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Citizens speak out against plans for health department at health board meeting

City manager Lee Ann Dumbauld presented plans to dismantle the city health department and outsource services, including immunizations and surveillance, to a large and impassioned audience gathered Friday at the very building the city hopes to sell.

Posted: August 19, 2011 - 10:14pm | Updated: August 20, 2011 - 12:31am

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Dr. Brian Carr with the Lubbock Health Board wears a "got public health?" button before a meeting on Friday to discuss the City's possible plans to close the health department. (Zach Long)

By [Kellie Bramlet](#)

AVALANCHE-JOURNAL

City Manager Lee Ann Dumbauld presented plans to dismantle the City Health Department and outsource services, including immunizations and surveillance, to a large and impassioned audience gathered Friday at the very building the city hopes to sell.

This marked the first time the Lubbock Board of Health and citizens had heard this plan.

Although tempers flared and accusations of secret meetings among city officials flew around the room from some members of the board of health and 29 citizens who signed up to speak, nobody reached a resolution after the air cleared.

The resolution will come later when the City Council decides on its budget. The revamping of the Health Department is a large portion of the

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Final 'Desperado' performance
William Kerns



city budget. The council meets again Thursday at 7 a.m. The city's governing body is expected to hold another budget hearing before its final

vote another opportunity for those who wish to keep City Health Services under a single roof.

Under the proposed city budget, several branches of the Health Department would be rearranged, including moving the bioterrorism lab to the Reese Center, water testing to water treatment, restaurant and pool inspections to the codes department and vital statistics to vector control.

The most notable changes were to immunizations, sexually transmitted disease clinics and surveillance.

These services would be overseen by public health coordinator Beckie Brawley and another nurse.

These services are funded and mandated by the State Health Department. Representatives from the state department have said they have no intentions to cut the grants that provide those funds.

Under the proposed budget, the city would outsource those grants to other clinics and groups providing immunizations. City planners have yet to determine which groups will receive the grant money, but the City Health Department will stop services Aug. 31.

Bridgett Faulkneberry, Department of Public Health director, said she was unsure how many health department staff members would lose their jobs as a result of these changes.

With all the services moved out of the health department building, the city would be free to sell the structure. The building, 1902 Texas Avenue, was built in the 1940s or '50s as a car dealership.

"That doesn't make it a really great clinic," Dumbauld said.

If the services were outsourced, the city would save an estimated \$400,000 during this fiscal year. Next year the city would save an estimated \$835,000.

Lubbock Health Board members, an advisory board to the City Council, voted to advise the council against outsourcing these services. They also asked the council to extend the time services are offered at the city health department building by 90 days.

Steve Presley, Board of Health president and associate professor at Texas Tech Institute of Environmental and Human Health, abstained from the board's discussion and vote because of his affiliation with the bioterrorism lab.

During the meeting of more than three hours, members of the Health Board and more than 100 others were unmotivated by the bottom line and seemed unsympathetic to the budget woes.

"This isn't a budget issue; this is a people issue" said Brian Carr, a licensed psychologist and health board member, to applause from those the crowd.



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Carr wore a homemade button, "Got public health?" and passed out similar buttons to the crowd.

Carr said he worried the other organizations absorbing those patients who typically went to the City Health Department would be overwhelmed.

He was also concerned local emergency rooms would absorb these costs, and the public would end up paying through their taxes or insurance fees.

Many board members said they wished this was not the first time they had heard this plan.

"It would have been good if we would have had this discussion six or eight months ago," said Dr. Donald May, a health board member.

Citizens expressed outrage over how city officials had handled this issue.

"This is not transparent government," said Grace Rogers, a retired Lubbock Independent School District teacher.

Rogers was one of 29 people who signed up in advance to address the Board of Health.

Each individual was given two and a half minutes to speak, and 30 seconds to discuss questions with the board. Very few speakers had questions.

Several more speakers who signed up to speak at the meeting followed. These speakers could not ask the board questions.

Not one speaker showed support for the plan to outsource services.

