



MINUTES

St. Clair County Board of Commissioners Human Services Committee

**Board of Commissioners' Room
County Administrative Office Building, 2nd Floor
200 Grand River Avenue
Port Huron, MI 48060**

March 3, 2022 at 6:00 PM

1. Roll Call/Opening/Pledge of Allegiance

Commissioner Bohm called the meeting to order at 6:00 p.m.

Commissioners Present: Greg McConnell, Duke Dunn, Dave Rushing, Dave Vandenbossche and Jeff Bohm

Commissioners Absent: Jorja Baldwin and Lisa Beedon

The Pledge of Allegiance was recited.

2. Additions/Deletions/Changes to the Agenda

Moved by Greg McConnell, supported by Duke Dunn, to approve the agenda as presented. Carried - Voice Vote 5-0. Ayes: Bohm, Dunn, McConnell, Rushing, Vandenbossche.

3. Citizens to be Heard

- Kim Hortop - Yale water meters, crosswalks, marijuana facility
- Mary Platt - yielded time
- Shawn Treadaway - lack of communication, leadership and guidance
- Lauren Martin - separate health department positions
- Carolyn Richards - Health Advisory Board and minutes and authority
- Steve Richards - yielded time
- Tim Parker - suggested an invocation be given at meetings, include a faith minded individual on BOC, countywide public meeting
- Joseph McNufs - change procedures, allow greater communication
- Pam Binsfield - overview of past 2 years, conspiracy theories, 2-party system
- Larry VanBeek - yielded time

- Helen Hermes - Open Meetings Act, vetting candidates
- Mary Powell - research candidates before elections, some Commissioners need to be replaced, Times Herald coverage, hatred in the community
- Kim Van Baak - history of Health Department position, increase in percentage of mental health issues and suicide, learn from mistakes
- Tracy Birgy - represent kids and do better for them
- Dawn Schafer - thank you for splitting position, change in milestone charts, lack of nursing home visitation
- Alyce Carl - letter read supporting splitting of Health Director positions
- Jessica Schulte - letter read supporting separating Health Director positions
- Vicky Ames - letter read in support of Dr. Mercatante and Health Department
- Diane Horn - letter read in support of Dr. Mercatante
- Sandy Mangan - letter read in support of Dr. Mercatante
- Rebecca Paull - letter read in support of Dr. Mercatante
- Mary Spencer - letter read in support of Dr. Mercatante
- Kathleen Madaj - letter read opposing splitting Health Director positions
- Marilyn Tipa - letter read in support of Dr. Mercatante
- Ashley Castello - letter read in support of Health Department
 - All letters attached to the minutes

4. Updates

None

5. Conceptual Initiatives

None

6. Old Business

None

7. New Business

8. Other Human Services Matters

None

A. Community Mental Health Board - Reappointments

Moved by Duke Dunn, supported by David Rushing, to forward to the Regular Board meeting the recommendation to reappoint Lori Ames, District 7; Anthony Essian, Member at Large; and Martha Partipilo, Member at Large, to the Community Mental Health Board each for a 3-year term expiring 03/31/2025. Carried - Voice Vote 5-0. Ayes: Bohm, Dunn, McConnell, Rushing, Vandenbossche.

9. Information Only

A. Health Department Points of Interest

Moved by David Rushing, supported by Duke Dunn, to receive and file item 9A as information only. Carried - Voice Vote 5-0. Ayes: Bohm, Dunn, McConnell, Rushing, Vandenbossche.

10. Receive and File Packets

Moved by Duke Dunn, supported by Dave Vandenbossche, to receive and file packets and all information received. Carried - Voice Vote 5-0. Ayes: Bohm, Dunn, McConnell, Rushing, Vandenbossche.

11. Adjournment

Moved by Dave Vandenbossche, supported by David Rushing, to adjourn at 7:01 p.m. Carried - Voice Vote 5-0. Ayes: Bohm, Dunn, McConnell, Rushing, Vandenbossche.

Committee Chair: Lisa Beedon

Note: The County complies with the "Americans with Disabilities Act" and if auxiliary aids or services are required at the meeting for individuals with disabilities, please contact Administrator/Controller's Office, Suite 203, 200 Grand River Avenue, Port Huron, MI 48060, (810) 989-6900 three days prior to said meeting.

