

**Hamilton County General Health District  
REGULAR MEETING – BOARD OF HEALTH  
December 13, 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  
Dan Meloy

District Staff Present: Greg Kesterman, Health Commissioner  
Dr. Jennifer Mooney, Assistant Health Commissioner  
Dr. Steve Feagins, Medical Director  
Nee Fong Chin, Chief Assistant Prosecuting Attorney  
Greg Varner, Finance Officer  
Rebecca Stowe, Performance Management & Grants Coordinator  
Martha Walter, Director Disease Prevention

**3. Clean Kitchen Awards**

Commissioner Kesterman read the list of six 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 November 8, 2021 Board of Health meeting.

**Mr. Meloy** seconded the motion.

**Roll Call Vote – All Aye**

**5. Public Comment: None.**

**6. Health Commissioner's Report**

Commissioner Kesterman reported COVID metrics are moving in the wrong direction. Omicron is the new variant and Ohio has now identified two cases in Central Ohio from individuals with no travel history. The message remains the same: get vaccinated, wear a mask, and social distance. Hamilton County has 117,560 COVID cases and is averaging 307 cases per day. Hamilton County's reproductive value is 1.04 and the region is 1. Deaths have been trending upward and the prognosis for patients in the ICU on a respirator are not good. Hospitalizations in the region are 568 with 150 in the ICU and 102 on ventilators. Mr. Rippe asked how many are vaccinated. About 10 percent are breakthrough cases and 90 percent are not vaccinated. Ohio remains in a high state of transmission status. Vaccinations of ages 12+ is at 73 percent of the population. Hamilton County is

exceeding the national and state averages for vaccinations in the 5- to 11-year-old age group. There continues to be plenty of opportunities for testing and vaccine. ODH continues to provide at-home testing kits and HCPH is working with County Administration to find new distribution points.

House Bill 218 Vaccine Exemptions and Mandate Prohibition would prohibit vaccine requirements for passports. Commissioner Kesterman would like the Board's authorization to oppose HB 218. Activity on House Bill 463, related to local health department governance has slowed down to allow legislators more dialogue with departments of health and other interested parties.

Rebecca Stowe, Performance Management & Grants Coordinator, will present the Strategic Plan for Board approval tonight. In addition, Greg Varner Finance Officer will present a revised 2022 and estimated 2023 budget tonight for Board approval.

American Rescue Plan Hazard Pay will appear on team member checks this week. All received \$450 and some employees working in more high-risk situations received \$1,000. Mr. Rippe asked if all HCPH staff got \$450? Yes, all received the minimum regardless of their position. Commissioner Kesterman advocated for all testing clinic staff to receive the high-risk pay.

HCPH serves a population of 497,392 and the total population served across four health departments in the county is 836,759. Mr. Rippe asked what was HCPH's population last time the population numbers were updated? Approximately 480,000.

Mr. Brett thanked the staff for their outstanding service this year. Commissioner Kesterman will share that with staff.

Ms. Stowe shared there is a wealth of data to back up what HCPH wants to accomplish on the strategic plan. The priorities have been downsized from five to four: Strong Leadership & Workforce, Flexible & Sustainable Funding, Timely & Locally Relevant Data, and Foundational Infrastructure. Health Equity is incorporated across all four priorities. Ms. Stowe explained each initiative in detail. Dr. Kelly asked if the initiatives apply back to measurable goals? Ms. Stowe explained they will trickle down when the team builds out measures with directors and staff. Mr. Rippe agreed with the need for measurable goals and would like to see more goal metrics in the quarterly progress reports. Commissioner Kesterman explained some are straightforward, others will be in the Program Implementation Plan (PIP) report. Mr. Brett asked about better communicating employment opportunities and benefits (i.e., tuition reimbursement to help with recruiting). Ms. Stowe shared they are in the early state of assessing and building into the recruiting strategy. The five-year plan has some direct goals with flexibility to pivot for emerging strategies. Commissioner Kesterman shared this document also aligns with HCPH's accreditation requirements. Mr. Meloy asked if there is a group that stays active with initiatives biannually or quarterly to keep topics top of-mind. HCPH's Performance Management Council does this quarterly with PIP, followed by annual plan reviews. Over half of the agency's staff are involved with the performance management process.

Mr. Rippe would like to see an addition of strong leadership, emphasize HCPH's culture, and core values. We must lead with that and get buy-in with prospective new hires. Commissioner Kesterman suggested the Board add an additional statement to section 1.1.C. to include values and culture.

Mr. Rippe thanked Ms. Stowe and staff for all their hard work on this project. Commissioner Kesterman congratulated Ms. Stowe for already being 66 percent finished with the accreditation process and shared HCPH will be ready for the March filing deadline.

## **Staff Reports**

### **(a) Medical Director's Report**

Dr. Steve Feagins, Medical Director reported the Medical Explorers met for the first time in person since the pandemic began. They had been meeting virtually so it was nice to bring them back to HCPH. The students write essays and are selected for the program by recommendations from teachers. They toured syringe services and environmental services and it was a great experience.

