

**Board of Health
Tuesday, January 25, 2022
Zoom Virtual Meeting**

Members Attending: J. Dethoff, B. Hospidor, K. Schorn, M. Kelleher

Others Attending: S. Smith, E. Blankenbiller, I. Litvinov, M. Sninsky, C. Reed

Dr. Dethoff called the meeting to order at 4:01 pm. He stated that a quorum is present.

PUBLIC COMMENT

None.

APPROVAL OF MINUTES

Motion was made by Ms. Schorn, seconded by Mr. Hospidor, to approve the December 7, 2021 meeting summary as written. Motion carried unanimously.

HEALTH INSPECTION REPORT

Dr. Dethoff thanked Mr. Reed for submitting his report in advance. He stated that a total of 898 inspections were done in 2021.

Mr. Blankenbiller stated that no inspections are taking place while City Hall employees are teleworking.

Dr. Dethoff questioned the 37 animal complaints. Mr. Blankenbiller stated that generally this is neighbors complaining about conditions with animals. He stated that they are mostly complaints about chickens and other farm animals. He stated that he recently received a complaint about a resident with 26 cats.

Mr. Blankenbiller stated that keeping farm animals, including chickens, also requires a Zoning Permit.

(Note: the Animal Control Board must approve permits to keep more than six dogs / cats, aggressive animals, and farm animals.)

COVID-19 UPDATE

Mr. Sninsky stated that infections are starting to decline but that there are still a fair amount of positive cases in Reading. He stated that several Fire Department employees have had breakthrough cases.

Mr. Sninsky stated that both Berks County hospitals were on divert status for a time which caused the need for Reading, Western Berks and the hospitals to plan patient flow. He stated that divert status ceased approximately two weeks ago.

Dr. Dethoff questioned if the Department had enough gear and test kits available. Mr. Sninsky stated that they do have enough gear but that test kits are difficult to acquire. He stated that the Department discussed reinstituting weekly testing but did not move forward due to this difficulty.

Mr. Estrada arrived at this time.

Dr. Dethoff requested Dr. Kelleher's perspective on the current COVID situation.

Dr. Kelleher stated that she is a member of the Berks County COVID Task Force. She stated that the Omicron variant caused a significant increase in infections but less serious illness for those who have been vaccinated and received their booster. She shared the Tower Health dashboard and noted that there had been a rise in those needing care in ICU.

Dr. Kelleher stated that a weakness in the dashboard is that it does not report those who are hospitalized and have been vaccinated or boosted. She stated that the dashboard also does not report the underlying health issues that may cause a person to need care in ICU.

Dr. Kelleher stated that the Omicron variant has caused the Berks Community Health Center (BCHC) to be short staffed for the first time throughout the pandemic. She stated that the situation is beginning to improve and stressed that having both vaccine doses and the booster is the best way to protect yourself.

Dr. Dethoff questioned how long the booster will be effective. Dr. Kelleher stated that based on observations of countries that are ahead of the United States in the pandemic cycle, it appears that the booster is effective for approximately six months but that it is unknown at this time. She stated that new variants are still unknown and noted her hope that the next variant would not combine the serious illness caused by Delta with the high rate of contagion of Omicron.

Dr. Dethoff questioned if hospitals are accurately reporting COVID statistics and expressed the belief that many cases are found without symptoms or illness. Dr. Kelleher agreed and expressed the belief that there are many incidental findings as people are screened for other procedures and found to be positive. She expressed the belief that the severity of the infection and the need for ICU and ventilators is the most important data.

Dr. Dethoff questioned if there was access to COVID treatments in Berks County. Dr. Kelleher stated that there is limited access to injections. She stated that there is some access to oral treatments but that those who are the sickest tend to have the least access.

Dr. Dethoff expressed the belief that treatment medications could be a game changer but that currently there is not enough access. Dr. Kelleher agreed and stated that Philadelphia and Pittsburgh have the most access within PA. She stated that BCHC is working to get access as it is able.

BERKS TEENS MATTER

Ms. Smith stated that the name change has not been finalized and the next meeting is scheduled in February.

LEAD ABATEMENT COALITION

Mr. Blankenbiller stated that inspector training is in process.

Mr. Estrada stated that he would request that Jeff Young attend the Board's next meeting to provide an update. He stated that Mr. Young has been fully trained and two other inspectors began training in December. He noted the need for the inspectors to receive both State and Federal certifications.

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No report.

COUNTY DEPT OF HEALTH

No report.

NEXT MEETING

The next meeting of the Board is scheduled for Tuesday, April 5 at 4 pm via Zoom.

Dr. Dethoff noted the convenience of meeting virtually and stated that more people attend meetings now.

The meeting adjourned at 4:23 pm.

Respectfully submitted,
Shelly Smith, CMC
Deputy City Clerk