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BOARD OF PEMBINA COUNTY COMMISSIONERS PROCEEDINGS

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SPECIAL MEETING

March 20, 2020

3:30 PM

Board of Pembina County Commissioners met in special session at 3:30 PM in the Commissioners Meeting Room of the Courthouse with the following members present: Laverne Doyle, Nick Rutherford, and Hugh Ralston. Also in attendance are Rebecca Flanders, Andrew Kirking, Mikka Willits, Rachel Ramsay, Kay Braget, Revel Sapa, Samantha Weeks, Devin Johnson, Jill Denault, Madeline Smith, and Dan Garvens. Available by telephone are Hetty Walker, Jim Benjaminson and Julie Hardy.

Chairman Ralston called the meeting to order and turned the meeting over to Pembina County State's Attorney Rebecca Flanders.

Ms. Flanders reviewed Executive Order 2020-06 signed by Governor Doug Burgum on March 19, 2020. Rebecca discussed Governor Burgum's order that all state agencies and offices accelerate the transition of non-essential staff members to remote, in-home worksites, with the requirement to continue until Monday, April 6, 2020. Ms. Flanders and Jill Denault, Human Service Zone Director, discussed the difference between essential and non-essential employees. Essential employees would include the Sheriff's Department, State's Attorney Office, Social Workers, and Court related employees. The changes made by the United States District Court and State Court were discussed as was the Families First Coronavirus Response Act, which will affect FMLA.

Ms. Flanders stated the Judges are rescheduling some court appearances, but not all, which the public has the right to attend. Kay Braget, Clerk/Recorder, discussed the State Court changes that occurred this afternoon. State Court is planning on setting up a Go To Meetings site to schedule court services, allowing individuals to call in versus attending in person. Julie Hardy, Public Health Director, explained her thoughts on the CDC recommendation to allow only ten individuals at a meeting. All the Clerk's offices are required to request individuals entering the courtroom to honor the social distancing recommendations, which is the protocol set by State Court.

Rebecca expressed her thoughts on policies she feels should be put in place to protect all employees, most especially those that are immuno compromised or have underlying health conditions, placing them in the high risk categories.

These are the individuals that should be working remotely. Rebecca reviewed information related to what other counties are doing to promote a safer work environment. Ms. Flanders is suggesting that the county put their employees first and adopt policies that will cover these situations.

Rebecca discussed county needs for employees to work remotely. Not all positions have the capabilities to work from home and not all departments are set up to allow the employees to work remotely. Ms. Flanders contacted Best Buy regarding the purchase of laptops to allow county employees to work remotely. Pembina County could set up a corporate account on a PO system with Best Buy to purchase laptops, however each laptop would need to be set up with the different programs needed for each department. Commissioner Doyle stated that since this was not included in departmental budgets a cost would need to be presented prior to making any decisions. Commissioner Rutherford suggested the county wait at least 14 days to address the situation. Julie Hardy, Public Health Director, asked if the purchase of laptops would qualify as an eligible FEMA expense. Andrew Kirking, Emergency Manager, informed the Commission that the state has already asked this question of FEMA and are waiting for a response. Jill Denault informed the Commission that several of the Human Service Zone employees are already working remotely, but she has some employees that choose to remain in the office. Jill feels the employees should be allowed to decide if they would work remotely or remain in the office.

Andrew asked if the Commission would allow employees additional paid time off if they do not have sufficient accrued leave. Commissioner Rutherford stated that the county needs to take care of the employees first. If employees have taken voluntary leave they would need to utilize their accrued leave for the 14 day self-isolation period, but if they have been exposed to the virus and need to self-isolate they would be allowed additional leave if they use all of their accrued leave.

Discussion followed on the several processes that need to occur to allow employees to work remotely, such as purchasing laptops, transferring phone lines, setting up VPN accounts for all individuals working remotely or allowing employees to take their desktops home if they do not have a laptop available. Samantha Weeks, IT/911/GIS Coordinator, explained the process for each individual to be assigned a VPN and the time it would take to set up laptops for individual departments.

Rachel Ramsey, Public Health, presented a COVID-19 statement from the Pembina County Board of Health Officer which will become effective immediately. Rachel reviewed the statement with the Commission. The statement was signed by Kristi Midgarden, Pembina County Board of Health Medical Officer, on March 20, 2020. This is intended for all Pembina County residents to encourage them to follow these guidelines to help slow the progression of COVID-19.

Motion made by Laverne Doyle and seconded by Nick Rutherford to allow the department heads to decide if their staff can work remotely, to move to a four day work week, with the 5th day being treated in the same manner as an emergency storm day, and to waive the use of accrued leave for 30 days for at risk employees, as defined by the North Dakota Department of Health, or symptomatic employees, effective March 23, 2020. Roll call vote: Laverne Doyle – yes; Nick Rutherford – yes; Hugh Ralston – yes. Motion carried.

Motion made by Laverne Doyle and seconded by Nick Rutherford to adjourn the meeting. All voting in favor; motion carried. Meeting adjourned at 4:57 PM.