

IN A SPECIAL JOINT MEETING WITH THE WHITE PINE COUNTY COMMISSION AND THE BOARD OF PUBLIC HEALTH HELD ON SEPTEMBER 15, 2021 IN THE COUNTY LIBRARY CONFERENCE ROOM IN ELY, NEVADA

The Following Were Present:

**County Commission
Richard Howe, Chairman
Travis Godon, Vice-Chairman
Ian Bullis, Commissioner
Shane Bybee, Commissioner
Laurie L. Carson, Commissioner
Melissa Tremain, Deputy Clerk**

County Officials:

**Dr. Daren Kunz, Public Health Officer
Mike Johnson, IT Specialist
Ross Smillie, Deputy District Attorney
Stephen Bishop, Justice of the Peace**

Also Present:

**George Chachas, Georgetown Media
Nathan Robertson, Ely City Mayor
Adam Young, Superintendent of WPCSD
Amy Adams, WPCSB Trustee
Krystal Blades, WPCSD Trustee
Shella Nicholes, WPCSD Trustee
Paul Johnson, WPCSD CFO
Terri Borghoff, WPCSD Trustee
Alan Hedges, Principal of WPHS
Kaylee Cracraft, WPHS Student
Dillon Rice, WPHS Student
Autumn Cavendar, WPHS Student
Madison Sorenson, WPHS Student
KayLynn McMurray, Ely Times**

Present via Zoom:

Geri Wopschall, Bethany Wheable (Finance Office), Naomi Harris (Social Services), Dee, Mary Kerner (NRHA), K. Ross, Shannin Pierce (Public Health), Lori Romero (Library), Veronica Nelson (Great Basin College), Elanie Eldridge (Finance Office), Tabatha Hamilton (Finance Office), Brett Carter, Kristi Lynch-Rozich (Aquatic Center), Art Olson, Michelle Beecher, Lynette Gust (Juvenile Probation), Marietta Henry (WP Tourism and Recreation Board), and others.

Commission Chairman Richard Howe called the meeting to order at 9:00 am. Commissioner Ian Bullis led the Pledge of Allegiance.

MOMENT OF SILENCE/SILENT INVOCATION

This was duly observed.

Public Health Officer, Dr. Daren Kunz, took over the Special Joint Meeting at 9:05 am and asked for public comment.

PUBLIC COMMENT

Adam Young, Superintendent of the White Pine County School District, addressed the Board and acknowledged the differing variables this Board needs to consider when making decisions about public health in our County. He urged the County Commission to reconsider the plan they drafted last spring and explained how distance learning is what they are looking at unless the spread can be slowed. They are working with a layered enforcement strategy to keep schools open and are proud of their efforts. He asked for encouragement and support from the Commission. He asked the Board to take any measures to mitigate the spread to keep the community safe and healthy.

Kaylee Cracraft, a student from White Pine High School, asked for the help and support from the Board to keep the schools open. They are struggling with kids being gone each day from being sick. Some sports and classrooms have been shut down. Kids lose motivation when things are shut down and she talked about the struggles felt by everyone. She asked the Board to revise the mask mandate and to think about the school kids.

Matt Walker, CEO of William Bee Ririe Hospital, addressed the Board. He is seeing a rise in COVID and the hospital has spent millions in PPE and medicines to combat the virus. All of these efforts have had a minimal impact locally. He works with hospitals in the region to discuss strategies and tactics that work as well as working cooperatively to share equipment and supplies. Their COVID ward was set up for 4 patients and they have seen anywhere from zero to 2 patients there. In the last week they have been over capacity with 6 patients over the weekend. He is also seeing patients with a need for a higher level of care, but they cannot get it because COVID patients are filling up the hospital beds. People are being sent home or are waiting for days for a bed in a hospital in a neighboring state. William Bee Ririe Hospital may run out of COVID tests today. He asked for the Board to consider any strategies to curb the spread. He knows masks can decrease the spread and asked that they recommend people wear masks and get vaccines. He displayed a graph to show how vaccines can help reduce hospitalizations and deaths.

Shannin Pierce, Public Health Nurse, addressed the Board via Zoom stating she and her staff are exhausted from administering COVID tests and vaccines. They are unable to perform other aspects of their jobs because they are too busy doing COVID related duties.

***1) Discussion/For Possible Action: Approval to consider amending the Local Mitigation and Enforcement Plan in light of COVID bed capacity at William Bee Ririe Hospital. Public Health Officer, Dr. Daren Kunz**

Commission Chairman Richard Howe felt this Board has a responsibility to educate everyone they can in regards to COVID and the vaccines. Dr. Kunz opened item 2. This item was left as discussion only.

***2) Discussion/For Possible Action: Approval to implement steps and strategies to curb the spread, keep the public educated, and for any other process to protect and inform White Pine County, as discussed. Public Health Officer, Dr. Daren Kunz**

Chairman Howe desired to educate department heads about the benefits of vaccines and he added a suggestion for a 30-45 day mask mandate. Dr. Kunz suggested requiring masks for County employees all of the time. He noted that small businesses in town have recently shut down due to COVID outbreaks. He suggested sending a letter of support for the School District.

Vice Chairman Travis Godon heard that is 2 kinds of medicine are given to COVID patients within the first couple days of the onset that will allow you to get the largest benefit to reduce hospitalization; one being Regeneron and the other being Hydrochloroquine. He suggested pushing those to make them available for patients. He will not vote for any mandates as he supports a person's right to choose. Dr. Kunz is offering an IV infusion of Regeneron to anyone who asks for it if they test positive.

