



**RIVER FALLS CITY COUNCIL WORKSHOP REGARDING  
COVID 19 RESPONSE AND RECOVERY**

**May 12, 2020, 5 p.m.**

**City Hall, 222 Lewis Street, River Falls, WI 54022**

**City Council Members Present:** Mayor Dan Toland, Todd Bjerstedt, Sean Downing, Chris Gagne, Scott Morrissette, Diane Odeen, Ben Plunkett, Hal Watson

**City Council Members Absent:** None

**City Staff Present:** City Administrator Scot Simpson; Assistant City Administrator Jason Stroud; others

**Others:** AZ Snyder, Pierce County Health Officer; Kelli Engen, St. Croix County Health Officer

Due to Covid 19, the Mayor called a virtual workshop to order at 5 p.m. He gave the floor to the health officers. AZ Snyder and Kelli Engen each introduced themselves and provided a brief background.

Snyder provided a situational update. Currently, Pierce County has 13 confirmed cases with four active and six probable. On March 9, Pierce County confirmed the second positive case in Wisconsin. This forced us to get ready for what was next. We had to halt a cluster in Ellsworth.

Engen said St. Croix County had 36 confirmed cases in St. Croix County with 19 active and 22 probable. She talked about a county resident that had returned from Wuhan, China.

Engen said both Pierce and St. Croix County are nationally accredited health departments. She talked about public health's functions during an outbreak: monitor health, diagnose and investigate, information, education and empower, develop policies, enforce laws, link to care, assure competent workforce, mobile community partnerships, evaluate, and research.

Snyder talked about practicing for emergencies. We work every day as epidemiologists to monitor and assess. They do a lot of educating and empowering residents, assisting and developing policies, enforcement, linking to care and care coordination, ensuring a competent workforce in the county. We work hard to keep up-to-date with news coming out of the CDC, DHS, and WHO on Covid 19.

Engen talked about the roles of a health officer. It is written in the statutes. Some of duties are in Chapter 252 which governs communicable disease. Some of the duties of local health officer are to take measures to prevent, suppress, and control communicable disease.

Chapter 252 defines powers and duties of the department and local health officers as relates to CDC control. It authorizes a fine of \$500 or not more than 30 days of imprisonment for violating state statute/rule or local ordinance relating to public health under this chapter. Administrative Rule 145 requires reporting of communicable disease.

Snyder talked about the key triggers for when a state can reopen including decrease in cases, decrease in health care worker infections, sufficient PPE for health care staff for two weeks, the ability to contact 100 percent of symptomatic contacts, having enough hand sanitizer to place at entrances to buildings, having designated facilities for non-hospitalized Covid-infected patients who cannot convalesce at home.

Engen talked about daily inquiries about PPE and the shortage of it.

Snyder showed a chart of the current metrics. She is unsure of how the state is measuring the metrics. She talked about the different metrics, their usefulness, and the information provided. Snyder talked about the next 18 months. She talked about tightening and losing resulting in smaller spikes. It is important to have good local data. Snyder talked about current public health efforts. This is what she is working on in May and June:

- Testing – ensure Pierce County residents have access to Covid-19 test if symptoms develop.
- Tracing – ensure all high and medium risk contacts of cases are contacted within 24 hours and if positive, are safely able to quarantine/isolate.
- Data – ensure meaningful metrics are used to guide decision making.
- Health care – advocate filling of gaps that inhibit Covid 19 care and testing.
- Partners – ensure service organization has practices in place to reopen in a way that minimizes risk to staff and clients.
- Businesses – ensure every business has practices in place to reopen in a way that minimizes risk to staff/customers.

Snyder talked about the testing events which were held last weekend. She said 229 people were tested at Baldwin and 184 at River Falls. There were positive results. She talked about where patients can get tested.

