

November 30 BOS remarks

Mr. Chairman, members of the Board of Supervisors, and Auditor Carr

My former colleagues...

Thank you for the opportunity to speak again on this vitally important issue of COVID-19 response in the Floyd County Courthouse.

I listened to what each and every one of you said in response to the concerns I raised at last Tuesday's meeting. I was particularly struck by Chairman Schwickerath's remark that I wasn't 'totally informed' on the issue, and Supervisor Tjaden's comment about all the weekly department head meetings that have occurred since the start of the pandemic. You are both correct. There were countless discussions going on that I was not aware of.

So, in an effort to become better informed on your response to COVID-19, I reviewed the minutes from all 44 Board of Supervisor meetings since the start of the pandemic.

This exercise gave me a lot of insight, and a better understanding and respect for the Board's response.

With your permission, I would like to review what I found. Please be assured my review is not a game of 'Got Cha'. It's more like 'We got to get to the bottom of what happened and why.' I reserve the right to express my own opinions.

Please don't be annoyed by the fact that I work best from prepared remarks. There is a lot to sort out. You know how I've confronted important issues during the years we all worked together. We didn't always agree. That's OK. But I'm proud of the work we accomplished.

One Example – When we came together in response to the deadly intersection at Floyd, and threw everything we could muster into our presentation at the IDOT meeting in Sioux City. That cooperative effort paved the way for major safety changes at the intersection and got needed improvements on the IDOT's five year funding plan to make it happen. That effort will save lives.

My proposed review of the Board's minutes is not a one way street. If you'd like to comment on anything I say, at any time during my remarks, please do so. My review and remarks will take approximately 12 minutes.

Mr. Chairman, am I in order to proceed?

The Board met in emergency session on March 19 to address the pandemic with respect to public access to county facilities. Supervisor Tjaden stated that while there are no identified, confirmed positive cases of COVID-19 in Floyd County it is a responsible position to lock the Courthouse down but continue to provide an avenue of services.

A motion was passed unanimously by the Board to “lock the main door of the Floyd County Courthouse to the public effective 8am on March 20, 2020 until further notice. “

The March 23 Board meeting was held in the Assembly Room and in-person access was limited to 10 people. A conference call-in option was made available to any interested parties.

In the interest of time, I will not go over everything that happened in the remaining 42 Board meetings, but I have highlighted every COVID-19 reference in yellow, and highlighted each of the 11 formal actions taken by the Board in orange.

Suffice it to say, it is very clear that the Board, elected officials and department heads were on top of the unfolding crisis and taking appropriate steps to deal with it.

At the March 30 meeting, the Board approved a motion to implement the COVID-19 screening checklist and have all departments and visitors start using the COVID-19 check list today. The motion also authorized Floyd County Public Health Director Gail Arjes to make changes as needed.

I believe this is a copy of the original COVID-19 screening checklist. Perhaps Auditor Carr should confirm that. It requires that all individuals (visitors and employees) entering the Courthouse and any other county facility must sign in and answer six questions written to determine if the individual has any symptoms associated with COVID-19. If so, they will be denied entry to the building.

The screening checklist also requires the individual to take specific measures designed to prevent the spread of COVID-19, including washing hands or sanitizing, and social distancing from others while in the building.

At the April 6 meeting, the proposed Floyd County Infectious Disease Action Plan was discussed and approved by the Board.

This is a copy of the Action Plan that I reviewed in detail with you at last Tuesday’s meeting.

It states, “The Board of Supervisors **may** order all visitors upon entering a county facility and employees at the beginning of each shift conduct a self-screening checklist. When ordered to do so, department heads/elected officials **must** ensure that their respective employees and visitors to their office are doing so and are required to maintain checklists for a minimum of two weeks beyond the last date of entrance into a county facility for purposes of contact tracing.”

This Action Plan is a very timely, pro-active plan that clearly demonstrates that the Board, other elected officials and department heads are taking decisive action in response to COVID-19.

As stated at last Tuesday’s meeting, I believe the STAFF UPDATES section should be amended to ensure department heads and elected officials are reporting important COVID-19 updates about their staff to all other elected officials and department heads to ensure others including the public don’t unknowingly enter an office where someone has recently been quarantined or tested positive for COVID-19.

I also believe you should consider implementing regular updates and emails to the media and your contact list to notify the public if someone tests positive in any county office. Something like this is being done effectively by the Charles City Community School District.

This is a great plan that with a couple of changes could be made even better.

At the May 26 meeting, the Board continued the discussion that occurred at two previous meetings regarding plans to unlock the Courthouse. The Board approved a motion to set parameters required to open the Courthouse, the Board would consider locking the door to the Courthouse again if there is a 50% increase in cases over a 14-day period, and also recommended that the public wear masks while in the Courthouse.

At the June 1 meeting, the Board noted the benchmark to unlock the Courthouse has been met and the doors will be unlocked tomorrow morning.

At the June 22 meeting, the Board discussed there are 34 total COVID-19 cases in Floyd County, and the re-opening of the Courthouse has been well received by the public, except for complaints that the Treasurer's office is closed.

At the July 1 meeting, Chairman Schwickerath updated the Board on a department head meeting stating many departments having autonomy to set their own rules and the majority felt there was no need to place a sign at the entrance mandating face masks.

On July 7, Treasurer Frank Rottinghaus emailed Chairman Schwickerath with his request to establish a positive COVID-19 case protocol like is used in Story County. I shared this with you last Tuesday.

At the July 13 meeting, the Board discussed what would be done if an employee tested positive for COVID-19 with respect to the Board's discretion to close the Courthouse.

