



SEARCH Community Meeting January 27, 2020 Minutes

Karin Rolett welcomed over 40 people to the first SEARCH dinner and meeting of 2020, held at the First Baptist Church in Burnsville.

After dinner she introduced Dr. Tonia Hale, the new CEO of the Blue Ridge Regional Hospital, who said she is finding the community warm and welcoming. BRRH Advisory Board Chair Alex Glover has taken her around to meet people. Her goal is to improve quality and safety at the hospital. If people would like to speak with her directly, by phone or in a meeting, they can call her assistant Christy Ryerse to set up an appointment.

Local Health Reports:

Ambulance Service – George Bennett and Risa Larsen reported on where Mitchell and Yancey counties are in making decisions about a provider of ambulance service in each county where the current contracts with HCA will expire in June. They had both attended the bidders' presentations to the Mitchell County Board of Commissioners and Karin Rolett had attended them in Yancey County. George reported concerns about triage and transfer in particular. Madison County has already chosen the company from Watauga County.

Lisa Schultz asked if the current levels of service are being compared with what is being proposed, non-emergency transport in particular. Mitchell anticipates continuing the current levels of support. The question is, how much will it cost? Mitchell is supposed to have another open meeting but the date has not yet been announced. Lisa also asked if the taxes HCA now has to pay to the counties will offset the increase in the cost of ambulance service, and the response was probably not.

Risa noted that the Mitchell County Commissioners allowed the public to ask questions and some of the best ones came from fire department members. The Commissioners still have questions. Risa commented that all the costs will be higher, which will make the decision even harder.

Ron Rolett, who also attended the commissioners' meetings, said that the RFP for Mitchell County Ambulance Service laid out three different levels of service, Plans A, B, & C, and suggested that anyone interested could read the newspaper article about the differences in plans.

In Yancey County there was not a public question/comment period. They hope to make a decision by the end of February.

Karin reported that Listening Project results that pertain to Emergency Services were compiled and given to the county commissions in each county so they can read what people are thinking.

Local Health Reports:

Mitchell County Health Department Diane Creek, the Executive Director of the Toe River Health District, gave a report on the history and current status of the district, starting 9-10 months ago when Mitchell County Commissioners began talking about pulling out of the Yancey-Mitchell-Avery District. They explored joining another district two counties away. Diane explained that misinformation was the source of the problem, but that better communication is now the order of the day. A public presentation to the commissioners by Jessica Farley and Diane Creek was well received and it now appears that Mitchell County will stay in the Toe River Health District. Diane attributed the change of attitude on the part of the commissioners to the fact that the public, including SEARCH, really made their voices heard.

Outreach Committee Chair Karin Rolett invited any community with opinions about local healthcare needs to contact her. Outreach is currently working on setting up listening sessions with local businesses, large and small. Karin thanked Lisa Schultz once again for doing such a great job organizing the information from the listening sessions.

Independent Monitor:

Victoria Hicks told attendees that Gibbins Advisors is the firm chosen to be the Independent Monitor of the sale of Mission to HCA. Specifically they were hired to make sure the Asset Purchase Agreement is being followed. The APA was passed a year ago. Gibbins is holding public meetings to gauge public opinion about how things are going. Two of the meetings are nearby, one in Marion and the other in Burnsville. Victoria urged people to attend. They are open to the public without reservations – first-come, first-served.

Victoria also noted that members of the Health Equity Coalition and SEARCH will have a private meeting with the Independent Monitors. She said that there will be a portal for people to report concerns and that HEC/SEARCH will work with Gibbins to make that most effective.

Again she urged people to attend the meetings with the Independent Monitor and ask questions. (The dates for nearby meetings are appended.)

SEARCH Nonprofit Status:

Susan Larson said that SEARCH has registered with the N.C. Secretary of State as a nonprofit corporation, has nearly completed the bylaws and will soon apply to the IRS for nonprofit status.

Philanthropy:

This is an extraordinary time for philanthropy in the region, Susan reported, with the creation of the Dogwood Health Trust and the six Legacy Foundations. She said that the Legacy Foundations gave over \$11 million to 169 grantees in 2019 and that the Dogwood Health Trust recently received 500 applications for Immediate Opportunities and Needs grants. With help from Charlie Hofheimer, she told about DHT's Leverage Fund which pays for experienced grant writers to write proposals to funding sources out of the area for projects in the area. Susan spoke briefly about a funders' forum which is in the planning stages, to be sponsored by WNC Nonprofit Pathways in the spring, date TBD.

Susan introduced Luke Howe, Executive Director of the AMY Wellness Foundation.

AMY Wellness Foundation:

Luke Howe reported that they received 44 applications and funded 17 totaling \$2.5 million in their first grant cycle. They met with applicants, even the ones that weren't funded, and got ideas of what might be helpful to them. Because of this feedback they will have two workshops in April, one on grant writing April 8 and the other on financial reporting April 30. Both will be held at the Cross Street Building in Spruce Pine from 8:30 to noon and will be led by WNC Nonprofit Pathways instructors.

AMY Wellness will begin accepting applications in their next cycle on April 27 and are especially interested in projects that show collaboration and/or service across the three counties of their service area. They expect to post on their website what they learn in the regional convenings on food, housing and mental health.

The AMY Wellness Foundation office is in the Cross Street Building, a few doors from the fitness center. Luke encouraged people to call in advance if they'd like to meet.

For newcomers to SEARCH:

Susan Larson told briefly about the successful coffees SEARCH hosted last fall and suggested a similar approach for orienting new people to the organization. Dates that were floated as possibilities for coffees were February 20 and 25.

Susan thanked Joyce Johnson for coordinating the food for the dinner and talked about that as a volunteer possibility for SEARCH along with committee membership on the Outreach, Communication, or Collaboration committees.

The next SEARCH Community Meeting will be at 5:30 p.m. on Tuesday, March 10, at Trinity Episcopal Church in Spruce Pine.