



MARATHON COUNTY REGIONAL MORGUE TASK FORCE MEETING MINUTES

Friday, July 11, 2022, at 3:00 – 4:00 pm
In-person and Virtual through WebEx

Members	Present/Web-Phone	Absent
Chair Craig McEwen	P	
Greg Bean		X
Dr. Michael Clark	P	
Dr. Lisa Grill Dodson	W	
Phil Rentmeester	P	
Scott Rifleman		X
Kimm Weber		X
Mark Westen	P	
Greg Zorowski		X

Present in person: Marathon County Medical Examiner's Office personnel Jessica Blahnik and Christina Wimmer

Also Present via Web: Administrator Lance Leonhard

1. **Call Meeting to Order**

The meeting was called to order by Chair McEwen 3:01 pm.

2. **Public Comment – None**

3. **MOTION BY WESTEN; SECOND BY RENTMEESTER TO APPROVE THE MINTUES OF THE APRIL 1, 2022, MORGUE TASK FORCE MEETING. MOTION CARRIED.**

4. **Educational Presentations/Outcome Monitoring Reports**

A. Informational updates, including funding options (DHS, ARPA, and State), business plan, facility costing, and ongoing discussions with potential stakeholders.

Discussion:

Chair McEwen expressed his appreciation for the hard work of staff to complete the business plan and felt it was well done. He explained that the Regional Forensic Science Center meets two of the county's strategic plan priorities:

Objective 7.1: Provide cost-effective and high-quality public safety services.

Objective 12.3: Promote cost-effective public services.

Blahnik reviewed the business plan financials and explained the changes from inflation; however, the business plan was still cash flow positive.

Administrator Leonhard shared that he had continued discussions with state legislators, primarily Senator Petrowski, who had been an advocate for the project. He has also spoken to Attorney General Josh Kaul, who is supportive of the project. Attorney Kaul requested to explore housing the Wausau Crime Lab Branch in the same facility as the Regional Forensic Science Center, as they are looking for a new location for the Wausau Crime Lab branch. Marathon County still needs to identify funding for the construction costs, hopefully through the Governor's Office or other state agencies.

Blahnik provided an update on the new facility layout that included an increased conference room area to accommodate 50 people and an autopsy observation area. Somerville was able to provide a new costing model for the construction due to the inflation over the past months.

Blahnik shared a new partnership with Northcentral Technical College (NTC). NTC expressed interest in the Regional Forensic Science Center being located on their campus, connected to their future paramedic training center. NTC is willing to donate the land to Marathon County, which is valued at roughly \$150,000. As part of the partnership, NTC had preliminary offered to complete exterior grounds maintenance, interior maintenance, information technology (IT) support, custodial services, and campus security. In exchange, Marathon County would provide students with numerous training opportunities to enhance their health sciences and public safety programs. NTC is currently exploring an associate degree Forensic Science program as well. Administrator Leonhard explained that there are numerous community and health care benefits of the partnership, especially if the crime lab project could be with the Regional Forensic Science Center. Administrator Leonhard then explained this is a new collaborative approach for this type of facility and there are no other facilities like this in Wisconsin and potentially the first of its kind nationwide. Chair McEwen supported the enhanced opportunities for training and the potential for

increased enrollment into NTC. The partnership and project would be a great benefit for the region. Sheriff Westen agreed with the benefits and added that the NTC campus is a great location for outside counties, with easy access from the highway. Blahnik stated that the NTC location meets all the identified location criteria from the project perspective.

Blahnik provided an update on the county \$2 million ARPA funds request. Blahnik completed the funding request application and presented at the Human Resources/Finance Committee meeting. The meeting went well and there were no major concerns raised at that time. Administrator Leonhard shared that the Human Resources/Finance Committee will be meeting Wednesday, July 13, 2022, to discuss ARPA funds. Currently, none of the funds for project requests have been allocated. There should be a better timeline after the meeting. Chair McEwen explained that the project will hopefully be like the Warm Water Therapy Pool project, regarding the success in raising outside funding after a portion of the project funding was allocated through the county. Having county funding should be favorable to other organizations and shows the county's support of the project.

Blahnik provided an overview of another potential funding source through the Department of Health Services (DHS). Marathon County has received grant funding for the past four years to establish an overdose fatality review team. Working with the DHS in the past, the need for additional forensic autopsy providers and increased educational opportunities has been identified for the region and Wisconsin in general. DHS has supported the project and mission of the facility. DHS has offered to allocate \$180,000 of grant funds towards equipment and supplies of the Regional Forensic Science Center through the fatal overdose review team grant, with the next grant cycle starting September 1, 2022. Marathon County personnel will be meeting with DHS on July 13, 2022, to discuss the funding opportunity and determine next steps.

Dr. Clark shared that there may be additional on-going funding opportunities through the North Central Wisconsin Healthcare Readiness Coalition (NCW HERC) with underspent grant funds each year. The project aligns with NCW HERC mission of creating a facility for mass fatality preparedness for the region. There may also be state funding available through the Funding Assistance Program (FAP) that offers funding for basic emergency medical technicians (EMT).

Administrator Leonhard explained further that Senator Petrowski was engaged with the project and working to identify any additional strategic names or organizations to support the project. He will be presenting the project to Governor Evers soon. The Attorney General would like to explore locating the Crime Lab in the same facility as the Regional Forensic Science Center. Administrator Leonhard has been in communication with Nicole Roehm, Division Administrator at the Wisconsin State Crime Laboratory, who agrees it would be in good alignment at the NTC campus. Administrator Leonhard stated he would reach out to NTC Dean, Dr. Jeannie Worden, to explore NTC interest. Sheriff Westen stated that the current Wausau Crime Lab building is not a large facility, and they should not need a large space.

Dr. Clark questioned if the project had been approved by county board at this time. Administrator Leonhard and Chair McEwen both explained that they would prefer to wait until the funding has been identified before they ask county board to approve the project. The project has been presented to numerous county committees and the entire board, so most of the board members are familiar with the project. However, there are seventeen new county board members this year that may not be familiar with the project.

Follow Up:

None

5. Policy Issues Discussion and Committee Determination to the County Board for its Consideration

A. Recommendation of next steps to Public Safety Committee

Discussion:

Administrator Leonhard and Chair McEwen both stated that depending on the timeframe, DHS would like to award the additional grant funds towards the project, accepting the DHS grant funds may have to go through the mid-year budget grant award acceptance procedure. If that is the case, it would be ideal to have the task force make a motion recommend the Public Safety Committee to accept the grant funds.

Action:

MOTION BY RENTMEESTER; SECOND BY CLARK TO BRING THE RECOMMENDATION TO PUBLIC SAFETY COMMITTEE TO ACCEPT THE DHS GRANT FUNDS. MOTION CARRIED.

Follow Up:

Forward recommendation to Public Safety Committee for consideration.

6. **Scheduling of Future Meetings and Identifying Agenda Topics**

Committee members are asked to bring ideas for future discussion.

7. **Announcements**

None

8. **Adjournment**

MOTION BY WESTEN; SECOND BY RENTMEESTER TO ADJOURN THE MEETING AT 3:45 PM. MOTION CARRIED.

Respectfully submitted by
Jessica Blahnik