

Transcript of the Broome County Covid-19 Recovery Plan
June 10, 2020 at 5:30pm

Beth Lucas: I'm just going to mute everyone if you could all just stay muted until we get to the public comment portion of the presentation. That'd be much appreciated.

Beth Lucas: Thank you all for attending today. This is the public hearing for the Broome county COVID-19 recovery plan.

Beth Lucas: My name is Beth Lucas, I'm from the Broome County Department of Planning and economic development.

Beth Lucas: We've developed this plan in partnership with other county departments and partner agencies on the line today we have Mike Ponticiello who is the director of the Broome County Office of Emergency Services, as well as the Broome County Executive Jason Garnar. So welcome to them today.

Beth Lucas: So let's get into an overview of the plan. This meeting is going to consist of just a quick overview of the contents of the plan and how we are planning to deal with COVID Recovery in Broome County and it's going to be followed by an opportunity for public comment. For anybody that wishes to comment during that portion, you'll need to enter your name into the chat box of Zoom.

Beth Lucas: We apologize in advance for any technical issues that may arise during this meeting. Unfortunately, everybody's adjusting during the covid 19 changes that that have occurred

Beth Lucas: We hope that we can get to all of you through the public comment period. However, if you do want to make comment, and there are some technical glitches or you can't access zoom you can submit your comments via writing

Beth Lucas: You can send me an email beth.lucas@broomecounty.us or mail your comments to the planning department and that information will be at the end of this presentation.

Beth Lucas: So first I want to just give a quick overview of the recovery planning process and why we are doing this plan.

Beth Lucas: First, as I'm sure everybody knows by now. On March 13 there was a nationwide emergency for COVID-19 declared by President Trump

Beth Lucas: And basically, by doing that he made it so that each state didn't have to go individually and declare their own emergency

Beth Lucas: On the 20th FEMA issued a major disaster declaration for New York State and that declaration gave any of the New York State communities access to any funding that came through FEMA related to the disaster.

Beth Lucas: Section 28 of New York state executive law states that a local municipality.

Beth Lucas: shall prepare local recovery plan when state disaster emergency has been declared. And so that's why we're doing this plan is part of that requirement of New York state executive law.

Beth Lucas: Emergency Management and disaster planning falls into four different categories you have preparedness, which addresses things such as preparing household with emergency kits.

Beth Lucas: So that when a disaster comes, they're able to protect their families or training for first responders prior to a disaster.

Beth Lucas: Following that is the response phase which is after disaster occurs. What are the immediate actions that need to be done to limit the impact of that disaster to protect life and property.

Beth Lucas: You then move out of the response phase, you start to move into the recovery phase. And these are dealing with some of the residual effects of that disaster. How can we basically get back to normal. And in this case, the word normal

Beth Lucas: Is going to be a pretty loosely used term there's going to be a new normal. After we start recovering from the COVID 19 pandemic. And then the fourth phase that you typically have is mitigation and these are the actions you take for the long term.

Beth Lucas: Actions that can help minimize risk to life and property in the long term. So for this event right now we are in the recovery phase.

Beth Lucas: And by developing a post disaster recovery plan, we developed a tool that the local municipality can use to identify community needs and issues resulting from a disaster.

Beth Lucas: And we can prioritize these actions for mitigating impacts. And so the county can then take this plan and use that to guide.

Beth Lucas: The actions that we take during our transition from response to recovery. This disaster is a little different than other disasters such as flooding, whereas in those disasters, you have a short term disaster and matter of hours or days and then you start to move into

Beth Lucas: Response and then a longer term recovery. It's a little more cut and dry. However, with COVID

Beth Lucas: The impacts that we're seeing are the actual response phase is a lot more prolonged. So we find that we're likely going to be moving between response and recovery and there's going to be some overlapping actions that are involved in both of those phases.

Beth Lucas: So this is just a graph showing the new daily COVID 19 cases up through the end of May, as you see, it's highly varied.

Beth Lucas: But the general trend is that it's going down. And so that indicates that we need to really start concentrating on some of the aspects of recovery.

