

SEARCH General Meeting Minutes  
Trinity Episcopal Church, Spruce Pine  
June 5, 2018

Karin Rolett welcomed the group. She noted that SEARCHers are researching what has happened in other areas that have been bought by HCA to determine how to have that go as favorably for us as possible.

RURAL DAY. On May 29 five people connected with SEARCH attended Rural Day in Raleigh. Karin Rolett reported for the group. She said that it was one of the best planned and executed conferences she had ever attended.

The conference focused on three topics: broadband, health, and small business development. Yancey County Planning and Economic Development Director Jamie McMahan was a featured speaker on the topic of small business. Dr. Steve North from Mitchell County spoke on telemedicine in the health section. Gov. Cooper made the case for expanding Medicaid as a way to improve the state's economy. Dr. Mandy Cohen, secretary of the NC Department of Health and Human Services, spoke of the moral imperative of providing quality healthcare.

Of particular interest to those present from SEARCH were the comments which Attorney General Josh Stein made in response to a question about the HCA/Mission deal. He said that the AG has the obligation/mandate to evaluate and monitor the contracts of not-for-profits sold to for-profits. He said he is watching the situation. He also remarked that the Charlotte/Chapel Hill consolidation wouldn't have worked as it would have been too big.

Noteworthy quotes from the day:

- A healthy state is a wealthy state.
- Where you live should not determine if you live.
- When does a financial decision outweigh a moral obligation?

A handout which included The Rural Center's platform on health was distributed to all the attendees. It will be available, along with additional information on Rural Day, on the SEARCHwnc.org website. It includes most of the seven recommendations made by a N.C. Legislative Study Committee on Rural Health Committee on Access to Health Care in Rural NC.

An *Asheville Citizen-Times* column written by Rep. Donny C. Lambeth favoring the HCA acquisition of Mission was noted. Rep. Lambeth is one of four legislators who are sponsoring HB 662, which would address the gap in insurance coverage for up to half the uninsured in N.C. The bill is as yet not out of committee. He also mentions 8 rural hospitals in N.C. that are in distress, but they do not include any in the Mission system. The article, along with others about HCA/Mission, is on the SEARCHwnc website.

ESSENTIAL SERVICES. Risa Larsen circulated the pink “Essential Services” lists for signatures and questions. Responses from the Community Conversations planned by Outreach may change the list. Now 40+ people have signed the sheets, some maybe suggestions and/or amendments.

OUTREACH. Karin Rolett reported that the committee has identified groups and individuals to be interviewed, with the expectation that the first interviews will take place in Yancey County, possibly at Reconciliation House. Outreach will be coordinating SEARCH’s efforts with Jessica Farley who is in charge of the official Community Health Assessment, which won’t be available to the public until March of 2019. The committee is getting help from MAHEC in organizing the questions so that the data collected can be organized logically. Karin asked for help in interviewing and in collecting data and reporting.

RESEARCH and OUTCOMES. Jon Ward, chair, said the committee meets quarterly with Becky Carter to monitor outcomes, in particularly in babies born to mothers living in Mitchell and Yancey counties. He reported on the meeting when three members of MAHEC’s research department, who came from Asheville and met with him and Susan Larson at the Yancey County Library. A fourth MAHEC representative, who lives in Yancey County, was also present. Their concerns are about “health manpower” – departures/recruitment/population of healthcare providers. Jon reported that he is continuing the dialogue with MAHEC, and Susan Larson commented that they had mentioned they might be able to get grant funding to help us with our Community Conversations. The outcome of these conversations might ultimately be grant funding from the foundation that is under construction now.

Jon wants to make sure that Research is keeping track of areas and questions they should be pursuing. One which came up was what it means for providers who have loan forgiveness when the system becomes a for-profit, rather than a nonprofit.

COLLABORATIONS. Risa Larsen and Susan Larson reported on their meeting with the Mitchell County Board of Commissioners. While they appeared interested in the fact that the Community Conversations will take place in Mitchell County as well as Yancey and will deepen the understanding of citizens’ needs, there was pushback on some of the details of letters SEARCH has written. There was not much discussion about the foundation to be formed. Susan Larson made it clear that SEARCH is not challenging the sale, but we want a fair deal for Mission as a whole and BRRH in particular. Karin Rolett was to make a presentation to the Yancey County Board of Commissioners on June 11.

Susan repeated what she had said to the Mitchell County Board, that we are not challenging the sale and think it could be good for our area. We do, however, want a fair deal for Mission as a whole and BRRH in particular. Our research into past HCA acquisitions similar to this one suggests that there is reason to be vigilant. We are advocating for equal and meaningful representation from across the region on the foundation board and for essential healthcare services to be maintained at BRRH as they were March 21<sup>st</sup> when the deal was announced.

QUESTIONS FOR MISSION. Since some of the attendees were unclear about how to pose questions to Mission, we closed the meeting by demonstrating the procedure on the spot, posing two questions, the answers to which we will track on-line. The website is [MissionHealthForward.org](http://MissionHealthForward.org).

It being summer, it was decided that while the focus area committees will meet in June and July, the next general meeting will be Tuesday, August 14, at the First Baptist Church in Burnsville.