

**Committee for Health Department Service Integration**  
Minutes and Notes of Meeting  
September 27, 2007

Raeanne Presley called the meeting to order.

Attendance: Skaggs Hospital Ann Davy, TCHD Board member Beth Huddleston, Branson Mayor Raeanne Presley, Branson Health Department Director Linn Smith, Branson Health Department Assistant Director Linda Randolph, Taney County Health Department Director Jim Berry, City of Branson Alderman Robert McDowell, Springfield/Branson Restaurant Association member Jerry Shakette

A motion was made by Beth Huddleston and seconded by Ann Davy to approve minutes of September 6<sup>th</sup> meeting. The motion passed without discussion.

The resolution to endorse the concept of integrating the City of Branson Health Department with the Taney County Health Department was read and brought up for discussion.

The question of what the final planning steps were was brought up. Jim Berry responded that this resolution would allow the committee to further explore those steps and to take the steps necessary to get to the final planning steps.

Mr. Berry expressed his opinion that the committee would need to ascertain information as to what sort of agreements to be put in place and possible changes in Branson Ordinances would be necessary to combine the two Health Departments. He also stated that the committee would need to consider startup funding for the combined departments, including probable budgets and the length of time the new entity would need to be subsidized by the City of Branson.

Mr. Berry felt that best way the committee would be able to proceed would be to bring the Branson City Manager, Finance Director, Board of Aldermen, and the Taney County Health Department's Board of Trustees up to date on the progress of the Task Force and receive their input. Mr. Berry also felt that the public would need to be addressed, but not before the information was available to the governing entities involved.

Raeanne Presley suggested that Linn Smith and she would be able to address the City Council meeting that will be held on October 9, 2007. Linn would be able to give a short presentation to the Council about where the Task Force was, and Raeanne and Robert McDowell would be able to "chime in."

When asked what the City Council would need to do, Linn Smith answered that the Council would have to have a resolution to either approve or disapprove the resolution from the Task Force. Once it is accepted by both boards, it would allow the Task Force to be able to meet with other government departments to gather information. Linn used the example of meeting with the Human Resources departments of the City and the County to determine specific salaries, benefits, and other issues for the employees of new department.

Raeanne Presley felt that the Task Force also needed to be looking at the full picture, as well as the minute details. Jim Berry agreed, stating that the Task Force would also be looking at developing a timeline for all aspects of the integration, stating the requirements and goals expected to be achieved at the end of each year until the process was completed.

Raeanne Presley stated that while it might be a meeting in which no one would come, but a meeting with the business leaders and the public might need to be briefed on what the Task Force is, what it's goal is and how they plan on achieving that goal before the general public felt that the government had already determined that this was what they were going to do and they would just have to accept it.

Jerry Shakette stated that he had specifically invited the president of the Springfield Branson Restaurant Association and the president of the Springfield Branson Chef's Association to the meeting, and informed them of what the Task Force's goals were. Jerry stated that they (the presidents of the associations) said "Have a good meeting."

Beth Huddleston felt that this reaction was due to the public respect for Linn Smith and Jim Berry and satisfaction in the job they have performed in the past. Ann Davy felt that the Task Force had evidence in the form of the minutes to prove that it had looked at public reaction in the past.

Robert McDowell asked if there might be the opportunity for a better audience should a community update be created and announced. Raeanne Presley expressed doubts that the general public would be very interested in such a meeting, but if it were to be sent out through the Chamber of Commerce to the businesses, it might prove useful. She felt that most of the public might not feel comfortable enough to speak at a general meeting that included "bigwigs." Linn Smith brought up the point that the general public would have different questions and concerns than the business community, the employees, or the government entities the two departments are currently dealing with.

Raeanne Presley brought the employee concerns to the table.

Beth Huddleston asked about the possibility of joint meetings with the employees of both Health Departments, as both departments have the interests of the City of Branson and Taney County at heart.

Linn said that there were going to be "bumps" in the integration, but that was not really a problem within the scope of this task force. This particular task force might be able to set up a special task force or advisory committee to try to smooth out the transition after it was already started to be handling it for two years or however long it might be, but that was something else that they would have to look at.

