

Emmet County
TRANSPORTATION COMMITTEE MEETING
July 8, 2015

Present: Commissioner Les Atchison; Commissioner Charles MacInnis; Commissioner Bert Notestine.

Staff: Director of Transportation and Development Kelley Atkins; Chief Deputy County Clerk Amanda Arthur

Absent: None.

Call to order:

The meeting was called to order at 9:00 a.m. by Atchison in the Emmet County Board of Commissioners Room.

Public Comment:

None

Minutes:

The draft minutes of the January 29, 2015 were presented. MacInnis motioned to approve the minutes of the January 29, 2015 meeting. Notestine seconded the motion. Motion carried in a unanimous vote.

The draft minutes of the February 23, 2015 meeting were presented. MacInnis motioned to approve the minutes of the February 23, 2015 meeting with the correction of John Drury being changed to Jill Drury on page 1. Notestine seconded the motion. Motion carried in a unanimous vote.

Goals of the Committee:

Atchison started by reiterating the importance of open, honest, and transparent interaction with the community. Atchison proceeded to share notes from face to face meetings with the following HSBC members in regards to their clients actual experiences: Probation Officer Victoria Weiderman, United Way, North Central Michigan College, Dental Clinics North, Emmet County Health Department, Manna Food Project, Community Mental Health, Disability Network, Women's Resource Center, Northwest Michigan Community Action Agency, as well as homeless citizens in Petoskey. Experiences included challenges with the hours of operation of the existing transit programs, the advanced planning required to make arrangements for rides, the limited area of coverage especially in the northern reaches of the county, the high cost of owning and maintaining a vehicle, and the inability to obtain a drivers license.

Atchison concluded that it is evident that more rides need to be available in Emmet County, and while every situation cannot be fixed, a “blind eye” cannot be turned on this need.

Petoskey Plastics Experience:

Atchison reported that he spoke with a Human Resources employee at Petoskey Plastics. He was unaware of any employee transportation issues at this time. In the past they had a bus, but the route was long and frustrating for staff. The bus is no longer in service.

Kelley Atkins Report:

Kelley Atkins shared his report summarizing meetings with the United Way, Health Department, Community Mental Health, and the Wellness Center. His report stated that their needs are similar, with most common issues identified as days and hours of operation, area of coverage the systems provide, as well as current system fares being unaffordable, the cost of owning and maintaining reliable vehicles and lack of driver’s license.

Atkins recommended to the Transportation Committee that a meeting be sought with Straits Regional Ride to discuss and assess how SRR could possibly address any of these issues and determine the costs to accomplish it.

Atchison referenced a conversation with Jill Drury of the Charlevoix County Transportation program stating that she suggested starting small and building, with the consensus being to expand the relationship with Straits Regional Ride. He went on to suggest that Atkins meet with Michael Couture of Straits Regional Ride regarding expanding on their system.

MacInnis thanked Rachel Smolinski of Habor, Inc. for putting together the binders of information for the committee. He referenced that in that collection was also the recommendation to “try something”. He concurred that Atkins’ recommendation is the right next step.

MacInnis motioned that the Transportation Committee recommend to the Board of Commissioners that a meeting be sought with Straits Regional Ride to discuss and assess how SRR could possibly address any of these issues and to determine what the possible costs to accomplish this would be. Notestine seconded the motion.

Discussion followed.

MacInnis modified the motion to state that the Transportation Committee direct Kelley Atkins to meet with Straits Regional Ride to address ideas and costs. Notestine seconded the motion. Motion carried in a unanimous vote.

Survey Status:

Atchison reported that when he presented to the Board of Commissioners to request \$2,000.00 towards the validation of the survey, he assured them that the Transportation Committee and the Emmet County Board of Commissioners would have some say in the survey questions in an attempt to ensure that the survey be as neutral as possible. Atchison noted that if Harbor, Inc. does the survey with the Little Traverse Bay Band of Odawa Indians paying for it, then the survey will be done via mail. MacInnis verified that is in fact the intent. Atchison referenced a conversation he had with Larry Willis. Willis offered his opinion that the people that draft a survey should be the ones to validate it. Atchison asked to review the value of having someone else, or having Harbor, Inc. validating the survey. MacInnis stated the importance of having a professional market research person provide oversight over the survey. MacInnis emphasized that a survey of this magnitude requires an expertise that no one here has. A second party assures that it is done correctly and represents a random sample. Atchison inquired as to how to select who to mail the surveys to. Smolinski explained that surveys would be mailed to registered voters, and there is software that helps to randomly select those recipients. She also explained that Cathlyn Sommerfield would be a consultant to Harbor, Inc. as a neutral party to help review survey questions and ensure random selection. Discussion followed regarding the public's response to the need versus the cost. Atchison went on to mention that in a previous conversation with Michael Couture of SRR, the need for millage funding would be great. SRR currently runs on multiple funding sources: a large community mental health contract, other private contracts, as well as state and federal funding. Atchison concluded that with or without millage funding, they need to move forward.

