

BOARD OF HEALTH COMMISSION
Meeting Minutes
May 24, 2022, 6:00 pm
Conducted Remotely

Commissioners Present: Noel Chavez (Chair), Jennifer Fritz, Abigail Silva
Commissioners Excused: Judy Carter, Suzanne Feeney
Board of Trustees Liaison Excused: Susan Buchanan
Staff Liaisons Present: Theresa Chapple, Vanessa De La Mora, Cindy Hansen, Sara Semelka

Call to Order. Chair Chavez called the meeting to order at 6:02 pm. The commission did not have a quorum so updates were given but no action was taken.

Approval of Agenda. The agenda was not approved without a quorum.

Approval of Minutes. The minutes of the April 26, 2022 meeting were not approved without a quorum and will be discussed at the June 28, 2022 meeting.

Public Comment. Public comments are at the end of this document.

Old Business:

IPLAN Planning. Ms. Semelka reported that we're doing the community themes and strengths assessment now. We have 630 survey responses and commissioners are encouraged to take the survey and share with their networks. We're doing focus groups to get the voices of specific community members and dig deeper.

For the local public health system assessment, commissioners are invited to attend our June 2 stakeholder meeting at the library to discuss how the 10 essential public health services are being carried out in Oak Park and River Forest. The forces of change assessment identifies forces and opportunities and/or threats that could affect community and local public health systems. We have another survey to ask people to identify forces of change that can impact us as we go forward.

The data analysis assessment is led by our consultant. We'll have two meetings in July to identify strategic issues and smaller meetings to set goals and priorities. Chair Chavez asked if Oak Park's population increased with the most recent census. Ms. Semelka will check with our consultants.

Staffing update. Dr. Chapple reported that our grant manager starts June 6th. We hired an epidemiologist fellow for one year. This is a grant-funded position that we hope will become full-time. She will help us with investigations and outbreaks and make our COVID response more data-driven. We hired a farmers' market manager and market assistant and we need two more assistants. We're hiring for a public health nurse, a sanitarian, an animal control officer. Then we'll be fully staffed.

COVID-19 update. Dr. Chapple reported that we are in a COVID surge. We started a way for residents to report at-home tests to us and then we give them guidance on contact tracing, containing it within the household, test to treat program, testing before leaving isolation, and masking after isolation. We offer tests and masks and can provide resources if they need food or other social supports.

We've seen many big outbreaks recently, larger than at any other point in the pandemic. We had an outbreak at a school that led to an outbreak at a long-term care facility. We had an outbreak at a daycare that led to a child too young to be vaccinated hospitalized.

We've reached out to all public and private schools to make sure they know the rules of reporting. We had lots of conversations and that led to the health department placing an order on one of our school districts to give us the info we've requested for six weeks. It was contentious but the district is now submitting their line lists to us so we can help them manage outbreaks. Hopefully this will lead to us getting info sooner so we can see a small outbreak before it spreads into the community.

The CDC released three metrics for the community level—total case count, new hospitalizations, and hospital capacity. Chicago and Evanston are in the red. We're having a data problem that's preventing us from getting the number of new hospitalizations. Once we rectify that issue, we'll likely be in the red. In the meantime, the message to the community is that we are in yellow, we have lots of cases and outbreaks, our hospitalizations have increased fivefold over two months ago. We need to be aware and cautious of behaviors impacting our community's health.

Chair Chavez asked what changes would be made if we go to red. Dr. Chapple responded that masks would be mandatory. Seeing our hospitalization rates go from 0.8% to 5% in six weeks is concerning. If we get to 10% capacity, we'll be in the red. The data piece we're working on would give us Oak Park data instead of regional hospitals. We hope to get this worked out with our new epidemiologist.

Boosters are available for ages 5-11. We're hosting our first booster clinic tonight and we'll host one every Tuesday through June. We expect the CDC and FDA to approve young pediatric vaccines, ages 0-5. Once that's available, our booster clinics will also be open to ages 0-5. Dr. Chavez thought we were going to turn that over to pediatricians. Dr. Chapple said we really wanted to, but the state requires we vaccinate anyone who shows up so we'll do that.

