

**HEALTH, SOCIAL, EDUCATIONAL & ENVIRONMENTAL COMMITTEE MEETING
HELD IN ROOM #318
PUTNAM COUNTY OFFICE BUILDING
CARMEL, NEW YORK 10512**

Chairwoman Sayegh, Legislators Addonizio & Nacerino

Wednesday

6:30PM

November 17, 2021

The meeting was called to order at 6:30 P.M. by Chairwoman Sayegh who led in the Pledge of Allegiance. Upon roll call Legislators Addonizio, Nacerino and Chairwoman Sayegh were present.

Item # 3 - Approval of Minutes – September 22, 2021 Meeting & October 12, 2021 Budget Meeting

The minutes were approved as submitted.

Item #4 - Discussion/Update/Putnam Hospital Center/PHC President Dr. Mark Hirko

PHC President Hirko stated he has been President of PHC for about 18 months and the entire time has been during the COVID crisis. He stated although Putnam County's numbers have not been astronomical, the COVID crisis has put a strain on the PHC's resources, particularly with staffing. He stated PHC being part of a larger network helped keep it going. He stated this allowed for the movement of patients and allowed sicker patients to go where they would be best served. He stated this saved a lot of lives. He stated Putnam Hospital is one of the last hospitals to return to a sense of normalcy. He stated this led to difficulty with case volumes in the Operating Rooms and Emergency Rooms. He stated this led to what has been seen nationwide, which is the mass resignation. He stated nationally, close to 20% of healthcare workers have quit and have moved on to less stressful jobs or jobs with more normal schedules. He stated the biggest area of difficulty was in the Emergency Room, where 60-70% of the staff quit over a period of time. He stated this was due to other opportunities nationally, such as traveling nurses who can get five (5) times the pay. He stated the Emergency Department only had room for eight (8) or nine (9) patients at a time, so wait times increased to 3-4 hours. He stated the system has approximately 1,700 openings. He stated the good news is that he believes it has bottomed out. He stated wait times have decreased and capacity has increased. He stated his biggest concern is the supply chain issues. He stated basic supplies are in a shortage and backordered through May of 2022. He stated they are keeping close tabs and there is cooperation between hospitals in the region. He stated he is happy to answer any questions.

Legislator Gouldman questioned what hospitals are in the health system.

PHC President Hirko stated in addition to PHC it is Vassar Brothers, Northern Dutchess, Sharon Hospital, Danbury Hospital, New Milford Hospital, and Norwalk Hospital.

Legislator Gouldman questioned if they are actively trying to fill the open positions.

PHC President Hirko stated they are, and they are looking outside the box.

Legislator Montgomery questioned if they are offering any incentives for new hires.

PHC President Hirko stated they are offering any incentive they can think of. He stated they even have nurse residencies which include tuition reimbursement.

Chairwoman Sayegh questioned if PHC offers a training program for nurses.

PHC President Hirko stated between 2017-2019 they developed nine (9) residencies in the three (3) hospitals that the system has in New York.

Legislator Sullivan questioned how many vacancies have been created by people not wanting to be vaccinated.

PHC President Hirko stated approximately 160-170 people left the workforce out of over 11,500 employees. He stated it was not as many as initially feared.

Legislator Jonke thanked PHC President Hirko for attending this meeting and for his hard work. He stated he believes that PHC is the largest private employer in the County. He stated for PHC to please let the Legislature know if there is anyway it can help. He stated Legislators should help get the word out about the many job opportunities.

PHC President Hirko stated he appreciates that and noted that PHC wants to be a good member of the community. He stated they still have a big hole to get out of, and that is why they are looking to retool the hospital. He stated it is a changing healthcare environment.

Chairwoman Sayegh stated there have been rumors and she questioned if certain specialties will be leaving PHC, such as maternity and critical care. She questioned if PHC President Hirko could address those rumors.

PHC President Hirko stated the labor and delivery unit has been doing fairly well. He stated the issue has been staffing. He stated no decisions have been made and there has been no hint at that happening. He stated as far as critical care, it again depends on staffing. He stated there are 10 beds, but they can only fill four (4) due to the lack of nurses. He reiterated that no decisions have been made to remove or discontinue any services.