Raeanne Presley asked if there would be any benefit with some members of the task force (other than the administrators of the respective departments) sitting down with the employees to ask their opinions, questions, concerns and general venting.

Linda Randolph thought this suggestion had merit.

Linn Smith also felt that this might be a good idea, although for the first meetings, there would be many more questions and far fewer answers, but these questions could be brought back to the task force to be addressed and the information and knowledge gained could be incorporated into the integration process, as well as taken back in subsequent meetings with the employees.

Jim Berry general perception the fact that the employees of the Taney County Health Department were not nearly as concerned about the integration as the employees of the Branson Health Department, as the impression was that the TCHD would be there no matter what, with the personnel from the City just working in with them. He felt that the employees of the City of Branson would benefit from knowing just what was going to happen by the Task Force coming to a decision as quickly as possible.

Bob McDowell asked Raeanne what exactly the Task Force member would be able to communicate to the employees, as at this point, the Task Force did not really have a lot of information to share with the employees nor would the task force have the answers to the questions that were likely to be asked at this time.

Raeanne responded that she was not necessarily worried about communicating *to* the employees, but was more interested in what the employees were to going to be saying to the members of the task force at this point. The questions that the employees brought up to the task force could be addressed, researched and answered and that answer relayed back to the employees at a later date.

Jim Berry stated that he felt it was important to him that this be a single organization, with one leadership position, not an organization that had two heads; as such an organization would be unable to function correctly. He would not have a problem with the City having a staff member reporting back to the City during a transition period to ensure that the needs of the City were being addressed, but he would not accept the responsibility of going in with the idea that there would be dual management. Linn Smith agreed that that possibility would not be an option for her, either.

Jim continued by stating that He and Linn had had private conversations in the past concerning how to ensure the new organization reflected the professional image of the current City of Branson Health Department, as that was possibly a concern. His impression was that the employees were waiting for the Task Force to make a definite commitment to what their futures were going to be. He finished by stating that he thought someone needed to meet with the employees to hear their questions and concerns.

Raeanne mentioned that she thought the employees would have a lot of valid input that would help the task force in its process, and that the Task Force owed a meeting to the employees. She felt that the merger was definitely the way to proceed, but that was not to say that if something drastic came to light, she would be unwilling to back away from it at that point.

Jim Berry stated that he also felt that other department managers who regularly interacted with the Health Department would have valuable input and concerns as well. He felt that a lot of the responsibility to keep the new organization responding to the needs of these other departments would fall to Linda Randolph and others like her, as they have worked with these other departments on a daily basis.

Robert McDowell stated that much of the employees concerns would be “What does this mean to me, individually?” As we are merging these organizations, when we use terms like “increasing efficiency,” generally that phrase is used to mean, “eliminating jobs,” and he doesn’t see that as being the case in this instance. The new organization’s workload will be heavy, and growing, so the message taken to the employees needs to be that we are looking to create efficiencies for the new organization to take on the new demands that will be placed on it, not to reduce staffing. Just that statement alone will go a long way to deal with the concerns of some of the people.

Ann Davy spoke of the merger between Skaggs Hospital and the Branson Heart Center, and speaking with some of the staff of the Heart Center would be valuable, as they would be able to say what had worked for them and what didn't work as well.

Jim stated the he was very sensitive to the employees feeling that they had a sense of pride in their organization, and where they worked. The City of Branson had put together a state and even nationally recognized Environmental Health service.

Beth stated that she felt a need to brag about the quality of the Taney County Health Department as well. The TCHD is a leader in the state, and the governor had appointed Jim to the State Board of Health.

Robert McDowell said that Jim made a really good point, organizationally; it inherently sets up an adversarial relationship between the two separate health departments. I think that we need to recognize that this is a possible challenge.

Beth Huddleston replied that the two organizations don't repeat services. They are premier in their services, and we are the best in ours. At this point in time we haven't duplicated the jobs.

Jim Berry responded with "Sometimes you inadvertently pit one office location against the other, and that can create a problem."

Ann Davy stated that the employees have got to see the value of the merger of two organizations. They have to start to rely on to each other to make their own jobs successful.

