

**Board of Health
Tuesday, February 2, 2021
Zoom Virtual Meeting**

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

Others Attending: S. Smith, F. Lachat, M. Sninsky, J. Long, J. Abodalo, E. Kraft

Dr. Dethoff called the meeting to order at 4:00 pm.

Dr. Dethoff 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 1, 2020 meeting summary. Motion carried unanimously.

HEALTH OFFICE REPORT

Ms. Smith stated that Mr. Estrada forwarded a 2020 annual health inspections report a few moments before the meeting began. She stated that she has forwarded the report to the members.

COVID-19 UPDATE

Dr. Dethoff thanked Ms. Smith for sharing the power point presentation. He stated that it was very informative.

Mr. Sninsky stated that Brian Gottshall from the Berks County Department of Emergency Services Manager prepared the power point. He stated that Mr. Gottshall and Mr. Searfoss have put much effort into their work with COVID to make progress. He reported that the Berks numbers are down slightly for the last seven days but that COVID will not be going away any time soon.

Mr. Sninsky stated that Mr. Gottshall reminds everyone that the work done now will show results in several weeks. He stated that the holiday spike was seen in Berks.

Mr. Sninsky stated that 62% of Reading Fire/EMS employees have received at least the first vaccine. He stated that approximately 20% of the Reading Fire/EMS employees contracted COVID. He stated that these employees are tested weekly. He expressed the belief that progress is being made.

Mr. Estrada joined the meeting at this time.

Dr. Dethoff questioned why the other 40% of Fire/EMS employees have not been vaccinated. Mr. Sninsky stated that 50% are ineligible at this time due to recently having COVID. He explained that they are still within the waiting period. Dr. Kelleher explained that the waiting period is not part of the CDC guidelines and that the vaccine can be administered with no waiting period. She stated that those who have recently recovered from COVID may not be a high priority but are eligible. She

stated that current thinking is that the COVID antibodies will be present for at least 90 days after recovery.

Mr. Sninsky stated that vaccines have been administered by Lehigh Valley Health Network, Tower Health, Penn State St Joseph's and Berks Community Health Center.

Dr. Dethoff questioned if those who have been vaccinated can carry the disease to others. Dr. Kelleher stated that this is still unknown. She stated that this is why it is recommended to continue masking and social distancing after both the first and second vaccine. She stated that it is also unknown if the vaccine will be fully effective on the new strains of COVID.

Ms. Kraft questioned if the 62% quoted by Mr. Sninsky was Fire/EMS or all City employees. Mr. Sninsky stated that it is Fire/EMS only. He stated that he does not have information about other City departments.

NEED FOR CITY HEALTH OFFICER

Dr. Dethoff explained that the Board has had this on its agenda for some time and provided a brief background.

Fire Chief Stoudt arrived at this time.

Ms. Smith reviewed the duties that the Health Officer had in the past.

Dr. Dethoff stated that the last Health Officer was reassigned due to his duties at Tower Health.

Mr. Abodalo stated that the City has discussed this in 2020 due to COVID. He stated that Property Maintenance believes that since the Health Officer was only onsite for a few hours it is not necessary. He stated that health inspections are now tied to the PA Ag Department. He stated that it was also determined that a Health Officer would not bring any advantage during COVID and the Administration does not feel one is needed.

Ms. Smith questioned if Reading having a Health Officer would be helpful if the County opens its own Health Department.

Mr. Abodalo stated that the merit of having a County Health Department would have been for the release of Berks County specific COVID data.

Dr. Dethoff stated that it seems as if counties with a Health Department have dealt with COVID and are doing a better job with vaccine distribution. He explained his interactions with the PA Dept of Health in Reading. He stated that the County Commissioners are discussing whether a County Health Department would benefit Berks.

Dr. Kelleher stated that she is on the Committee established by the Commissioners to examine this issue. She expressed the belief that Berks would be having issues with administering the vaccine even if there was a County Health Department. She reminded all that the vaccine appointments are based on the supply received.

HEALTH CODE AMENDMENT

Ms. Smith stated that the Law Department has contracted with a consultant to move this Code amendment forward.

BERKS TEENS MATTER

Ms. Smith and Dr. Dethoff described the condom box project. Ms. Smith stated that she is working with the Mayor's staff to schedule a meeting between the Mayor and Berks Teens Matter staff.

LEAD ABATEMENT COALITION

Mr. Abodalo stated that he has met with US EPA reps to set goals for the grant application. He stated that the summary information will be shared with the Board. He stated that the focus will be on reducing blood lead levels in children. He noted the need for children to have a safe environment.

Mr. Abodalo stated that there are 20 partners on this project and that the next meeting is February 23 at 11 am. He welcomed any Board member to attend. He stated that the grant application period opens on May 21 and that he has also spoken with HUD about Reading's former lead program.

EVICTION MORATORIUM

Dr. Dethoff requested an update on the moratorium. Mr. Abodalo stated that the moratorium has been extended to March 31, 2021. He stated that the Reading Human Relations Commission has been attending eviction hearings with the MDJs. He stated that 740 applications for eviction assistance are in process. He stated that they are working to resolve the issue before a hearing is necessary.

Mr. Abodalo explained that the City received \$773,000 in additional CDBG Cares #1 funding and \$1.4 million in Cares #2 funding. He stated that to date \$122,000 has been spent. He stated that there is a bottleneck in the process to mediate a payment. He commended Neil Nemeth from the CD staff for his work on this program.

Dr. Dethoff questioned if there would be mass evictions. Mr. Abodalo expressed the belief that there would not be mass evictions.

NEW MEMBERS

Dr. Dethoff thanked Dr. Kelleher for her interest in serving on the Board. He stated that there is an opening for a member with an environmental health background. Dr. Kelleher stated that she is looking forward to working with the Board.

Dr. Kelleher stated that her priority at this time is the rollout of the COVID vaccine. She stated that she hopes to work with Berks Department of Emergency Services to administer the vaccine. She stated that many people want to be vaccinated but that there is a limited supply at this time.

Dr. Dethoff noted the federal government's announcement that additional vaccine would be released directly to retail pharmacies to administer the vaccine. He stated that he volunteered to administer the vaccines through the State website but has had no response. He stated that the Berks Medical Society is recruiting volunteers and that the State website is not sharing the volunteer information locally.

Dr. Kelleher stated that she is aware that the PA website is not sharing volunteer information locally. She stated that Tower Health and Berks Community Health Center are actively recruiting volunteers to administer the vaccine.

There was a brief discussion regarding who is eligible to administer the vaccine. Ms. Schorn stated that she also looked into volunteering but could not because her RN license is not current.

NEXT MEETING

Dr. Dethoff explained that the Board meets every other month unless there is a need to meet sooner. He stated that the next meeting of the Board is scheduled for Tuesday, April 6 at 4 pm.

The meeting adjourned at 4:39 pm.

Respectfully submitted,
Shelly Smith, CMC
Deputy City Clerk