



Shelby County Government

LEE HARRIS
MAYOR

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CHIEF ADMINISTRATIVE OFFICER

May 19, 2021

To: Mayor Lee Harris

From: La Sonya Harris Hall, PHD *llh*
Deputy Chief Administrative Officer
Interim Director, Shelby County Health Services Division (SCHD)

SUBJECT: Recommendation from the Interview Panel for the Director of the Shelby County Health Services Division

The purpose of this memo is to provide you with an update regarding the search for the permanent position of Director, SCHD. As discussed on May 6, the search was conducted in two (2) phases:

Phase I – Candidate Interviews conducted on April 29 and April 30

Candidate interviews were conducted by a diverse panel of stakeholders representing local hospitals, non-profit partners, public health professionals, the private sector, legislative body, public health advisory board and SCHD employees.

The interview panel considered SCHD's current state of affairs:

- SCHD's operating budget of \$102M is expansive and covers multiple funds (i.e. General, Special Revenue, Enterprise and Grant);
- SCHD's grant portfolio is roughly \$59M or 58% of the Division's budget;
- SCHD oversees two (2) of Shelby County Government's largest contracts (i.e. Inmate Health and Forensics) totaling \$25M;
- The SCHD Director's salary of \$145K is not competitive when compared to peer county health departments;
- There is only a 1-year guaranteed appointment remaining in this term;
- There remains over 100+ vacancies covering all funding sources, with specific recruiting challenges in the Public Health Nursing and Epidemiologists positions; and
- There is a critical need to rebrand SCHD and rebuild community trust following the TDH/CDC investigation and findings regarding the COVID-19 vaccination operation.

Interview Panel Recommendation:

The candidate interviews resulted in the advancement of two finalists, Mr. Derrick Neal and Dr. Michelle Taylor. Assessments from the interview panel (which were shared with you during our May 6 meeting) noted the limited experience of both candidates, which included 1) managing a division as large as the SCHD; 2) overseeing a robust grant and contract portfolio; and, 3) implementing the requisite change management required to improve the operational and programmatic functionality of the SCHD.

Phase II – Candidate Presentation & Focus Group Discussion-May 11 and May 13

Each of the candidates delivered a 20-minute presentation on *Advancing a Public Health Agenda in Shelby County Post COVID-19*. Following the presentation, each candidate fielded questions from SCHD community partners including two (2) SCHD employees. A copy of each candidate's presentation and assessments from focus group participants are attached for your review. A summary of Focus Group observations as noted on Candidate Rating Forms is provided below:

May 11 – Mr. Derrick Neal

1. He is very knowledgeable and passionate but lacks formal training in public health.
2. He lacks familiarity with the Shelby County Community as noted in incorrect data provided (i.e. high school completion rates) in his presentation.
3. His presentation focused on data points from Texas and not Shelby County.
4. He didn't clearly communicate how his plan would advance Shelby County post-COVID-19.
5. He struggled to maintain focus in his presentation and to stay within the time allotted but successfully regained composure during the Question & Answer session.

May 13 - Dr. Michelle Taylor

1. She is very articulate, highly credentialed possessing the MD, Dr.PH and MPH degrees and has previously worked as SCHD's Administrator of Maternal Child Health.
2. She is a native Memphian and therefore has familiarity with local politics, partners, community issues and needs.
3. She has an established rapport with the TN Department of Health Commissioner.
4. Her presentation focused more on her accomplishments but was weak on how she plans on changing the health department.
5. Her presentation failed to mention the needs and wants of the inner city.

Final Recommendation from the Interview Panel

On Tuesday, May 18, the interview panel reconvened and reviewed the assessments from candidate interviews conducted on April 29 and April 30 and Focus Group participants from May 11 and May 13. Members of the interview panel were able to listen to both presentations as well as the Question & Answer sessions. While it appears that focus group participants favored Dr. Taylor as the finalist, the interview panel expressed strong concern regarding Dr. Taylor's lack of administrative acumen, experience leading an organization the size of SCHD and change management skills. Furthermore, the interview panel stated that Dr. Taylor required "more gradual, progression of leadership prior to being named as Director of the Shelby County Health Department."

The panel emphasized the magnitude of the SCHD operation citing the multifaceted budget of \$102M, diverse and complex grant portfolio and overall culture change required to advance the Division. "Careful consideration must be taken when selecting a leader for an organization of this size and community reach." The panel noted that the "Health Department is too critical an asset to Shelby County not to perform due diligence in selecting the Director". Acknowledging the aforementioned areas of concern, the interview panel does **NOT recommend** either candidate for the permanent position of Director, Shelby County Health Department.

Instead, the interview panel recommends the following next steps:

1. Identify additional funding (e.g. public/private sources) to supplement the salary of the position to improve the recruitment of more qualified candidates.
2. Direct the search firm to identify a stronger candidate pool, preferably a current or "#2 leader from a comparable health department."
3. Maintain the current interim leadership at the SCHD until a permanent Director is identified and approved.

It should be noted that Dr. Taylor's credentials are ideal to fill the vacant Physician position in SCHD. In either case, if you are interested in meeting Dr. Taylor, a virtual meeting is tentatively scheduled on your calendar for Friday, May 21 at 11AM.

Please advise me of any concerns and questions you have. I look forward to serving as you deem appropriate.

Attachments