Commissioner Laurie L. Carson suggested having the County departments replace the plexi glass partitions at their front counters. She talked about how she wipes down things that are often touched in her home and in her car and noted the care she takes when going out in public. She is more inclined to vote for a 30 day mask mandate. Dr. Kunz advised the grocery stores are not sanitizing carts any more.

Commissioner Shane Bybee advised that his business is under the Gaming Control Board causing them to have to wear masks since the Governor reinstated the mandate recently. He's hoping that Dr. Kunz comes up with a solution to protect the community without bringing out the pitchforks. His staff has been getting COVID which makes running his business very difficult, plus people have not been coming to work due to government incentives to not work since 2020. Dr. Kunz advised that local mines have voiced concerns about employee absenteeism and curbing the spread. This Board set a stance to where they will not take away a person's rights and liberties, but at what cost. It was discussed at what cost that could be given up and Commissioner Bullis insisted that at NO COST will this County give up the liberties of its people. Commissioner Ian Bullis explained there is no statistical difference between states with mask mandates and states without. If every person wore an N95 mask at all times and replaced it properly, we might see a drastic improvement in COVID infections, but nothing is stopping the spread. He reminded the Board that vaccines do nothing to slow the spread because people can still get sick and spread the virus. When comparing the current COVID numbers to last year's, no significant increases were seen. Commissioner Bullis felt improving and equipping the hospital is the way to go.

Chairman Howe described a time in the 1950's when kids were made to take a vaccine and no one said a word or fought against it. He felt a plan needs to be made to curb the spread. There is a 72% vaccination rate for employees at the hospital and if the President's mandate came down for mandated vaccinations, they would lose about 20% of staff which would be detrimental to health care locally and nationwide. Commissioner Bullis described a hypothetical situation in which the government shuts down our schools and people such as himself stood their ground to keep it open for our kids. Superintendent Adam Young responded that the School Board is united in keeping the schools open and they do not give in to every demand made of them. Mr. Young felt masks worked last year and the County-wide mask mandate is what helped the school to stay open then. He recommended the Commission to encourage local entities and people in their efforts to keep people safe by wearing masks and by asking them to stay home when they are sick. Vice Chairman Godon apologized for seeming harsh on some topics and pointed out his difference of opinion from others. Commissioner Bullis felt the mitigation plan was fine as it is.

Chairman Howe made a motion to approve item one and then withdrew it after a short discussion. Vice Chairman Godon moved that every active case of COVID be given the choices and opportunities to be given Regeneron, Hydrochloroquine, and/or Ivermectin as quickly as possible and that information be rolled out as soon as possible in regards to that. His motion was amended to these medicines becoming more available upon the approval of

a physician. It was clarified that public knowledge be increased to be made more aware of treatment options as long as the proper medical channels are gone through. Commissioner Carson moved to replace the partitions in County departments. Vice Chairman Godon absorbed Commissioner Carson's motion into his motion as an amendment added to the previous motion and added that people be encouraged to stay home if they are sick. Commissioner Bullis seconded the motion. Motion passed unanimously.

Commissioner Carson moved to encourage the follow-through with the mask mandate handed down by the school district. Commission Chair Howe felt we should use all advertising options to get it out that the County is aware of the critical stage we are in and we encourage people to take every step necessary to stay safe and keep others safe.

It was discussed that people be encouraged to explore options and make the best decision with the advice of their health care provider. Vice Chairman Godon made a motion to approve that and Commissioner Carson made the second. Motion passed unanimously.

Commissioner Howe moved to implement a 30 day mask mandate in all County buildings. Commissioner Carson made the second and the motion passed with a vote of 4 to 2 with Commissioners Godon and Bullis voting in the opposition.

Commissioner Bullis expressed his love and support for the members of the White Pine County School District and the Commission recognizes that they make choices they feel are best for our kids. Commission Vice Chairman Godon thanked Dr. Kunz and explained their disagreements do not mean he is not supported.

***3) Discussion/For Possible Action: Ratification of quarantine orders from the Public Health Officer. Public Health Officer, Dr. Daren Kunz**

Commissioner Bullis moved to approve and Commissioner Godon made the second. Motion passed.

***4) Discussion/For Possible Action: Approval of minutes from the Joint County Commission and Board of Public Health meeting held July 21, 2021**

Commissioner Godon moved for approval and Commissioner Carson made the second. Motion passed.

PUBLIC COMMENT

George Chachas addressed Dr. Kunz and noted that he read something in regards to the impact of COVID on women going through childbirth. He asserted that many problems in the community come from this Board and this battle could turn into a full-fledged war. He told the Board that their personal beliefs are fine, but when it comes to making decisions for a community of people, they need to broaden their minds. He noted what is going on around the nation in regards to being overrun with COVID patients. He noted the City Mayor wanting to spend thousands of dollars to encourage the community to get vaccinated that would be for nothing due to this Board telling the public they don't have to.

Finance Director Elizabeth Frances addressed comments made previously in the meeting in regards to funds from ARBA (sic) being used to build a Public Health building. She stated the funds are being used to mitigate the issues that she sees that challenge public health and public health delivery.

Burton Hilton addressed the Board via Zoom in regards to the mask mandate. It was clarified that all vaccinated and unvaccinated persons are to follow the mandate.

ADJOURNMENT

Vice Chairman Godon moved to adjourn the meeting and Commissioner Howe made the second. Meeting was adjourned at 10:26 am.

BOARD OF COUNTY COMMISSIONERS/BOARD OF PUBLIC HEALTH

**WHITE PINE COUNTY
STATE OF NEVADA**

BY:



CHAIRMAN

ATTEST:



WPC CLERK OF THE BOARD