

Traverses County Commission  
Special Board Meeting  
April 11, 2023

The meeting was called to order at 4:30 p.m. by Commission Chair Kayla Schmidt. Other Commissioners present were Mark Gail, Dwight Nelson, Jerrel Olson and Chad Metz. The Pledge of Allegiance was recited. The purpose of this special meeting is to discuss the Social Services contract with Western Prairie with current Social Services employees. There was no conflict of interest. In attendance were many employees of Social Services, members of the public and members representing Western Prairie Human Services.

Background was given on Traverse County Social Services contracting with Grant County Social Services for services in 2010. From that time until the current other services continued to be added to the contract including the Social Service Director. In 2022 Grant County joined Pope County and they are now Western Prairie Human Services (WPHS). There were three options presented to the Traverse County Board on March 21. The first option is to let the current contract expire with WPHS at the end of 2024. Option 2 would be to engage with the Western Prairie Board and discuss continuing to contract. Option 3 would be for the Traverse County Board to start exploring the option of joining WPHS.

Schmidt explained that at the Western Prairie Board meeting on Friday, April 7, the Western Prairie Board approved to extend the contract with Traverse County Social Services for one year, this will allow Western Prairie time for their first audit as a Joint Powers entity before taking on another County.

Leah Krauth, Social Worker for Traverse County Social Services expressed the employees concerns with merging which included wages, medical insurance, losing autonomy and losing staff. Ideally, they would like to go back to being independent but they don't know if that is realistic financially for Traverse County. Krauth mentioned that things do go well with contracting with WPHS and it is nice to have the expertise and be able to consult with another agency.

Nelson said that they need to be fiscally responsible with the option that is chosen and he does believe it would be a benefit for all three counties to join due to the resources and expertise. Stacy Hennen, WPHS and Traverse County Social Services Director, said that the Minnesota Department of Human Services would require a commitment 18 months prior to joining WPHS if that was the decision that would be made, with the one-year extension it gives Traverse County Commissioners more time for discussion. Hennen discussed the difficulty Traverse County had hiring for a Child Protection worker, it took eight months and during that time WPHS stepped up and filled the gap that Traverse County had. Hennen touched on the financial commitment it would take to join and the negotiation process for the employees' salaries, insurance and benefits. The WPHS staff that were present discussed some challenges that Grant County and Pope County had when they went into the Joint Powers Agreement some being payroll, which agency forms to use, contract negotiations and different systems for the Minnesota Department of Human Services. They explained that those things have been worked out and they are in a good spot right now. They also explained some steps that Grant and Pope took prior to joining to give the Traverse County Board a place to start.

There were no public comments.

The Commissioners discussed forming a Traverse County Social Services Working Group that would comprise of Nelson and Olson, Commissioners; Leah Krauth and Dawn Boehmlehner, Social Workers; Shelly Staebler, Financial Assistance Supervisor; and County Attorney Matt Franzese.

Schmidt adjourned the meeting at 5:38 p.m.

---

Lisa Zahl, County Coordinator

---

Kayla Schmidt, Chair