



County of Dare

P.O. Box 1000 | Manteo, NC 27954

HEALTHCARE MINUTES DARE COUNTY BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS - SPECIAL MEETING

Dare County Administration Building, Manteo, NC

10:30 a.m., June 28, 2022

Commissioners present: Chairman Robert Woodard, Sr., Vice Chairman Wally Overman, Rob Ross, Steve House, Danny Couch and Ervin Bateman

Commissioners absent: Jim Tobin

Others present: County Manager/Attorney, Robert Outten
Master Public Information Officer, Dorothy Hester
Skyler Foley, Assistant Clerk

A complete account of the Board of Commissioners meeting is archived on a video that is available for viewing on the Dare County website www.darenc.com.

ITEM 1 – CONVENE, PRAYER, PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE

At 10:31 a.m. Chairman Woodard called to order the special meeting with appropriate prior public notice having been given. He invited Commissioner Couch to share a prayer, and then Chairman Woodard led the Pledge of Allegiance to the flag.

ITEM 2 – OPENING REMARKS – CHAIRMAN'S UPDATE

A brief outline of the items mentioned by Chairman Woodard are as follows

He recognized guests from the Town of Manteo, which included Mayor Bobby Owens; Mayor pro tem Betty Selby; Commissioners Tod Clissold, Sherry Wickstrom and Town Manager Melissa Dickerson. He also recognized members of the DHHS Board: Tim Shearin, Allen Moran, Ashley Jackson and Wally Overman. Ronny Sloan, President of the Outer Banks Hospital, Tess Judge, Chair of the Outer Banks Hospital and Jay Briley from ECU Health were also present. On May 23, 2022, a letter was sent to patients outlining that effective June 23, 2022 the Outer Banks Family Medicine Office in Manteo would no longer be providing medical care to them and they needed to seek new providers. Chairman Woodard had had conversations with Ronnie Sloan about why these services were no longer available and what steps were being taken to resolve the issue. On June 22, Ronnie Sloan responded and he shared the details. Chairman had sent a letter to Dr. Michael Waldrum, the Vidant Health CEO, to express concerns about the health crisis in Dare County. He read the letter. He attended the virtual meeting held by Vidant Health and the Outer Banks Hospital with several other Board Commissioners. The PowerPoint, which discussed the healthcare provider issues, was shared during this meeting. Chairman read a response he had received from Jay Briley. Chairman stated that with all of the information thus far, he was cautiously optimistic and believed that we all need to step back and be proactive to solve the issue.

ITEM 3 – REMARKS FROM VARIOUS STAKEHOLDERS (brief outline)

Bobby Owens: He thanked the Board and Mr. Sloan for their efforts. He stated that all feelings needed to be put aside and put towards finding a solution for this matter. Believing that the issues were about corporate structure, he was confident after the meeting he had attended the night before that things were moving in the right direction.

Tess Judge: She stated the Outer Banks Hospital was working hard to recruit, but pointed out the worker shortage had affected healthcare. She promised that restoring healthcare on Roanoke Island and throughout our community was her number one priority.

President Ronny Sloan: Asked the community as a whole to look at all the good the Outer Banks Hospital had done since the eleven years it had been in Dare. He mentioned the Cancer Service Center, two Urgent Cares, locally sourced mammograms, colon and drug screening services, wellness/cancer screens along with other services. He stated he was confident the situation would be resolved soon.

Jay Briley: He expressed that he understood the level of anxiousness and concern about healthcare services in Dare County, regionally and statewide. He was confident in the ability to move forward to provide quality and accessible care. In the meantime, he asked for the county to continue to work collaboratively with the challenges in providing healthcare, which included affordable housing.