Many said they hoped the city council would host a public hearing on this issue. Citizens will have a chance to speak before the council at Thursday's meeting.

Another budget workshop is scheduled before the council votes on the budget.

"I'm very impressed by the quality and the reasoning of the statements that had been made today" said Dr. Ted Reid, a health board member.

He urged citizens to address the council.

Most speakers asked the board to advise the council against outsourcing services.

During her presentation, Dumbauld cited other cities like Dallas, Ft. Worth and Plano, where clinics are provided by the county, rather than the city.

Nicole Smith, a second-year medical student at Texas Tech Health Sciences Center, argued against this during her three-minute speech.

"Shouldn't we strive to be better, not hide between other's shortcomings?" Smith said. "A decision as damaging as this should not be made behind closed doors."

Phyllis Johnson, a Child Protective Services staff member, spoke out of concern for children who would not be able to receive immunizations. A sign at the Health Department announced it will not take any more patients. Johnson worried some children will not be able to start school because they were unable to receive immunizations.

Dr. Charles Henry, a retired physician and health and wellness chair of 100 Black Men, worried about accessibility to care.

"To close this facility and these services would be a step backwards," he said.

Many expressed they did not want to live in a city that didn't have a health department.

"Sometimes you do something because it is the right thing to do," said Cindy Ford, a Lubbock Christian University nurse educator. "Closing the health department or fragmenting it is not the right thing to do."

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They're are not getting rid

By Keyhole | [08/20/11 - 07:35 am](#)

They're are not getting rid of the functions they are simply consolidating functions and outsourcing others. The funding and access to immunizations, from what I read, is still viable. Shut it down!

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KEYHOLE

By 7mulas | [08/20/11 - 08:22 am](#)

They are getting rid of the functions! The service to taxpayers WILL NOT be the same as now. This is a policy issue not a budget issue. Access is not the same. Combest Center and the other proposed are standing room only as it is add the people from the existing Health Dept. and people will not be seen. Leave the Health Dept. and EXPAND IT>

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Grants

By civitas | [08/20/11 - 08:46 am](#)

City governments, as well as states, should learn something about taking grants; they eventually go away and the organization gets stuck with the continuing cost. This is a fundamental flaw in many of the current administration's plans to increase jobs and stimulate the economy, including the dangerous hiring incentive to add new workers. After the grant money is gone, so are the jobs. This tactic has gone on for years and people keep falling for it thinking it is easy money. If the health department in Lubbock is that important, then it will have to be funded out of Lubbock money and not risk it's future on the fickle use of state or federal grants. The city should also learn how entitlement groups will squeal when any taxpayer funded services are cut back or even changed. In this case, even moving the services around caused all kinds of moaning and wailing worrying about "accessibility." I wouldn't worry, those who want "free" care will find it wherever it is.

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I hear dumb auld really got

By hdbg62 | 08/20/11 - 08:51 am

I hear dumb auld really got her knickers in a twist during the discussion, walked out at first break; typical.

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It's

By lubbockleft | 08/20/11 - 09:27 am

absolutely outrageous what the City is doing to the Health Department. I'm glad so many citizens -- from left and right and everywhere in between -- showed up to express their thoughts on this issue.

"Not one speaker showed support for the plan to outsource services."

If the Council insists on ramming this bad decision through as part of the budget, the voters will not forget when the May elections roll around.

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@lubbockleft

By 7mulas | 08/20/11 - 09:39 am

It was so refreshing to hear the crowd shouting "It's time to fire her and the whole city council!" That was after Dumbald said she knew that no one on the city council was against her move to close the health dept. and that they would not budge on the issue.

