Minutes
Local Emergency Coordinating Committee Meeting
March 5, 2020
Town Hall Conference Room B

1. The meeting was called to order at 5:00 PM.

Present: Amanda Backhaus, Finance Office; Mark Kiefer, Public Works; Bill Trudelle, Coventry Public Schools; Jim McLoughlin, Fire/EMS/EMD; Bud Meyers, Fire Marshal, NCVFD; Lenny Bragdon, Coventry Public Schools; Julie Blanchard, Town Council; John Elsesser, Town Manager

Also Present: Robert Miller, Eastern Highlands Health District; Chuck Beecher, John Alosky, Paula Curtis, Nurse Coordinator; David Petrone, School Superintendent, Ryan Boutin

2. Acceptance of Minutes:
Bud Meyers moved to accept the minutes of the February 6, 2020 meeting. The motion was seconded by Jim McLoughlin and carried on unanimous vote.

3. COVID-19 Preparedness:
John Elsesser said that when the COVID-19 epidemic started to emerge, we remembered when Rob Miller worked here and some of the last pandemic issues that came up. We fully expected it to start escalating as it has. John asked Rob to come and give a briefing for where we are, what we can anticipate and what we need to do as an organization. People will be looking to us for education and advice.

Rob Miller was present to provide an update and overview of the epidemic across the country, our state and locally, and some of the things the Health District has been doing in response. He will also outline some of the guidance the Health District has been providing and discuss some scenarios and specifics about what schools and the town can do, as well as where we might be three months from now.

Currently, the states of Washington, Oregon and California have some instances of community transmission. There are some isolated cases in Rhode Island and New York. We can expect sustained community transmission in Connecticut. There have been about 150 tests conducted. Quest Labs is ramping up testing availability to any doctor who orders it, which will be ready Monday. There are no confirmed cases in Connecticut right now. The risk is very low here and in the northeast. The risk is actually low throughout the US.

Transmission is through droplet exposure (coughing and sneezing). It is not like the measles. Based on the best data we have available, it appears it has a reproduction rate of 2-3, meaning that for every person infected who practices no control whatever, it could potentially make 2-3 people sick. The idea is to implement controls to bring that number down. A lot of what we are going to be doing will center around social distancing, cleaning, etc.

Severity: Based on current information, because this is a novel virus, the World Health Organization put out a number of 3.4% fatality rate based on documented cases. The actual rate is probably much lower because cases haven’t been reported, but 3.4% is pretty high. There are areas in China where the fatality rate is much lower. Also the younger you are the more likely you are to recover. Nobody under age 10 has perished yet. If you are over age 70 or 80, the fatality rate is much higher.
What the Health District is doing: We are mobilizing partners. We are meeting next week with area superintendents. The Board of Directors has special meeting with town CEOs next week. We started a public education campaign to get the word out. We are participating in weekly conference calls with the CDC and DPH on topics such as testing resources, surveillance systems, and monitoring of traveler health. We are also aware of many travelers who have come from other hotspots such as UConn study-abroad students, business travelers and tourists. Our system is porous - we don’t know where everyone is going. Sometimes an employer calls. Despite recommendations, some of these travelers might not be self-quarantining. We will be encouraging self-quarantine of anyone who has come into contact with those exhibiting symptoms. We are reaching out to vulnerable populations – such as seniors. We compiled a list of contacts, i.e. senior centers. Anything you can do to help us reach out would be appreciated.

The current focus is containment, which may include quarantine and isolation. Travelers from hot spots are being asked to self-quarantine. Guidance has been provided to individuals and screeners. At this point, we are starting to transition out of containment to community mitigation, with non-pharmaceutical interventions. Some measures include personal respiratory etiquette, hygiene such as hand washing, staying home when sick, more frequent cleaning, and making sure cleaning products are appropriate to kill the virus. There are lots of forms of social distancing, from trying to avoid other people, avoiding mass gatherings, or more disruptive events such as school closings, and canceling mass gatherings. Those kind of tactics are typically based on risk assessment. Those decisions are not made lightly.