Snyder talked about what happens next. She will be working with the state on a specific plan for moving from Safer at Home through the Badger Bounce Back phases using risk-based strategies. She talked about communication of the high likelihood of multiple peaks and advocating for detailed travel recommendations within each phase. Snyder spoke about working with the state to develop meaningful local metrics, include measuring local capacity. Engen talked about the importance of having consistency when things reopen. She talked about the importance of being safe, careful, and strategic.

Upon conclusion of the presentation, the Mayor asked Council if they had questions. Alderperson Downing asked Snyder to describe contact tracing. Snyder answered and also talked about doing detailed interviews with persons who test positive to understand their movements in the 14 days before they became symptomatic, reaching out to other persons who have been in contact with the infected person, monitoring symptoms, and working with employers where the exposure may have occurred.

Alderperson Gagne asked about if people don't comply. Snyder talked about strategy for high and medium risks contacts. Gagne asked about her authority if the Wisconsin Supreme Court rules that the governor's authority is unconstitutional. Snyder talked about local health officer order which is separate from the governor's order. Gagne asked further about her authority based on a scenario regarding the Barron County Sheriff. Snyder talked about the options including issuing tickets.

Alderperson Morrissette asked the health officers about the Covid numbers in their respective counties. Each provided answers. Morrissette expressed concern about the City having two health officers (due to the City sitting on the county borders). Engen said that she and Snyder are communicating constantly. We don't want to divide communities between county lines. Snyder talked about clusters effecting clusters in other areas. It is likely for St. Croix County to have more cases due to a larger population. Morrissette talked about assessing needs county by county.

Alderperson Bjerstedt asked about the 18 months chart. What does regional mean? Snyder said we are part of western region which is 17 counties and two tribes. She talked about Polk, Pierce, St. Croix, Dunn, Pepin are more similar and can coordinate better.

Gagne asked why did the big box stores allowed to stay open? Why can't local businesses do the same? Engen thought it was interesting what is deemed essential. Big box stores do carry essential items. She talked about the gap economically with big and small businesses and small versus large spaces. As we go into reopening, we need to have good guidance. Snyder said the state needs to explain the public health reasons behind decisions that are being made.

Gagne asked about retail versus service. He talked about chiropractors, veterinarians, hair salons. Snyder talked about essential versus non-essential distinction. She talked about helping the businesses operate going forward.

Alderson Plunkett asked about death rates and other long-term health implications. He asked how these impacts are taken into consideration for public health. Engen said we don't know the consequences yet, but it may show up later.

Alderson Downing asked about the cluster in Ellsworth. Snyder talked about the cluster and how she dealt with it. Small communities think they are immune.

Plunkett asked about using masks. Snyder said masks are a great control but not everyone can safely wear a mask. She is cognizant of the social stigma about wearing a mask. She recommends wearing masks.

Engen talked about universal masking. Orders around masks are hard to enforce. She strongly recommends wearing a mask.

Alderson Odeen asked if Snyder or Engen had run into opposition in doing your work. How can the Council help you do your work?

Engen said we have had a little bit of pushback. There are groups that they say nasty things. Councils, county boards, etc. need to support good public health. It's weighing on us. Snyder talked about threats of violence. She appreciated the reminder Mayor Toland did – reminding everyone that we are local people who live in your community.

Alderson Watson learned a lot tonight and appreciated Snyder and Engen doing the workshop. He is reassured that you two are working closely together. He appreciates that the City won't be split. We need to know what you need from us. He hopes people take to heart wearing facemasks when in public. He thinks that is the next step to move forward.

Gagne asked about a worker testing positive; what does that look like? Snyder said it depends on timeline when they were last at work. She gave an example. Engen has had a number test positive in businesses. Businesses have been more than willing to cooperate.

Watson asked about workers coming back to businesses. Snyder said some is addressed in the Pierce County toolkit.

Gagne asked about the best resources for people in both counties to reach them. Engen provided her email address, and she there is a Covid hotline on the website. Snyder said there is a direct line and email for businesses. The Mayor thanked Snyder and Engen.

