

**Hamilton County General Health District
REGULAR MEETING – BOARD OF HEALTH
August 9, 2021 – 4 p.m.
Minutes**

1. Call to Order

At 4 p.m., Mark A. Rippe, President, called to order the regular session of the Board of Health of Hamilton County General Health District followed by the Pledge of Allegiance.

2. Roll Call of Members

Members Present: Mark A. Rippe, President
Elizabeth A. Kelly M.D., Vice President
James Brett

District Staff Present: Greg Kesterman, Health Commissioner
Dr. Jennifer Mooney, Assistant Health Commissioner
Craig Davidson, Assistant Health Commissioner
Dr. Steve Feagins, Medical Director
Nee Fong Chin, Chief Assistant Prosecuting Attorney
Greg Varner, Finance Officer
Mike Samet, Public Information Officer
Stephanie Taylor, HR Officer

Guests: Julie Beckham, Tom Foy, Standish Fortin, Kim Georgeton, Maureen Green, Susan Haines, Rachel Hamlin, Caroline Hofmann, Brittany Jones, Bonnie Klusmeyer, Paul Merlo, A. Settell, Don Wegman, and Kelly Vetter

3. Clean Kitchen Awards

Craig Davidson read the list of two Clean Kitchen Award recipients and congratulated them for their efforts to maintain a high level of sanitation and staff education.

4. Approval of Minutes

Mr. Brett moved to approve the minutes from the July 12, 2021 Board of Health meeting.

Dr. Kelly seconded the motion.

Roll Call Vote – All Aye

- 5. Public Comment:** Standish Fortin chooses his children's school based on how they will be treated. Mr. Fortin is a child of veterans who fought for our freedoms and asked for the masking decision to be in the hands of parents. Maureen Green, RN is a graduate of Xavier University. Ms. Green has Crohn's Disease as well as auto immune system issues, and she was hospitalized from wearing masks. Ms. Green spoke to natural remedies that kill the virus. Why is HCPH not sharing other treatment resources? Kim Georgeton served the Health Commissioner and Board Members with an Affidavit/Declaration of Truth. She feels HCPH is being coercive in making recommendations from CDC guidelines. She believes that the CDC guidelines prove that masks don't work and presented the Board with a list of articles claiming proof of such. Bonnie Klusmeyer is a parent of four children, three are still

in school, and is claims to be witnessing psychological warfare. Schools are not honoring mask mandate exceptions. Ms. Klusmeyer claims there is no efficacy in wearing the mask and there is no danger to children getting the virus. Masking should be the parents' decision. Don Wegman asked if HCPH has the right to do what they are doing and stated that residents have inalienable rights. Mr. Wegman says he is a veteran who put his life on the line for everyone's freedom and is peacefully protesting. Julie Beckham is concerned about the children, the actual COVID numbers and the unsanitary mask conditions. She says the vaccine has become a political issue and it is the vaccine that is driving the variants; and that the numbers between the mask mandated states and the not mandated states don't add up. Brittany Jones is a respiratory therapist and indicated that she and many of her co-workers believe hospitals should not be mandating vaccinations that have not been FDA approved. Contrary to what is being said, unvaccinated employees do care about their patients.

Mr. Rippe thanked everyone for their comments and will share their feedback with the State of Ohio. Commissioner Kesterman said that HCPH does not have the authority to issue mask mandates and that mandates must come from the State of Ohio. HCPH has worked hard throughout the pandemic to educate and provide resources to those who have been impacted by the pandemic. The HCPH team has reviewed data and information released by ODH and the CDC and believes in the accuracy of reports and aligns with recommendations in the interest of protecting the public. There are no local mandates. However, HCPH strongly recommends, in alignment with CDC that masks be worn in indoor public locations and, regardless of vaccination status, in schools.

