

**WATCHUNG BOARD WATCHUNG
BOARD OF HEALTH
SPECIAL MEETING
OCTOBER 26, 2009**

CALL TO ORDER-

President's Statement-

Under the provisions of N.J.S.A. 10:4-6 et seq., notice of the time and place of this meeting has been posted and sent to the official newspapers.

ROLL CALL-

Robert Riedinger, President (A); William Nehls (P) member/council liaison;
Harriet Stambaugh (P); Fran Ellis (P) arrived 7:30; Mary Mobus (P);
George Pogosky (P); Bruce Ruck (P) John Sachariah (P); Peter Savulich (P);
Middlebrook-Kevin Sumner (P)

Bill, speaking as the Middle Brook Commission President, started the meeting with a brief synopsis on the reason for the meeting.

At the Middle Brook meeting Monday night, Kevin brought to their attention a draft report that was supposedly sent to all Administrators in Somerset County. Watchung never received a copy of the report until he gave the Administrator one.

The report is from Peter Wright, Shared Services, Somerset Business Alliance that they sent to the Freeholders as part of their process in shared services, consolidating services in Municipal functions. Part of the problem being Mr. Wright gave us all of five (5) days to respond to the report. We will not be able to meet that time frame. Bill did bring this up at the council meeting Thursday night.

Part of the problem is Mr. Wright discussed this with the Somerset County Health Officers Association, asked for their input, which they provided, and he ignored it. He came up with his conclusions not using any of the input from the Association it is all his in the report. Bill is not sure what he based his conclusions on.

Mr. Wright has no health background, he is the former Bernards Township Director of Recreation. His Grant came from Johnson & Johnson and for some determination, not sure who made the determination, they decided to look at consolidations of Health Departments within the County. It is the Counties desire to take over all the Boards of Health.

Bound Brook is considering joining the County, leaving the Commission, as a cost saving measure (not that they are going to save, but they feel they will).

If Bound Brook does join the County there will be several impacts, the costs for all remaining towns will increase.

The problem with this report is that a lot of this gentleman's conclusions cannot be substantiated and it is very important for all the Departments of Health, and mostly for the Commission who has been doing shared services for close to 40 years, to respond to the report.

Bill would like to get everyone's thoughts and put a response together from the Board of Health that's going to be endorsed by Resolution by the Mayor and Council. Tonight we need to brainstorm and come up with some comments and thoughts.

Harriet asked who asked Mr. Wright to do this report and what is their interest? Bill said it came from the Somerset Business Alliance. They are a semi-Chamber of Commerce. Their interest is from the Freeholders. It is to consolidate everything under the County.

Where are all the funds going to come from to pay for these services? We pay for it now.

What will happen if more towns join Somerset County Health Department will be a dilution in services. If Watchung were to consider going with the County we should be discussing as a Board of Health to protect ourselves in losing the Health Specialist we have. The Health Officers Association will be meeting with the Freeholders on November 4th to discuss this report.

Bill said Gerry Mobus had a very good point when they were talking about this. This is an expansion of County Government. Why are we expanding when we should be reducing it and this is going to create a whole new department at the County level?

Bruce said we have to keep our comments factual and as far as he can see this report lacks facts. We should take topic by topic and discuss because maybe in one of them it would be beneficial to do it. Bill said there is one that should be taken over by the County – Animal Control. There is no way towns can keep paying for an Animal Control contract. The County could effectively handle this

Bill said we are the first Board of Health to be discussing this. We are the most Pro-active Board in the Commission. Once we come up with our comments, etc. He will bring to the other Boards of Health and argue it there. But we need to do it first. He then has to get it to the Mayor and Council and then to the Business Alliance.

Comments on each of the reports recommendations:

Health Education:

From Bruce:

- 1) Report states Somerset Medical Center be the lead agency in County wide health Education.
 - a) What are their qualifications? Just because they are a hospital does not mean they have the qualifications to lead a health education program for multiple towns. Do they currently have the ability to coordinate a county wide program and what are there qualifications?
 - b) Have they done this before and if so what has been the outcome of the Education programs they have done.
- 2) Report states – doing this will result in lower number of Emergency Room experiences as the primary medical care service.
 - a) Where is this data coming from?
 - b) If it is true what is the amount of money it will save the Somerset County Medical Center and how they will take that money and put it back into the community? Do they have a plan?
 - c) Do we know what they would charge for this service?
 - 1) They are a for profit organization they are going to charge for this service.
 - 2) Do they even want to do this? Assuming they do – why do they want to do it? Because they see a profit motive – a way to make money.
 - 3) If they are considering – have they done this before and if so how much did they charge the town and how many people showed up at the education program.
 - 4) Our Health Educator looks at what our town needs as far as health education. (example –we do not need health education for lead based paint health education services).
 - 5) One of the concerns is how they would come into our town and for that matter how is the County going to come into our town – we are at the far end.

