

# BOARD OF HEALTH MINUTES

## TAMA COUNTY PUBLIC HEALTH & HOME CARE

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**Monday, March 17, 2025 – 12:00 P.M.**  
**Special Meeting with Tama County Board of Supervisors**  
**Meeting held at Tama County Annex Building and via Zoom**

<b>Members Present:</b>	Sally Custer	Micki Ferris	Sherry Parks, PA-C – via Zoom
	Lori Johnson	Jolynn Harger	Chris Behrens -via Zoom
	Shannon Zoffka – via Zoom	Curt Hilmer – BOS Liaison	Casey Schmidt
	Sherri Vesely, DNP – via Zoom	Heather Knebel - BOS	David Turner - BOS
	Mark Doland – BOS	Curt Kupka - BOS	Karen Rohrs – Tama County Auditor

**Also Present:** Members of the Public including: Hope Gibson, Miah Mapes, Beverly Putter, Kelly Purk, Melanie Blocker, Lee Anna Kriegel, Beth Eberle, Claire Shefchik, Kevin Wacha, Eric Wacha, Richard Arp, Linda Pearson, Linda Opperman, Karen Musgrave, Michael Davis, Laura Wilson, Martha Baker, Janet Wilson, Ruth Childers, Byron Witt, James Nehring -via Zoom, Al S – via Zoom, and Ann -via Zoom.

The meeting was called to order by Sherry Parks, Chairman at 12:01 p.m.

Sally Custer moved to accept the Agenda as presented. Micki Ferris seconded. Motion carried unanimously.

### **New Business:**

Introductions were made from the Tama County Board of Supervisors, Tama County Board of Health, and Tama County Public Health & Home Care staff that were present.

Curt Hilmer started the meeting by stating that he thinks that this whole situation has gotten out of hand on Facebook and things have gotten blown out of proportion. The BOS is not trying to shut the Tama County Public Health department down. The BOS is looking for ways to cut nearly two million dollars from the whole county budget. They are going line by line for the smaller departments, but with the bigger departments like Conservation, Roads, and Public Health it made more sense to give them a percentage to cut instead of going line by line.

Heather Knebel said that they wanted to meet in person to see what the Board of Health had to say.

Curt Hilmer said it was easier to meet in person and try to get on the same page, rather than all the back and forth between the two boards.

Lori Johnson, TCPH Assistant Director, said that we were told initially to cut 25% of our budget, then the percentages changed. Some of the line items we were able to cut: Melanie Blocker resigned and we won't be replacing her position, no step increase for employees, no cost of living increases for employees, not filling the open HCA/Office Assistant and open HCA positions. There were several other line items that were able to be decreased to meet the 25% cut asked of us. The amount we were asked to cut was \$372,881.50. The budget that Lori is presenting today has a cut of 22.5 % (\$336,067) with an all over cut to our budget in the amount of \$445,714, which includes FICA, IPERS, and health insurance.

Shannon Zoffka, our CEO/Executive Director, has resigned and her last day is in April, it will be up to the Board of Health to fill that position.

We are also looking at other avenues of revenue. This includes renting out our RV as a clinical space for Specialists that come into Tama County. We will have to do contracts, we don't know yet what kind of income this will bring in yet. We are working on obtaining grant funding to pay for a new Senasphone that our office needs for the vaccine refrigerator. We are also looking at providing vaccinations for employers throughout the County.

Curt Hilmer said that he has received a lot of questions about the RV. He has explained that it was bought with American Rescue Fund money and not taxpayer funds. He has also been getting a lot of calls from people concerned that the BOS is cutting home care. He is hoping the budget goal doesn't affect home care. The State is the one that is saying home care is not essential, not the Board of Supervisors. This is part of why the Supervisors gave a percentage cut rather than a dollar cut, so each Board could decide where to make the cuts.

Another question he also gets asked is how and why the County is in this position. There was a lot of overspending from the previous Board and he feels that too much trust was put in people that were in charge of the budgets. No major red flags were raised by anyone that should have been raising them. The State government is taking away funds and there are also unfunded mandates that the County has to cover. The Board of Supervisors has been spending many hours crunching numbers, and they are trying to do the best they can to fix the problem.

Lori Johnson shared that Tama County is one of nine counties that doesn't have a hospital. Of the nine, seven of these provide home health.

