

**Board of Health
Tuesday, April 6, 2021
Zoom Virtual Meeting**

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

Others Attending: S. Smith, M. Sninsky

Dr. Dethoff called the meeting to order at 4:00 pm. He stated that a quorum is present.

PUBLIC COMMENT

None.

APPROVAL OF MINUTES

Motion was made by Mr. Hospidor, seconded by Dr. Kelleher, to approve the February 2, 2021 meeting summary. Motion carried unanimously.

Mr. Lachat joined the meeting at this time.

HEALTH OFFICE REPORT

Ms. Smith stated that Mr. Estrada provided the report and that she distributed it via email.

Dr. Dethoff questioned what Hansen is. Ms. Smith explained that it is the property database used by the City.

Dr. Dethoff questioned why so many businesses were changing hands. Ms. Smith stated that she will check with Mr. Estrada and provide this information to the Board.

Dr. Dethoff questioned how the lack of masks by customers could be enforced. Mr. Lachat stated that it would be done similarly to “no shoes, no shirt, no service”. He stated that it could either be a disorderly conduct or a trespass offense.

COVID-19 UPDATE

Deputy Chief Sninsky stated that according to the PA Dept of Health website positive cases have increased 4.7% in Reading. He stated that the City has kept all restrictions in place.

Deputy Chief Sninsky stated that approximately 70% of the Reading Fire Dept is vaccinated and some remain on waiting lists. He stated that the City has been planning vaccination sites and that ten paramedics have been cross trained to assist with administering the vaccinations.

Mr. Estrada joined the meeting at this time.

Dr. Dethoff questioned if there were any new staff cases. Deputy Chief Sninsky stated that the last new case in the Fire Dept was in January. He stated that those who received the vaccine got very mild symptoms.

Dr. Dethoff questioned why the other 30% were not vaccinated. Deputy Chief Sninsky stated that the majority are on waiting lists and some are not interested in receiving it. He stated that he is encouraging everyone to get vaccinated. He explained that HB 262 is being considered by the State legislature and that this bill would prohibit employers from mandating COVID testing or vaccination.

Dr. Dethoff expressed the belief that many people who are not eligible in phase 1a of the vaccine rollout have already been vaccinated. He stated that there are also many people in phase 1a that have not been vaccinated. Dr. Kelleher stated that approximately 10,000 people remain on the vaccine waiting lists. She agreed that fire fighters are not part of the 1a group but that many went outside Berks County to mass vaccination sites where the phases were not as closely followed. She explained that PA has begun scheduling phase 1b and that 1c can begin scheduling on April 12. Eligibility opens up to anyone age 16 and older on April 19.

Ms. Smith stated that it has taken many weeks to make progress with phase 1a. She questioned how phases 1b and 1c can be handled in one week's time. Dr. Kelleher stated that phases 1b and 1c were promised priority scheduling and this one week time period allows PA Dept of Health to say that priority was given, even if for only a short time. She stated that realistically there will be no impact with this short priority time frame. She expressed the belief that much of Berks County's 1a eligible residents have received at least their first vaccine and that is why hospitalizations are down. She also noted her hope that vaccine supply will increase.

Dr. Dethoff questioned the out of County location's operations. Dr. Kelleher stated that mass vaccination clinics in Lehigh Valley were able to vaccinate many people and those not in phase 1a were allowed to jump in line.

Ms. Smith briefly lost her connection.

Dr. Kelleher stated that the vaccination providers have been told that they must distribute 80% of their supply in one week's time.

Dr. Dethoff questioned how those who do not or cannot use a computer are being scheduled for their vaccine. Dr. Kelleher stated that the Office of Aging and the Co-County Wellness Center are assisting this population. He stated that there is a mandate to have a system in place to assist this population and Co-County Wellness Center is very helpful.

Dr. Dethoff stated that he was glad to see Berks County's vaccine supply increasing the last several weeks. Dr. Kelleher agreed and stated that Berks was initially not receiving a supply commensurate with its population and that many officials advocated, and succeeded, in getting Berks County's supply increased.

Dr. Dethoff noted his hope that at the next meeting of this Board, all would have received their vaccine.

Dr. Kelleher explained that there are several new variants that are more infectious and are targeting the younger population. She stated that she is very concerned about what this means for in-person school attendance.

Dr. Dethoff noted his concern at seeing case positivity increasing even with increased vaccinations and exposures.

Dr. Dethoff stated that there have been far fewer cases of the flu this year. Dr. Kelleher agreed and stated that Tower Health had no hospitalizations due to the flu.

Dr. Dethoff stated that it will be interesting to see how people continue with their personal hygiene habits after the threat of COVID has passed.

HEALTH CODE AMENDMENT

Dr. Dethoff stated that work on the amendment has been outsourced. He requested an update. Mr. Lachat stated that multiple Code updates are needed but none have been provided to him to date. He stated that this Code will require a massive update and that he will check on the progress and report back to the Board.

BERKS TEENS MATTER

Dr. Dethoff stated that Ms. Smith has distributed the most recent meeting summary and BTM's updated goals. He stated that the group has been struggling through COVID.

Dr. Dethoff questioned the Askable Adults program. Ms. Smith explained that this is a training program for adults to guide their interactions with youth on sexual health issues. She stated that this will make the adult more approachable by the youth and help them provide accurate information.