George stated if anything – **this will Escalate Costs – Not reduce them.**

Bill said this was a good point – how is Watchung going to be serviced? We are going to be paying the most per capita as an individual in this County Health Department.

Cooperative Purchasing:

Bruce:

- 1) What do we as a town purchase and if we were to go into this what would we see as far as savings?
 - a) Many times this costs are much higher in a co-op program. Some County & State Contracts could cost more.
 - b) Our cost for supplies, Labs, etc. are minimal. We do not have a lot of supplies we purchase. We do not do health screenings that we pay for.
 - c) What would the County be purchasing that we don't right now?
 - d) Would County Health Department do Health Screenings?

Kevin said the County holds one Health Fair a year – held in North Plainfield.

Public Health Nursing :

- 1) Will County provide the Visiting Nurse Services?

Kevin said their recommendation did not focus on money – it has to do with resources. There are only 2 VNA's in the County (one of them does all except Bernards Township). We all have contracts with them and we are all competing for the same limited pool of nursing. Their point was to expand the Nursing not about saving the money.

Bruce asked if the number of VNA nurses down because they can not hire them or because the money to hire them is limited?

Kevin said most of the nurses are primary care nurses. There are very few Public Health Nurses.

- 2) Under the Public Health Nursing section it is recommended that a partnership be developed with the Health Insurance Industry in supporting Public Health Nursing. Did they approach the Insurance Industry? We do not know if the health insurance industry will do this?

- 3) We have Obama regulations coming soon. We do not know what type of impact his insurance health plan will have on any of this.
- 4) How will County coordination with the American Cancer Society, The American Heart Association, National Diabetes Association, etc. how does them taking it over affect these organizations. They don't provide Public Health Care Services. Where are the nursing services coming from with these organizations. Are they going to provide these services or are we going to go to them for technical advice? What is his proposal in dealing with these organizations? There is no data showing costs. How do you measure the success of this?

Regionalization of Public Registrar:

Bill:

- 1) This would need Legislative Change – the State would have to change the law to do this. By law each town has to have a Registrar.

Bruce:

- 2) The report says it will increase the quality of customer service and save tax dollars with the elimination of redundant services per municipality.
 - a) Customer service: Bruce would like to see the customer satisfaction survey they are using to base it upon. How does the local Registrar customer service compare to Somerset County service?
 - b) How does this save the towns money? Do town Registrars perform any other functions in their office? If so we will not save any money because we still have to keep the person for their other functions. We would lose the revenue from making the certified copies – which is a lot.
 - c) Our older or more senior residents would have to go to the County for all Registrar information. Many are not capable of doing this. How would they get the service?

Animal Control:

- 1) This is one area that would be a good thing for the County to take over. It is very expensive for the town to have their own animal control contract.
- 2) It would definitely save the town money.

Bill – final comments:

We must keep in mind when addressing these issues that we can call Kevin, Robyn or anyone else at Middle Brook and then they are here. We would not have that service if we join the county. You would have to contact John Horensky and if you are lucky enough to get him on the phone then where are the Health Specialists- they would not be in our town. The response time would **definitely not** be the same. When you have limited manpower they may not be able to respond as quickly.

Septic Systems: Inspections

Harriet -

Will we be limited on number of inspections for services such as closure of septic systems? How fast will the response time be for inspections.

If you were to look at the Bedminister contract with the County, the County Health Department will only do the plan reviews – the rest is contracted out through the local Engineers office. When they were with the Local Health Department the septic inspections were part of the contract. The County contract is lower but the town is still paying the engineer to do septic. When you add it all together is there any real savings? The monies are just moved around – you have not saved any dollars. Or you don't get the inspections done. There is no law for someone to be at a septic abandonment. Robyn is at every one of ours.

We have 2 representatives at the Commission Level with voting rights. Our charter sets this up.

We have no way of getting this at the County Level.

Currently there is no County Board of Health (but there probably never will be one). Kevin said there should be one because they would then be overseeing the County Health Department. Right now there is no one overseeing the County Health Department.

We would have no say on Costs.

We will never have someone like Kevin come in and account for every penny spent. No one will be accountable if it was a County Board of Health.

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Bill said we will be responding to the Somerset County Business Alliance not to Mr. Wright. He would like to present something to the Mayor and Council at their next meeting. He wants to get a resolution from them backing us.

Kevin – final comments:

Don't focus on costs

Focus on the areas that would have room for improvements in public health services based on shared services or collaborative efforts on the Regional or County wide basis for some activities.

Kevin will give dates of other towns meetings to Bill and can put him on their agenda.

Kevin likes the way we are doing this with a response from the autonomous Board of Health of the Borough of Watchung with a Resolution of endorsement from the Mayor and Council. Both voices speaking independently saying the same thing.

Respectfully submitted,

MaryAnn Hance