Shannon Zoffka said that you can't compare what we provide to other counties. We provide more services, therefore we have more staff. Staff wages regularly come up as an issue as well. The RN's have a Nursing Degree and have to have a license to do their job. They also have to do CEU's to maintain that license. Our other staff have degrees or certificates to do their positions. The RN's are doing hospital level of care at home. She feels that there are a lot of fingers pointed at our department and not a lot of questions asked by anyone.

Lee Anna Kriegel, TCPH RN, shared that the Baby Boomers are coming of age and all across the nation there is a shortage of healthcare workers to take care of this population. Tama County has a large population of people 55 to 75, but the largest population is from 60-70 years of age. There are a few mental health services available, there is one dentist in Tama County, and 4 medical clinics. We are the 9<sup>th</sup> largest county of the 99 and we have no urgent care clinics or hospitals. The big entities are not going to find it cost effective to provide services in Tama County. Tama County is basically a healthcare desert.

Candance, from Accura Healthcare, shared that hospitals don't want to send patients to nursing homes as it impacts their reimbursement. That is why patients are being sent home instead of to the nursing home.

Linda Pearson, Tama County Resident, shared that TCPH has been taking care of her brother and she has seen such a big difference in the quality of his life. She is thankful that this service exists to help people in Tama County.

Claire Shefchik, TCPH RN, shared that one of her patients has United Healthcare for insurance, is handicapped, and doesn't drive. He is given 10 rides per calendar year by his insurance company for his doctor appointments. Each way to the appointment counts as a ride, so he basically has 5 rides per year. Most of the specialists that he sees are in Iowa City, and the insurance says that is too far of a drive to qualify. His insurance company told him he should move from Tama County to be closer to his doctor's office. He has family in Tama County, if he were to move closer to his doctors, he would have no one.

Kelly Purk, TCPH RN, spoke about how she has worked in long-term care in Tama County for a decade and switched to home health, and has seen so many different situations here in Tama County. She said that sometimes the Home Care Aide going into help someone with a shower is the only person that patient might see that week. She sees the BOS looking at giving raises to other departments and taking bids for a building to be demolished and wonders if those things could not be done and to save the money for home health services. She also says they are working every day with the stress of wondering if they were going to have a job.

Curt Kupka said that the BOS has decreased a lot of items in budgets not just home care, they are going line by line.

Lee Anna Kriegel said that we offer services to everyone regardless of income.

Ruth Childers, Tama County Resident, said she has lived in and paid taxes to Tama County since 1967. She has not touched a county dollar. She has used TCPH services three times and hopes she doesn't need their care again, but she appreciates knowing that they are there if she needs them.

Beverly Putter, Tama County Resident, shared that she had Stage 4 Cancer and she was ready to give up. She said that the Tama County RN that came in helped her to smile and remain positive the 2 ½ years that she received services. She is now cancer free and is thankful for them pushing for her to get better. She thinks without their help a lot of people like her would end up in the nursing home.

Heather Knebel said that there was been a lot of phone calls and good conversations these last couple of weeks. It is great to hear the kind words about TCPH and that they have been doing a great job. The 18-20% budget reduction received was a good starting point.

Lori Johnson said that the budget that she passed out today had larger cuts than that on it.

Heather Knebel said that the State is overhauling the tax system which will mean larger cuts in the future. We need to think of how this will affect us in the future. Maybe this department could start a home care service on its own. It seems like it would be good to keep open communication between the boards throughout the year, maybe have quarterly meetings between the two boards.

Lori Johnson said that it would be good to contract state and federal legislators.

Shannon Zoffka said that open positions will not be filled, staff members have taken on extra work, and there has been no overtime allowed. Staff is told to flex their time when they work over 8 hours.

Curt Hilmer said that he didn't walk into this meeting needing convinced that home health was a needed service in Tama County because he already knew how important home care is. Veterans Affairs is also getting cut. But in black and white – if we don't figure out this budget people won't get paid. Nobody wants to cut services.

David Turner stated that he had no intention of home care going away. He comes from a very varied background and he understands how important it is to people to stay in their own homes. He thinks that we shouldn't cut people going into the home, we should cut office staff. That would be his idea. He also wanted to know what RN staff does if they go into a home where a person was sent home from the hospital and they never should have been sent home in the first place.

Kelly Purk replied that they have to talk to the doctors and send them back to the hospital. David Turner asked if we could push back if the patient should not have been discharged from the hospital. Sherry Parks replied that is not always the doctor, in most cases it is insurance company that dictates that. David Turner said that some push back needs to be there otherwise we lose local control. He frequently goes to the State Capital and wants us to let him know when these cases happen so he can talk to legislators about this.

