

**CITY OF NORWALK
BOARD OF HEALTH
REGULAR MEETING
APRIL 25, 2023**

ATTENDANCE: Janet Karpiak, M.D.; Ken Lalime, R.Ph.; Theresa Quell, Ph.D., R.N.; Norman Weinberger, M.D.; Joan McNeil, D.N.P.

OTHERS: Deanna D'Amore, Director of Health; Theresa Argondezzi, Assistant Director of Health, Community Health; Aniella Fignon, Project Coordinator; Diane Lauricella

This meeting was held via teleconference.

CALL TO ORDER

Ms. D'Amore called the meeting to order at 8:03 a.m. A quorum was present.

APPROVAL OF THE MINUTES

• March 28, 2023 Meeting Minutes

**** Dr. Weinberger MOVED TO APPROVE THE MINUTES OF THE MARCH 28, 2023 MEETING.**

**** Ms. McNeil SECONDED.**

**** THE MOTION TO APPROVE THE MINUTES OF THE MARCH 28, 2023 MEETING AS SUBMITTED PASSED UNANIMOUSLY.**

DIRECTOR'S REPORT

Ms. D'Amore presented her report. The annual report required of reaccruited health departments was submitted to the Public Health Accreditation Board (PHAB). Ms. D'Amore gave a brief overview of some of the highlights of the annual report.

The Department is reviewing and updating the Quality Improvement (QI) Plan for the first time post-pandemic. They plan to include the entire staff in a NACCHO Culture of Quality assessment to guide upcoming QI efforts.

A bilingual candidate for the receptionist position has accepted a job offer and is slated to begin in May. The current receptionist has been promoted to Public Health Program Associate.

The Department has been notified of changes to the process for acquiring Preventative Health and Human Services Block Grant funding. The Department must now apply for funding, with the benefit of potentially receiving additional funds.

EPIDEMIOLOGY UPDATES

Ms. D'Amore then presented epidemiology updates. The total number of COVID-19 hospitalizations has dropped to 88, with Fairfield County having 27 cases. Wastewater management has also continued to show a downward trend. All of Connecticut's counties have been classified as having "low" COVID-19 levels. Connecticut is also ranked as normal for the flu.

Ms. D'Amore stated that the Department has posted information about protecting oneself from ticks as the warmer weather arrives.

COVID-19 UPDATE

Ms. Argondezzi then spoke about changes as the COVID-19 Public Health Emergency ends on May 11th. She explained that there are a number of resources that will be ending at that time as the country and Health Department transition into a new phase of COVID response. COVID-19 will be treated as a routine medical matter, meaning that clients will be referred to their physicians for treatment rather than a non-traditional location for care. The Health Department is monitoring potential cost and access barriers, especially among individuals without health insurance, and working with local partners to plan for and communicate these changes. Annual Medicaid eligibility redetermination has been re-instituted and around 4,000 individuals will have their eligibility redetermined over the course of the year, so it is important that individuals communicate updated contact information to the Department of Social Services. For those who are not eligible for Medicaid anymore, there are other plans available.

Many of the free at-home tests will no longer be available. Insurance companies may continue to provide those tests. The federal government will no longer be purchasing at-home test kits and, once the supply of the tests are gone, that will be the end of federal distribution. She updated everyone on the protocol for the PCR test.

Regular health care providers will now handle COVID-19 vaccinations. Children who are not covered by insurance will have access to those vaccines through a free program. A fall booster is expected to be encouraged. Treatments will also move to the traditional primary care model.

There will be some changes for the labs and hospitals regarding federal COVID-19 reporting and this may change the metrics for monitoring. Monitoring will continue.

Dr. McNeil said that when she was at her local drugstore, she had been advised to pick up her COVID-19 tests, so pharmacies are educating the public about these upcoming changes.

COMMUNITY HEALTH UPDATES

Ms. Argondezzi said that the Health Department has been busy with traditional health programs and narrated a PowerPoint slide deck on activities. She stated that the Department will be hosting its seasonal community walks – “Walking Wednesdays” – beginning May 3rd at 5:30pm. Seven community walks were hosted in summer 2022.

The Department relaunched Fit Kids in the summer of 2022 and had 12 active sites. During that time, about 190 kids participated. The Department is looking to expand that.

The Know Your Numbers program, which provides free blood pressure, blood sugar, and body mass index (BMI) screenings at food pantries and churches, is starting back up. Participants are screened and then receive counseling. Those with healthcare needs receive referrals to community resources including the local community health centers and SNAP.

The Growing Gardens, Growing Health program where families learn how to grow and cook with fresh fruits and vegetables will continue at Fodor Farm. In summer 2022, nine families participated and 89% reported improved overall diet quality. Ms. Argondezzi named UConn as a critical partner in this program.

Ms. Argondezzi then spoke about food access initiatives, which have been expanded to include food insecurity. Much of the work is focused on providing food access resources, including a Food Provider List with information about where free meals or food pantries are located. She reviewed the list’s various resources included with the Board members.

Mr. Lalime said it was an exhaustive list.

PUBLIC PARTICIPATION

Ms. Lauricella greeted the Board Members and praised the Health Department for having a table at the Earth Day on the Green event and its Norwalker program. She is also pleased to see that the Growing Gardens program is continuing. She said that she was part of the group that worked to save Fodor Farm when Mayor Esposito was in office.

Ms. Lauricella asked about the DPH Commissioner’s recent recommendation that people wear a good mask in indoor locations. Ms. Lauricella claimed that she is often one of the few wearing a mask. She said that there was no mention of a new variant that involved pink eye and said that putting the variant in laymen’s term would be important. The Health Department can help the public make informed choices. She would love to see the Health Department become creative

about making people aware of long COVID. She said that in the early days of COVID-19, she suggested that the Health Department have COVID ambassadors in the parks to approach people and remind people about masking. If the public is not reminded, they will forget about it.

Ms. Lauricella stated that the City needs to help the Health Department do a better job in terms of risk. She said that the Mayor and Council were not helping the Department and come the fall, the residents might have to go through COVID-19 again.

Ms. Lauricella said the CDC failed in getting the message out about reporting the results of the home tests to the Health Department. She said that she was saddened and frustrated that her messages were not getting out. She thanked the Health Department for all that they do.

ADJOURNMENT

**** MS. QUELL MOVED TO ADJOURN.**

**** THE MOTION PASSED UNANIMOUSLY.**

The meeting adjourned at 8:49 a.m.

Respectfully submitted,

S. L. Soltes
Telesco Secretarial Service