

## **Board of County Commissioners (BOCC) / Board of Health (BOH) Emergency Meeting**

**August 16, 2021**

**4 p.m.**

Present: Commissioner Pollock, Commissioner Swope, Commissioner Stamper (4:10 p.m.), County Manager Erik Martin, Eric Eisenberg, Andrew Logerwell, JP Anderson, Meja Handlen, John Abplanalp, Sheriff Snaza, Erik Martin Amber Smith, Connie Riker, Jonathan Meyer, Austin Majors, Steve Wohld, Dr. Alan Melnick, Dr. Steven Krager, Dr. Kevin Caserta, American Medical Response (AMR) Operations Manager Tony Kuzma, various members of Lewis County staff

Guests: Various members of the public and press

Recorder: Rieva Lester

Commissioner Pollock noted that the Board of County Commissioners and the Board of Health called the emergency meeting, as permitted under RCW 42.30.70, because a delay could increase the risk of injury to persons or property.

JP Anderson said Lewis County has seen a huge increase in COVID-19 cases.

Eric Eisenberg noted that the commissioners could choose to deliberate in executive session if they so desired.

The meeting was paused shortly after it started due to technical difficulties with audio.

The meeting resumed at 4:36 p.m.

Lewis County Deputy Health Officer Dr. Steve Krager said Lewis County currently has the highest rate of COVID-19 hospitalizations in the state. He said he and Health Officer Dr. Alan Melnick recommend that events with groups of larger than 50 people be canceled.

If the Fair does continue, Dr. Krager said, the two of them recommend social distancing, moving events outdoors, limiting capacity and increasing ventilation at any indoor sites.

Commissioner Stamper asked if there were any measures the county can take to improve safety at the fairgrounds.

Steve Wohld discussed efforts the county could take, such as providing masks, etc.

Connie Riker said bathrooms are cleaned every 90 minutes.

Providence Chief Medical Officer Dr. Kevin Caserta noted that the Centralia hospital has canceled elective procedures in response to increased COVID-19 cases and decreased capacity. Dr. Caserta said the Centralia hospital and St. Peter's hospital are caring for 88 COVID-19 cases, compared to a previous high of fewer than 60 patients. Dr. Caserta noted that he is 48 and that there are COVID-19 patients at the hospital younger than him who likely will die over the course of the next week.

Commissioner Swope said he heard Dr. Caserta indicate he would like to use fear to encourage people to avoid the fair.

Commissioner Pollock asked how trauma patients would be cared for as the hospital faces capacity concerns. Dr. Caserta outlined efforts to care for trauma patients.

JP said his understanding was that Providence may need to seek the assistance of the National Guard to help staff the hospital. Dr. Caserta said Providence would look to meet the need with local staff if possible and could reach out to the National Guard as a last resort.

Commissioner Swope said he understands the following regarding Providence:

- Staffing is down 60 percent.
- The hospital plans to fire more staff who don't get vaccinated.
- 50 percent of the current COVID patients are vaccinated, and 50 percent are unvaccinated.

Dr. Caserta said Providence said staffing is not down 60 percent. He said Providence did not set the governor's mandate and that Providence does not intend to fire staff. He said he doesn't want anyone to lose their jobs.

Dr. Caserta said he would gather the information regarding the number of recent deaths and the percentage of vaccinated / unvaccinated COVID patients for Commissioner Swope.

Salkum Fire Chief Duran McDaniel said EMS personnel are facing a "round robin" effort to find hospital beds for patients. He said fire and medical resources are taken out of commission for three to four hours as they wait for open beds and that emergency responders have had to have patients airlifted to other hospitals – at a cost of \$60,000 or more per flight – because nearby hospitals did not have capacity.

American Medical Response (AMR) Operations Manager Tony Kuzma said AMR emergency personnel are waiting hours to get patients turned over to the hospitals. He said he has been shocked to see how frequently the hospitals are housing patients in hallways for days. Tony said the system is overwhelmed. He asked what emergency personnel are to do if there is nowhere to take the patients. Tony said the area needs more hospital capacity.

Commissioner Pollock asked if the county would take on additional liability if it moved forward with the fair despite the health officers' recommendations.

Eric Eisenberg said it is likely that if the county is put on notice regarding risks to the public and county employees but does not act, that makes it more likely a lawsuit could follow and that the county would take on additional liability.

Jonathan Meyer and Eric noted that the county gets sued all the time. Jonathan said the fact the fairgoers know the risks and still choose to go provides some insulation for the county. However, he said, the county could be at risk if employees were to sue.

Eric said some of the fair contracts do not include a force majeure clause, meaning the county would still have to honor the required payments. He said it's likely the county could be sued for breach of contract should it cancel the fair.

Eric recommended the commissioners make liability-reducing recommendations, such as:

- Suggest the public wear a mask inside and outside.
- Stay with family members, do not mix with others.
- Post signs that warn the public about the danger.

Commissioner Pollock said it appears the BOCC and BOH have three options:

- Close the fair.
- Proceed with mitigation efforts.
- Proceed with no changes.

Commissioner Pollock said she doesn't think the group should cancel the fair. Commissioner Swope and Commissioner Stamper agreed.

Commissioner Pollock said the respectful thing to do would be to discuss recommendations regarding the fairgrounds.

Commissioner Swope suggested the recommendations include:

- Encouraging guests to wear masks.
- Encouraging guests to social distance.
- Posting signs warning of potential COVID-19 dangers.

Dr. Krager suggested the following:

- Encourage mask use.
- Have individuals remind fairgoers to wear masks indoors.
- Move indoors events outdoors when possible.
- Increase ventilation indoors.
- Limit indoors capacity to 50 people (or just limit capacity as much as possible).

Commissioner Swope made a motion to proceed with the fair with the following recommendations:

- Encourage mask use.
- Remind fairgoers to wear masks indoors (but staff members are not to act as "enforcers").
- Move indoors events outdoors when possible.
- Increase ventilation indoors.
- Limit indoors capacity as much as possible.
- Encourage fairgoers to maintain social distancing.

Commissioner Stamper seconded.

Motion passed 3-0.

Meeting adjourned at 5:26 p.m.