Jim Berry joined in with that while they don't have the occasion to do that every day, but there have been isolated incidents in the past that and then commented positively on it.

Raeanne Presley asked if the Task Force was ready to bring the resolution to the table at this point to vote on it.

Beth Huddleston clarified that if they voted on it now, the resolution would then be presented to the Branson City Council at their meeting on the Ninth of October, which Raeanne confirmed. Beth stated that the Board of Trustees for the Taney County Health Department would not meet until later in the month, unless called in for a special session, but did not feel that would be a problem, as the resolution was not worded to be time critical.

Ann felt the resolution was fine, but a "little wordy."

Jim Berry mentioned that the passage of this resolution was not an issue as to whether the meetings of the employees would happen or not, as the employees were talking about the subject amongst themselves, anyway.

Raeanne Presley agreed and called for a motion to approve the resolution as is. Robert McDowell made the motion, Jerry Shakette seconded the motion, and the motion was approved unanimously.

Kathryn Buckstaff had created a list of frequently asked questions, copies of which were handed out for review, comments and suggested alterations. The discussions and alterations are as follows:

Raeanne Presley and Beth Huddleston discussed the concept of an advisory committee to advise the Taney County Health Board of Trustees about problems and concerns specific to the City of Branson, but the Board of Trustees would have the final say.

Robert McDowell stated that there should be some process in place from the beginning for resolving grievances so that at some point future there would be a procedure if something happens.

The inclusion of the dollar amount of savings was felt by the task force members as unnecessary and perhaps even ill-advised, as the savings might be better utilized in funding of other services or use in an emergency.

Robert McDowell stated it as “It is our hope that we could take the combination of these budgets and expand services due to some of the efficiencies that we gain.”

Robert McDowell stated that the thing that made him the most nervous about projecting budget numbers for the Health Department is that at any time there could be an epidemic or some kind of situation that is completely unexpected that blows the budget out of the water, but must be dealt with anyway.

Beth Huddleston and Linn Smith explained what precautions were in place, in that the entire budget was not spent all at once, but saved to be able be reallocated later in the year if necessary to cover for such unexpected expenses. Prevention is also a key to stopping outbreaks. “With the help of the business community, we stopped an outbreak of Norovirus in May. We have the data to back that up, and our educating the businesses prior to that was key.”

The question of violations and fines were brought up, and the differences between city and county. Linn Smith stated that at this time, the Health inspectors were able to give citations if necessary, and bring the person up to municipal court to pay the fines. In the county, that is the domain of the prosecuting attorney, and the ability to give citations would need to be worked out with the Prosecuting Attorney’s office.

Linn stated that the best enforcement tool that she has is her inspections. “If she finds a critical violation, she can look at the owner of the business and say ‘Fix it. I’m not leaving until you fix it.’ If I leave, knowing that there is a major violation, I become liable for it as well as the owner of the establishment.”

Linda Randolph said that being brought up in front of the judge and everyone else at court to have to explain exactly why their establishment has cockroaches could be a very effective enforcement tool as well.

The subject of the wording of enforcement was to be changed to an even application of the food code across the county.

Key statements for the stakeholders were next discussed, as the different groups of people would have different questions and concerns.

The key statement for the employees would be to give straightforward answers to their concerns.

For the business owners, a reassurance that the new department would stand up for the local business owners just as the City of Branson Health Department currently does.

For the medical community, making certain that the hospital and clinics would know whom to contact in an emergency.

For the general public, continued working with the press to keep them informed and to educate the public for the need. For the governmental entities, Linn Smith and Jim Berry would come to speak as necessary to the board members involved and give them a short report and answer questions.

Planning of a timeline was next discussed. Linn Smith said that she would start the process. After the timeline is fleshed out, the various members of the task force would be able to determine who would best be the person to handle various tasks. Linn and Jim would commit to the non-negotiable items, the task force would flesh it out, and other people could be called in as necessary for information or services.

The next meeting of the task force was set for 3:00PM on Thursday, October 25, 2007 at the Bee Creek office of Taney County Health Department.