

Clay County Commissioners

Public Hearing on Proposed Consolidation of Board of Health and Social Services Board

Monday, November 13, 2017

Chairman Logan called to order the public hearing on the proposed consolidation of Board of Health and Social Services Board at 7:25PM in the Multipurpose room of the Clay County Courthouse. Those present were: Clay Logan, Chairman; Robert Penland, Commissioner; Ed Roach, Commissioner; Dr. Rob Peck, Commissioner; Mark Pullium, County Manager; Merinda Woody, County Attorney, and the press and general public. Commissioner Randy Nichols was absent.

Mr. Pullium presented a slide show entitled Health and Human Services Board Consolidation which a copy of the slides is attached to these minutes.

Mr Pullium explained that in 2012, the North Carolina General Assembly passed legislation giving counties options on how to organize and govern some local human services agencies including health departments and departments of social services. The legislation gives counties the authority to create consolidated agencies governed by an appointed board, or by the county commissioners. Merging the two boards in Clay County would help develop efficient ways of streamlining or expanding the services offered, reduce duplication of efforts and simplify red tape.

Mr. Pullium explained that there are three options under consideration. Nearly 30 counties across the state have opted to merge under one of these options or a combination of them. Consolidating the boards would assure one less layer of governance by putting both boards under the county commissioners. The County Commissioners already have the ultimate responsibility for the health of their citizens as well as the financial impact that these departments have on the county. Since the commissioners are elected, they are ultimately responsible to the public.

Commissioner Peck commented that the consolidation would improve efficiency and stewardship of tax dollars and strive to provide better services to the Clay County citizens.

Chairman Logan opened the floor for public comment, laying ground rules that those who signed up at the beginning of the meeting would each be given three minutes to make their presentation.

The following persons commented:

1. Natalie Moses from Brasstown expressed her opposition to consolidation. She stated that her concerns were threefold. She stated that “the commissioners are not qualified in any way to act as a final governing board and that the administration of either of these departments should not be political. The administration by county commissioners put patients’ confidentiality at risk.” She further stated that “the consolidation of these boards as an appallingly bad idea.”
2. Marilee Powell, a member of the Clay County DSS Board, addressed the good work that DSS currently does. She went on to say that if the consolidation can make the work that is being done more efficient, then she is for it, however, in the research that she has done, she has not found evidence of how it is making service delivery more efficient and serving the needs of people better across the State. She does not want “to jump on the bandwagon when we don’t know exactly where the bandwagon is going.”
3. Callie Moore of Tusquittee expressed that she is against consolidation. Her argument was that consolidation is not necessary to have consistent policies. She expressed that she was concerned about the commissioners putting political pressure on employees and interjecting politics into these agencies, especially in the environmental health department.
4. Judith Wickstrom, nurse practitioner, said that Clay County ‘s health department is probably one of the best in the nation, in her opinion, in serving the health and social needs of its citizens. She advocated to keep the boards separate as they are and to consolidate purchasing and accounting if any consolidation is necessary. She was opposed to having an advisory board with no power in the end.
5. Jane Hindsman, a member of the Clay County Board of Health stated that she was opposed to consolidation and that she “would challenge almost anyone in here to tell me when consolidation has been good for the end user. It has not been good for the consumer It results usually in poor service and higher cost. Human service should never be run like an assembly line. It should be personal and excellent, just as it is now.”
6. Steve Hindsman, praised the health department and social services for the work that they currently perform. He stated that there are mandated services that both departments must perform that cannot be consolidated.
7. Barbara Lawyemeyer stated that “my concern is mostly about the timing of this. With Janice Patterson retiring, that’s a huge change and big loss. We’re also in a public health crisis with drugs and opioids. We can’t afford to dilute these services in a time of crisis.”

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8. Sandy Zimmerman opposed the consolidation. She wants the boards to stay the way they are. She does not think that consolidation is a good idea.
9. Dr. Russell Hughes, chairman of the Clay County Board of Health praised the expertise of the current board members and the professionals who work with him. He questioned whether the commissioners have the knowledge to run the health department as it has run in the past. He opposes consolidation.
10. Sandy Morgan, said she wondered what the motivation of the consolidation was. She questioned as to whether the motivation was to save money or gain control? She stated, "With the opioid challenges this is not the time to do this. Consolidation and reducing the amount of expertise is not going to help. Taking away expertise does not work."
11. Dr. Douglas Klaucke, a member of the Clay County Board of Health, said that just because 30 counties in North Carolina have moved to make this change means that 70 counties have not. He stated that the Department of Health has been moving forward for several years and provides exceptional services to the citizens of Clay County. He expressed his concerns for consolidation; namely, employee protections, client privacy, HIPAA concerns, and the qualifications of the commissioners to oversee these two departments. He emphasized that the focus should be on the quantity and quality of services to the citizens of Clay County.

There being no other comments from the public, Chairman Logan then stated that a special called meeting of the Clay County Board of County Commissioners will be held at 7:00 am Thursday morning, November 16, 2017 in the Multipurpose Room in the Clay County Courthouse to consider adopting a resolution to consolidate the boards of health and social services for Clay County.

Commissioner Roach made a motion to adjourn the Public Hearing at 8:35 pm. Commissioner Peck seconded the motion and the motion carried. The meeting adjourned at 8:35 pm.

Chairman Clay Logan

Commissioner Robert Penland

Commissioner Ed Roach

Commissioner Dr. Rob Peck

Attested: Clerk to Board