MacInnis inquired with the committee about contributing the previously approved \$2,000.00 for survey validation toward the oversight of the survey by Cathlyn Sommerfield. Sommerfield's cost is \$5,200.00. Notestine agreed. He also stated that it is a case of not if, but how they can move forward with transportation. Smolinski added that Sommerfield's oversight will add another layer to the validity of the survey.

MacInnis motioned that the Transportation Committee authorized the expenditure of \$2,000.00, payable to Cathlyn Sommerfield's consulting firm in Traverse City, for the purpose of providing oversight for the survey. Notestine seconded the motion but would like to add "with the Board of Commissioners permission". Smolinski asked for clarification as to whether Sommerfield would be reporting to the Transportation Committee or to Harbor, Inc.. The committee agreed that she would report to Harbor, Inc.. Smolinski then suggested that that \$2,000.00 be payable to Harbor, Inc.

MacInnis modified his motion to state that the Transportation Committee, with Board of Commissioners concurrence, authorize the payment of \$2,000.00, payable to Harbor, Inc. for the purpose of contracting with an outside consultant. Notestine seconded the motion. Motion was carried in a unanimous vote.

Public Comment:

Lorraine Manary from CharEm United Way thanked the committee for their hard work and for visiting so many organizations. She also thanked Atchison for attending the Poverty in Paradise meeting. She stated that the report from that meeting will be forthcoming. Manary went on to share that a need she thinks may have been overlooked that she has noticed is the need for medical transportation for the purpose of appointments.

Atchison stated he has talked with Larry Hansen from Emmet County EMS about this need and has asked him to keep his mind open to ideas on how to address that need.

Amanda Swiss spoke as a citizen regarding the marketing of a public transportation program, stating that if the program is marketed correctly it won't just be marketed to those in need. It should be marketed to all, including tourists visiting the area, therefore generating revenue for the program.

Martha Lancaster spoke as a community member thanking the committee for their work, as well as their visits to other agencies. She informed the committee that in the binders provided by Harbor, Inc., they will find the draft survey. She encouraged committee members to review the survey. Lancaster suggested melding together Straits Regional Ride and the Friendship Center to build on. Other ideas included more contracts, fare boxes, mileage, state and federal funding. She feels there is no doubt that the Friendship Center is behind public transportation. They could roll over into SRR, contributing funding and buses. Lancaster also stated she was pleased to hear the committee's desire to get started soon. She would love to see a circle tour including stops such as Meijers, Community Mental Health, Walmart, North Central Michigan College, etc.. She also expanded on Swiss' previous comments about other riders of choice and riders that pay full fare, suggesting that bike racks be placed on buses so someone could be bused to a destination and then bike back. Lancaster concluded that the objective is to have a program that services not only riders in need but riders of choice, with buses more full, more often.

Swiss spoke on behalf of the Little Traverse Bay Band of Odawa Indians stating that they have an FTA transit planning grant coming. She explained that they have access to funds that the county does not have access to. She suggested coming to terms of a partnership with the county.

David Chaffee stated that he originally felt that there was little support for public transit. He now sees positivity and feels confident that something good will come of this.

Committee Member Comments:

Notestine shared some of his thoughts that have come up through the meetings with different agencies. He stated his concern with making the program self supporting, without it being cost prohibitive. He also sees a real need for the non-emergency medical transportation such as doctor and pharmacy visits but he is unsure of how to make it affordable. He noted that

extended hours of operation, including early, late, and weekend hours would be needed. He is hoping that a hybrid program of some fixed routes in addition to some looped routes can be developed. He also feels that this will be best accomplished with a multicounty system. Notestine recognizes the need for accommodating wheelchairs as well. He concluded with stating his concern with where transportation funding within the state is heading, noting that several other programs are reducing services.

Atchison thanked F.E.E.T. for their persistence and professionalism. He also asked that they thank Terry Newton when they see him.

Notestine posed a question to the audience, asking if their expectations have evolved throughout this process.

Lancaster responded by stating that a hybrid system has always been the goal, using other communities as models.

Linda Ward, co-chair of F.E.E.T., added that 20 years ago, the vision was a program within Emmet County. There was a shift 3-5 years ago to combine with Straits Regional Ride and the Friendship Center.

Atchison shared a concept he saw in Midland County of a repair shop run by a church that serviced the working poor.

Swiss added that the auto shop at Petoskey High School only charges for parts. They donate their hours.

Smolinski stated that she felt this was a great concept for a church or other organization but did not think it was a county function.

Swiss also noted that perhaps North Central Michigan College could start an auto program that may help service this need.

Atchison agreed it was not a suggestion for the county but just a concept he felt could be replicated in this area.

Adjournment:

There being no further business, Atchison thanked everyone and the meeting was adjourned at 10:15 a.m.

Minutes Approved: November 23, 2015