All of this is done primarily to protect our healthcare system. If an outbreak of this type is left completely uncontrolled, then the outbreak could amplify very quickly and overload our healthcare system. The worried well and those who think they are sick start showing up at doctors’ offices and those who need the care the most will start to miss out. The objective is to lower the peak of the outbreak and spread it out over time so as not to overwhelm the system. Japan closed their schools but not their sporting events. Italy did the opposite. Connecticut’s response could be disparate from surrounding neighboring states. It is hard to say what states are going to do. The State of Washington is an indicator. The Township of Kirkland is inside Seattle King County and a primary health care center in the country. They are producing some really effective communication and messaging - really cutting edge. Rob looks at their website every day looking for information.

Next steps for towns:
- Start thinking about continuity of operations planning for critical services. What type of chain of command system is in place?
- Examine and update Human Resources policies.
- Determine what kind of materials to stock up on.
- Develop a continuity of learning planning for schools.

Hypotheticals:
- What happens if we get a confirmed case in our community.
- How to manage a community outbreak.
- If there is a confirmed case at town hall: the Health department would be notified. The person would be isolated either at the hospital or at home. Close contacts would be identified and interviewed. We will also notify the person’s employer. It may be appropriate to close town hall or the schools for a period of time. The virus has an incubation period of 2-14 days. How long we close would be a matter of discussion.
If there is a confirmed case in close contact with an employee (husband or child), we wouldn’t necessarily close for a long period of time but perhaps for the rest of the day and do some enhanced cleaning. Close contacts would go into a 14-day quarantine.

Sustained community spread: the only way to reduce impact would be more significant social distancing, including canceling mass gatherings, closing schools for longer periods of time. This would be more disruptive and those decisions would more likely be made by the Governor’s office in collaboration with Commissioner of Public Health.

One thing the Health Department will be looking at down the road is the shortage of equipment such as masks, gloves, sanitizer, etc. Supplies may come through the five DEHMAS regions or the local health departments for distribution. Anti-virals are under development and may become available before vaccines. Eventually, mass vaccination is a possibility but that is a year plus away.

It is hard to say if this will happen in our local communities. If you look at China who practiced draconian measures they have reduced the impact.

John Elsesser said he has asked Jim McLoughlin to start working with outside agencies. The Kirkland case was concerning because of the lack of medical resources. They have 40 EMS people in quarantine so we need to start looking at restricting our resources, i.e. limiting the number of responders, etc. to limit exposures. People are starting to ask: should we have church services? Yes, but wouldn’t hurt to stop shaking hands. If you’re sick stop going to church.

David Petrone said from the school’s perspective, our staff has some concerns. We sent 200 kids home from the grammar school with the flu so far this season. Does it put an incredible strain on the healthcare system if we don’t contain? Rob Miller replied yes. Kids may recover but will go home and make their parents and grandparents sick. We are already seeing referrals to ERs which is not what we want. If we were to get 25% of our population sick it will overwhelm the healthcare system. It’s really our elderly that are going to burdened. David asked if they believe this will be a seasonal thing. Rob replied that nobody knows for sure, but typically a corona virus is seasonal. We have anti-virals and vaccines for seasonal flu, which is why the fatality rate is .1%. We have an average of 25-40k deaths a year due to seasonal influenza. This virus is 20 times more, so the potential is there for a greater number of fatalities. We have some time to do a little bit of planning so we should take advantage of it.

David Petrone said we already ramped up our cleaning protocols and increased the availability of sanitizers but we are mindful that surfaces are only as clean as the last person who touched it. John Elsesser asked if there are issues with some of the clean green products? David replied that the commissioner issued some regulations today and we have already ordered some new cleaning items. John noted there is already a shortage of sanitizers.

David Petrone said we have some of the pieces in place for remote instruction. Approximately 97% of our students have access to technology, based on a survey we conducted 3-5 years ago. John Elsesser said we are considering canceling daily programs at the senior center, which does not have a large number of people. Orchard Hills has 101 seniors. They are fairly isolated and stay in their homes. The Senior Center is asking what to do at this point. Rob Miller said we are concerned about the senior population not only for their physical health, but for their emotional health if programs are suspended.