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Civitas lives in a rabbit hole with Alice

By 7mulas | 08/20/11 - 01:43 pm

Let's just not do anything until the future is perfect! Who is to say that some "organization will get stuck with the bill"? How do you know the future? You and Dumbauld are cut from the same cloth of bean counters. This is not a budget issue it is a policy issue. When the Charter of Lubbock was written someone thought it was important to keep diseases away from the public and that it was a good idea to immunize against polio, mumps, measles....etc. Maybe you are too young, Civitas, to remember how devastating those illnesses are. Some things are bigger than a balanced budget. If the H1N1 returns I guess you can go ask Lee Ann for some money to gaurd against it. Gov't. cannot wait around for budget approval when pandemics break out...prevention, education and action are necessary now. As far as an incentive to "add new workers", there is nothing wrong with getting people to work NOW....not until YOUR pie in the sky comes around. The Lubbock Health Department serves all people not just the poor, and disabled. You belly ache now - wait until the emergency room charges from the County comes to your tax bill.

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Change Always Means Deterioration?

By Intelligent Observer | 08/20/11 - 02:36 pm

I am amazed to see the comments that indicate any change in the Lubbock Health Department's structure automatically means that services will go away and costs will be increased. Change is a natural part of life. So, instead of threatening the City Manager and the City Council, how about some constructive ideas about how to make changes that will reduce costs and insure that services are available. Moreover, how do we know that significant extra costs will be added to taxes or insurance premiums? How many children will go without immunizations? Will those children not get their immunizations paid for and provided through Medicaid/CHIP/Insurance and administered in clinics where they are already established patients? Would it not also be more cost effective and efficient to combine services into the City departments that would be involved in implementing any Health Department orders? This might save the time of a phone call and someone's life. So let's answer some of these questions before we jump to the conclusion that this is the end of the world as we know it.

Finally, I strongly object to the some the Health Department's Advisory Board members' behavior during this meeting. They are an advisory board to the City Council, not an independent governmental organization/agency. The attempt to interrogate the City Manager (e.g., Dr. Carr), who also answers to the City Council, was inappropriate and goes far beyond their role!

I know this will generate great hostility and angst from those emotionally involved in this issue, but take some time to think about the issues without the fog of emotion.

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Healthcare vs Health Department

By opinionated | 08/20/11 - 03:59 pm

With Covenant and UMC (and probably others that I am unaware of) clinics opening up all over town, it makes sense to me to let them take over the immunization and similar services. I have never visited the Health Department and likely never will. What is wrong with letting professional health organizations do what they do best? This is a perfect opportunity for a private-public relationship to form where the City manages the state grants and the private clinics compete to perform the services (likely at lower costs than the Health Department).

I do agree with the health board in one matter: a definite plan should be worked up and presented to the City council in open session on how the various responsibilities of the Health Department will be reassigned. Balanced budgets are important, but we must make sure the savings don't end up costing us more somewhere else.

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@7mulas

By civitas | [08/20/11 - 04:08 pm](#)

It doesn't take reading tea leaves to understand how grants work; when they go away somebody has to either pick up the bill or discontinue whatever the grant was for. My point was, since you apparently didn't read or understand the post, was that if the city feels a service is important then it shouldn't be based on grant money. Ergo, it is most certainly a budget issue and not a policy one. The reason you like to make it a policy issue is that you obviously feel some sort of entitlement to taxpayer's money to provide services you feel are necessary. It is clear from the meeting that many people not only feel these services should be provided, but provided whenever and wherever those beneficiaries want them. Apparently you are not among those who are finally figuring out that the people who are paying the bills get to decide what and how much they are going to support, and not the ones claiming a right to the service. I personally feel we have a moral, if not legal, responsibility to provide a level of public health services, but it is not an unlimited amount and it should be determined by the taxpayers and not socialist politicians or supporters.

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Smaller government good

By originalpatriot | [08/20/11 - 09:17 pm](#)

Ah yes, when the carts carry fewer loaves to the mob, they will bellow. True, the shopkeeper is quiet but the community benefits nonetheless.

America managed to thrive for two hundred years without a government providing for our every desire.

We have the right to life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness - not the right to happiness, rather the opportunity to pursue it.

Please do not intrude on my right to the pursuit of happiness with excessive taxation nor intrude on the rights of my children with irresponsible borrowing.