From: Alyce Carl <[REDACTED]>
Sent: Monday, February 21, 2022 2:52 PM
To: Morris, Kristine <kmorris@stclaircounty.org>
Subject: SPAM: FOIAFOIA: My Stand in making 2 positions

Read to the record please.

I support the choice to make this two positions! It is a step into a direction where more voices and questions can be heard and answered.

What I do not support is dr Annette mercatante. Her fake news of being “fired” to try and keep this a one job that she controls is proof this is the right choice! Her choosing to not resign into any of these positions is her greed and right. LET HER GO! And DO BETTER!

Thank you for making this two positions and making a step to the better. All it takes is just 2% more than the day before!

Thank you,
Speak for your children now, before they live in a world where they can not.

From: Jessica Schulte <[REDACTED]>
Sent: Thursday, February 24, 2022 3:45 PM
To: Morris, Kristine <kmorris@stclaircounty.org>
Subject: Letter to be read at 2/25/22 BOC mtg

Good evening Comissioners. My name is Jessica Schulte. I am a St. Clair County resident and mother of 2 students within PHASD. I am writing to you because I am unable to attend regularly due to my work schedule.

Moving forward, I would like to give my support for seperating the positions of the county health director. No one person should hold both positions whether or not the positions can be easily filled. This is no different than other counties in our state. Due to extensive drama from the pandemic, I would expect qualified professionals to be hesitant to want to apply for either of the positions posted, as it will take two valorous individuals to uphold the law and practice medicine with integrity. This is why we NEED to continue with the resolution already passed and having the two positions is completely necessary, so that no one officer may work unilaterally with the system!

I would also like Dr. Mercatante's poor attitude (towards the resolution to seperate the positions passed) at the last BOC meeting to be acknowledged. It was reported by the Times Herald, when she was interviewed, she was "fired". Which is fareset from the truth! Her contract and salary are still active, as she may still apply for one of the two positions in the future. One would think she would welcome this, be relieved she still has a job, and is grateful to not been held accountable in court thus far. Whether or not our health director is a kind/nice person, personally thought she was acting in the best interest of the community, or was just plain scared... she broke the law when she bypassed the Constitution and violated her medical oath!

The county health director may provide (not force) advice, testing, and programs to assist those in the community. That is all! Anything beyond such is an overreach period. Along with, if the country health director did not provide the ability to access those services, that too would be inappropriate and an abuse of power also!

Let us continue to move forward and part ways with anyone who is not willing to uphold the Constitution of MI and/or the US and protect our freedoms as citizens!

Thank you,
Jessica Schulte

From: [REDACTED] >
Sent: Friday, February 25, 2022 3:38 PM
To: Morris, Kristine <kmorris@stclaircounty.org>
Subject: SPAM: FOIAFOIA: Support for Dr Mercatante - please read to the record

February 22, 2022

To the St Clair County Board of Commissioners:

I request the following be **read to the record** at the March 3, 2022 meeting of the St Clair County Board of Commissioners:

I am in full support of the St Clair County Medical Health Officer, Dr Annette Mercatante, and the St Clair County Health Department.

As everyone knows, the world around us changed in a short period of time and Covid-19 created fear, frustration and anxiety in everyone. It was too easy for criticism, stress and politics to creep in. I believe Dr Mercatante has the education, experience, and knowledge to be our county health officer, along with her reliance on the CDC guidelines. She and her staff have worked tirelessly to keep the residents of St Clair County safe by following science – not by following a bunch of beliefs, many of which are based on untruths.

I spoke with one of the area's leading pulmonary doctors a few weeks ago and the doctor expressed his frustration with all the politics and misinformation surrounding Covid. He has seen much more death than you or I in the past two years. I believe the doctor knows what he is speaking of, but it makes me wonder about how much medical experience or medical education anyone on the Board of Commissioners has – do any of you have more experience in those fields than Dr Mercatante or the pulmonary doctor I spoke with?

I do not agree with the decision the board made at their last meeting to split the chief health department position in two. In my opinion, it wasn't broken – it didn't need fixing! Health concerns are challenging enough in the current climate without making things worse and trying to fill two positions. In nearby Sanilac County, the public health director has to cover 4 counties. Is this what we want to end up with? How many people are even qualified for these positions, interested in our area and the pay for these positions here --- and with the knowledge of what happened with Dr Mercatante? Public health is supposed to be apolitical and it clearly is not in St Clair County. I predict that splitting the chief health position will turn out to be an unwise decision. I am thankful that after weighing all sides of the issue and seeing the big picture, Jorja Baldwin, the commissioner who represents me, voted against splitting this position.

