

BOARD OF HEALTH COMMISSION
Meeting Minutes
January 25, 2022, 7:30 pm
Conducted Remotely

Board members present: Noel Chavez, Judy Carter, Abigail Silva, Suzanne Feeney, Jennifer Fritz, Wynne Lacey; Trustee liaison not present: Susan Buchanan; Staff liaisons present: Theresa Chapple-McGruder, Sara Semelka, Cindy Hansen

- 1) **Call to Order:** The meeting was called to order by Chairperson Chavez at 7:33 pm.
- 2) **Agenda Approval:** With the addition of a discussion about appointing youth board members, a motion was made and seconded to approve the agenda as presented.
- 3) **Approval of Minutes:** A motion was made and seconded to approve the minutes of the December 14, 2021 and December 27, 2021 meetings.
- 4) **Public Comment:** Public comments are attached at the end of these minutes.
- 5) **Old Business**

IPLAN Planning. Staff liaison Semelka provided an update on the workgroup, which consists of the Health Department, the Park District, River Forest Township, Oak Park Township, Oak Park Mental Health Board, and Rush Hospital.

We are using the MAPP process, which consists of four assessments of local health systems and two processes identifying strategic issues. We'll synthesize the data from our assessments, use it to identify core issues that we want to guide our activities for the next five years, and then formulate goals and strategies to carry those out. We'll start with the community themes and strengths assessment to look at what is important to our community, how is quality of life perceived, and what assets does the community have that can be used to improve community health.

Some methods for getting the opinions of community members include larger community meetings, smaller community dialogues, and focus groups, which would all be held virtually. We can also do things like a walking survey or a photo voice, which is a visual representation and may be an opportunity for youth involvement.

The survey is an opportunity for board engagement. Our 2017 survey was very long so we want to make it easier to complete and make sure it's accessible and all demographic groups are represented. Staff liaison Chapple asked the board to consider if they have access to any groups the health department does not.

Staff liaison Semelka will send the 2017 survey to board members for edits and format and distribution suggestions. We would like to receive feedback by our next board meeting on February 22.

Board member Silva wondered what data we already have, such as the City of Chicago's health dashboard. Staff liaison Chapple said we are working to identify a consultant who can identify data sets specific to small areas like Oak Park. Staff liaison Semelka added that the community health status assessment includes the databases mentioned and we can use the census data coming in mid-March.

Staffing Update. Staff liaison Chapple reported that we made offers for a grant coordinator and farmers' market manager and they were both rejected so we are still hiring for those and other positions. Our open positions are posted on our website and we hope board members will use their connections help us get the word out.

COVID-19 Outbreak Mitigations. Staff liaison Chapple reported that we implemented the vaccine mandate for restaurants, fitness centers, and recreational activities effective January 10. We did not include the same exemption as Cook County in Chicago for children 18 and under, as their concern was that children needed an outlet to not increase crime, which is a different situation than we have in Oak Park. For our order, we included a testing option so if children 18 and under are not vaccinated, they can test within 24 hours of that activity and participate if they test negative.

There's concern from some organizations about children being able to test daily for some daily activities. We are thinking of ways to work with those groups. One idea is to do twice-a-week testing for those daily activities. Another option is to leave things as is and continue to promote vaccinations in these age groups.

The majority of people expressing concern about daily testing are not Oak Park residents, so we are considering whether to make the change here when the majority of the concern is from non-residents. We are doing something we haven't done before with this order, so making changes are par for the course as we try to see what's most impactful.

Chairperson Chavez suggested we check with Skokie and Evanston to see how other health departments are handling it. Staff liaison Chapple replied that the Cook County health directors are all meeting tomorrow to discuss the order.

6) New Business

Approval of Board of Health Work Plan. Chairperson Chavez asked if board members had comments or changes to our proposed 2022 workplan. She will email it again and request feedback by Monday so she can send it to the Board of Trustees.

Other Business. Staff liaison Chapple said that in her role, she often sends letters to organizations asking them to comply within the bounds of public health. She wonders if that is a place to engage the board and have those types of letters come from her and the Board of Health.

Chairperson Chavez said she can see how board members could be involved with this. Board member Fritz would not want to slow things down since the board only meets monthly. Board member Silva does not feel the board needs to be involved in enforcing something that has already been set. Board member Feeney is in favor of the board adding its support if it would provide a stronger message and is in favor of holding a special meeting if it needed to be done quickly. Chairperson Chavez said it might help to know what types of letters have been written previously and she requested to discuss this at the next meeting to give board members more time to think about it.

Youth applicants for Board of Health membership. Chairperson Chavez said we have one remaining position on the Board of Health. One option is to have one high-school aged youth or two youths share the membership.

Board member Fritz is interested in having another youth member because we had great insight from our previous youth member. Board member Feeney nodded in agreement. Board member Lacey would prefer a youth member and thinks they've been forgotten during the pandemic and it would be great to hear their perspective.

Board member Silva likes the idea and asked how we would recruit a youth member. Chairperson Chavez responded that we have two applicants and she has spoken with them both. Board member Carter moved and seconded in favor of a youth member.

7) Adjourn. With no further business, the meeting was adjourned at 8:30 pm.