A Day in Our Village event. Ms. Semelka reported A Day in Our Village is back on Sunday, June 5th. The health department will have a booth and our mobile response will do testing and vaccinations. We have branded materials and a colorful display of all of the services we offer besides COVID-19. Commissioners are encouraged to staff the booth or stop by. Chair Chavez will be there, Commissioner Silva is tentative. We do not have staff shirts but we'll include it as an idea for next year. We can make name tags for commissioners. Chair Chavez remembers we created a public health brochure in 2019. Ms. Semelka will look for it.

Climate Plan. Chair Chavez attended the session for commission chairs. They want us to prioritize the goals and strategies. She'll send the draft plan to commissioners to respond.

New Business:

New testing program and media campaign. Dr. Chapple reported that we hired a COVID-19 testing coordinator and a summer intern. The government stopped financial support for testing, though we received a grant to do it. We can do nasal and saliva for PCR and BinaxNOW for antigen. We tested at the Wright House Walk and What's Blooming on Harrison. We plan to do testing at every summer event. We're working with a PR firm to get the word out and we're reaching out to camps.

Farmers' Market. Ms. Semelka reported that opening day was last Saturday and we have 26 vendors. We're working on a new way for collecting attendance. The mobile van will be there to do testing and vaccinations. We need two more market assistants and we encourage commissioners to share the job posting on the Village website. We're working with HR to lower the age limit from 18 to 16 so high schoolers can do it. We have a new logo this year and will be ordering new merch.

Open positions. Chair Chavez reported that we have two open positions and will check with the Clerk about the nine applicants we sent to her and the Community Engagement Commission. Dr. Chapple said some of our applicants have been assigned to other commissions.

Percy Julian Middle School community service project. Chair Chavez said we received an idea from two students regarding a project to create a safe place for drug litter. They're asking the Village to do a PSA that they are willing to write. Ms. De La Mora suggested connecting them to Positive Youth Development. Dr. Chapple said the letter made a good point about having anonymous collection boxes throughout the community. Chair Chavez will respond on behalf of the Commission and copy Kelly at PYD. Ms. Hansen will forward the email to commissioners.

Adjourn. With no further business, Chair Chavez adjourned the meeting at 7:00 pm.

Public Comment:

Debbie Weeks. To all whom it may concern, I have lived in Oak Park with my husband and two daughters since 1998. Today the COVID case transmission in Oak Park is 783 out of 100,000 out of seven days. According to infectious disease experts and epidemiologists, this is most certainly a significant undercount. According to the old CDC transmission metrics, 100+ out of 100,000 out of seven days was considered high transmission. Under the CDC's new metrics, 200+ out of 100,000 out of seven days is considered high transmission, shockingly 783 out of 100,000 out of seven days a significant undercount, according to public health experts has made no impact on public health policy and Oak Park. Shockingly, Oak Park Elementary Schools and OPRFHS also aware of significant increases in case transmission in their schools have not reinstated any mitigations known to decrease transmission such as masks and improved ventilation. Governor Pritzker recently made a disaster proclamation of COVID-19 through the end of May. He stated that community leaders have the ability to implement mitigations to protect their communities. As a community member, I would appreciate an explanation from Oak Park decision makers as to why no action has been taken to decrease transmission of COVID-19 and our community. As a community member, I would appreciate an explanation from Oak Park decision makers as to why no action has been taken to protect our most vulnerable community members, the elderly, the immunocompromised and the children too young to be vaccinated. As a community member, I would appreciate an explanation from Oak Park decision makers as to why no action has been taken to protect community members from long COVID.

Robin Kalish, MD. I wanted to write in to support of the OPPHD. The outbreaks that we have had in the community and the schools recently affect us all. The CDC guidelines are the bare minimum and are clearly not enough to protect our community. Pritzker has made it clear that communities have the ability to do more. There are still a large number of unvaccinated young children along with other at-risk people. And we are all at risk of lung symptoms of COVID, let alone the illness and disruptions that acute COVID still causes. Things have certainly improved in the past two years. But it is clear that the current vaccines and medications are not yet enough and we still need a layered approach. We can work to increase ventilation in all public spaces and use masks as needed, particularly among our most vulnerable. I hope that the Village and the school districts continue to follow the guidance of the OPPHD. Thank you.