

**CITY OF NORWALK
BOARD OF HEALTH
REGULAR MEETING
FEBRUARY 23, 2021**

ATTENDANCE: Vincent Amoruccio, MA, Theresa Quell, PhD, RN; Norman Weinberger, M.D.; Ken Lalime, RPH (8:09 a.m.)

STAFF: Deanna D'Amore, Director of Health; Theresa Argondezzi, Health Education

OTHERS: Diane Lauricella; Lamond Daniels (8:07 a.m.)

This meeting was conducted by Zoom/Teleconference.

CALL TO ORDER

Ms. D'Amore called the meeting to order at 8:02 a.m. A quorum was present.

**** DR. WEINBERGER MOVED MINUTES OF JANUARY 26, 2021 MEETING.**

**** DR. QUELL SECONDED.**

**** THE MOTION TO APPROVE THE MINUTES OF JANUARY 26, 2021 MEETING AS SUBMITTED PASSED UNANIMOUSLY.**

PUBLIC PARTICIPATION

Ms. D'Amore requested that the public limit their comments to three minutes or less.

Ms. Diane Lauricella said that it would be warmer outside soon. She thanked everyone for their work.

Based on the minutes, she was happy that the Board was weighing in on important Zoning applications and Land Use issues. After reading the Operating Report, it is very important to have subject experts available to support the Health Department's concerns about land uses that could impact Public Health. She said that it was good that the project was withdrawn. Having neutral subject experts helps because they are not based on the Health Department's proximity to a site.

She asked that Theresa and Ms. D'Amore review the notes that Theresa took about creative measures regarding mask messaging, particularly in regards to the double layer issue.

She said that she was hoping that there would be a vigorous discussion about the Governor's changes with the vaccine policy. She added one anecdotal incident about a friend who is in charge of the Stamford Transit District. In the New Haven Transit District there were 40 workers who came down with COVID. This is being investigated to identify the exposure. This policy needs to be revised, not just by age but also by job function. It seems that there is an unfair potential for exposure to this group.

There was no one else who wished to address the Board at this time.

Mr. Daniels joined the meeting at 8:07 a.m.

DIRECTOR'S REPORT.

Ms. D'Amore said that there was a new person from Telesco Secretarial Services who would be taking minutes for the Health Department, the Shellfish Commission and Water Quality.

She spoke about having additional funding opportunities in regard to opioid work. They will also be speaking with Mr. Daniels about securing support for this grant.

The Department is reviewing the immunization programs and potential funding for outreach.

This is the last month of Crisis funding.

Mr. Ken Lalime joined the meeting at 8:09 a.m.

The Department received slightly more the \$80,000 from the CDC to help with COVID response. Many of the costs for overtime have been reimbursed with this funding.

The Operating Budget is in process and the request in the budget is related to some of the staffing changes.

Mr. Lalime asked if there were potential funding from FEMA. Ms. D'Amore said that there was more potential reimbursement funding and some additional CDC funding that has funded an additional Public Health Nurse and will fund contact tracers.. The funding will also be utilized for the epidemiologist moving forward.

COVID-19 Updates

Ms. D'Amore then displayed a PowerPoint document on the screen regarding COVID-19. The CT travel restrictions still are in effect and people need to quarantine after traveling. While those who have been fully vaccinated within 3 months, they do not need

to quarantine after being exposed to someone who had COVID. That is being adjusted for in contact tracing.

There have been a number of questions about the travel advisory and whether a vaccinated individual must quarantine on their return. The CT travel advisory is still in effect and those individuals still need to quarantine upon their return.

There had been discussions about double masking and creating a proper tight fit. Many of the staff are using a cloth mask over a medical procedure mask. This provides extra protection. There have been many meetings about getting the information to the public.

Ms. D'Amore displayed some charts that illustrated the number of cases over the months. The cases are continuing to trend downward. In order to keep the numbers in a downward trend, the Department continues to encourage vaccination, mask wearing and social distancing.

The test positivity rate was below 1% over the summer. Since September the rate of positivity increased to 10% but is now down to 6.5%. The current percentage will be included in the Mayor's report later today.

Ms. D'Amore was asked if there was a decline in testing. She said that the testing sites have reported they are not as busy as they were around the holidays. While they are not seeing the long lines for those waiting for tests, there has also been a change in the number of locations where testing is available.

Vaccine Update

Ms. D'Amore said that the Health Department was very close to having administered 3,000 doses of the vaccine. There was a health clinic scheduled for later in the day and it is expected that they will surpass the 3,000 dose marker. The State is providing information by city and town. It is important to remember that people can obtain the vaccination at a variety of locations, such as the hospital or a health clinic. She said as of the previous week, there were 8,817 first doses administered and this represents just under 10% of the Norwalk population. Norwalk is doing well in comparison with other cities and towns.