NEW MEMBERS

Ms. Smith stated that an application has been received for the alternate resident position and for the environmental health position. She stated that the applications are in the review process.

Mr. Murray arrived at this time.

LEAD ABATEMENT COALITION

Mr. Murray apologized for joining the meeting late but stated that he was in a meeting regarding the lead abatement project. He stated that the City, RAWA, EPA and HUD are working on the grant to ensure that Reading has the capacity to complete the program. He explained that Act 47 has restricted the hiring of new employees but that both the City and RAWA support participating in this program. He stated that the grant will require letters of support and letters of commitment.

Mr. Murray explained that there are three years until RAWA hits a milestone with DEP and EPA regarding lead and copper. He stated that RAWA has a program to replace lead services and that RAWA has been searching for locations with lead and copper services. He stated that approximately 250 of 28,000 properties are possible locations. He explained that from the water main to the curb is RAWA's responsibility and from the curb into the home is the homeowner's responsibility.

Mr. Murray stated that one property has been located to date for the replacement program but that it is a four unit and the RAWA Board originally approved the program for owner occupied properties only. He stated that the Board has now changed the program to include rentals with a cap of 25 properties per year. He stated that this property owner hesitated due to liability issues but did agree to the replacement. He stated that as other services are located they will be replaced. He stated that this property's water was tested and the lead levels were well below safe limits.

Mr. Murray expressed the belief that this Board will have a role in the coalition moving forward. He described the successful program in Lancaster and stated that he will share the link to a YouTube video from Lancaster. He asked all to watch the video. He expressed the belief that the lead levels being found in Reading are not coming from the water but from the old housing stock.

Dr. Kelleher stated that some of her patients tested at higher lead levels than those in Flint. She stated that she had a child test at 55 last week and she can see patients' function reduce over time. She stated that she cannot recall if water testing is included in the home testing that is done to locate the source of the lead.

Mr. Murray stated that generally the lead is either in the water or in paint dust. He expressed the belief that the probability that the source is the water in Reading is very low. He stated that EPA and DEP maintain a list of properties that may contain lead. He stated that generally piping is changed inside properties in the basement where they are accessible but that they are usually not replaced in the upper floors.

Dr. Kelleher stated that dust, soil and paint are tested.

Mr. Murray stated that Lancaster's program will test a property and certify it as lead-free. He explained that Lancaster's rate of lead poisoning is higher than Reading. He stated that properties that are certified are published. He noted his hope that healthcare providers would test for lead at no cost to the individual so that those who may not have the ability to pay for the test are protected.

Dr. Kelleher questioned if the coalition is addressing the cost of testing. Mr. Murray stated that not all children are tested.

Dr. Kelleher stated that she trained in Baltimore, MD and she tests all her patients.

Mr. Murray noted the great work done by Baltimore on their lead abatement. He stated that they also used a federal program for their work and noted the importance of Reading receiving this grant.

Dr. Dethoff stated that Dr. Kimball served on this Board in the past and she also screened all her patients. He stated that Dr. Kimball was dismayed that suburban children are not routinely tested. Dr. Kelleher agreed that all children should be tested.

Mr. Murray questioned Dr. Kelleher's testing protocol. Dr. Kelleher stated that she tests high risk children at 9 months and all others at age 1. She stated that her patients are then tested annually. She agreed that some parents do not follow through and get the testing completed.

Mr. Murray questioned if Dr. Kelleher would distribute a flyer to patients about RAWA's testing and service replacement program. He noted the need to provide options for Reading's children. Dr. Kelleher stated that she will check on this possibility and follow up with Mr. Murray.

Mr. Murray stated that depending on the test results, the property would qualify for the free service replacement. He explained that RAWA adds extra protection to customers by including a substance that clings to the pipes to reduce the amount of lead that leeches into the water.

Mr. Abodalo arrived at this time. He apologized for joining late but stated that the lead coalition meeting just concluded.

Mr. Murray explained that he has already provided an update on the coalition. He stated that the RAWA Board may be willing to provide a contribution to pay for lead testing.

Mr. Abodalo stated that CDBG funds may also be available for testing expenses. He requested that Dr. Kelleher provide a cost estimate. Dr. Kelleher stated that she will speak with staff and provide this information.

Mr. Murray stated that he is willing to meet with her staff if it is helpful.

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Mr. Abodalo stated that many organizations are collaborating and that the City program is making good forward progress. He stated that new applications are processed daily. He stated that he does not have updated statistics but that operations are moving smoothly and families are remaining in their homes.

Dr. Dethoff questioned if the use of hotels has become necessary. Mr. Abodalo stated that the courts have delayed the eviction process. He stated that the program rules have also changed and funds can be used to pay an entire year's back rent. He thanked all for their efforts.

COUNTY DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH

Dr. Kelleher stated that this is still a big debate. She stated that the big issue is whether Berks County would have responded better to the vaccine rollout with a Dept of Health. She stated that the cost for the Dept is also a big issue. She stated that there have been many discussions but no concrete direction.

OTHER

- Pop-up Vaccine Distribution

Mr. Abodalo announced that the Mayor and Managing Director are working with Tower Health to hold pop-up vaccination locations throughout the City in April and May.

NEXT MEETING

Dr. Dethoff stated that the next meeting of the Board is scheduled for Tuesday, June 1 at 4 pm.

The meeting adjourned at 5:00 pm.

Respectfully submitted,
Shelly Smith, CMC
Deputy City Clerk