

Minutes of the Board of Ward County Commissioners

March 17, 2020

The special meeting of the Ward County Commission to discuss building access and County policies during the COVID-19 pandemic was called to order by Chairman Fjeldahl, at 8:30 AM with Commissioners, Walter, Pietsch and Weppler (via phone) present. Also present were department heads: Dana Larsen, Devra Smestad, Jason Blowers, Jennifer Wiechmann, Kerriane Boetcher, Leona Lochthowe, Melissa Bliss, Roza Larson, Ryan Kamrowski, Robert Roed and Tammy Terras.

Human Resource Director, Tammy Terras appeared with recommendations for the Commission regarding building access and employee sick, vacation and comprehensive time. Ms. Terras' first recommendation was to close all County buildings to public access only allowing access by appointment. She encouraged employees to utilize other forms of communication to avoid contact whenever possible. Ms. Terras' informed the Commissioners President Trump signed the Families First Coronavirus Response Act into law on March 18, 2020. The Act requires employers to provide paid leave for employees related to the COVID-19 pandemic. She recommended the Commissioners adopt Ward County Personnel Policies-Coronavirus effective 3-20-2020 regarding employee absences.

Jennifer Wiechmann Emergency Management Director also recommended that all County buildings be closed to the public. Ward County Emergency Management along with other entities including, but not limited to, The City of Minot, First District Health Unit and Trinity Health opened a joint information center.

Jason Blowers Director of IT informed the Commissioners he has ordered cases and batteries for the twenty notebooks the County already has and has placed an order for fifteen new notebooks. The IT Department has spent this week preparing for employees to work from home and for the possibility of having meetings live streamed or utilizing a Conference Bridge which would allow for meeting to occur without face to face interactions.

Facility Management Director, Leona Lochthowe requested that deliveries be made at the east garage by the jail only. She also is encouraging all employees to help clean and sanitize their offices. Also, if patrons do have a scheduled appointment that the west door of the Administration building be the only access point.

Judge Gary Lee informed the Commission that the Supreme Court has ordered to maintain services as usual, except no jury trials until April 24, 2020. He continued that the Courts have been encouraging the use of email communication whenever possible. There are hearing that are required to be held as in mental health cases and any offenses that are held at no bond, these cases are required to be open to the public. Judge Lee continued that his offices has been working with the State's Attorney and the Sheriffs' Department to minimize the amount of hearings needed at this time.

Sheriff Roed added the Sheriff's Department is operating as normal, trying to limit contact when possible. He continued that anyone entering the jail are screened for symptoms.

Human Service Zone Director, Melissa Bliss stated that her department has suspended all face to face visits. She continued that if the buildings are locked to the public there needs to be a location where paper applications for economic services can be picked up.

Moved by Comm. Weppler, seconded by Comm. Pietsch to approve closing County buildings, except the Courthouse and County Jail, to the public and operate on an appointment only bases beginning on March 23, 2020 until further notice. Roll call; all voted yes; motion carried.

Moved by Comm. Walter, seconded by Comm. Pietsch to approve all deliveries be accepted at the east side garage door by the jail until further notice. Roll call; all voted yes; motion carried.

Moved by Comm. Wepler, seconded by Comm. Walter to adopt the Families First Coronavirus Response Act and the following County policies

Ward County Personnel Policies -Coronavirus (COVID-19) - EFFECTIVE 03-20-2020

The Ward County Board of Commissioners has adopted the following policies effective immediately and until further notice. The policies are adopted to protect the health of our workforce.

COVID-19 Employee Absences

Employees that are isolated or quarantined because of the COVID-19 will be paid their regular working hours' wages during the time that they are not at work. Absences will not be charged against the employee's accrued Annual or Sick Leave balances. Using guidelines established by First District Health Unit and/or the North Dakota Department of Health (NDDoH), the county in consultation with medical providers will confirm, approve, and document the need for an employee to be isolated or quarantined.

COVID-19 Employee Absence Assessment

If an employee learns they have been potentially exposed to the COVID-19 virus, please:

- Contact your supervisor to complete a COVID-19 Management Assessment form; and,
- Upon approval from the Ward County HR Office, you will be provided guidance on how to proceed and report your absence, depending on your individual situation.

Hygiene Recommendations

If you are feeling sick, refrain from coming to work even if you are not demonstrating COVID-19 symptoms, influenza and other viruses could be harmful to our workforce.

Regularly and thoroughly clean your hands with an alcohol-based hand rub or wash them with soap and water for at least 20 seconds.

Avoid touching your eyes, nose, and mouth.

Avoid close contact with people who are sick, maintain social distancing which is defined as maintaining a distance of at least 3 feet distance between yourself and anyone who is coughing or sneezing.

Make sure you, and the people around you, follow good respiratory hygiene. This means covering your mouth and nose with your bent elbow or tissue when you cough or sneeze. Then dispose of the used tissue immediately.

Clean and disinfect frequently touched objects and surfaces.

Work Related Travel

Employees will not travel out of state for work related events.

Employees must follow CDC recommended travel guidelines. Annual Leave will not be approved if your intention is to travel to restricted areas. The following links will provide you the CDC travel guidelines and the current US case counts and map. Check back frequently – it changes OFTEN!!

Travel information: <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/travelers/index.html>

US case counts and map: <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/cases-in-us.html>

According to *Policy - Annual Leave* found in the *Ward County Employee Personnel Manual*, all Annual Leave must be approved by the employee's supervisor before the employee is authorized to take the leave. A leave request can be denied if the absence would unduly disrupt the operations or services of the workplace or other business-related purpose. This is especially important right now because of the county's need to assure that adequate staffing is available to respond to a COVID-19 crisis.

As we continue to monitor developments, our priority is first and foremost the safety of our

Ward County citizens, employees, and their families. If you have fever, cough and difficulty breathing, seek medical care early. Stay home if you feel unwell. If you have a fever, cough and difficulty breathing, seek medical attention and call in advance. Follow the directions of your local health authority. For updated information on the Coronavirus in North Dakota: <https://www.health.nd.gov/diseases-conditions/coronavirus>.

Roll call; all voted yes; motion carried.

Moved by Comm. Wepler, seconded by Comm. Walter to approve suspending the employee compensation time policy until further notice, as recommended by HR Director. Roll call; all voted yes; motion carried.

At 9:31 AM with no further business, the meeting was adjourned.

ACCEPTED AND APPROVED THIS 7th DAY OF APRIL, 2020

Chairman, Ward County Commission

ATTEST:
