

March 27, 2020
Cottonwood County Board of Commissioners
Special Meeting
Minutes

The Cottonwood County Board of Commissioners met in special session on Friday, March 27, 2020 at 9:00 a.m. at the Cottonwood County Courthouse in Windom, MN. Present in person or via teleconference for all or portions of the meeting were: Commissioners Kevin Stevens, Tom Appel, Donna Gravley, Norm Holmen, Larry Anderson; County Attorney Nick Anderson, County Coordinator Kelly Thongvong, Auditor/Treasurer Donna Torkelson, Gale Bondhus, Kathy Kretsch, Paul Johnson, Joel Alvstad, Mark Schenk, Jason Purrington, Kelsey Andrews, Craig Myers, Todd Dibble, Kristi Sell, Jason Rupp, Nick Klisch, Teresa Determan-Schwartz.

Chairman Stevens called the meeting to order. The Pledge of Allegiance was recited. Motion by Holmen, second by Anderson, unanimous roll call vote to approve the agenda as amended. Motion by Holmen, second by Stevens, unanimous roll call vote to approve the minutes of the March 17, 2020 meeting.

* * * *

It was noted that Commissioner Appel would like Policy 198 "Utilization of Paid Leave During a Public Health Emergency" to be attached to the minutes from the March 17th board meeting.

* * * *

Motion by Gravley, second by Appel, unanimous roll call vote to extend and continue the Cottonwood County Office Closure through April 10, 2020. This is as a result of the Governor's Stay at Home Directive, which will begin on Friday, March 27th at 11:59 p.m. through Friday, April 10, 2020 at 5:00 p.m.

* * * *

Much discussion was held regarding the COVID-19 pandemic. One of the main topics was Continuity of Operations Planning as well as how employees are to account for their time off relating to the COVID-19 pandemic. The County Board adopted Policy 198 "Utilization of Paid Leave During a Public Health Emergency" at the last board meeting, which allows for an advancement of up to 80 hours of sick leave as needed.

Motion by Holmen, second by Anderson, unanimous roll call vote to approve the Families First Coronavirus Response Act, which will go into effect on April 1, 2020 and will extend through December 31, 2020. This is another option available to employees, which allows for up to 80 hours of paid sick leave and expanded family and medical leave for specified reasons related to COVID-19. These hours will not be taken from an employee's own personal sick bank.

Further discussion was held as far as what is expected of each department. All employees that are planning to work from home must have a signed Telecommuting Agreement returned to the County Coordinator. Motion by Appel, second by Anderson, unanimous roll call vote to have all Department Heads submit a Continuity of Operations Plan to the County Coordinator by the end of the day on March 31st, which should include a schedule of employee hours. All departments are also to let the County Coordinator know of any absences from work due to illness.

Motion by Appel, second by Anderson, unanimous roll call vote to set special board meetings for Wednesday, April 1st at 9:00 a.m., Friday, April 3rd at 9:00 a.m. and Friday, April 10th at 9:00 a.m. All of these special meetings will be held to deal with COVID-19 issues only. The next regular county board meeting will be held on Tuesday, April 7th at 9:00 a.m. All of these meetings will be Webex meetings and instructions will be sent out prior to the meeting.

Kelsey Andrews, DVHHS Public Health Director, provided an update on behalf of Cottonwood and Jackson counties.

Motion by Appel, second by Gravley, unanimous roll call vote to inform Department Heads that employees are not required to obtain a doctor's note to use sick leave during the COVID-19 pandemic. Healthcare providers are overwhelmed enough at this point.

* * * *

Brief discussion was held regarding an outside drop box for the Courthouse. The board agreed that the installation of a drop box would be beneficial especially since tax season is coming up. Mark Schenk, Building Operations Manager, will work with the Auditor/Treasurer to get a drop box installed.

* * * *

Brief discussion was held regarding the Blandin Seed Capital Fund. The Windom EDA is going to be offering low-interest loans to businesses that may be in need as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic. There is a potential that the county might have some funding available in the upcoming months ahead.

* * * *

Discussion was held regarding one of the Jeffers Highway Shops that may be vacated as a result of putting on a new addition to the newest shop. The board was asked to begin thinking about their options as to what they would like to see done with the building.

* * * *

Commissioner Appel reported that he recently attended a Solid Waste Commission Meeting and there are a number of landfills that are or will be closing to the public. Nick Klisch, Public Works Director, provided an update on what is being done at the landfill currently to limit exposure to the public. The board agreed to keep the landfill open to the public at this time with the exception of the Household Hazardous Waste collection site, which has been closed and to continue to monitor the situation.

* * * *

Commissioner Gravley commented that she would like the board to consider temporarily suspending extra hiring and spending during the COVID-19 pandemic. The board will continue to monitor this situation before determining if seasonal hires will be impacted as well.

* * * *

Discussion was held regarding whether or not the county parks will be impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic. The board suggested suspending all camping reservations for the time being and to notify the public. Further discussion will be had at the April 7th board meeting.

Discussion was held regarding whether or not the board would give consideration of utilizing Policy 350 – “Layoff/Workforce Reduction” as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic. There are some offices that may not have enough work for all employees since the county offices are currently closed to the public. Further discussion will be held at the next regular board meeting.

* * * *

County Assessor Gale Bondhus had some questions regarding upcoming Boards of Review and how they might be handled. Paul Johnson, Emergency Management Director, has an upcoming conference call and he will try to get some further questions answered and will communicate any further information to Bondhus.

* * * *

Emergency Management Director Paul Johnson wanted to relay to Department Heads that if any supplies are purchased that relate to the COVID-19 pandemic to let him know as these purchases need to be approved and coded by him for tracking purposes.

* * * *

There being no further business, the meeting was adjourned at 10:32 a.m.

Donna Torkelson, Auditor/Treasurer

Kevin Stevens, Board Chair

Kelly Thongvivong, County Coordinator