Thank you, Dr Mercatante and the St Clair County Health Department, for your dedication. There are many, including myself, who do appreciate you!

Vicky Ames
[REDACTED]

Fort Gratiot MI 48059

-----Original Message-----

From: Diane Horn <[REDACTED]>

Sent: Tuesday, March 01, 2022 12:48 PM

To: Morris, Kristine <kmorris@stclaircounty.org>

Subject: SPAM: FOIAFOIA: Dr. Annette Mercatante

March 1, 2022

Board Of Commissioners:

Requesting "Read to the Record"

I feel Dr. Mercatante has done an exceptional job during this pandemic and has kept our schools open, which every parent should be grateful for, especially those board members with children.

It's so easy to criticize someone when not one of you is qualified to fill her shoes. Dr. Mercatante has given us weekly Covid updates for the county and has kept the schools informed as well. We should all be praising her for doing such an outstanding job. She is well qualified and is deserving of her salary.

Our county has gone through a rough time and I'm sure we all have either lost loved ones or know people who have in the last two years. Let's all pull together, be a little kinder and support each other.

We have a more serious issue in this county today and that truly concerns me. There are no intervention/mental health facilities for our younger children who need long term care who are suffering and falling through the cracks. This should be your priority!

Sincerely,

Diane L. Horn

To the St. Clair County Board of Commissioners:

My name is Sandy Mangan, and I am the Nurse Practitioner at the St. Clair County Teen Health clinic. I began my career in 2009 with Dr. Mercatante as my collaborating physician and mentor. Over the years, she has impacted my career in ways that cannot be described by words. I have been honored and blessed to cross paths with her. There is no way for me to ever repay her for her kindness and guidance. One of the most important lessons I use daily is “to do no harm, step back, listen and have the client as the main focus.” I can assure you that Dr. Mercatante guides her practice by this same standard. Regarding your decision pertaining to Dr. Mercatante, the client is the community of St. Clair County. Throughout the past 13 years and especially the last 2 years, she has had the entire community as her focus. She basis each project, decision, or order on this premise- Do No Harm and Focus on the client (community).

A second value that she shared with me is that the clients who seek services need someone to hear their voices, understand their needs, breakdown their barriers and offer them a hand-up. The Health Department services clients from all socio-economic classes, those employed and unemployed, babies through adulthood, those that are sick and those that want to stay well. Many of you have benefited from services provided by the Health Department. The only way to know what a client or community needs is to take the time and really listen. Listen to all the voices, not just the ones that you want to; not just the loud ones but listen to the quiet, meek voices. They have a right to be heard and have their needs met too. You see listening is only part of communicating. Communication takes two willing parties-Both parties have a voice and both must be willing to listen. Even though the parties may disagree, they can still work together and achieve great things if they are willing to listen to each other.

I respectfully urge you to reconsider your actions. Place your focus on your client- ALL community members of St. Clair County, step back and listen. Listen to all voices, experience the barriers, address the needs but most of all hear even the quiet voices. Allow the work of the Health Department Team continue to care for this community with the leader who has provided unshakeable guidance.

Respectfully,
Sandy M

My name is Rebecca Paull, I am a resident of Port Huron since 2012 and an employee of the St. Clair County Health Department since 2018. I am writing today to express my disappointment in the majority of the Board with the recent vote of 4-2 to not renew Dr. Annette Mercatante's contract, and to split her position in two. This move has been unsuccessfully attempted in other counties all over the country, most with larger populations and likely a higher salary than St. Clair County can even offer; for example Oakland County, MI has reposted their attempt to do this multiple times over the last year with no qualified applicants. St. Clair County will most likely have a harder time filling this than counties that offer more, financially and location wise.

Dr. Mercatante has worked in this position for over a decade focusing on the health and wellness of this entire county, and only when Covid 19 became a politicized mess did her job performance come into question, wrongfully. Dr. Mercatante and the entire Health Department has spent the last two years combating a Novel Virus, meaning it's NEW, meaning there isn't much available information wise, meaning that information is constantly evolving, meaning the scientific method steps we learned in fourth grade are still happening in real time around us. We joked at the Health Department that our "word of the year" was pivot, because that's what we've all been doing under Doc's leadership. She has an undeniable passion for the health and wellness of everyone she comes across.