Beth Lucas: To develop the plan. We pulled together the COVID 19 recovery Task Force. It's made up of several members of different community agencies and county departments and a lot of the nonprofits that deal with social services, schools, Economic Development leaders and as well as elected officials and so all of these individuals helped give us information for the plan and develop our recommendations.

Beth Lucas: The recovery, the recovery plan was developed with two major principles in mind first that the focus needs to remain on protecting the public health, that is, above all, the most important priority as we work on recovery.

Beth Lucas: And also that we should temper our expectations for a quick recovery as I just mentioned, this is a prolonged disaster and also the impacts are on a large scale, they're on a large scale basically to the state level to national level in the international level, and there are

Beth Lucas: And so some of the localized impact. They're going to be seen on a broader scale.

Beth Lucas: So now I'm going to go through some of the major categories that were established in the plan for our recommendations.

Beth Lucas: First is to provide reliable and comprehensive information. One of the things that we've learned through this through this event is that people are looking for consistent, reliable, predictable information and so

Beth Lucas: Some of our recommendations involve establishing one source for information that can lead to the other various sources, the various agencies that are out there that can offer assistance. We want to provide clear and consistent messaging and we also want to promote resources such as 211 that can provide one on one assistance and so

Beth Lucas: This first item is probably one of the most important items, because there are a lot of resources out there. We've learned a lot through past disasters such as flooding. So you want to make sure that you're providing those resources to the community.

Beth Lucas: The second item is assist with provision of necessary supplies, and this is something that county has been working on all along. And it's really important to understand that with the initial event, the initial provision of supplies. It's not going to be over. People are going to still need supplies, all through this pandemic until it comes to some resolution and it's still uncertain what that resolution will look like.

Beth Lucas: But third item is aid and implementation of best practices for safe operating. There's a lot of information out there from the CDC

and from New York Forward for businesses and other agencies and organizations, our local health department. And so we want to make sure that that information is getting out there to people and they're able to implement it well.

Beth Lucas: Even if people have the information. Sometimes it is difficult to apply it to your own personal business or your own personal facility. And so, assisting them and helping them develop their plans for their own facilities and their own safe operating practices is also really important

Beth Lucas: Number four is protect the healthcare system as the foundation for a successful recovery and this is also something we've been doing all along.

Beth Lucas: Supporting efforts for telehealth and virtual care is a good way to do that so that people don't have to go into the facilities to get care, they can get it from their homes.

Beth Lucas: But we also want to make sure we're communicating the importance of continuing to seek medical attention for non COVID related issues. We don't want people to fear seeking medical help. So those are a couple the recommendations under that item. The plan also will elaborate these further and lay out some additional items as well.

Beth Lucas: Number five is to ensure that child care providers can continue to operate, we're finding that if you want the workforce to be able to go back to work being able to have childcare is an important component of that. There was a child care crisis prior to this event and this event is only highlighting that issue. And so we need to make sure that, especially in light of the schools closing, as well as many of the summer camps that are associated with schools or that aren't able to implement social distance distancing practices. We need to make sure that people are either having their child care provided for, or we are accommodating people that have unique childcare situation.

Beth Lucas: Number six is to recognize the importance of mental health services and this came out as a really important item in the plan.

Beth Lucas: we need to take these mental health impacts seriously as people are facing difficult times. It's going to create a lot of difficulties, especially for people that hadn't really suffered such hardships before. So it's important that we provide services for these people and make sure they're getting the appropriate assistance that they need. And so programs like Mental Health First Aid that's run through our Department of Mental Health that provides training for agencies whose patrons or clients come in that aren't used to dealing with mental health issues and helps them find the appropriate assistance that they need.

Beth Lucas: We also want people to be aware of the impact mental health impacts that might occur later on in the recovery process as some of the major impacts really start to hit people hard

Beth Lucas: The seventh item is protect our most vulnerable residents from the impact of COVID 19. So this is a pretty broad one. There are certain residents of the community that are more vulnerable outside of a disaster. And these vulnerabilities are only enhanced during a disaster.