At the July 14 meeting, the Board discussed there are 84 total COVID-19 cases in Floyd County. Chairman Schwickerath commented there is no action to be taken and staff seems to be satisfied with the processes in place at county facilities.

At the August 17 meeting, the Board discussed there are 178 total COVID-19 cases in Floyd County including 43 new positive cases in the last 14 days.

At the August 25 meeting, the Board approved a motion to amend the Infectious Disease Action Plan, approve the revised COVID-19 screening form, and directed the judicial branch to use the screening form like any other employee or visitor to the courthouse is required to do.

At the August 31 meeting, the Board discussed there are 215 total COVID-19 cases in Floyd County including 47 new positive cases in the last 14 days. The Board also spoke with Treasurer Rottinghaus about numerous complaints received about the Treasurer's office being locked.

At the September 8 meeting, the Board discussed there are 243 total COVID-19 cases in Floyd County including 59 new positive cases in the last 14 days.

At the September 14 meeting, the Board discussed there are 262 total positive COVID-19 cases in Floyd County including 47 new cases in the past 14 days. The Board also approved a Resolution requesting \$198,309 in eligible expenditures in response to the COVID-19 public health emergency.

At the September 21 meeting, the Board discussed there are 301 total positive COVID-19 cases in Floyd County, including 58 new cases in the past 14 days. Chairman Schwickerath stated he thought signage was on the north entrance door to the Courthouse recommending facemasks be worn in the Courthouse, but there is no such sign located there now. The Board approved a motion to put signage at the door to notify and recommend the public to wear a mask upon entering the building and note that some departments are requiring facemasks. Thanks again for making that needed public notification, Roy.

On September 25, an article by Editor Bob Steenson was published in the Charles City Press with the headline **Recent new COVID-19 cases set records for Floyd County**. The article included a graph that showed the 14-day rolling average of new COVID-19 cases in Floyd County had surpassed the 50% threshold used by the Board of Supervisors to determine when they should consider closing the Courthouse. According to data from the Iowa Department of Public Health, the 50% threshold was exceeded from approximately August 5 thru August 20, peaking at nearly 70% during the period. The 50% threshold was exceeded again starting on about September 12 and continued to climb to the record 85% level on September 22.

At the September 28 meeting, the Board discussed there are 352 total positive cases in Floyd County, including 51 new cases in the last 14 days.

At the October 5 meeting, the Board discussed there are 375 positive cases in Floyd County an increase of 33 new cases, and the total deaths in the county from COVID-19 had risen from 3 to 6 in the past week. Board minutes state that at the department head meeting tomorrow, Chairman Schwickerath will again ask about processes in place and if anyone thinks there needs to be changes.

At the October 12 meeting, the Board discussed there are 391 total positive COVID-19 cases in Floyd County, and the total deaths had risen from 6 to 9 in the past week. Supervisor' Tjaden and Kamm commented that each have received two complaints of the Treasurer's office being locked.

At the October 19 meeting, the Board discussed there are 412 total positive COVID-19 cases in Floyd County, and the total deaths had risen from 9 to 11 in the past week.

At the October 27 meeting, the Board discussed there are 438 total positive COVID-19 cases in Floyd County. Auditor Carr updated the Board on protocols put in place for facemasks for voting purposes.

At the November 9 meeting, the Board discussed there are 589 total positive cases in Floyd County including 151 new cases in the last 14 days. Board minutes state the Board's benchmark criteria suggest the Courthouse be locked down. Discussion included whether to mandate masks in the Courthouse, garner the public health director's recommendation on masks, and the logistics of having a person at the door to mandate masks.

At the November 10 meeting, the Board discussed there are 620 total COVID-19 cases in Floyd County including an increase of 31 new cases since yesterday, and the total deaths had risen to 12. The Board continued to receive complaints about the Treasurer's office being locked. Board discussion included wearing masks, mandated or recommended, and if mandated how it would be enforced.

At the November 23 meeting, the Board discussed there are 936 total positive COVID-19 cases in Floyd County including an increase of 316 new cases in the past 14 days, and the total deaths had risen to 14. 23.3% of all COVID-19 tests conducted in the county were positive. The minutes state that at next week's department head meeting, department heads will be asked if they think any changes should be made with the county's current status of following the Iowa Department of Health's guidelines for masks and if what they are doing is working to assist customers.

The minutes from last Tuesday's Board of Supervisor's meeting have not been published yet, but the Charles City Press reported in last Friday's edition that the number of positive cases of COVID-19 in Floyd County hit 1,000 last Monday. The number has doubled in only three weeks.

This sign is posted in the entryway of the Courthouse. It says STOP – As a precautionary measure COVID-19 SCREENING is now required at this location.

Here is my copy of the completed screening checklist that is required before any individual is allowed entry to the Courthouse. This safety checklist is the cornerstone of your response to the greatest public health emergency of our lifetimes.

Everyone at today's meeting knows the COVID-19 Screening Checklist is largely ignored and not enforced.

The hundreds of Floyd County citizens who stood in long lines outside the Courthouse door waiting to vote in the recent election were not required to take this safety screening. And as a result, they were not protected by it.

Please correct me if I'm wrong, but virtually everyone who has entered the Courthouse since it was reopened on June 2 has not completed the required safety screening.

Your collective failure to follow through with the implementation of the COVID-19 screening checklist is a clear and present danger to everyone who visits the Courthouse and the employees who work here.

The buck stops at your desks. The members of the Board and Auditor Carr have a lot of explaining to do.

I yield the floor back to you, Mr. Chairman.