assistant), Melissa Nichols (Finance Manager) via telephone, and Luther Thurlow (joined 4:02 pm)

Absent Excused: Orla McKiernan-Raftery

Public Participation Attendees: Ann Hinchman, Lana Salisbury, Sean Regan and David A. Griffiths

E. Lippke requested a motion to amend the agenda, correcting the date of the meeting minutes for review. R. Kerr motioned to amend the meeting minutes date from January 27 to February 16. R. Kelleher seconded. E. Lippke, N. Swift, R. Kerr, and R. Kelleher in favor. Motion carried (4-0-0)

Meeting Minutes – February 16, 2023

Motion made by N. Swift to approve the minutes of February 16, 2023, as presented. Seconded by R. Kerr. E. Lippke, N. Swift, and R. Kerr in favor. R. Kelleher abstained. Motion carried (3-0-1).

FY24 – Draft Budget Estimates

Fees / Income Sources / Reserves / Salary & Benefits / Expenses / Town Per Capita

Draft 3 shows a reduction of the town per Capita estimate from \$3.75 to \$1.00 however, it requires NDDH to use reserve funds to cover costs. The 1st draft provided was based on what staff and leadership determined NDDH needed to support services. Dramatic cuts to staff were made to keep the per Capita down. All drafts for FY24 have estimates for the upcoming Union negotiations.

NDDH was asked how they would get work completed without a chief sanitarian. The current environmental health specialists can do some of the work as they gain credentials in food service, subsurface, etc. The only people who can sign off on forms for items such as septic, are registered sanitarians (RS). The Director meets with EHS staff to free up time for the one RS / Team Leader currently employed.

NDDH was asked if they would catch up on the lagging inspections. We expect that when EHS staff are fully trained, they will have more time in the field and will grow in proficiency. They have been training for two years.

S. Starkey encouraged Board members to take the message to their towns. We are looking out for the best interest of the staff and the towns. There was much discussion regarding costs other health departments do not have that NDDH does. Some of the other health districts received ARPA funds. For example, eight out of twelve towns elected to give Uncas ARPA funds which will last for a couple of years. ARPA (American Rescue Plan Act) was for public health services. We asked the towns in our district for funds and received none. When the funds given to Uncas disappear in a couple of years, their per Capita rate will inevitably increase.

S. Regan asked why NDDH did not request a more reasonable per Capita of \$1.24 in the beginning rather than \$3.75. E. Lippke explained that we started out with a dream of filling the agency with the right employees to do the work that the towns expect, and what they have complained about us not completing in a timely fashion. To do that, we needed \$3.75. If we cannot have the \$3.75, then we remain with our current staff and hope that we can do what is needed in a timely fashion based on EHS staff gaining expertise as they complete their certifications.

R. Kelleher said it is nice that it is a dollar, but the towns need to understand that they are not going to get the services we are supposed to deliver. We cannot afford it for a dollar. It was pointed out that the towns do not want to hear anything about it costing more than \$1. We do not know how to get the information out to change that concept.

L. Salisbury asked if NDDH was top-heavy and not getting work completed in the field.

S. Starkey noted that the positions listed on top of the salary / benefit sheet are grant-funded. Currently, the Public Health Program Manager and Public Health Program Specialist are participating in courses for general subsurface skills and for food inspections. Grant requirements are very specific in how funds may be used.

NDDH's continued loss of staff is our greatest liability which is why we wanted \$3.75.

Towns are requesting that NDDH send per capita estimates earlier than January. We thought that by providing an estimate in January about how we were trying to fund the department, it would be sufficient. We thought towns wanted the tightest, best version by April. S. Starkey thanked the Board members who cared enough about the staff to entertain the \$3.75 rate increase. She noted that the best we can do is provide an estimate in March. It was noted that NDDH did not give an inaccurate number. We gave them the best number for what we need but no one wants to pay that.

S. Starkey noted that it is the Board members role to have a conversation with their towns asking how they want them to vote for a per Capita rate. Board members can come back to the table and talk about it with NDDH. R. Kelleher admitted that the Board may have been derelict in consulting with the towns. They have not talked to them. Each town representative is responsible for advocating for both the town and for NDDH.

The Town of Killingly has requested a presentation from NDDH. NDDH will answer questions about why the initial per capita estimate was high and how NDDH reduced it to \$1.00. B. Otto, Environmental Health Specialist, who completes a lot of work in the town of Killingly, will attend the meeting and if available, the Finance Manager, M. Nichols. S. Starkey hopes D.A. Griffiths, Killingly NDDH board representative will attend. S. Starkey has asked both

R. Kelleher and E. Lippke to also attend. We can advise Killingly that the Board was conscientious and considered everything. They have been diligent in making cuts.

The district per Capita handout provides a yearly history of per capita rates and what the original forecasting plan increases were predicted.

NDDH provided a projection forecast for inspections that may be done as people are trained/certified.

Permit fees were reviewed. M. Nichols noted that NDDH has the highest fees over Uncas, Ledge Light and EHHD. R. Kelleher noted difficulty in increasing costs when we are not delivering. NDDH has fallen behind. NDDH must pay for all EHS staff training/certifications that are necessary during the first 2 years of employment.

The Finance Committee will not be voting on final per Capita today. They will vote at the March 30 meeting and will bring to the Board for an approval vote on April 13.

D.A. Griffiths left the meeting at 3:58 p.m.

L. Thurlow joined the meeting at 4:02 p.m.

Vacation Time Buyout FY23

Buyout will reduce vacation banks to 80 hours The salary/benefit estimated cost is \$30K. More information will be presented at the next Finance meeting on March 30th.

Union Negotiations Update -Nothing at this time.

Water Damage – NDDH

NDDH prepared a list of its products/services due to the burst water pipe damage and sent to A. Tanner, Brooklyn's First Selectman. The list contained lost medical supplies and lost wages for the day NDDH was closed. The town's insurance should cover all the costs.

Unfinished Business -Nothing at this time.

Other Business – None

Next meeting: Thursday, March 30, 2023, at 3:00 p.m.

Adjournment

Motion made by N. Swift to adjourn. R. Kerr seconded the motion. E. Lippke, N. Swift R. Kerr, R. Kelleher, and L. Thurlow in favor. Motion carried (5-0-0).

Adjournment: 4:56 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,
Linda Violette Buisson
Administrative Assistant