Jim McLoughlin asked if there is information about the surface life of the virus. Rob Miller replied that we don’t know specifically. We have heard half a day to 24 hours. David Petrone said there is a lot of misinformation out there. Rob said that will be an ongoing challenge. The Health District is trying to be a credible and timely source. The CDC, State Department of Health will
also be credible sources. Some local providers might not be the best source of accurate information, unfortunately. John Elsesser asked if there is a role for the CERT team? Rob replied that we are not sure at this point. If we have to start moving commodities around or doing mass vaccinations then perhaps so, unless some of them have special skills such as communications.

Julie Blanchard asked if has anyone trained our 911 dispatchers to provide information and ask questions. Jim McLoughlin replied yes, we have been working with the police department so that questions are asked at the time of the call. EMTS are also being given guidance. If symptoms are suspected, we may limit the number of responders to minimize exposure. We are updating equipment inventories and doing fit testing for N95 masks. Rob Miller noted that surgical masks are ineffective for people who are well.

Jim McLoughlin asked for additional information about self-quarantine protocols. He said that in New Hampshire, somebody was identified as needing to self-quarantine and did not follow instructions, which exposed others. Is any discussion being given to enforcement? Rob Miller replied that right now everything is voluntary, but that could change. There may be some instances, such as if there is a clearly-confirmed case and they are planning to go to a senior center movie night, where we might mobilize to take action. Through state statute there is a process which can be applied for quarantine, isolation and detention that can be implemented. Nobody is really trained for that. Legal provisions are in place but training is not in place. The State Health Department perspective is our efforts are at the personal containment level, but we are transitioning to community containment. If an individual is being recalcitrant it is possible it won’t be worth going after them when canceling mass gatherings might be more effective.

John Elsesser asked if we should be sending messages about preparation, i.e. stocking up on food, etc., like we do for pending weather issues. Rob Miller replied yes. It is helpful to advise families about stocking up on food and supplies, medical prescriptions, etc. Follow me on twitter if you have an account. @RobMillerMPH. John said the messaging should tell people not to buy into panic. There are mechanisms in place to protect yourselves and your families. We are worried about the senior population but most everyone will recover just fine.

4. Agency updates:

Town Manager – John Elsesser:

- A lot of projects are in the works. We have put out RFP’s for upgrades to the school unit ventilators, and adaptive reuse of Caprilands. We are a month away from putting out a bid for the Folly Lane Bridge replacement. The Swamp Road intersection is delayed a year due to the State DOT’s requirement for a new signal light. We are lining up a contractor to start the catch basin work in Northfields during the second week of April. The water main work is pretty much done. We are also lining up contractors to start milling, regrading and replacement. A lot of other road work is needed but the State isn’t giving us any money. The South Street reconstruction project got through DOT approvals so we are on to the design phase, with construction likely next summer. We are putting an application together by mid-April for the next round of LOTCIP funds to reconstruct the S curves on South, Swamp and the dip by Love Lane if funding is sufficient. DOT did not agree with our plans for the Swamp Road realignment - they wanted it hardened which would be a problem for emergency vehicles. They agreed to do an alternate design on Northfields Road at their expense. Property owners at that area are not happy.
- The Town Council did interim job description approvals for fire. If they need to be amended during the interim period, that can be done before finalization. Jim said we
didn’t necessarily feel that the interim qualifications have to be in place that will be required for the permanent positions. The process to recommend people for the positions will be discussed at the meeting on the 12th. The descriptions have been distributed so people who may be interested will know what the requirements are for the permanent position. John said it was not acceptable that there are no job descriptions during the interim. We think even interim people should be substantially in line with the permanent requirements. Bud Meyers said he agrees that the person should be able to meet the qualifications by the time the position becomes permanent.

- We bought a new boat from CT DEEP. It is a Sea View, 23’ with a Honda motor that has 600 hours on it. It was $50 with a trailer. It will need some work on the transom. It is being looked at. The Police Department had asked for new police boat because the old one is getting tired. This might be able to be fixed up and put in service this season. It has a lower profile which is better for water rescues. As a result, John cut $43,000 out of next year’s capital budget.

