

Hamilton County General Health District
REGULAR MEETING – BOARD OF HEALTH
December 14, 2020 – 4:00 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, conducted by conference call, followed by the Pledge of Allegiance.

2. Roll Call of Members

Members Present: Mark A. Rippe, President
James Brett, Vice President
Elizabeth A. Kelly, M.D.
Dan Meloy
Tracey A. Puthoff, Esq.

District Staff Present: Greg Kesterman, Health Commissioner
Dr. Jennifer Mooney, Assistant Health Commissioner
Craig Davidson, Assistant Health Commissioner
Dr. Steve Feagins, Medical Director
Greg Varner, Finance Officer
Philip Graham

Guests: Alison Auciello, Willie Hopkins, Anna Kouyate, Mary Metzmeier, and Lenore Newland

3. Public Comment

Community United for Action (CUFA) member Lenore Newland explained that CUFA is a grassroots organization to help people resolve issues. Current efforts are to stop utility cut offs during the winter and especially during a pandemic. Anna Kouyate read a few letters from children and residents pleading for their utilities to not be cut off. CUFA asks HCPH to deliver all the letters to Governor DeWine asking for an executive order to bring back a moratorium on utility cut offs. Commissioner Kesterman shared some local relief efforts available to residents and offered to scan the letters to the Governor's office and discuss them on the weekly call with other Health Department Commissioners and the Governor. CUFA appreciates all support for this important issue.

4. Clean Kitchen Awards

Craig Davidson read the list of 11 Clean Kitchen Award recipients and congratulated them for their efforts to maintain a high level of sanitation and staff education.

5. Approval of Minutes

Dr. Kelly moved to approve the minutes from the November 9, 2020 Board of Health meeting.

Mr. Meloy seconded the motion.

Roll Call Vote – All Aye

6. Health Commissioner's Report

Commissioner Kesterman reported that a lot has happened in the past month. Dr. Feagins will discuss and provided additional detail on the vaccine distribution in his report. Ohio has 562,727 COVID-19 cases. HCPH put out a Health Advisory encouraging Hamilton County residents to stay home as much as possible. The County Commissioners issued the same advisory. There was a drop in daily cases around November 19, possibly attributed to all the health advisories. Daily numbers are plateauing at an extremely high level. Ohio added a large number of antigen tests on December 8 and they changed how the tests are calculated so that attributes to some of the change. Regionally, hospitals are holding at an average of 750 patients a day and is creating significant staffing issues for the systems. Hamilton County's positivity rate is 13 percent. On the Ohio Public Health Advisory System, Hamilton County is at Level 3. There were three indicators that are currently not flagged which include ER visits, hospital admissions, and ICU bed occupancy. These indicators kept us from going to Level 4. Schools continue to do a great job and they have been great partners through this pandemic. The ODH quarantine standard following possible exposure has been revised from 14. While 14 days remains the best standard, an individual is now able to leave quarantine after 10 days or seven days with a negative test. This provides some relief to those affected.

The HCPH team has started significant work standing up their vaccine program. Phase 1A focuses on frontline healthcare workers and long-term care centers. Commissioner Kesterman reviewed Ohio's allocation numbers and reported HCPH is to receive 1,800 Moderna on December 22. HCPH's first doses of vaccine will be provided to the Fire Departments in Hamilton County for the paramedics and EMTs. Commissioner Kesterman indicated that he is requesting funds from the State of Ohio to assist with vaccination efforts to ensure that public health does not have to charge for vaccine. The vaccine should have equitable distribution. Charging the public could become a barrier for lower income residents and this might prevent them from having access to the vaccine. Also, billing for the administration of the vaccine would create a burden on the health departments. Commissioner Kesterman spoke with Governor DeWine during a weekly update and had significant support from other health commissioners on this topic.

HCPH has received there first of three new vans are equipped with refrigeration and are ready for distribution to begin. These vans will initially be used to transport vaccine to each of the fire departments that will assist with vaccinations. HCPH staff are also working on large scale points of distribution (PODs) anticipated to occur in spring 2021 when the vaccine is available to the public.

Ms. Puthoff asked what process will be put in place to ensure that recipients get the 2nd dose. Commissioner Kesterman shared that the state has the same concerns. It is important that the 2nd dose be administered of the same type and within the prescribed window. There will be cards distributed with the vaccine type and due date of the 2nd dose. There will also be software to help manage that information.

Staff have been working very hard, and to help support our employees, on tonight's agenda is legislation to extend the temporary amendment to the current sick leave policy into 2021. Full details are in the Board packet. Mr. Rippe clarified that there should be no carry over of the emergency sick leave hours. Commissioner Kesterman will ensure that no carry over language is included in the policy.