Legislator Addonizio questioned how drug abuse and overdoses are handled. She questioned if there are any inpatient services.

PHC President Hirko stated there is no set number of beds for drug detoxification. He stated there is no official “detox” unit, but those patients are treated. He stated it is handled on a case-by-case basis.

Legislator Addonizio questioned if it would be better to designate a set number of beds for overdoses.

PHC President Hirko stated it would be difficult because the State has different requirements when there are certain numbers of beds set for overdoses.

Chairwoman Sayegh questioned what the most immediate need of PHC is.

PHC President Hirko stated it is staffing, as it is discouraging to have people that need to use their facility, but they are backed up. He stated this is going to be an ongoing issue and that is why they are looking at different strategies. He asks that people be patient.

Chairwoman Sayegh thanked PHC President Hirko for attending and the information he provided.

John Nelson, Government Relations with Nuvance Health, provided his business card to the Committee.

Item #5 - Approval/Appointment/Board of Health/Dr. Lebwohl

Chairwoman Sayegh stated Dr. Lebwohl provides a wealth of institutional and professional knowledge.

Chairwoman Sayegh made a motion to approve Appointment/Board of Health/Dr. Lebwohl; Seconded by Legislator Nacerino. All in favor.

Item #6 - Approval/ Budgetary Amendment 21A098/ Health Department/ Account for Correct Allocation of COVID-19 Expenses

Senior Fiscal Manager Bill Orr stated this is moving COVID expenses into the correct budget line.

Chairwoman Sayegh made a motion to approve Budgetary Amendment 21A098; Seconded by Legislator Addonizio. All in favor.

Item #7 - Approval/ Budgetary Amendment 21A099/ Health Department/ Preschool Transportation

Senior Fiscal Manager Orr stated this is schools billing the County for transportation. He stated the cost per child has gone up each year. He stated the Health Department is anticipating bills for 546 children at \$602 each. He stated this amendment has zero (0) fiscal impact.

Chairwoman Sayegh made a motion to approve Budgetary Amendment 21A099; Seconded by Legislator Nacerino. All in favor.

Item #8 - Approval/ Budgetary Amendment 21A100/ Health Department/ Public Health Emergency Preparedness COVID-19 Grant Award

Senior Fiscal Manager Orr stated this amendment is an additional funding award. He stated it will go towards training additional MRC (Medical Reserve Corps) volunteers.

Chairwoman Sayegh made a motion to approve Budgetary Amendment 21A100; Seconded by Legislator Nacerino. All in favor.

Item #9 - Approval/Budgetary Transfer 21T287/Finance Department/Fund Mandated Community College Tuition Costs

Chairwoman Sayegh stated the cost for community college tuition has increased.

Chairwoman Sayegh made a motion to approve Budgetary Transfer 21T287; Seconded by Legislator Addonizio. All in favor.

Item #10 - FYI/Fund Transfer 21T295/Office for Senior Resources/Kitchen Supplies for Nutrition Sites

Office for Senior Resources (OSR) Director Michael Cunningham stated this transfer is to move funds for food utensils out of the food line, into the supplies line.

Legislator Nacerino questioned if there will still be enough funding in the food line to get through year end.

OSR Director Cunningham stated yes, they are in good standing.

Legislator Albano questioned if biodegradable utensils can be looked into as an alternative.

OSR Director Cunningham stated the biggest complaint that he hears is regarding the quality of the utensils. He stated some of this has to do with product availability. He stated OSR is exploring alternatives.

Legislator Montgomery noted that there are programs through Climate Smart and the State to assist with initiatives like this. She stated she hopes OSR really looks into this situation and analyzes the cost of waste removal and environmental impact. She stated her idea is still to hire dishwashers. She added that she is sure there are people who would volunteer as well.

OSR Director Cunningham clarified that these funds are for more than just plastic utensils. He stated it is everything that goes into food preparation.

Item #11 - Other Business – None.

Item #12 – Adjournment

There being no further business, at 7:08PM, Chairwoman Sayegh made a motion to adjourn;
Seconded by Legislator Addonizio. All in favor.

Respectfully submitted by Administrative Assistant Ed Gordon.