6. Health Commissioner's Report

Commissioner Kesterman continues to monitor the rising number of COVID cases and hospitalizations in Hamilton County. Now up to 3,400 hospitalized cases averaging 145 per day when the numbers were down to 13 per day. CDC core indicators of and thresholds for community transmission levels reports 115 cases per 100K population and 7.15 percent positivity. This was the trigger moving Hamilton County to "high transmission" status as classified by the CDC. The Hamilton County R factor is 1.52 and the region is 1.34. Hospitalizations continue to increase with 170 confirmed cases. Hospitals are now seeing more people under 60. The vaccination goal is 70-80 percent and the current percent vaccinated is 60. There are over 200 local pop up/walk-in vaccination clinics. The State will be providing Hamilton County additional funding for offering incentives to those getting vaccinated. HCPH anticipates giving \$100 gift cards in the coming weeks to enhance the program. School quarantine guidance was changed from last year. The indicators are designed to better keep kids in school

Commissioner Kesterman is pleased to report the Community Health Improvement Plan quarterly progress report indicates all five priority areas are on track.

Board Members were reminded to complete the strategic planning survey (survey link is in the Board packet).

The Quality Improvement Project to increase vaccination rates in Lincoln Heights did just that, despite not reaching the original goal assigned for the project. Dr. Kelly thanked and congratulated the Quality Improvement team who did such a fantastic job in Lincoln Heights.

Congratulations to Dr. Mooney and her team on the excellent vaccine pharmacy audit results.

On tonight's agenda are three personnel policies that were updated based on Board feedback and leadership conversations and two resolutions. Resolution A: Supplemental Appropriation to the 2021 Revised Budget and Resolution B: Certification of Delinquent Sewage Fees.

Staff Reports

(a) Medical Director's Report

Dr. Steve Feagins Medical Director congratulated the HCPH staff on the CDC COVID-19 Vaccination Site Assessment where no areas for improvement were identified. Full details of the assessment are in the Board packet.

The Delta variant presently circulating has higher transmissibility than earlier variants of the virus. Influenza transmission is 1.3, COVID is 2-2.5, Alpha is 3.5, and Delta is 5-8. With higher transmissibility, the peak is seen earlier. The COVID vaccine is mostly effective against variants; however vaccinated people can transmit the virus. The higher viral load means more transmissibility. Dr. Feagins explained why this surge is different. Hospital staff are tired and there are labor shortages. Forty-one percent of inpatients are under 50. Hospitals also have sicker non-COVID patients due to delayed care during the pandemic. The Infectious Disease Working Group recommended a vaccine mandate for healthcare (and other) employers. All local hospitals have implemented with their own timelines, and all have religious and medical exceptions.

A booster (3rd dose) for the most vulnerable population (2.7 percent of US adults) -- immunocompromised patients -- is expected soon. Alpha variant is declining, and the Delta variant prevalence is increasing. There is a recommendation for providers to discontinue plasma therapy. Providers are calculating medicine and respiratory equipment needs for potential surges.

Mr. Rippe asked what influenza is coming. Dr. Feagins shared that typically we look to the southern hemisphere, but the last couple of years that has not been a good indicator. Influenza vaccines will start earlier this year and are required by health systems and are expected to be bundled in with COVID vaccine.

The monthly Communicable Diseases Epi report was provided in the Board packet.

(b) Department of Community Health Services

Assistant Health Commissioner Dr. Jennifer Mooney reported that disease and harm reduction programs are very active and HCPH is staffing up. In follow-up to a Board information request, the HIV case statistics since HCPH was awarded the prevention grant are in the Board packet. Butler County is seeing an increased number of HIV cases. Additional funding has been pushed to Butler County to help expand outreach services.

ODH will provide TB training in Southwest Ohio in early fall. There has been staff turnover as well as new staff, so this training will help standardize case management services.

Dr. Mooney explained a seed funding enhancement for sexual health services and the partnership with UC to expand services in the next few months. They are partnering with UC department of OB/Gyn's Dr. Meredith Pensak to expand services to better serve patients in need of sexually transmitted infection screening and treatment, cervical cancer screenings, family planning services, and PrEP for HIV prevention.

The Epi team has been working on a grant from the National Association of County and City Health Officials (NACCHO) to enhance infection prevention and controls. They created a standardized process that has been recognized at the state and national levels.