WeTHRIVE! proclamations in appreciation for local community's public health efforts will be mailed this year, since given the pandemic, there is no recognition event. The Board will be asked to approve the proclamation later tonight.

Plans for the 2021 District Advisory Council (DAC) meeting are underway. The recommendation is to move to a virtual meeting on March 9. Ms. Puthoff asked whose seat is up for re-election. Commissioner Kesterman reported Ms. Puthoff's seat is up for re-election. Ms. Puthoff stated she is willing to serve another term. Other term expiration dates were reviewed. Commissioner Kesterman will verify the accuracy of the other term expiration dates.

Special thanks to Finance Officer Greg Varner for his work coordinating extremely busy staff to prepare the 2021 Revised Budget and the 2022 Proposed Budget. There are contingencies built into the budget related to COVID-19 activities that Mr. Varner will explain in his report. Commissioner Kesterman indicated that the budget included upgrades to technology, several safety enhancements to the physical space and new training opportunities for staff. He thanked staff for all their hard work during these difficult times. The next two months will be challenging as the agency ramps up activities associated with vaccination.

Ms. Puthoff commended HCPH staff for keeping our residents and families safe. The Board is very grateful. Ms. Puthoff recommended that HCPH should continue the contact tracing efforts (using financial reserves) even if congress does not fund it.

Staff Reports

(a) Medical Director's Report

Dr. Steve Feagins Medical Director provided an update on vaccine development in the United States. Healthcare provider communications and processes continue to be refined. Dr. Feagins explained emergency vaccine approvals, timing of future approvals, refrigeration and storage requirements, trial results, comparisons to other vaccine studies, dosing and administration, adverse events (all will be recorded in the state database), and key points. Commissioner Kesterman will share Dr. Feagins slides with the Board.

Ms. Puthoff asked for clarity around the timing of when the vaccine will be available to the public. Dr. Feagins cannot give a specific date but expects it to be in Q2 2021.

Mr. Rippe asked about Guillain Barre Syndrome (GBS). Dr. Feagins reported GBS was not seen in this instance. Mr. Rippe asked about the use of Remdesivir. Yes, it is being used, but it is very expensive.

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

Mr. Brett joined the meeting at 4:55 p.m.

(b) Department of Community Health Services

Assistant Health Commissioner Dr. Jennifer Mooney highlighted contact tracing in her report. HCPH has 85 full time equivalents doing this difficult work. Seven temporary staff are dedicated to managing data entry and answering general phone calls and emails. Dr. Mooney feels we are providing the best services we can. Most positive cases are responded to within 24 hours. Other health departments in the state are relying on self-notification for close contacts. To offset the toll on staff's mental health and capacity, teams have been creative on ways to stay positive. For example, they conducted a fun digital "scavenger hunt." Another activity is planned for the beginning of 2021.

Dr. Mooney called attention to the overdose statistics in her report. June had the highest OD and ED visits. Since then, the numbers continue to shift. The team is keeping an eye on it and developing ways to respond and stay engaged. Initially the statistics for people of color were low, but those numbers have been on the rise.

Mr. Rippe asked for the mobile unit statistics. Dr. Mooney explained the syringe data is now available on the HCPH website but will include it in future reports.

(c) Department of Environmental Health Services

Assistant Health Commissioner Mr. Davidson highlighted two storyboards on the backflow letters and database in his report. The projects created significant efficiencies and improvements in the backflow program. Mr. Davidson also reported landfill licensing is on track except for Loveland Landfill; a plan to resolve the matter in 2021 is being developed. Mr. Davidson was very pleased with the successful Ohio EPA audit. The open dump surveillance cameras have helped with prosecuting violators. Hamilton County's COVID-19 warehouse has adequate refrigeration storage and planning continues for large scale vaccine distribution. Details and photos of enforcement activities are in the Board packet.

Ms. Puthoff asked if all vaccine distribution is running through HCPH. No, some vaccines will be delivered to the hospitals directly and CVS/Walgreens are managing a national program to vaccinate residents/staff of long term care facilities.. Ms. Puthoff asked if HCPH has enough personnel to administer vaccinations. Mr. Davidson explained that hospital systems providers are administering their own. HCPH will be responsible initially for long-term care facilities not participating in the CVS/Walgreens programs as well as other healthcare providers with EMS at the top of the list as part of the ODH Phas 1a roll out. Details about additional phases is yet to be released by ODH or CDC. We are securing agreements with nursing agencies and building out a staffing model to help administer the vaccines during the subsequent phases. Commissioner Kesterman explained the state has been proactive with getting other providers onboard at the start (lesson learned from H1N1 distribution) and we are hopeful the distribution will be much more distributed taking some of the burden off of local health departments.