City Administrator Simpson provided a staff presentation He credited Jason Stroud about organizing the workshop with the health officers. The City has issued a 'Crushing Covid' plan. We are bound by the State of Wisconsin and are operating on framework of the Wisconsin Bounce Back plan. He talked about the four phases and the metrics.

The City is maintaining our focus on our five core functions: delivering quality public safety services; supporting local economy and business community; connecting community resources.

The core focus areas are being adaptable in face of change and uncertainty, capitalizing on opportunity for improvement, removing barriers, applying lessons learned in response, aligning collaborating and innovating with partners.

He said the 'Crushing Covid' plan is located on the City's website. There is a real connection to the St. Paul/Minneapolis metro area. Simpson talked about the City being located in two counties. There are times when Madison/Milwaukee approaches are not adequate. At end of day, if state-wide measures are inappropriate, have to convince them. As things are relaxed, we will work with local health officers.

There is some policymaking role that the Council has - plus we are an employer. We have to keep both roles in mind. The plan includes Badger Bounce back plan. The primary job is to provide insight into local execution. It will come back to the Council at the next meeting. PPE is still an issue, but it is much improved. We do favor a regional approach but is not necessarily allowed right now. What we can control is phasing up things that are allowed. He talked about phasing.

Simpson talked about the communication strategy. There will be a Mayor's video message weekly. There will two reports in the packet from the City Administrator. We will focus on our official partners for official information. Simpson talked

about the City's enforcement strategy and provided an example. He talked about the business community. The City is committed with working with the Chamber on recovery. He talked about the City's loan program which will be done with our own money sources.

Simpson talked about the City's fiscal plan. We need to rebalance 2020 budget. He talked about the different funds. We are reworking strategic initiatives. He highlighted projects that will be delayed until 2022 - any big work on strategy for the fire department project, the water utility portion of AMI, working on a strategic plan for the library, the update downtown master plan, working on the new science facility for UWRP, the update of the outdoor recreation plan, street light utility, Mann Valley delayed (possible EDA funding for industrial parks – that we may take advantage of it.)

The Mayor asked for questions. Gagne thanked Simpson for all the stuff that he and staff are enduring. You guys are doing a fantastic job particularly the clerks. He appreciated staff working to remove red tape and helping move the businesses forward.

Downing had a question for Police Chief Young. He wanted to know how he feels we are progressing as a City. Young thought we were progressing very well under the leadership of Scot, Jason and public health.

Morrisette asked about the four measurements. We are starting to put ideas on what it looks like.

Simpson said we are frustrated with some things from State. He said most of measures they are using are up. He suggested that it is difficult for most people to get at. Our plan is to get best localized plan they we can. He talked about getting data. We don't make the final call as a City.

Morrisette talked about conversations with business owners. They don't understand where they fall. He talked about bars and restaurants.

Simpson said our summary is from the Badger Bounce Back. Bars are still a no in Phase 1. State is working on Phase 2. If there are questions, call the City's general number for help. Simpson talked further about different businesses.

Morrisette asked if metrics would be put together in the four areas. Simpson said yes and spoke in more detail. Assistant City Administrator Stroud said Snyder and Engen have been very helpful. They are willing to hold weekly check in meetings with him. On Thursdays, he will have data updates.

Plunkett asked about the City's liability issues in accordance with Chapter 893 Wisconsin Statutes. Have we looked at our insurance coverage?

Simpson talked about employee liability. He talked about protecting customers on a best practices' standpoint.

Odeen said unless we are purposely wanting to hurt people, we, as a City, have immunity. This was Simpson's understanding too.

Downing asked about legal obligations with Shared Ride Taxi Service. Simpson said it is our service, so we have some liability. There is a process if someone has a claim. He talked further.

Gagne asked about mental health issues.

Mayor Toland thanked everyone tonight. Watson said nice work on communications.

The workshop ended at 7:27 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Kristi McKahan, Deputy Clerk