- Probably within a month, a company may be here boring through the state ROWS on Main Street to connect CGS and Robertson School with fiber. This is a new type of boring not typical in this region. It will reduce our reliance on Charter/Spectrum. It will be an interesting project and will require very little pavement repair.

NCVFD – Bud Meyers:
  - During the month of February NCFD/CVFA responded to 32 calls consisting of: 1 building fire, 1 chimney fire, 1 trash fire, 1 brush tire, 4 CO-related, 6 MVA’s, 5 false alarms, 3 electrical issues, 6 good intents and 4 medicals.
  - No equipment failures this month. Thanks to Chuck for his coordination activities.
  - During the month of February our departments averages:
    - 14 personnel for fire calls
    - 8 personnel for CO incidents
    - 11 personnel for MVA’s
    - 5 personnel for false alarms
    - 5 personnel for electrical issues
    - 8 personnel for good intent
    - 4 personnel for medicals
  - Our average response time for calls was 08:09. For 78.88% of the calls we were on scene within 9 minutes.
  - John Elsesser noted that we put a little bit in the public works budget for emergency repairs to fire equipment.

Fire/EMS/EMD – Jim McLoughlin:
  - Jim met w/fire, police the farmers’ market and the finance director to discuss supporting the market for the season. Ray Oliver is coordinating and has about 12 people to rotate in as a crew. This should enhance market safety. John noted they will be part time employees of the town and covered by workers’ comp insurance.
  - We are doing prep for corona virus including inventory of equipment, review of our emergency management plan for continuity of government and plans for deployment of mass vaccinations. We are as prepared as we can be in terms of staff knowing what to look for. The next thing is management of communications both messaging and frequency.
  - We are getting quotes on refurbishment of the engine tanker.
  - We met on CoventryFest to prepare for the fireworks plan. A mini-barge is being recommended this year. We working on modifying their suggested barge location. It
might allow us to open the beach and bathrooms. The perimeter is set up and enforced by police and the dive team.

- We are working on grant application for radio replacements and getting ready for a budget presentation to the Town Council on 3/9.

Public Works – Mark Kiefer:

- The mild weather has allowed us to work on projects throughout the winter. A walking path for the neighborhood has been cleared on Old Tolland Turnpike.
- Miller Richardson baseball field irrigation is moving along – we got blocks and the cradle in place. We will install the tank and plan to hook up irrigation in late April. John Elsesser said we are not happy with progress on the football field. The permit was not applied for yet and the plan is not acceptable.
- We are picking up curbing to get ready for sweeping the first week of April.
- We plan to get on the fields as soon as they dry out for preliminary maintenance and fertilization.
- The Northfields catch basin project is gearing up – it is a big project.
- Mark spoke with the paving contractor today concerning shimming some of the roads we had hoped to do last season. They are gearing up to open the plant during the first week of April.
- Our biggest thing right now is trees. We are seeing a continuance of die-back on ash and oak. We anticipate lots of calls when the trees bud out. There is about $40,000 remaining in the de-icing budget – we may re-direct that to trees, as we feel this work is imperative. We are basically out of tree work money except for Folly Lane and Old Tolland Turnpike. We suspect we will be dealing with this problem for many years to come.

CVFA – Ryan Boutin:

- There is a transition meeting this coming Sunday night.
- The new furnace seems to be working. Water to the north end of the building got shut off at some point. We are trying to figure that out. Jim said they have been notified and are sending a technician out.
- One member finished EMT certification and one finished FFI.

5. **Radio communications with Police, Fire and future Public Works:**

Jim McLoughlin said a subcommittee is working on this. We are collaborating with the schools and will meet on 3/9 to discuss progress. There is a new state system – we assume public works will go to that at some point in the future, and emergency management wants to jump in too. Tolland County also working on a work-around.

6. **Adjournment:**

The meeting was adjourned at 6:37 PM on a motion by John Elsesser, seconded by Bud Meyers, and unanimously approved.

Respectfully submitted,
Laura Stone