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RECALL

By followthemoney | [08/20/11 - 10:14 pm](#)

If they shut down the Health Department, we need to organize a recall for the Mayor and Council member's who vote's for the shut down of our Health Department.

If they want to save money, then GET RID OF THE 5 ASSISTANT CITY MANAGERS WHO MAKE 125,000.00 plus a year.

They don't do anything except suck the tax payers dry! Seriously, some of them come to work at 8:30 am and take an hour an half for lunch and go home at 4:30. Quincy White makes about 150,000 a years. This don't include benefits, so I think we could save about 800,000 or more if we eliminated these positions. Dumbauld makes about 225,000 or 250,000 a year.



Cuts elsewhere can be made rather than shutting down a needed service.

I believe the Health Department should be considered a public safety asset to our great City.

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@CIViTas

By 7mulas | 08/21/11 - 07:27 am

Wow you are such the independent/capitalist and have never benefitted from government what an odd animal you are. The very street that leads you to your gov't. protected job (if you work) and the schools that your children attend, and the lunch you will have are protected by the government. How many schools, and teachers have you paid out of your own salary? How many soldiers have you paid out of your own salary? You are a belly acher. You are another one of the bunch of "ditto heads" that yell "socialist" when you seem not to know the difference between gov't. of the people and communism. "those who are finally figuring out that the people who are paying the bills get to decide" You are completely wrong with this assanine statement. You and the T party are the ruination of America. Anyone who pays taxes are the ones that decide. What gives you that authority? No, one.

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Health Care for all???

By swcowan3 | 08/22/11 - 12:30 pm

Excuse me, but all those arguing FOR closing the Health Dept are the same folks who are against "Obamacare", so where are indigents and children supposed to get their immunizations now? How will STDs be attacked? Oops, I forgot, in this city no sex ed means the kids aren't having sex, so don't worry, and if the tracking of STDs goes away, the city manager can claim she eliminated STDs all by herself in only one year!

How does the new plan propose to track and attack any future epidemic that may strike? Who will arrange for public health education? More importantly, how well is our city manager and council covered by city paid health insurance?

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Health Dept.

By jdavis | 08/22/11 - 02:02 pm

Anybody smell traffic light cameras? We know in our hearts what the outcome will be of the Health Department debate. They are gonna do this thing and we can like it or lump it. What we need to be looking at is where these services may be "outsourced" to, then make sure none of the city council, or any city employee, for that matter, have any financial connection --whatsoever. If they have to move the STD clinic to another location, fine. We have a bit of a reputation in this town as far



as STDs go. It is the same as far as the location for immunizations. They're both a necessary public health service to prevent epidemics. It doesn't matter where the services are available at, as long as they are still available. Call me a pinko liberal if you want, but at least my kids won't have V.D. or swine flu. (well, I hope not anyway)

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Close it

By LBuck | [08/23/11 - 12:49 pm](#)

I would be willing to bet that the folks who are most upset about the closing have never used the Health Dept, much less ever stepped foot in the building. Do you know that they charge for immunizations? And it is cheaper to go to your kids Medicaid paid Pediatrician? Anyone who needs a flu shot can get them all over town and Medicaid and Medicare still pay for them. And anyone who needs testing for STD's can still be tested all over town. Same, same.

It appears essential services will just be transferred to other departments.

Get rid of the excess and waste - start with the Health Department and lets continue to get rid of non-essential City Services. I hope my City Councilman is listening...

Why cant y'all get as upset about water issues - the bills are seriously affecting those on fixed incomes.

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what is the rush to sell?

By snow1 | [08/24/11 - 12:49 pm](#)

Maybe we need to see who is pushing to buy this building and why? Could the CM be getting a cut/commission from the sell of the building? There has to be a reason, all of a sudden, why this building and business needs to close. Who is benefiting from the sell of this building- the city of lubbock, the CM, the mayor, McDougals', who? Why can't they move the health dept to another city building? Why does it have to be closed and people fired? I don't think everything is open.

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