Having the majority of the board constantly coming for Dr. Mercatante's work has been a kick to every public healthcare worker in this county. There are very few health professionals in this county that disagree with Dr. Mercatante's decisions over the last couple years, these people may not have necessarily always liked them, but they did not disagree with them because they understand why we've done what we've had to do for public health. The few that did disagree seem to be the loudest. It reminds me of something I learned when I was very young, that common sense ain't that common, and that the weakest are usually the loudest in the room. Most of this county's board has proven that as well. Certain board members should be ashamed of themselves and their lack of human decency, all because of a few people saying they would possibly not re-elect them into their position. I honestly am not sure how some of them sleep soundly at night.

I want to thank the two commissioners who voted the correct way. I want to thank Dr. Mercatante for all her hard work and let her know it has been an honor working under her direction at the Health Department.

I would ask for the board to reconsider their decision and instead of listening to the same 50 people that show up to these meetings, listen to the actual voices in the county, the silent majority that is just trying to get through these trying times, the ones that are working everyday through this pandemic, and the ones that are teaching their children empathy and decency.

Thank you for your time.

From: Mary Spencer <[REDACTED]>

Sent: Wednesday, March 02, 2022 5:13 PM

To: Morris, Kristine <kmorris@stclaircounty.org>

Subject: SPAM: FOIAFOIA: Board of Commissioners Request to be read to record

My name is Mary J Spencer. Address is [REDACTED], Port Huron, Mi 48060.

I had planned to be here today to address the board but unfortunately I am currently in quarantine because although the numbers are down I caught covid this week.

I am a retired St. Clair County Public Health Nurse having worked 26 years in various Health Department positions. The last 15 in Communicable Disease and Immunization as the program coordinator. Giving me ample time working under Dr. Mercatante. During that time I can tell you we worked well together although I did not always agree with her policy. Never once did I not respect her or feel that she was honestly doing what she thought was the best for our health department and community.

When things are going well public health goes unnoticed, but when a pandemic hits as we are experiencing things quickly change. Everyone has an opinion and becomes an expert except for the experts. Many decisions were made after extensive meetings. Those decisions were made knowing full well many would not be popular. But public health is not a popularity contest and sometimes for the greater good we have to do the hard thing. I find it totally unbelievable that we have the great fortune of having the experience and expertise of Dr. Mercatante in our community and the board does not recognize her value. She is not going to be replaced at the drop of a hat. I urge the board to reconsider your decision before it's too late.

Hi my name is Kathleen Madaj, I have worked at the Health Department for over 13 years and have been a St Clair County resident all my life. I am writing this letter in response to your decision about Dr. Mercatante. I have never been a political person, but unfortunately it's hard not to be with what has happened with MAGA and Covid. These two things should have never been intertwined, but again unfortunately they have. I came to one Board meeting and what I seen was astonishing. In all seriousness I had to laugh at some of the things being said. I am quite familiar with conspiracy theories and I thought there is no way the Board can fall for these people's so called "research", I thought wrong. Not only do we have non-medical persons spouting unclaimed "facts" (using that term loosely) we have a chiropractor, Mike McClelland from Yale giving us medical advice and let me just reiterate the word **Chiropractor**. I mean if we had an epidemic of sprained knees then he might be the person to listen to. He came into this meeting talking about his first interaction with Dr. Mercatante and how she wanted to go into Yale schools and teach the boys how to use condoms using bananas. He was horrified, I do believe his response was something along the lines of 'no, not in our schools'. I was born and raised in Yale, and if any school system could use this type of education, it is Yale. While I watched the meeting I looked at Greg McConnell and thought, hopefully he has some sense. His mother was a nurse and was a nurse for probably one the strictest Doctor's I have ever met, Dr. Clyne. NEVER would my mother have gone into his practice and told Dr. Clyne he didn't know what he was talking about or question any medical advice he gave her. So as I watched him have a private conversation with Mike McClelland, my heart sank I thought nope he's a sell out too. Also, not sure how his vote even counts since he represents areas in which he doesn't even live, but that's another can of worms.