Next meeting: Tuesday, February 22, 2022, 7:30 pm

Public Comments:

Gail Galivan: So I'm just looking at the mandate and the Cook County and health departments. And they claim that they have the authority to approve a vaccine. It says that all EUA vaccines are approved, which is a fallacy. No local state or government health official has the authority to define what is an approved vaccine. The FDA approved one vaccine and that was the new version of the Pfizer BioNTech and it's called Comirnaty. That is not available here. So you are mandating a vaccine that's not approved by the FDA, it's EUA, and that's not according to law. And also it seems that the health department is in violation of impersonating the FDA according to 18 U.S. Code Section 912, officer or employee of the United States whoever falsely assumes or pretends to be an officer or employee acting under the authority of the U.S. or any department, agency, or officer thereof and acts as such or in such pretended character demands or obtains money, paper, document, or thing of value shall be fined under this title or imprisoned not more than three years or both. So that's law. Impersonating the FDA, I don't know what else this could be called. And it's not the truth. So I would like to have this addressed and there needs to be an acknowledgement, I don't have my timer here, by the Health Department. I'd like to know and so would the community, like what is going on? We don't understand.

Jennifer K. Hicks: First let me state we are proudly vaccinated and support the decision not to amend Oak Park's order as Cook County did regarding children and athletics. Upon receiving contradictory information from different employees of PDOP concerning proof of vaccination requirements after the first day of class, I contacted Jamie Lackey and Mikayla Williams. It appeared that the local order was not understood. Having read it, their instructions to parents were not in line with the order I understood until an email dated January 10th. After learning of the need to provide proof of vaccination, I was assured by Jamie that it would only be required the first day of class. When I lamented the dearth of parking and safe sidewalk space to accommodate the large number of people in social distancing, particularly when temperatures are frigid. Another email from Makayla Williams regarding classes under her supervision, some of which also take place at the GRC, stated a child must have proof of vax every class or face being denied entry. In week four of a five-week class, I received an email from Maureen McCarthy stating it was too much for paid staff to keep a roster with an X marked by it to note vaccination status. When I complained the policy was overreach not required by the order, she responded by saying she didn't see anything in the order I attached for her that kept it from being asked every entry. By that logic I reminded her there is nothing in the order that doesn't require a notarized copy or a birth certificate to prove their identity. It was simply her whim. Just because you can does not mean you should. I was told supervisors made the call. Then I was told they were following orders from the park district and the Oak Park Board of Health. The solution is as simple as a class roster with an X next to it. Impossible? A Google doc then that can be sent to subs. Ms. Williams and Ms. McCarthy's complaints centered around subs. A whiteboard? Solutions are ridiculously simple and free or inexpensive. I am exhausted. The people being burdened by this are the very people that are following the rules. We wore the masks. We waited in line.

Elle Morton: Many thanks to the BOH for implementing the vaccine mandate. The impact on my family has been very positive in that we feel more secure sending our children to their activities and enjoying the small businesses in our village. Thank you to the BOH for doing the difficult but right thing to protect our residents.

Erin Hutto Sowers: I am writing to thank Dr. Chapple and the Board of Health for making the decision to implement a vaccination requirement in Oak Park which is in line with the county and Chicago protocols. For us and as we witnessed in the last two years, multi-layered mitigations are key to keeping our community safe and reducing the spread of COVID. This vaccine mandate is another tool to accomplish that goal.

Laura Sakiyama: To the Oak Park Board of Health, we are writing to you in support of local efforts to decrease COVID-19 transmission, including mask mandates and vaccine requirements, and to express our support for Dr. Chapple-McGruder, who is working tirelessly to lead us through this pandemic. We also want to express support and gratitude for Board of Health members who have pushed back against the narrative that people are discriminated against by vaccine mandates, who have called out the misuse of data or use of unproven theories by anti-vaxxers, and who have denounced the horrifying equation of vaccine requirements to Nazi Germany. These statements are incredibly harmful to Oak Park as a whole, to any community members that face present and historic discrimination and oppression, and especially to Jewish community members. According to the Village of Oak Park, the Board of Health has authority to make recommendations as to rules, regulations, and orders as it may deem necessary for the preservation and improvement of public health and for the prevention and/or suppression of disease. Considering the above, we find it problematic that Wynne Lacey, a vocal anti-vaxxer who believes that Oak Park should stop trying to prevent and/or suppress a disease in the middle of the pandemic, sits on our board of health. We find it highly problematic that time and energy are spent debating vaccination efficacy with her. We find it highly problematic that she weighs in on decisions related to our community's health and well-being. And we find it highly problematic that she has a position to make harmful statements about vaccine requirements. Board Member Lacey has mentioned that healing needs to happen and we think she is correct in that regard. We think Dr. Chapple deserves an apology for the way her expertise and training has been disregarded, for the way she has been yelled at and demeaned for enacting policies to try to keep our entire community safe, especially the most vulnerable, and for the accusations that she does not care about mental health. We think our Jewish community members deserve an apology for the statements made repeatedly that the local vaccine requirement is similar to Nazi Germany. We would like to offer these apologies today, acknowledge those that have already called out this.