Mark Doland said that they don't come here as enemies, as the last BOS came here. He provided a handout regarding the General Fund (Iowa Code 331.427). This discussed the local health services and how some appropriations might be able to come out of the Rural Services Fund. He has been speaking with the Department of Management about this. They were able to move some of the Sheriffs line items to come out of the Rural Services Fund. Mark said that he talked to Shannon and Lori to see if any of TPCCH services were provided to patients in the rural areas.

Lori said that 21% of home health patients were rural patients. All of Chris' Environmental Health budget is rural services. Mark said that they need to talk to the State Auditor more about this and have them answer questions.

Mark also provided a county comparison to other counties that provide home health services. He feels that this comparison shows that our agency is not bloated with staff compared to other agencies. He also said that it doesn't look good for Tama County not to have home care services as we don't have a hospital. He said that is not a requirement to have home care but we would be in the minority if we didn't provide it.

He said that is critical to understand why RN's make \$45/hr. He checked on Indeed and most were hiring for at least \$44/hr. He also talked to people that work in nursing and that \$45/hr is what RN's make. He also said the BOS was the one that gave them the large wage increases the past few years. They are trying to find a way to fund at the current level. They don't want to impose restrictions on services and this doesn't come lightly. He feels

what was cut in the budget is sufficient, but that the BOS needs to meet to see if this works. If every department was able to cut that would help.

Kelly Purk asked if we are the only department not taking raises. Heather Knebel replied that some departments are and some aren't taking raises.

Lori Johnson asked if the BOS could help squelch the rumors that our office is closing in one month. She also asked if the other departments could stop having such animosity for our department.

Heather Knebel thanked TCPH for being proactive and doing budget cuts before they even asked for them. The BOS has been spending hours reaching out to other counties to see what ideas they might have to help with the budget. She also said the Board intends to start working on budgets for the next FY in October instead of waiting until January.

Laura Wilson, Tama County Resident, had questions about the Rural Services Fund and how that affects the budget, if that amount fluctuates yearly, if TCPH has cost increases to those that are paying for services, if additional office staff could be hired to help the RN's to do some of their work so they aren't doing stuff that an office staff person could do at a lower pay rate.

Mark Doland said that they are waiting to talk to the outside Auditor to receive guidance if things can be shifted to the Rural Services Fund.

Lori Johnson said that TCPH evaluates our service rates yearly and there was just a rate increase at the beginning of March.

Micki Ferris asked if funds can be transferred from the Rural Services Fund to the General Fund. David Turner said that no, the money cannot be transferred, but stuff can be paid out of that fund.

Mark Doland said that he has been asking questions to the Department of Management regarding transfer amounts and how the local option sales tax can be used to pay for the roads transfer.

David Turner said that in the past these funds had not been moved around correctly. Not illegally, just not correctly.

Sherry Parks left the meeting at 1:23 p.m. Micki Ferris, Vice-Chair took over Chairperson duties.

Eric Wacha, Tama County Resident, spoke of how he has received TCPH services for several years now. If it wasn't for this department he wouldn't have been able to stay in his home. He has been maintaining his good health and his brothers who don't live in the area, don't have to worry about him anymore.

Kevin Wacha, brother of Eric, spoke about how he lives in New York and he didn't have to worry about his brother all the time because he knows how great TCPH services are. They also took care of this Dad and he was able to stay in his home until he went to hospice, because of the services that he received. Having worked as a Firefighter for many years he understands budget cuts and he is thankful for the work the BOS is doing, but he doesn't think the most vulnerable citizens in the county should have to shoulder the burden of the financial situation the county is in.

Richard Arp, Tama County Citizen, said that he was asked to come to the meeting by Lori Johnson. He has known Lori for over 20 years, and you can trust that her numbers are right. He also said that this meeting was such a huge difference from the last BOH/BOS meeting he attended, with the previous BOS and their lawyer. That was a terrible meeting and this is encouraging with both boards working together. He understands that the new BOS is between a rock and a hard place and feels that they are doing a great job.

Bryon Witt, Tama County Citizen, said that he kept hearing two words today "listening and caring" and that is just what we need.

Micki Ferris said that she came into today's meeting not knowing what to expect. She is thankful for the comments and thankful for the offer to keep communications open between the two boards.

**Public Comment:** The public made comments during the meeting time.

**Future Meeting Dates:** The next Board of Health meeting will be held on Monday, March 24, 2025 at Noon.

The meeting adjourned at 1:30 P.M.

Respectfully Submitted,  
Jolynn Harger, Executive/Financial Assistant