During the last 2 years Dr. Mercatante and our team at the Health Department have been going up and beyond. There were times when we were working 7 days a week and majority of those days were 12 hour days, while the Board Members and citizens of the county went about their lives. I'm not complaining, watching all of us come together as a well-oiled machine was amazing to watch. We had it easy compared to the medical staff at hospitals across the country who couldn't/wouldn't go home to their families because they didn't want to infect them with this novel virus. They watched patients having to say good bye to their loved ones via face time. I can't even fathom what toll that took on them. While people like Marcy McClelland sat in front of their computers regurgitating useless data and putting them in pretty little binders telling everyone on the Board how not only the Health Department, but apparently all medical staff across the country that we don't know what we are doing.

What I learned from the Board meeting is if you go up to the podium and threaten the Board members with them losing their jobs, you can get your way. What a great thing to teach our kids, bullying works. The Board members must be really proud of themselves. Let's not teach today's youth that sometimes you have to be unpopular and do what's right, but at least when you go home at night you have a clear conscious.

Shame on the 4 of you that voted against Dr. Mercatante because she didn't bend to your whims. Just because none of you have a backbone, doesn't mean the rest of us should have to suffer because of your cowardice.

-----Original Message-----

From: Marilyn Tipa <[REDACTED]>

Sent: Tuesday, March 01, 2022 5:05 PM

To: Morris, Kristine <kmorris@stclaircounty.org>

Subject: SPAM: FOIAFOIA: Read to the Record

Kudos to Dr. Annette Mercatante!

Every parent in St. Clair County should be thanking her. Because of her decision to implicate the mask mandate again....every child has been attending in person school classes. She did the best job she could under Covid circumstances even though certain commissioners had some secret agenda. Her communication on the mask mandate to the board is a lame excuse to censure her or fire her. Even the PHASD agreed with her mandate. Like I stated prior....has to be another agenda to further the boards action.....besides costing more money...YIKES!

March 3, 2022

RE: 3/3/22 BOC MEETING; Read to Record

St. Clair County Commissioners:

I realize these last two plus years have been difficult on all of us. Lives have been lost. Work interrupted. Businesses have struggled, some have closed. Kids have missed time in the classroom and extracurricular activities. We've missed out on cherished gatherings with family and friends. Our collective mental health has suffered.

To date **807** people in our county have died from COVID-19.

Before we even had our first case of COVID-19 in St. Clair County the employees of the St. Clair County Health Department got to work. For the last two plus years they have worked tirelessly and have gone to tremendous efforts to minimize the impact of the pandemic on our community and save lives. They have acted in accordance with their mission to promote and protect public health. They have followed the guidance of the most trusted state and federal scientific and medical experts. They have collaborated with community partners. They have kept the public informed and remained accessible and transparent. They have worked long hours, evenings, weekends, on their feet or giving so many vaccines their hands would cramp. They have responded to the various and changing needs of our community during this difficult time.

Let me remind you of some of the measures they have taken: the creation of the COVID-19 hotline to field the thousands of calls and emails from the community; regular press releases with important updates; daily social media updates; the addition of the COVID-19 information Hub on their website with data dashboard; collection and distribution of needed PPE when it was in shortage; gathering of community resources to assist families struggling to find food or other assistance; working with CMH to address growing mental health concerns; providing weekly LIVE video updates to address questions from the community; tedious contact tracing to limit the spread; testing services; holding massive vaccine clinics to swiftly and efficiently vaccinate our community.

The work of the St. Clair County Health Department in response to this pandemic is extremely commendable and to great thanks to the leadership of Dr. Mercatante. You should be giving that woman a raise.

Your decision to divide the Health Officer/Medical Director position as a means to remove Dr. Mercatante in order to punish her for a decision that was made carefully, based on sound evidence, and in order to protect the public, is not only a dishonorable use of your political position but also a slap on the face to Dr. Mercatante, her dedicated team of employees, and the citizens of this county who have made countless sacrifices to protect their families and help end this pandemic.

I am especially disappointed in Commissioner Bohm, who Dr. Mercatante communicated directly with regarding the mask mandate, who admitted he failed to pass on the information to his fellow commissioners and yet still voted on a resolution to essentially remove Dr. Mercatante over a failure of communication that was false.

I hope you understand that your actions have interrupted the important work of a passionate team of people and have disappointed and embarrassed many citizens of this county.

Cordially,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Ashley Castello". The signature is written in black ink and is positioned above the printed name.

Ashley Castello