Beth Lucas: So we want to ensure that people aren't having to choose between being employed and risking their health and safety. We want to make sure that their workplaces are protecting them because a lot of people can't afford to not go to work.

Beth Lucas: We want to make sure they're able to get to work and that includes ensuring that public transit continues to allow them to do so, we also want to take special care for some of our our populations such as seniors. Many seniors already face issues related to isolation. So we want to just take special care to address that.

Beth Lucas: We also want to make sure we're diligent about addressing child abuse and neglect, normally those issues might get recognized in the school environment, but without those traditional safe spaces, it can become an issue.

Beth Lucas: We want to document impacts across all sectors and really this is just about keeping track of some of those key impacts in our community and noting when there's any dramatic changes in things such as evictions or foreclosures and things like that as well as some of the financial costs, we're seeing, throughout our community for which include additional costs of PPE or overtime expenses or having to add infrastructure. These are things in the community that have tangible costs and tangible numbers and we can track them we can keep track of how our community is doing overtime.

Beth Lucas: We want to advocate for financial support for local and county governments.

Beth Lucas: The impacts that are be seen at the federal and state level of government trickle down to the local governments. Impacts on local businesses can also reduce the revenues that come into the local governments and so these impacts do have a major effect on local budgets and so it's important to keep advocating for programs to assist with this.

Beth Lucas: We want to continue to coordinate recovery efforts, both locally through the Recovery task force that was outlined earlier as well as coordinating with our regional partners through the regional control room.

Beth Lucas: We want to work to ensure an economic recovery.

Beth Lucas: We work a lot with our partners at The Agency and the Greater Binghamton chamber of commerce and we really are relying on them a lot to help inform the local businesses and keep them up and running, keep them informed of assistance opportunities. Some other activities that we want to undertake to help with this economic recovery include identifying businesses that may have staffing shortages to match them up with people

that may be laid off or losing work because of COVID, and making sure that we're filling those gaps with people that are looking for work in our community.

Beth Lucas: We want to help consumer confidence by helping businesses and organizations promote the fact that they're open for business and implementing safe practices.

Beth Lucas: And then we want to also help with technological tools for businesses and provide business mentoring. So these are all ways we can help carry businesses through this difficult time.

Beth Lucas: The other issue that we've addressed is housing and housing insecurity and these are some items that we also had identified prior to COVID 19, but the pandemic has highlighted these issues and enhanced the impact and so things like monitoring homeless evictions and foreclosures.

Beth Lucas: We want to help promote programs for affordable housing and helping people rehab their homes during this difficult time when they might not have the money to do so.

Beth Lucas: And also just by providing landlord and tenant resources to help carry them through this time in stay in their homes and reduce displacement during this time.

Beth Lucas: We want to maintain our efforts over the full recovery period and beyond. And so a lot of the items in this plan aren't only helpful in dealing with COVID 19 but they're also helpful in the long term, to our community. And also, as I mentioned, it's going to be kind of a new normal after this event. And so we need to make sure that the items that we implement are sustainable in the long term for that reason.

Beth Lucas: So things like encouraging business continuity planning to make sure businesses are prepared in the event of an additional wave of the pandemic, or the next pandemic.

Beth Lucas: And exploring options to improve broadband. That was a big issue with distance learning at the schools and so that's a real opportunity, you hate to use the word opportunity and event like this, but it's an opportunity to identify where there are gaps in service because the schools basically know which household had issues during this time.

Beth Lucas: And the final item is that we want to prepare for a second wave at where we might have a partial or full shutdown. We want to keep assessing the strengths and weaknesses of our response and address any service gaps. So if there are services that had to cease during this event. We want to make sure we're addressing the reasons why that happened so that maybe in future events. Or a second wave should it occur, we're able to provide that service and transition easily between remote services from in person services.

Beth Lucas: And then similarly we want to address those distance learning and remote working issues that came up during this past event. And

identify opportunities to improve. So as our recovery continues while we're proceeding with the phased reopening the threat of the COVID 19 pandemic is going to continue into the for the foreseeable future.