ITEM 4 – PUBLIC COMMENTS

At 11:30 the County Manager explained the procedure for making public comments. *The following comments were made in Manteo: Brief outline:*

1. Brie Sansotta: She had not heard anything about the waiting list for individuals to receive to try to restore their healthcare physicians. She expressed that the patients dropped should immediately be reinstated when a physician became available.
2. Randy Fenninger: He expressed the public should have been informed about the status of the office prior to the letter being distributed in May. He wanted to insure those dropped would be given priority when a provider became available. He suggested a commission be formed to include hospital, corporate input and other governmental representatives to help keep the citizens informed.
3. Joseph Hawkins: Expressed his concerns for his 99-year-old mother who would have to travel three hours round trip to get medical treatment. His family had no way to get prescriptions refilled. He then stated Vidant had escorted Dr. Harrison out of the office and she had been loved by her patients. The other physician had resigned due to these actions. He stated Vidant created Dare County's healthcare situation.
4. Mitchell Bateman: He had been seen by Dr. Farrow for over 46 years and it was hard not to be angry. He stated he was unaware there was a law on how much money a doctor could be paid. Dare County was a victim of corporate medicine. The County should consider a supplement to be paid to healthcare professionals.

5. Amy Phillips: After becoming aware of the medical situation on Facebook. She went to the Manteo office and questioned why she had not received the letter. And had no assurance she would receive the wait list letter. She understood, Dr. Harrison was escorted from the practice due to her not being able to see a certain number of patients a day. She expressed how much Dr. Harrison cared about her patients.
6. Jeanine Emory: She was a patient of Chris Handron, PA. She asked if the Outer Banks Medical Group considered recruiting nurses to act as physician assistants, to allow someone to work hands on. She said with the nationwide physician shortage, competitive compensation was required. She stated if we started voting for leadership that would act and not just talk, we would not be in this position today.
7. Chris Roberts: He and his wife own Coastal Counseling in Manteo. He expressed that one of his major concerns involving the healthcare crisis was the role primary care doctors had with mental health and treatment plans. They prescribe medication to clients with uncomplicated mental health issues and now we no longer have those services on Roanoke Island.
8. Gay Morris: She was glad there were plans to expand, but stated the reality was this was a justice issue for the citizens of our community who were marginalized and did not have transportation to get to another practice so far away. She recommended we expand Outer Banks Transportation to allow citizens to have transportation to their out-of-town doctor appointments with the cost covered by ECU.
9. Sarah Farrow: Stated she was Dr. Farrow's wife and he had planned to retire over a year ago and expressed that he did not leave for any other reason other than that he had worked for 25 years, 7 days a week. She stated that the opportunity presented itself at Urgent Care, which allowed him to only work three days a week and spend more time with his family.
10. Malcolm Fearing: Dare County had been in a crisis before and some of the best work he had ever seen was when different bureaucratic agencies came together and masterfully solved problems. To say the Manteo Family Medicine Office was not closed might be technically true, but the practice was closed to thousands or more. This was not a Roanoke Island issue, it was a Dare County issue because patients could not leave one Vidant provider and go to another Vidant provider in our county because they had no capacity. He challenged Ronnie Sloan who had stated the hospital would assist outside providers to set up. He stated three primary care physicians had met with public officials and wanted to open up practices on Roanoke Island. Housing and recruitment were not required since they are already here. He encouraged everyone, as a community, to try to solve our community issue.
11. Dr. Walter Holton: He had practiced for 44 years and offered when the person-to-person way of handling medical treatment changed to include computers, it became much more difficult for providers. He did not have an answer to the problem but added he recruited for all of the years that he was in practice here. He discussed the salary for a physician. After eleven years in school and training, physicians were

Commissioner Bateman:

He acknowledged the local hospital and the board and applauded them on their service to the community. Things had changed and as a community we were much better off than we were because of the Outer Banks Hospital services. He offered with the corporate model enacted by hospitals all over the United States, we had gravitated away from the Dare County personal residence model. He stated Dare County was a leader in many things, and it could be a leader in healthcare and physician care. He expressed that the Board, the citizens and others involved in the healthcare crisis could all move forward together and create a model that would help resolve this situation. He would like to have an answer on who gets priority when physicians do become available at the Manteo Family Medicine Office.

Vice-Chairman Overman:

Expressed that he and his wife both received the letter about losing their primary care physician. This was a medical service crisis in Dare County and it needed to be treated as that by Vidant and the Outer Banks Hospital. He discussed the fair market pay for doctors and asked who determined that value. He also asked who had to request to make the fair market value be re-evaluated since it was obviously different in Raleigh and Greenville than Dare County.