Mr. Rippe asked about the storyboard and backflow letters stating there is crossover communications from city and county which can be confusing. There needs to be adequate time allowed to comply which was one of the improvements brought about through the quality improvement project. Mr. Rippe will review future backflow letters that he receives to determine if there is a jurisdictional issue related to duplicate letters.

Mr. Rippe also recognized HCPH staff for the positive Ohio EPA audit report.

7. Unfinished Business: None.

8. Finances

The November 2020 Disbursement Reports are included in the Board packet.

Ms. Puthoff moved to approve the monthly disbursements.

Dr. Kelly seconded the motion.

Roll Call Vote – All Aye

Finance Director Greg Varner reviewed the 2021 Revised Budget and 2022 Proposed Budget objectives, investment in staff, COVID-19 response, technology upgrades, renovations/capital outlay, personnel information, revenue and expense changes, fund balances, and grants. The 2021 expenditures in the budget includes 3% merit pay increase and 2% bonus pool increase; \$542k in COVID needs such as overtime for staff, contact tracers, temporary staff to assist with COVID efforts, and cell phones for the contact tracers; server infrastructure upgrade as well as other software upgrades/replacements at total estimated cost of more than \$260k; and over \$130k in renovations/improvement for safety, security, and user experience in the central lobby, Water Quality area, and in TB clinic.

Mr. Brett thanked Mr. Varner for his presentation and is comfortable using the surplus for the additional expenses.

Mr. Meloy asked if there is a guideline for the general fund minimum balance. Mr. Varner explained the restricted funds dictate themselves and he is not aware of a HCPH general fund standard minimum, but he agrees it is a good idea. Commissioner Kesterman reported to be conservative, there has typically been a \$500K Budget shortfall, but the actuals are always positive due to grants, performance, a delay in filling positions, etc.

Mr. Rippe thought the HCPH guideline was a minimum of six months personnel expenses. Mr. Brett agreed and thought research was done years ago with other health districts to determine average general fund balance. Commissioner Kesterman recalled that research and will resurface it. Mr. Varner shared that burn rate is another helpful calculation.

8. New Business:

Ms. Puthoff moved to approve Resolution G – 2020: Expressing appreciation for the outstanding and dedicated service of Mary Ann Robertson.

Mr. Brett seconded the motion.

Roll Call Vote – All Aye

Ms. Puthoff moved to approve Resolution H – 2020: Approval of 2021 Revised Budget and 2022 Estimated Budget for the Hamilton County General Health District.

Mr. Meloy seconded the motion.

Roll Call Vote – All Aye

Mr. Brett moved to approve a temporary revision to HCGHD Personnel Manual Amendment to Sick Leave Policy Section 4.1. with language that there is no carry over of the emergency hours.

Dr. Kelly seconded the motion.

Roll Call Vote – All Aye

Mr. Meloy moved to approve Proclamation in Recognition of the 2020 WeTHRIVE! Communities.

Mr. Brett seconded the motion.

Roll Call Vote – All Aye

Ms. Puthoff moved to hold the January 11, February 8, and March 8 Board of Health Meetings via Zoom at 4:00 p.m.

Mr. Brett seconded the motion.

Roll Call Vote – All Aye

Ms. Puthoff moved to provide a bonus to staff in recognition of their hard work and efforts related to the COVID response as detailed in email from Board President, Mr. Rippe to Health Commissioner Kesterman which provides staff \$1K bonus for 1 year of service or greater, \$750 bonus for 9 months of service, \$500 for 6 months of service, \$250 for 3 months of service and \$100 for newest employees.

Mr. Brett seconded the motion.

Roll Call Vote – All Aye

Mr. Brett moved to close HCPH offices at noon on December 24 and December 31.

Ms. Puthoff seconded the motion.

Roll Call Vote – All Aye

Ms. Puthoff moved to hold the District Advisory Council meeting at noon on March 9, 2021 via Zoom.

Mr. Meloy seconded the motion.

Roll Call Vote – All Aye

9. Adjournment

Mr. Meloy moved to adjourn the meeting at 6:19 p.m.

Ms. Puthoff seconded the motion.

Roll Call Vote – All Aye

Next Board of Health meeting: January 11, 2021 at 4 p.m. via Zoom.



Mark A. Rippe, President



Greg Kesterman, Secretary
Health Commissioner