Beth Lucas: And so in order to address our ongoing recovery. We're going to have to continually assess are changing conditions and needs. We're going to want to make sure we're flexible in our recovery approach because there's still a lot of uncertainty that's out there.

Beth Lucas: And we also want to make sure we're having coordination and collaboration with all of the necessary agencies and departments, because there's going to be a lot of overlapping of response and recovery efforts as things move forward.

Beth Lucas: So that's the end of our overview of the plan. I want to move into the public comment period. I would just ask that you put your name in the chat box of the zoom chat and if you want to comment and we can unmute you. And then just state your name for the record, and then we'll limit individuals to three minutes. But if there's not a whole lot of people that want to speak we probably don't need to be too strict on that.

Beth Lucas: Right now I see that there is Terraine Jones, one second. And I will unmute you so that you can make your comment.

Terraine Jones: How you doing. Yes, ma'am. Thank you much, first and foremost, I would like to say that It is very endearing and very Motivational that You allow the public to be a part of this. First of all, I thank you for that. I'm an only have three minutes, but I also only have one question. I have a Small business here in town. My business internet based 40 options calm and I tried to center my business around personal improvement. And my only question is for you. How can I help because I would like to be involved. So how can I help

Beth Lucas: Thank you.

Beth Lucas: There are a lot of volunteer opportunities and I would say it probably depends a lot on what your specialty is but

Beth Lucas: I think that one of you. I think your comments very important and that we do need. We do have donations that we do, accept through the county, however.

Beth Lucas: If you're talking about personally volunteering. I think that's a good point that we maybe need to add to our plan, a way to document that. If you call 211 which the United Way runs that service they can match you with volunteer opportunities.

Terraine Jones: Okay.

Beth Lucas: So we don't have anyone else that listed that they wanted to speak. So I'm going to unmute everyone. So if anyone has anything else that they would wish to ask or say then feel free to speak up now.

Legislator Bob Weslar: Okay. Thank you. Thank you for this. Mr Evangelisti and your entire team for doing this over the past month or so. And everyone who was involved. One thing that I was excited by this by reading the plan is the whole notion of No Wrong Door Policy that whole idea of creating a space and time within everybody's workspace to have all the answers, or have them is available to everybody to limit people's Need to travel in order to get the information or to get their services. I think that's that's brilliant. Because it's a good customer service policy. I also like that the mental health aspect is in the forefront moving forward. So I am very, very thrilled with all of this. And thank you very much.

Beth Lucas: Thank you, Bob. Yeah, I will give the Department of Mental Health, a lot of credit is that The No Wrong Door Policy is something that had come from them and they really already have. And I guess throughout this whole plan. We have a lot of departments that do offer a lot of great services.

Beth Lucas: So a lot of what we've done is just have to focus and make sure that people are accessing those great services and that we're supporting those departments and agencies to make sure they can provide the best services they can carry us through this really difficult time so

Beth Lucas: Is there anyone else that would like to say anything before we end with the public hearing

Terraine Jones: Miss Lucas. I didn't want to flood the meeting with comments and questions. That's why I tried to narrow it down to, how can I be involved myself. I'm sorry. This is terrain Jones again. But it seems like nobody else is speaking. I'm not sure how many people are attending. I can't see that. But just to let you know, and Mr. Michael he voiced his opinion and he had something to say. I will forward you my email. So we can keep in touch. And if there's something going on. Well, I can be directly involved to help our community. I know the world is in an uproar. But if I can help our community. I would be more than willing to do so. And if anybody else doesn't have anything to say. Want to reach out to me, Mrs Lucas email is on the screen. At 40 options is where you can reach me as well.

Beth Lucas: Great, thank you very much.

Beth Lucas: Again, you can provide written comments to me via email through the email on the screen beth.lucas@broomecounty.us

Beth Lucas: Or mail them directly to the planning department at Broome County Planning P. O. Box 1766 Binghamton, New York 13902 just in case people are on the phone and not don't have the screen in front of them.

Beth Lucas: Well, thank you everyone for attending and feel free to contact me anytime with your ideas or any additional comments and please look out for the plan once it is finalized.