(c) Department of Environmental Health Services

Assistant Health Commissioner Mr. Davidson shared he is pleased to provide a report covering more routine Environmental Health items this month. There was a significant water main break at the intersection of Vine St./Galbraith Rd. and HCPH coordinated closures of food service and retail food establishments where needed while communicating with Cincinnati Water Works (CWW) and Cincinnati Health Department. CWW issued a boil water advisory and EH staff ensured all licensed facilities were in compliance with the food code.

Mr. Davidson explained the BioWatch Emergency Preparedness Program. The chair of the BioWatch Advisory Committee rotates, and Commissioner Kesterman is chairing this year with support from staff. HCPH coordinated with the Ohio National Guard (which is new to this process) to facilitate a Phase 1 sampling drill. The process worked and it was efficient.

August is the time for the Board's annual certification of unpaid sewage treatment system fees to the County Auditor. The amount owed fluctuates annually and this year the total is \$116,702.50. Payment can be made until certification occurs by the Hamilton County Auditor at the end of August.

Mr. Rippe asked if the unpaid sewage treatment system fees are about the same as last year. Mr. Davidson explained this year is higher because of COVID delays authorized by ORC, but fees are still being collected.

Mr. Rippe asked about the timeline of reviewing the processing fee to ensure HCPH is covering its cost. The last change was three years ago. Mr. Davidson will do a fee assessment over the next couple of months.

There was one residential condemnation and details are in the Board packet.

7. Finances

The July 2021 Disbursement Report is included in the Board packet.

Dr. Kelly moved to approve the monthly disbursements.

Mr. Brett seconded the motion.

Roll Call Vote – All Aye; Mr. Brett abstained on Whitewater expenditures.

8. Unfinished Business:

Mr. Brett moved to approve Resolution A-2021 for Supplemental Appropriation to the 2021 Revised Budget, Effective July 12, 2021.

Dr. Kelly seconded the motion.

Roll Call Vote – All Aye

Stephanie Taylor, HR Officer explained the changes to the Personnel Policy Section 1.3. Mr. Rippe recommended “student” should be described as studying at an accredited school or college. The Board agreed.

Dr. Kelly moved to approve Personnel Policy Section 1.3: Definitions with the addition of “studying at an accredited school or college.”

Mr. Brett seconded the motion.

Roll Call Vote – All Aye

Mr. Brett moved to approve Personnel Policy Section 2.3: Employee Status

Dr. Kelly seconded the motion.

Roll Call Vote – All Aye

9. New Business

Stephanie Taylor explained the definition of immediate family was updated to make it uniform throughout agency policies

Dr. Kelly moved to approve Personnel Policy Section 4.1: Sick Leave

Mr. Brett seconded the motion.

Roll Call Vote – All Aye

Commissioner Kesterman explained that sewage fee payments are still being accepted through August 31 and the delinquent list will be updated before submitting to the auditor.

Dr. Kelly moved to approve Resolution B: Certification of Delinquent Sewage Fees

Mr. Brett seconded the motion.

Roll Call Vote – All Aye; Mr. Rippe abstained on Brian Brockhoff.

10. Executive Session

Mr. Brett moved to go to Executive Session to discuss personnel matters at 5:21 p.m.

Dr. Kelly seconded the motion.

Roll Call Vote – All Aye

Mr. Brett moved to end Executive Session at 5:38 p.m.

Dr. Kelly seconded the motion.

Roll Call Vote – All Aye

Dr. Kelly moved to authorize the Health Commissioner to negotiate and enter into contract for lease to gain additional, needed space for the health district.

Mr. Brett seconded the motion.

Roll Call Vote – All Aye

11. Adjournment

Mr. Brett moved to adjourn the meeting at 5:42 p.m.

Dr. Kelly seconded the motion.

Roll Call Vote – All Aye

Next Board of Health meeting: September 13, 2021.



Mark A. Rippe, President



Greg Kesterman, Secretary
Health Commissioner