Ms. D'Amore said that they were working on making vaccination access easier and locations for various other sites.

Mr. Daniels said that providing education would be the key to increase the numbers. They are excited about being able to present to a large inter-denominational group the following day. He said that they want to do some targeted and focused community education awareness and opening up sites in specific communities in the weeks to come.

A question was asked about the Johnson and Johnson vaccine that was being evaluated for approval. Mr. Daniels said that Ms. Argondezzi was the lead educator in this effort and doing a phenomenal job. The big strategies needs to be reaching out to the non-profit meetings and other groups and having conversations. Discussion followed.

Ms. Argondezzi said that they have been doing outreach to Early Childhood Care Providers, and agencies that do home visiting work. Many times people hear bits and pieces from the news and it is helpful to answer questions and dispel some myths.

The Community Health Workers in the Children's Agency have been doing a tremendous job in assisting with Contact Tracing. They have started shifting to providing education to the community with flyers in different languages. They are also reaching out to the faith communities and will be helping at the clinics to provide language assistance and assure people while answering questions.

Ms. D'Amore said that the Governor had announced a change in the vaccination schedule, which will be an aged based approach. They will start with those who are 55 and older, and later moved to those who are 45 and older and start opening it up to everyone. They are also granting vaccine access to those who are working in schools and childcare.

The State Department held a meeting on the 22nd and the State is looking at the local Health Departments to be the vaccinators for schools and child care institutions. Ms. D'Amore said that the State has requested that they gather information on the schools and child care institutions so the State can supply the vaccinations. This will mean that the community outreach plans would have to be paused for the time being. She spoke about the vaccine disparity rates in Norwalk, so the Department will be asking the State for enough doses for both programs. Discussion followed about reaching out to the underserved communities and the age qualification.

Ms. D'Amore said that she would like to do some updates about the staffing and the various mandates.

Ms. D'Amore said that Mr. Daniels had a chart for the re-organization of the City government departments and would review it with the Board Members.

Mr. Daniels displayed an Organizational Chart and gave a brief overview of the overall City reorganization for the Department. He spoke about Maria Escalara who is now the Human Services Director. They are working on aligning the Health Department's needs with the greater community.

Ms. D'Amore spoke about the three early retirements: a Housing Inspector; the Director of Environmental Services and an administrative technician. A new Housing Inspector has been hired. The other two positions are having their job descriptions reviewed.

Ms. D'Amore said that there was a new 10 Essential Public Health Services, which was recently updated. The State Statutes requires every Health Department to deliver these services in their communities. Equity is now front and center and involves accreditation and health standards. She displayed a colorful chart showing Health Equity.

Ms. D'Amore then spoke about Public Health 3.0: A Call to Action which talked about where Public Health was going. Two key points are Strong Leadership and Strategic Partnerships. She spoke about some of the trends that were noted, such as chronic diseases, re-emergent infectious diseases and climate change. Environmental Health, Health Equity and other initiatives all contribute to this. There are many different aspects to consider, including funding and disaster management.

The position of the administrative technician is being transformed into a Health Operations Manager. The draft job description has been sent to Personnel for approval and hopefully it will be approved and filled soon.

The Department has added two new positions, the Assistant Director of Health with a Community Health focus and a Public Health Program Assistant.

Ms. D'Amore said that they have transitioned the position of Director of Environmental Services into an Assistant Director of Health, Environmental Health.

The Public Health Program Assistant position would help with support in many different research areas like evidence based practices. It will also help to think about those who can help across the Department.

Both Assistant Director positions have been posted. The Epidemiologist position is guaranteed until November 2022 with grant funding and City support. Several applications have been received and hope to start interviews soon.

The Department has also requested a Medical Biller in the Operational Budget and is working with the City's Personnel Department to fill that position. It will generate additional revenue. They will also be filling two temporary contact tracer positions as well.

Ms. Quell said that she was concerned about the fact that approximately half of the staff on the organizational chart were City funded and the remaining were grant funded. Considering the amount of work that the Health Department does, this is very disturbing. Only a few of the positions are related to the current pandemic and most of the others relate to services that the Department has provided for a long time. Next time the budget is formulated, the Department should ask the City to assume a few more of the positions so that the Department will have more solid funding in the future.

Ms. D'Amore said that during the Department review, they were able to add two new positions and during the recession the Department had lost positions, but over time, they have been working on restoring these positions.

Ms. Quell said that she would like to thank the staff for all their hard work, their overtime and dedication.

ADJOURNMENT

Ms. D'Amore adjourned the meeting at 8:47 a.m.

Respectfully submitted,

S. L. Soltes
Telesco Secretarial Services