Steve House:

- Stated he had been a paramedic with Dare County EMS for a long time. He acknowledged the EMS team for being recognized both across the state and nationally. He explained that he personally reached out to Sentara Healthcare. They had informed him that when the letter went out to the public, their call center was bombarded. They are aware of the crisis going on in Dare County and they want to continue dialogue with the Dare County Commissioners and County Manager. He read a letter he had received from Sentara Healthcare. He was concerned on how the whole situation was handled and offered there should be more open discussion with our community.

Commissioner Ross:

Stated the parallels from a local scale and national scale were surprising. He referred to a scenario where a government agency elected to close a baby formula facility, which was done with very little fanfare. He stated the results of this action which he described was a predictable outcry. Forty percent of supply was terminated and in ninety days shelves were empty. He noted we have a very large provider on our scale called the Manteo Health Clinic, and we have a very dominant market share which was represented by the 2,400 plus patients that were notified their healthcare services would no longer be provided. He stated this quickly and predictably caused the same outcry that he previously discussed on a national level. He began to discuss the following statements:

- Three full-time physicians. Dr. Farrow, Dr. Harrison, and Dr. Blackburn all departed from the Manteo Clinic in a short period of time.
- We had three temporary physicians who all chose not to renew their contracts in a very short period of time.

- We are now in a mode of aggressive recruiting and being told that the housing issues are preventing and slowing down the recruiting process. He asked if there were underlying issues that got Dare County to this point and were they being looked at and addressed.

County Manager Outten: Stated Vice-Chairman Overman, Commissioner Tobin and himself had been in touch with their lobbying group in Raleigh when this situation first arose. He explained the lobbying group had reached out to the North Carolina Community Health Center Association to assist with facilitating ideas for recruiting. He also explained they had been in touch with the CEO for the North Carolina Academy of Family Physicians to get ideas and guidance to help Dare County move forward in trying to recruit physicians to the area.

Amy Philips: She wanted to inform the community she had contracted with a local nurse practitioner in order to get her prescriptions. She paid upfront, and had a one-year refill through her. She stated that unless you had pain or certain psychiatric medications, the nurse practitioner would contract to refill prescriptions. She quoted the "Five P's": Proper preparation prevents poor performance.

Dr. Jennifer Harrison: She stated she wanted to let President Ronnie Sloan, Chairman Tess Judge and Mr. Jay Briley know she was available to have discussions with them regarding these issues to help the community.

Gene Emory: Clarified that when she discussed voting in her prior public comment she was not referring to the Dare County Board of Commissioners. She was referring to the federal and state-level elected officials.

ITEM 6 – PLAN OF ACTION

Chairman Woodard stated before a plan of action was enacted he wanted to discuss all comments and information. He and his fellow commissioners would keep the public fully informed on what steps would be taken next. The dialogue between the Board, Mr. Sloan, Ms. Judge and Mr. Briley would be continued.

At the conclusion of the meeting, County Manager asked for a motion pursuant to §143-318.11 to go into Closed Session to preserve the attorney-client privilege.

MOTION

Commissioner House motioned to adjourn the meeting into Closed Session.

Commissioner Bateman seconded the motion.

VOTE: AYES unanimous

At 12:41 p.m., the Board of Commissioners adjourned into a Closed Session.

They reconvened at 1:23 p.m. and Mr. Outten reported that during the Closed Session the Board gave guidance to the County Attorney and they took no other action.

At the conclusion of the meeting, Chairman Woodard asked for a motion to adjourn.

MOTION

Commissioner House motioned to adjourn the meeting.

Commissioner Bateman seconded the motion.

VOTE: AYES unanimous

At 1:28 p.m., the Board of Commissioners adjourned until 5:00 p.m., July 18, 2022.



Respectfully submitted,

By: *Cheryl C. Anby*
Transcribed by Cheryl C. Anby
Clerk to the Board

APPROVED: By: *Robert Woodard, Sr.*
Robert Woodard, Sr., Chairman
Dare County Board of Commissioners