Dr. Feagins shared that COVID peaked at 650 daily cases and the lowest was November 10 at right below 300. Today there are 568 COVID patients in the hospital. ICU admissions indicate the severity of the virus, with 80 percent of those admitted on a ventilator with a 50 percent chance of dying. Mr. Rippe asked if age makes a difference? Body mass index is a detrimental factor. Providers are using crisis standards of care to manage the large volumes of patients. High vaccination rates in nursing homes helped to reduce the peak. Region 6 / Southwest Ohio currently has the lowest cases per day. Over the next two to four weeks, expect an increase rather than a plateau. Mr. Rippe asked what is driving the increase? Conjecture is the different variants, unvaccinated people and more gatherings. Omicron transmission is believed to have a doubling factor of three to four days, so it is incredibly transmittable compared even with the most recent Delta variant. There still is not enough data to truly understand the epidemiology of the new variant.

Mr. Brett asked about deer transmissibility of COVID. Dr. Feagins indicated that the public health recommendation is to wear gloves and a mask when field dressing a deer.

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

### **(b) Department of Community Health Services**

Assistant Health Commissioner Dr. Jennifer Mooney shared the Harm Reduction team hosted a national webinar about the partnership with Easter Seals on workforce development. They have developed a robust job readiness program and are continuing with this work. The team hired a full-time person who is dedicated to this work in partnership with Ohio Means Jobs. Mr. Rippe asked where are the people coming from? They are people in recovery, they apply through Easter Seals, go through the program to become certified peers and then are offered a paid internship. Enrollments have exceeded expectations. Dr. Mooney will share more data at the next Board meeting.

HCPH partnered with volunteer UC Medical Students to work on the tobacco cessation project/grant. Students collected information from local businesses that sell tobacco products and gathered data on marketing tactics. The work will help HCPH increase community awareness and facilitate tobacco prevention and control efforts.

The Disease Prevention team continues to grow and services continue to expand. The staff are turning an office into an additional exam room to address the influx of patients.

Mr. Rippe asked how the downtown space is working out. Great, parking issues were resolved, staff like the space, and are very connected.

Mr. Rippe inquired about Harm Reduction Narcan being predominately distributed to white individuals. This is because nearly 70 percent of Narcan is distributed from the syringe exchange – which is largely attended by white participants. The overdose decedents are predominately white, but 30 percent are African American this year compared to 25% in 2020. Staff are working to update messaging/branding and enhance community outreach for people of color.

**(c) Department of Environmental Health Services**

Commissioner Kesterman reported on Craig Davidson’s behalf, calling attention to his Board report. His team was successful in getting residents who had homes condemned help with long term solutions. One notable experience is in the Board packet.

Mr. Brett asked to pass on to Chuck DeJonckheere and the Waste Management staff the Board’s appreciation for their hard work and patience with the public.

**7. Finances**

The November 2021 Disbursement Reports are included in the Board packet.

**Mr. Meloy** moved to approve the monthly disbursements.

**Dr. Kelly** seconded the motion.

**Roll Call Vote – All Aye; - Mr. Brett abstained on White Water expenditures.**

Finance Director Greg Varner reviewed the 2022 Revised Budget and 2023 Estimated Budget objectives, including: investment in staff; no increase in assessments to townships villages and contract cities nor planned increases in service fees; capital improvements including to increase seats for staff, grants, and fund balances.

Mr. Rippe asked what are drivers of the fund balance trend? COVID is a big contributor to this positive variance in the past two years, and we budget for expenses higher than expected to cover for things that come up so that variances don’t have to brought to the Board every time. Unfilled positions reduce expenses. Sometimes expenses can be applied to grants. We budget conservatively on revenue and liberally on expenses. We try to anticipate some costs that are increasing (mileage rate [gas], postage increases, supplies, etc.). Feedback from last month was incorporated into the pay grades giving directors flexibility to reward high performers. There are currently three open positions, which is lowest number of unfilled positions in quite a while. Dr. Kelly asked about the downward trend. That is the conservative budget where actual numbers typically come in better than expected. Mr. Rippe thanked Mr. Varner for the great job he has done with the budgeting process and would like to look at increasing fees for service to help offset increased expenses. Commissioner Kesterman shared cost methodology for other programs are projecting deficits and they are seeking help from the state. Past lobbying efforts have failed, but the need continues.

**8. Unfinished Business: None.**

**9. New Business**

**Dr. Kelly** moved to approve Resolution E: Board of Health Approval 2022 Revised and 2023 Estimated Budgets.

**Mr. Meloy** seconded the motion.

**Roll Call Vote – All Aye**

**Mr. Meloy** moved to approve the 2022-2026 HCPH Strategic Plan with amendment to include values and culture in Section 1.1.C.

**Dr. Kelly** seconded the motion.

**Roll Call Vote – All Aye**

**Mr. Meloy** moved to approve authorizing the Health Commissioner to provide, if needed, opposition to House Bill 218.

**Dr. Kelly** seconded the motion.

**Roll Call Vote – All Aye**

The Board is invited to attend this Wednesday at 10 a.m. the HCPH holiday party where 14 staff awards will be presented.

Happy holidays and happy new year!

**10. Adjournment**

**Mr. Meloy** moved to adjourn the meeting at 5:30 p.m.

**Dr. Kelly** seconded the motion.

**Roll Call Vote – All Aye**

Next Board of Health meeting: January 10, 2022.

  
\_\_\_\_\_  
Mark A. Rippe, President

  
\_\_\_\_\_  
Greg Kesterman, Secretary  
Health Commissioner

