**Columbia County Community Healthcare Consortium, Inc.**

**Strategic Planning Committee**

**Notes from the meeting of August 23, 2018**

**Participants:** Bob Gibson, Chelly Hegan, Jack Mabb, Michael Cole, PJ Keeler, Robin Andrews, Scott Thomas, Claire Parde

Robin and Claire began the meeting by pointing out the difference in purpose between this Strategic Planning committee and the one convened in 2016 when the committee examined the Mission Statement and looked at the question of “who we are.” This time the committee will explore the large system forces at work, and how we need to be structured and function in response to those forces. It was pointed out that the name “Strategic Planning Committee” is a bit of a misnomer, because the committee is examining issues, not charged with producing a deliverable; for instance, there probably won’t be a written document reflecting the work of the committee. This committee will also meet over a longer period than the two or three sessions of the last effort, because it is a bigger conversation, which the committee will carry forward to the board. It’s understood that not every member can attend every meeting; it was agreed that as long as 5 or more members are able to attend, the meeting will take place. It is important that all members of the committee work to keep up with meetings they missed, so that there is forward momentum. To support that, meeting notes will be sent out shortly after meetings, and each meeting will begin with a five-minute recap from the one prior. Robin will lead the meetings, acting as committee Chair.

Robin assured the group that while sensitive issues may be discussed, there should be trust that we can have these conversations confidentially; the committee is exploring--not making--commitments. The analogy was made that the committee is a think tank, brainstorming ideas.

After this introduction, Claire informed the group that she was going to facilitate a TOWS analysis with them, explaining that TOWS is a variation on SWOT (Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, Threats); this variation begins with the external threats and opportunities, then looks at internal weaknesses and strengths in relation to those threats and opportunities. While comfortable facilitating the first meeting, Claire expressed her concern that continuing to serve as facilitator for this process would be too conflicted a role for her. An opportunity exists through the Dyson Foundation to bring in a neutral facilitator (Dyson is currently a funder and community partner, with whom the Consortium has a good relationship). Their Strategic Restructuring Initiative supports organizations that are exploring strategic issues that may involve restructuring through a multiphase process. Phase I is exploratory, examining the external operating environment and asking the question “why now.” Phase II supports the early stages of partnership and contracting; additional phases follow. As part of Phase I, Dyson would provide the funding to bring in Doug Sauer, a facilitator from the NY Council of Non-Profits (NYCON), to guide the committee’s process.

Some members felt that NYCON could well come in with an agenda for consolidation, in part because the organization’s understanding of ‘rural areas’ is different than that of organizations actually in rural areas. Several questions were raised, including whether Dyson would fund a facilitator other than Doug Sauer from NYCON, so that a neutral facilitator could be found. Claire will contact Dyson regarding the possibility of funding a different facilitator, and, at the group’s request, will also inquire about the possibility of ‘plugging into’ Phase II funding in the future, if the decision is made to bypass Phase I.

The TOWS process began with Claire reminding everyone that this is a starting point, that TOWS is not intended to be a problem-solving exercise but rather, an assessment of the internal and external operating environments. With that in mind the group was asked to first brainstorm Threats, keeping the Consortium’s mission as a reference point. Then the group moved on to brainstorm Opportunities, noting that there were a few items that appeared on both lists.

It was decided that the complete list of Threats would be ‘collapsed’ to combine similar ideas, and then be sent out in a Survey Monkey format to allow the attendees to rank them.

Following the Threats and Opportunities exercise, discussion returned to the Dyson Strategic Restructuring Initiative. The question was asked, “The Consortium is successful; why would we merge, and with whom?” In response, Claire reminded the group that this is an opportunity for self-reflection, and that a merger is one of many options that will likely examine. The TOWS process is a jumping off point for our work and may suggest a number of different options to further explore. It was suggested that rather than being a facilitator, Doug Sauer could be brought in to present on the topic of mergers, and that generally, outside experts could be invited to present to the Committee about particular options as they surface.

Additional conversation arose around Claire continuing to facilitate; it was expressed that in this initial step, she appeared well able to separate out her role as ‘facilitator’ from that of ‘Executive Director.’ Claire stated that she is willing to continue at this time, but that at some point she may feel out of her depth and advocate for an outside facilitator. She and the group agreed they aren’t at that point yet and Claire will continue.

There was some final brief discussion on one of the threats that is being felt by organizations within the Network-- the downward pressure on administrative costs--and how administrative costs can be spread out, or shared/consolidated.

It was agreed that a Doodle poll would be sent out to schedule the next meeting, with the intention to meet in mid-September.